

Turkey's Operations against ISIS Networks Found Lacking



Mourning after the 2015 Ankara bombings.

Source: Yildiz Yazicioğlu via Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_after_the_2015_Ankara_bombings_\(2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mourning_after_the_2015_Ankara_bombings_(2).jpg), Attribution: CC-PD-Mark | PD VOA

By Ihsan Gündüz
OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying article, written by a top Turkish analyst for *al-Monitor*, a globally read security news site with regionally based reporting, provides insight into militants of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) operating in Turkey and Turkey's efforts to combat them. The author argues that while Turkey's operations against ISIS members have substantially increased, the country still lacks a comprehensive national strategy to combat such elements within its borders. The extremist elements gaining ground inside Turkey have far-reaching consequences beyond Turkish borders.

The article states that suspected ISIS members inside Turkey are overwhelmingly from Iraq and Syria. Iraqi nationals in Turkey are most likely to be predisposed to ISIS activities, with Syrian nationals the next most likely. Turkish ISIS suspects who have been detained are generally recruiters, financial sponsors, and facilitate logistical necessities, including providing documents to ISIS members from other countries. The article also states that there are several Turkish Salafi groups involved in the operational cells of ISIS activities in Turkey, which likely pose a bigger threat than the foreign nationals.

“We can say without hesitation that IS has penetrated deep into Turkey,” A Turkish Security Expert.”

Most of these Salafi groups are composed of former Turkish sympathizers of al-Qaeda who later joined ISIS. The article continues to note that Turkish cells have connections to the ISIS leadership cadre through Turkish nationals who fought in Syria and Iraq. The article cites a Turkish security expert stating, “IS[IS] has penetrated deep into Turkey” and has more presence in larger urban centers like Ankara and Istanbul, posing a serious threat to Turkish national security.

The author infers a few points from his research regarding anti-ISIS operations in Turkey. First, they are either episodic or involve deliberate targeting to dismantle ISIS-affiliated groups. Second, Turkey does not have an inter-institutional strategy to combat the ISIS threat inside its borders. Third, Turkish officials have failed to track and identify about 2,000 ISIS members who received military training and were actively involved in armed conflict in Syria and Iraq. This is partially caused by the lack of intelligence sharing between Turkey and other countries. Finally, while Turkey's anti-ISIS operations may seem to be successful, a significant number of ISIS-affiliated militants continue to roam in Turkey without being detected.

Source continued: Metin Gürcan, “Turkey’s mixed record against Islamic State,” *al-Monitor* (a news site with analysts from the Middle East), 30 June 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/06/turkeys-mixed-record-against-islamic-state>

Turkish security operations against networks linked to the Islamic State (IS) appear on the rise, but how efficient they are remains open to question amid a number of shortcomings, including the lack of adequate cooperation with foreign counterparts.

A Turkish security expert who worked with the security forces until recently said the nationality of IS-affiliated foreigners apprehended in Turkey is often withheld because their home countries request so, citing two reasons — operational security and concerns to avoid negative publicity. “We have received files on nearly 5,000 IS suspects from various countries and caught about 2,300 of them in the past four years...

The data derived from the research show that the number of Syrians detained in anti-IS operations is not as high as one might expect. Iraqi nationals top the list...

...Turkish detainees stand out as recruiters, financial sponsors and providers of logistical help and documents to foreign militants. But there are also those involved in operational cells, mostly Salafi groups made up of former Turkish defectors from al-Qaeda who later gravitated to IS such as the Yamacli and Meydan groups in the southern province of Adana, the Amer Onay group in the eastern province of Van and the Bayancuk group in Istanbul. Most of those groups have links to the IS leadership through Turkish nationals who fought in IS ranks in Iraq and Syria.

According to a journalist who closely follows IS-affiliated networks in northern Syria, Turkish IS members are more dangerous than foreign ones, even though their number is smaller than those of Iraqis and Syrians. He explained that Turkish cells usually get into contact with the higher ranks of IS through Turkish IS militants who fought in Syria and Iraq.

TERRORISM, TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

Continued: Turkey's Operations against ISIS Networks Found Lacking

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The findings of the research show how real the IS threat is in big urban centers in Turkey...

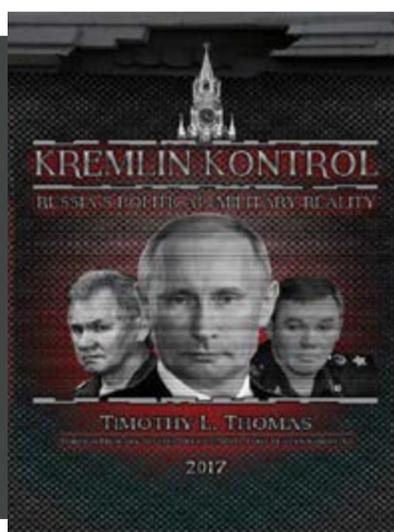
The security source said... "We can say without hesitation that IS has penetrated deep into Turkey," the expert said. He continued, "Most of the time, we are unable to tell which foreigner could be an IS member at first glance. During investigations, most of the details are blurred for us due to their ability to hide themselves and difficulties in accessing the background information of suspects... What we need is to build a comprehensive security approach with intelligence, home country cooperation, preemptive investigation and cyber capabilities."

...

...the research suggests that Turkey's operations against IS lack inter-institutional cooperation.

...the Turkish security forces estimate that about 2,000 IS members who were actively involved in IS operations in Syria and Iraq and received armed training have made it to Turkey. Yet they have failed to identify them all. "To do that, we need intelligence from Syria and Iraq, which has not been forthcoming," the security source said. "Furthermore, there is almost no intelligence sharing with Western countries. This lack of coordination and intelligence sharing means no intelligence for the Turkish police."

Finally, there is no benchmark to measure the efficiency of Turkey's anti-IS operations, although they may seem intense and successful. Turkey refrains from releasing ample data on the issue, but the picture emerging from the analysis of open-source data suggests that Turkey remains a place where a significant number of foreign IS militants continue to take shelter.



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

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