

Turkey's Influence Campaigns in America Go Unchecked

While the U.S. focuses on foreign influence from Russia, China, and Qatar – Erdoğan's Influence Operations Evade Scrutiny



Source: [Anadolu Ajansı](#)

Executive Summary

Turkey operates a sophisticated, multi-channel foreign influence operation across the United States that exploits gaps in American legal and regulatory frameworks to project Ankara's Islamist political agenda into American institutions.

While formally a NATO ally, Erdoğan's regime—ideologically rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood's pan-Islamist project—has built an influence apparatus often at odds with American interests, pursuing concessions from Washington and undermining American law.

Turkey's operation runs through four interconnected channels:

- The **Diyanet Center of America**, a \$100 million Turkish state-controlled religious complex in Maryland, projects foreign-government authority into American Muslim communities through an imam network loyal to Ankara, not American congregants. Diyanet works as a surveillance and intelligence-collection platform, all while receiving American taxpayer grants.
- **Turkish-American proxy organizations** translate Ankara's priorities into domestic political pressure while deliberately evading FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) disclosure requirements.
- Turkey has emerged as the **primary state sponsor of the American Muslim Brotherhood network**, aligning with **CAIR** and other legacy Brotherhood organizations to project foreign influence under the guise of civil rights advocacy.

- Turkey's **TRT World**, which has an alleged audience of over 1.2 billion people worldwide and a studio that broadcasts from Washington, D.C., reports and promotes content that is highly critical of the United States and sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood and its networks. Turkey's English-language media platform **Clash Report** likewise broadcasts criticism of the U.S. and its policies to over 1 million followers in America and abroad.
- Turkey purchases political access through **registered lobbyists** who have interfered in active federal prosecutions while exploiting legal gaps to shield its institutions from criminal liability for sanctions evasion and terror financing.

The result is a multidimensional influence model: registered lobbying secures policy concessions and judicial interference, while unregistered proxies conduct covert political operations below the disclosure threshold. Turkey has successfully leveraged this apparatus to secure favorable resolution of federal criminal cases, advance toward readmission to the F-35 program and sanctions relief, and neutralize executive scrutiny—despite documented evidence of the government's direct involvement in the largest Iran sanctions-evasion scheme in U.S. history.

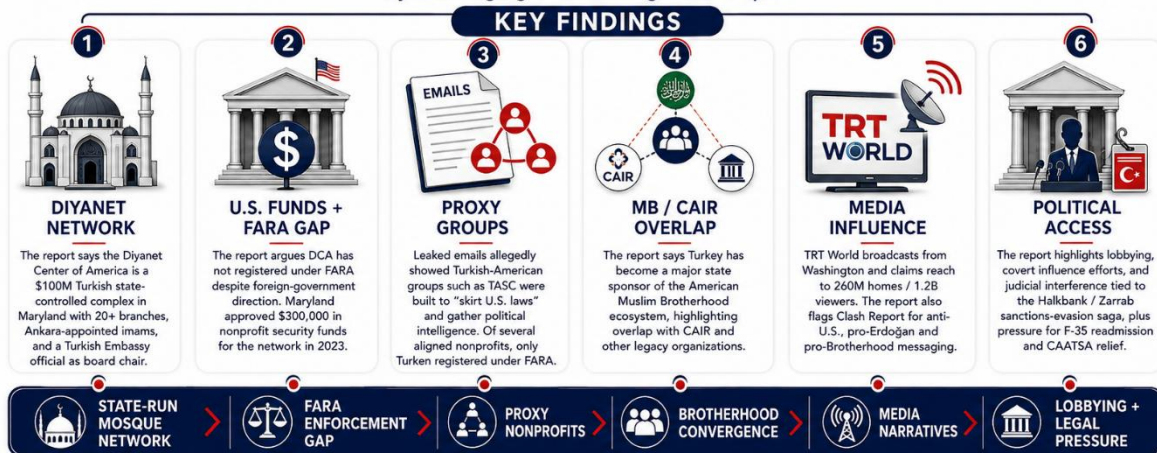
American regulatory frameworks have failed to adapt to a NATO ally that weaponizes its alliance status to evade legal accountability and has allowed Ankara to essentially operate as a rogue actor within the United States—purchasing influence when possible, evading scrutiny when necessary, and converting criminal liability into diplomatic currency.

This report documents the scope, mechanisms, and ideological foundations of Turkey's influence operation in the U.S. and what amounts to be a coordinated foreign assault on American sovereignty that demands urgent legislative and executive response.

TURKEY'S INFLUENCE CAMPAIGNS IN AMERICA

ERDOĞAN'S INFLUENCE OPERATIONS EVADE SCRUTINY

Key issues highlighted in the August 2026 report.



Key Findings

- The **Diyanet Center of America (DCA)** is a Turkish religious body based in Maryland with a Turkish government official as its board chairman. This nominally American religious nonprofit has over 20 branches staffed by Ankara-appointed imams who are not accountable to their American congregants but to Turkey. Despite being directed and substantially financed by a foreign government, **the DCA has not been ordered to register under FARA** —in 2023 Maryland legislature approved **\$300,000** in nonprofit funds for the network, routing U.S. taxpayer security dollars to a complex under Turkish operational control.
- Leaked emails belonging to Erdoğan's son-in-law's revealed that a series of Turkish-American groups and charities – such as the **Turkish American National Steering Committee (TASC)** – are part of a vehicle explicitly designed to "skirt U.S. laws and hire freelance journalists to collect political intelligence."
- Of the cluster of Turkish government-aligned nonprofits operating in the United States — including TASC, the Turkish Heritage Organization, the Turkish Coalition of America, MÜSiAD and the Turken Foundation — only the latter registered as a foreign agent under FARA.
- **Turkey's influence apparatus holds significant sway within the broader Muslim Brotherhood network in America**, and especially with **CAIR** (the

Council for American-Islamic Relations) – supposedly the largest Muslim advocacy group in the United States.

- U.S. federal prosecutors found that **Turkey attempted to covertly buy influence with a sitting U.S. mayor**; a separate declassified intelligence assessment confirmed Erdoğan "trying to covertly influence U.S. political candidates."
- Turkish-Iranian gold trader Reza Zarrab, arrested in 2016, testified in court and directly implicated Erdoğan's approval of a \$20 billion transfer to Iran through a Turkish state bank - **the largest Iran sanctions-evasion scheme** in U.S. history.
- Turkey runs and funds a media-influence operation called **TRT World** – a 24-hour English-language online news channel, launched in 2015. Broadcasting from **Washington D.C.** to over 260 million households, it covers global affairs and emphasizes Turkish foreign policy perspectives and issues important to the Erdoğan government. **Although its parent company, TRT, has been registered under FARA since 2020**, TRT World continues to broadcast highly critical content against the United States into American smartphones, households, and screens worldwide.

Background

Turkey's influence operations in the United States cannot be understood apart from the ideology that drives them – that of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Erdoğan's political career grew from the same ideological soil as the **Muslim Brotherhood** (MB) – the **Milli Görüş** movement that merged pan-Islamist supremacism with Turkish nationalism. Erdoğan built the **AKP** (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; Justice and Development Party) as a more domestically palatable vehicle to reach the same ends.

Once in power, Erdoğan systematically Islamized Turkish state institutions by introducing religious curriculum into all public high schools, established direct ties with **Hamas** (the Palestinian branch of the MB) and sheltered 15,000–30,000 Egyptian

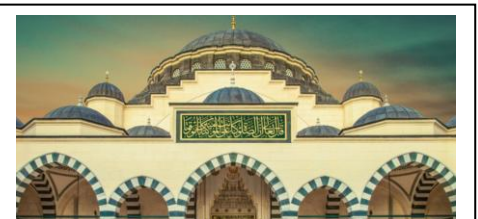
Brotherhood members and their families in Turkey after the 2013 coup, and hosted Muslim Brotherhood leader **Salah Abdulhaq** in Istanbul as recently as 2023.^{1 2}

The MB's global spiritual leader, **Yousef al-Qaradawi** — who endorsed Hamas attacks, praised Hitler, and declared the Holocaust placed Jews "in their rightful place" — called Erdoğan "the effective caliph of Muslims" in 2014.³ **Under the AKP, Turkey became the operational headquarters for Brotherhood chapters from Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria, housing U.S.-designated terrorist financiers and al-Qaeda-affiliated ideologues under state security protection.** Turkey's AKP has been considered by some as "the Turkish arm of the Muslim Brotherhood."⁴

This foundation is the operating logic behind Turkey's influence channels. The Diyanet mosque network, TASC proxy apparatus, MB-legacy convergence, multi-front sanctions evasion infrastructure, and transnational repression of American-based dissidents are coordinated expressions of a coherent foreign influence project. The fundamental error in Washington's treatment of Turkey as a significant Western NATO partner is the failure to recognize what the AKP truly is — an Islamist civilizational project that is using, abusing and subverting the U.S. to achieve its goals.

Turkey's Diyanet Center of America

Seventeen miles from the White House, in Lanham, Maryland, Turkey operates a \$100 million religious complex that functions not as a local mosque, but as an extension of the Turkish state. The Diyanet Center of America is controlled by Ankara's Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs), staffed by Turkish government employees, and directed by a Turkish Embassy official. Built with Turkish government funding, and unlike typical American mosques governed by congregants, this network projects foreign-state authority into American Muslim communities while exploiting tax-exempt status and security grants meant for domestic institutions.

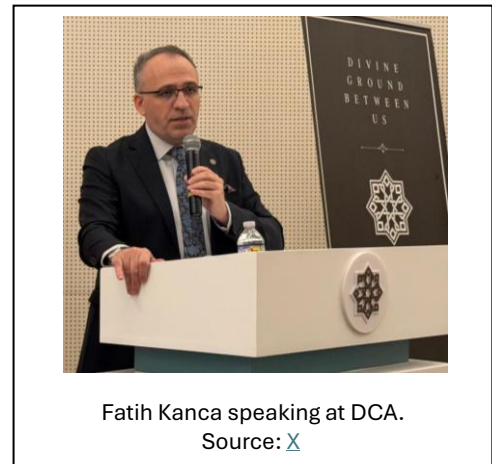


The Diyanet Center of American in Lanham, Maryland.
Source: [DCA](#)

In 2013, Erdoğan personally laid the cornerstone and inaugurated the complex in April

2016. The head of the DCA, current board chairman **Fatih Kanca**, also serves as the **Social and Religious Affairs Counselor** at the **Embassy of Turkey in Washington, D.C.**

Every imam assigned to DCA's 20+ branches across the country is **appointed by Ankara**, not by any local congregation — making DCA clergy Turkish state employees accountable to the Diyanet bureaucracy, not to American congregants. The network has been described as a Turkish government surveillance platform where imams are instructed to identify and report members of Gülen-affiliated congregations to Turkish consular authorities, who relay the



intelligence to **MIT** (Turkey's national intelligence agency). Freedom House's Transnational Repression 2025 report documents this pattern and ranks Turkey among the most active practitioners of transnational repression globally and specifically documents its use of consular networks and imam infrastructure in the United States to surveil Gülenist communities.⁵

That transnational repression is not a peripheral feature of the DCA network, but a documented function. Because every DCA imam is appointed by and accountable to Ankara, the network functions effectively as a **human intelligence collection apparatus inside American Muslim communities** where the clergy is accountable to the Turkish state, not to American law.

Turkey has also systematically weaponized Interpol Red Notices to detain diaspora critics abroad. In August 2017, German-Turkish novelist **Doğan Akhanlı** was arrested in Granada, Spain, after Turkish authorities filed a politically motivated Red Notice. The German government launched a formal diplomatic protest; therefore, Spain released him within days, but the case prompted the European Parliament to formally debate Turkey's abuse of Interpol mechanisms.

Following the 2016 coup attempt, **Turkey filed thousands of**

Red Notice requests targeting suspected Gülenist

opposition members— a mass-filing campaign that

Interpol's own review body, the Commission for the Control of

INTERPOL's Files (CCF), partially reversed after finding that

the requests violated Interpol's prohibition on politically motivated notices.⁶ The ICC

has examined "enforced disappearances" carried out by Turkish operatives in Kenya,

Cambodia, Albania, Moldova, Mongolia, Switzerland, and further in the U.S. where there

was an active effort to forcibly remove Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen from his

compound in Pennsylvania.⁷



Source: [Diyanet America](#)

An investigation found that Michael Flynn —Trump's campaign national security adviser who was also simultaneously under a \$600,000 contract with a Turkish government-linked firm — met with two senior Turkish officials to discuss Gülen's rendition for payment. Flynn's retroactive DOJ FARA filing identified the client as the Turkish government.

Unfortunately, the imam surveillance network, the rendition planning on U.S. soil, and the Interpol abuse still do not trigger legal disclosure requirement under current FARA interpretation.⁸

A **July 2016 WikiLeaks release** of about 57,000 emails from **Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak**, then Turkey's Energy Minister, documented coordination between AKP inner-circle figures and pro-government media executives to manage diaspora-facing narratives, tracking of Gülen-affiliated individuals and institutions abroad, and discussions about Turkey's political positioning in Western countries through non-governmental intermediaries — **consistent with the surveillance DCA carries out.**⁹

Beyond direct mosque control, the DCA converges deliberately with the MB-legacy network in America, such as its think tank the **IIIT** (International Institute of Islamic Thought) with which it has a memorandum of understanding.¹⁰

Even though there is proof that DCA is under strong influence of and direction from the Turkish government, which also helped to finance much of it, the DCA has not been ordered by the Department of Justice to register under FARA as a foreign government entity. In August 2023, the **Maryland legislature even approved approximately \$300,000 in DHS Nonprofit Security Grant Program funds** for the DCA, routing taxpayer dollars to a mosque network controlled from Ankara.¹¹

Turkish-American Proxies

Turkey's influence operations run through American nonprofits that translate Ankara's priorities into domestic pressure without registering as foreign agents. These proxy organizations target elected officials, state government, and diaspora communities through lobbying, fundraising, and media operations—deliberately designed by Erdoğan's inner circle to operate under the threshold of legal disclosure. By using family members and cutout entities, Turkey pursues political leverage and policy outcomes while maintaining plausible distance from its American proxies.



Love Erdoğan Trucks in NYC. Source: duvaR.english

One example of this U.S.-based influence apparatus is the **Turkish American National Steering Committee (TASC)**.

The TASC was cofounded in 2016, in part by members of Erdoğan's family; its co-chair Halil Mutlu is Erdoğan's cousin.¹² TASC presents itself as a civic nonprofit but was revealed in Erdoğan's son-in-law's leaked emails as being part of a network explicitly planned by Erdoğan's inner circle to "skirt U.S. laws and hire freelance journalists to collect political intelligence".¹³

TASC's documented activities over the past decade include driving "Love Erdoğan" trucks through New York City¹⁴; organizing ASC TV as a domestic Turkish-government propaganda broadcaster¹⁵; lobbying to have American cities designate July



Source: ourtasc.org

15 as Turkey's "Democracy and National Unity Day"¹⁶; counterprotesting Armenian genocide commemorations; and receiving a formal **Governor's Citation from the State of Maryland** in November 2024 despite its explicit alignment with a foreign government.¹⁷

In September 2023, Erdoğan spoke at a TASC event and called on members to "combat Islamophobia." TASC deputy chair, Israfil Demir, was sentenced to federal prison in 2024 for trafficking counterfeit goods from China, while maintaining active TASC and Erdoğan-government ties as recently as September 2024.¹⁸

TASC operates alongside several other related organizations—the **Turkish Heritage Organization (THO)**, **Turken Foundation**, **Turkish Coalition of America**, **Turkish Cultural Foundation**, and **MÜSİAD** (the U.S. wing of a Turkish charitable organization)—coordinated from Ankara, but only the Turken Foundation is registered as a foreign agent under FARA.¹⁹

Turkish Sponsorship of the Muslim Brotherhood in America

Turkish influence in America deliberately converges with the broader **Muslim Brotherhood-legacy ecosystem**. In 2020, former Turkish counterterrorism official Dr. Ahmet Yayla identified **USCMO**, **CAIR**, **ICNA**, **IIIT**, **MAS**, **AMP**, **ISNA**, the **Zakat Foundation**, and **Zaytuna College** as entities through which Erdoğan's regime furthers its U.S. influence operations.^{20 21}

Erdoğan's daughter attended the annual MAS-ICNA convention in 2016 to defend her father and the Turkish consul general in Chicago delivered an Erdoğan message at the

2018 MAS-ICNA conference. But the Muslim Brotherhood-linked organization that seemingly works most closely with Turkey is the Council on American-Islamic Relations.

CAIR is the premier Muslim Brotherhood-legacy

organization in America which describes itself as the largest Muslim advocacy group in the United States.



Source: [YouTube](#)

Founded in 1994 by leaders of the Islamic Association

for Palestine (IAP), including now CAIR director **Nihad Awad**, it emerged from the

Brotherhood's "Palestine Committee," the MB's domestic

group for advancing Hamas's political and financial agenda

in the United States. Federal prosecutors cited CAIR as a

component of the Brotherhood's U.S. network in the Holy



Source: [IPT](#)

Land Foundation proceedings, the largest terrorism-financing trial in U.S. history, and an

FBI agent testified at the trial that CAIR functioned as a Hamas front organization.²² In

November 2025, Texas Governor Greg Abbott designated CAIR and the Muslim

Brotherhood as foreign terrorist organizations under Texas state law.^{23 24} Even without

CAIR's problematic history and affiliations, its deep connection to Turkey and other

foreign countries and entities with radical ideologies and goals raises serious questions

about one of the largest and most influential Muslim groups in America.

CAIR director **Nihad Awad** has spoken at pro-Erdoğan rallies organized by the TASC and

CAIR reportedly holds events at the Diyanet Center.²⁵ **Turkish Airlines**, whose largest

shareholder is the Turkish sovereign wealth fund, Türkiye Wealth Fund (TWF),²⁶ also

sponsors CAIR events. CAIR figures also appear regularly on Turkey's state broadcaster

TRT World — further demonstrating the institutional convergence between the **Turkish**

state and the largest Muslim Brotherhood-legacy organization in America.^{27 28 29 30}

TRT World's parent company **TRT** (Turkish Radio and Television Corporation) **has been**

registered under FARA since 2020, and even though **TRT World** has a Washington,

D.C. studio, it broadcasts content that is highly critical of the United States and its

policies into American households. The channel **also amplifies Muslim Brotherhood-**

sympathetic narratives, covers CAIR events, and attacks critics of the Muslim

Brotherhood network in America.³¹ TRT World claims distribution in 190 countries, reaching over 260 million homes and potentially 1.2 billion viewers. Its Facebook page has nearly 7 million likes, and its YouTube has about 10.3 million subscribers.³²

Another Turkish state-affiliated media platform which promotes anti-American, anti-West and pro-Muslim Brotherhood content as part of Turkey's influence campaign is Clash Report. **Despite having connections to TRT World, Erdogan's "inner circle," and Turkish defense contractors, Clash Report still claims to be independent and neutral** as it disseminates English-language material to over 1 million people worldwide, including young, impressionable Americans.³³ And because it claims to "provide accurate and impartial reporting to raise awareness and promote understanding of critical global issues," Clash Report content is also shared by American and international journalists, politicians, and social media figures.³⁴ Clash Report manipulates the narratives of geopolitical issues to suit Turkey's interests – not those of the U.S., further proving just how dangerous Turkey and its foreign influence operations are.

Political Influence and Judicial Interference

Turkey projects its influence across the United States, operating in Washington D.C. and beyond to secure military benefits and political relief via official channels in addition to its unregistered proxies. Registered lobbyists have represented Ankara and Turkish banks under criminal investigation, and intervened in active prosecutions, all while unregistered entities evade disclosure requirements. Turkish entities exploit American legal gaps – including arguably vague and inconsistent FARA requirements and the option to register under the **Lobbying Disclosure Act (LDA)** - that allow Turkish influence operations to proceed without serious scrutiny.

The Registered Lobbying Shield – Interference in Federal Investigation

What seemingly allows for the FARA registration gap discussed above is a registered lobbying apparatus used to purchase executive-branch access and pursue interference in active federal prosecutions. The following are some significant examples:

- The Halkbank case represents the most documented instance of Turkey's influence apparatus interfering with American justice. **Halkbank** — Turkey's state-owned second-largest public lender — was charged by Southern District New York (SDNY) prosecutors with **facilitating approximately \$13 billion in gold transfers to Iranian government entities between 2012 and 2013**, described as "one of the biggest sanctions-evasion schemes in history." **Ballard Partners**, run by President Trump's Florida fundraiser Brian Ballard, simultaneously held lobbying contracts with the Turkish government and Halkbank while it was under SDNY active criminal investigation. He billed approximately \$2 million in Turkey-related work.³⁵
- **Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey** appeared on the record before SDNY Judge Richard Berman in April 2017 to acknowledge their intent to seek a White House "diplomatic solution" (i.e. executive interference) to the Zarrab prosecution. In July 2026, an agreement was reached in large part due to Turkey's involvement in the ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas.³⁶ Zarrab was formally sentenced to time previously served; federal prosecutors filed a presentence memorandum that month requesting leniency, citing his "substantial cooperation."³⁷ The DOJ cited "unique and extraordinary national security and foreign policy considerations," specifically Turkey's role in brokering the Israel-Hamas ceasefire and Israeli hostage releases based on the Trump administration's DPA (Deferred Prosecution Agreement) requiring a compliance monitor but no admission of wrongdoing or penalty.
- **Michael Flynn** published an opinion piece in *The Hill* on Election Day 2016 calling on Washington "to see the world from Turkey's perspective" without disclosing his \$600,000 Turkish government contract or that the client had reviewed the piece before publication. *The Hill* subsequently added an editor's note acknowledging both omissions, and Flynn's retroactive FARA filing identified the client as being Turkey.³⁸
- President Trump publicly acknowledged his "little conflict of interest" – referring to the **Trump Tower in Istanbul**.³⁹ Turkish officials reportedly visited Trump

properties 14 times, more than any other foreign country, including attending at least four Turkish government events at the Trump Hotel in Washington.⁴⁰

Turkey may be a fellow NATO member state and American ally, but its goals and interests are often at odds with America's. Its registered lobbyists and politicians purchase access, push political influence in the media and vie for executive interference – sometimes in violation of American law – and its actions remain largely unchecked.

Political Pressure Campaigns

- On February 10, 2026, the House Ways and Means Committee identified six foreign entities funneling \$2.65 billion through 501(c)(3) and (c)(4) organizations and although the hearing focused primarily on Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-linked networks, the framework could be directly applicable to Turkey and Qatar as well.⁴¹
- After being expelled in 2019 for purchasing Russia's S-400 missile system, Turkey has continued to pursue readmission to the **F-35 program** and is pressing for **CAATSA sanctions to be lifted**.
- At the July 2026 NATO summit in Ankara, President Trump stated *"we're going to be taking the sanctions off"* — drawing immediate congressional objection, due to Turkey's purchase of the S-400s, the illegal occupation of Cyprus, the threats to Greece, and other issues.⁴²
- The Trump administration's January 2026 Muslim Brotherhood designations — targeting the Lebanese, Egyptian, and Jordanian chapters — acknowledged that it *"could impact Washington's relationships with Qatar and Turkey,"* but still only targeted foreign chapters and not the domestic organizations through which Turkey and Qatar project their influence within the United States.⁴³

Conclusion

Turkey's influence operations inside the United States are expressions of a coherent and coordinated foreign influence project — rooted in an Islamist civilizational ideology and directed from Ankara through four main interconnected channels: a foreign-state mosque network, AKP-aligned political proxy organizations, a deliberate convergence

with the MB-legacy ecosystem, and a network of registered lobbyists and politicians who purchase political access.

Each channel exploits the same structural gap: American legal and regulatory frameworks — campaign finance law, nonprofit tax exemptions, foreign-agent designation. The wide gap between Turkey’s documented influence operations and actionable legal response remains the defining unresolved problem. If Turkey’s influence operation remains unchecked, American national security and stability could suffer.

Endnotes

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