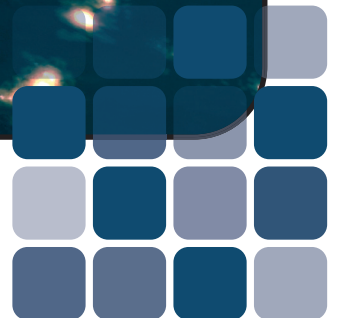


TURKEY'S FIGHT AGAINST ISIS



ASST. PROF. GÖKTUĞ SÖNMEZ





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Introduction

Turkey, due to its geographical position neighbouring Syria and Iraq and the long land border it shares with them, has been a country affected by radicalisation of different actors and terrorist attacks carried out by them to a great extent. As a consequence of its fight against various terrorist organizations for more than four decades including ASALA, DHKP-C, PKK, and ISIS, Turkey has long been a key actor in terms of global security as well as a key partner in global counter-terrorism efforts. In the last decade, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) has become one of the major security concerns of the international community with the group's direct military advances especially in Iraq and Syria as well as due to the presence and activities of its affiliates all over the globe. Accordingly, since 2013, Turkey has been an active player in terms of the global fight against ISIS as one of the first countries designating the group as a terrorist organization long before its military advances on the ground. Within this context, in this study, the group's emergence and rise as well as its diminishing power and physical presence recently will be discussed. Following that, how Turkey responded to this threat with both hard and soft measures will be mentioned. As two concepts becoming more and more important lately, namely Foreign Terrorist Fighters and "returnees" and Turkey's measures and performance fighting them will be touched upon. Consequently, the current situation both within and out of Turkey and possible next steps in line with the group's transformation will be discussed.

1- ISIS: A Brief Background

Ahmed al-Khalayleh or Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, with his widely known Nom de guerre, who was born in 1966, went to Afghanistan in

1989. Although he met bin Laden there, he had an attitude that focused on enemies positioned in close proximity while Laden gave more importance to the distant enemy, the US.¹ This, in time, would turn into the group's modus operandi which aims at increasing its power by advancing towards particular closer targets where it perceives it can establish field dominance rather than focusing on the "faraway enemy". In 2002, al-Zarqawi went to the camps of Ansar al-Islam in Northern Iraq along with important figures from the Herat camp, where he laid the foundations of the structure which was to be called firstly Tawhid and Jihad and then Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn (in which Rafidayn refers to Euphrates and Tigris Rivers) and eventually the Iraqi al-Qaeda. In 2006, the Mujahideen Shura Council, formed as a result of the unification of the Iraqi al-Qaeda with other small groups, came to be known as the Islamic State of Iraq.² Once in charge of the Herat training camp for fighters from the Levant region in Afghanistan, Zarqawi could quickly gather fighters from Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, thereby strengthening the human capital of the group.³

The letter that was written by Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2005 to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi who proclaimed himself to be the commander of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2004 may be considered a signal of the upcoming separation. The most crucial point of the letter was the three criticisms Zawahiri brought to Zarqawi. These criticisms were mainly about Zarqawi's brutal methods, his harsh attitude towards the Shiites, and that he did not give more space to Iraqis in his groups, raising discontent among locals.⁴ In the following years, it would be seen that the group would maintain its attitude with respect to the first two, even some "improvements" regarding the third point would be made.

The structure formed by Zarqawi in Iraq had five fundamental aims and these are the points that would determine the goals and modus operandi of the organization in the following years; to weaken the central government and security forces in Iraq, to gain the warriors from the insurgency groups on the field, to take advantage of the position of the Sunnis who are side-lined the system, to provoke the Shiite militias to carry out overreactive actions and to make the US withdraw from Iraq.⁵ In this context, the conduct of a strategy called the “foco strategy”, which is attributed to Che Guavera and requires the conduct of small actions to incite a conflict⁶ has been applied to the Shiite and their holy places as seen in the example of the al-Askari Mosque.

Zarqawi's death in the US airstrike in 2006 led to a new era. In this period, the organization experienced troubles within itself due to the dissatisfaction towards the leadership of Abu Musab al-Masri who replaced Zarqawi and some of the non-Iraqi fighters moved to other countries to form their own groups. One of them was Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, who later formed the group known as the Nusra Front.

Later rising to the leadership of the organization, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was born in 1971 in the city of Samarra and he has been registered in the records with the names of Ali al-Bedri al-Samarrai, Dr. Ibrahim and Avvad Ibrahim, and he is known to use al-Abu al-Dua as the nickname.⁷ Starting in 2012, it is observed that the then Islamic State of Iraq undertook an ambitious restructuring and empowerment program. The attacks on prisons and the release of prisoners in this period within the scope of the “Breaking the Walls” operation were considered as a move to provide serious human resources to the organization. The Iraqi Army started to be targeted more hardly and frequently after July 2013 within

the scope of the “Soldiers' Harvest” campaign. This shifting and more aggressive attitude was also believed to be linked to the US decision to withdraw from Iraq and the idea that the Iraqi Army had become an easier target. Following this process, the group made major military advances including in Anbar, Fallujah and Ramadi, and then Mosul. On June 29, 2014, the so-called “Islamic State” and Baghdadi's “Caliphate” were declared.⁸ 2013 was also a key turning point for the group. In order to take advantage of the conditions in Syria and use the country as a field of training and possible sphere of influence, Baghdadi moved to Syria and changed the name of the group to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Syria (ISIL/ISIS). This change was criticized by Zawahiri, who warned Baghdadi to limit his activities to Iraq, which in return was eventually rejected by Baghdadi in mid-2013. After the attempts to push Baghdadi back to Iraq and to prevent him from trying to unite his group with the Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's Syrian arm, failed, al-Qaeda cut off all its contacts with the group in February 2014.

In the same month, Baghdadi put an end to the “homage” he paid to al-Qaeda. One of the most crucial messages in this process is Baghdadi's call for Zawahiri to break his allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar and pay homage to himself as the leader. In this message, Baghdadi referred to Mullah Omar as “an ignorant and uneducated warlord who does not deserve political or religious respect”. Keeping its silence until the beginning of 2015, the Taliban announced in January 2015 that all of the groups fighting in Afghanistan were fighting under its emirate and the groups other than that would not be given the opportunity to be active in Afghanistan.⁹ Following the proclamation of the so-called “caliphate”, Baghdadi also conveyed the message that the focus of the organization would not be limited to Iraq

and Syria, signaling the global focus of the group. In this speech of Baghdadi, a call for global resistance was brought forward. Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, India, Kashmir, and China were mentioned in this context.

Over time, in many parts of the world from Central Asia to Africa, both the groups which have been active while “being loosely connected to al-Qaeda” and those who have just emerged started paying homage or declaring their allegiance to the group. Overall, ISIS, from the very first efforts to form and empower itself in Iraq, in the meantime, turned into a key security threat with a global reach. In time, and especially by advancing in Iraq and Syria the threat posed by the group to Turkey became more and more visible. In the next section, a brief overview of the group's attacks in that context will be mentioned.

2- ISIS' Attacks in Global Context and the Group's Attacks against Turkey

As a result of the above-mentioned global reach, overall, in 29 countries, around 140 attacks were carried out either directly by the group or by the people/groups affiliated or inspired by it, claiming the lives of around 2100 people. To mention some of the most spectacular attacks of the group, on 18 April 2015, a suicide bomber on a motorbike blew himself up in front of a bank in Jalalabad killing more than 30 people, on 31 October, 2015 a bomb destroyed a Russian passenger airplane flying over the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt, killing more than 220 people; on 12 November 2015, 6 attacks in Paris claimed the lives of at least 130 people and wounded more than 350, on 22 March 2016, three explosions in Brussels (two in the airport and one in an underground station) killed more than 30 people, on 12 June 2016, an attacker opened fire on the crowd at a nightclub in Florida, killing 49

people, on 28 June 2016, a combined attack carried out by guns and suicide vests at the airport in Istanbul killed more than 40 people, on 14 July 2016, in Nice, France, a man rammed a truck into the crowd in France's National Day, killing more than 80 people, on 31 December 2016, an ISIS-linked terrorist attacked a crowded nightclub in Istanbul, killing 39 people, on 23 March 2017, a terrorist rammed a car into the crowd over the Westminster Bridge in London and then stabbed a police officer. Thus, putting aside the group's military advances and operations in Iraq and Syria and presence in Libya, it owes a significant portion of its “fame” to its affiliates and people inspired by its discourse carrying out attacks all over the world.

Since mid-2014, ISIS has been regarding Turkey as a high priority in its list of possible areas in which the group needs to exert its influence and gain fighters from and from which to defend itself from possible military move. Within this context, some of the most sensational and tragic terror attacks carried out by ISIS are as follows:

Storming the Turkish Consulate Building in Mosul (June 11, 2014): 49 people were kidnapped and held captive for 101 days including Turkey's Consulate General

Suruç attack (July 20, 2015): Claimed 34 lives, left 104 people injured

Ankara Train Station attack (October 10, 2015): Claimed 103 lives, left more than 400 people injured

İstanbul Sultanahmet Police Station attack (January 12, 2016): Claimed 13 lives, left 14 people injured

İstanbul İstiklal attack (March 19, 2016): Claimed 4 lives, left 39 people injured

İstanbul- Atatürk Airport attack (July 28, 2016): Claimed 45 lives, left more than 230 people injured

Gaziantep wedding attack (August 20, 2016): Claimed 51 lives, left more than 94 people injured

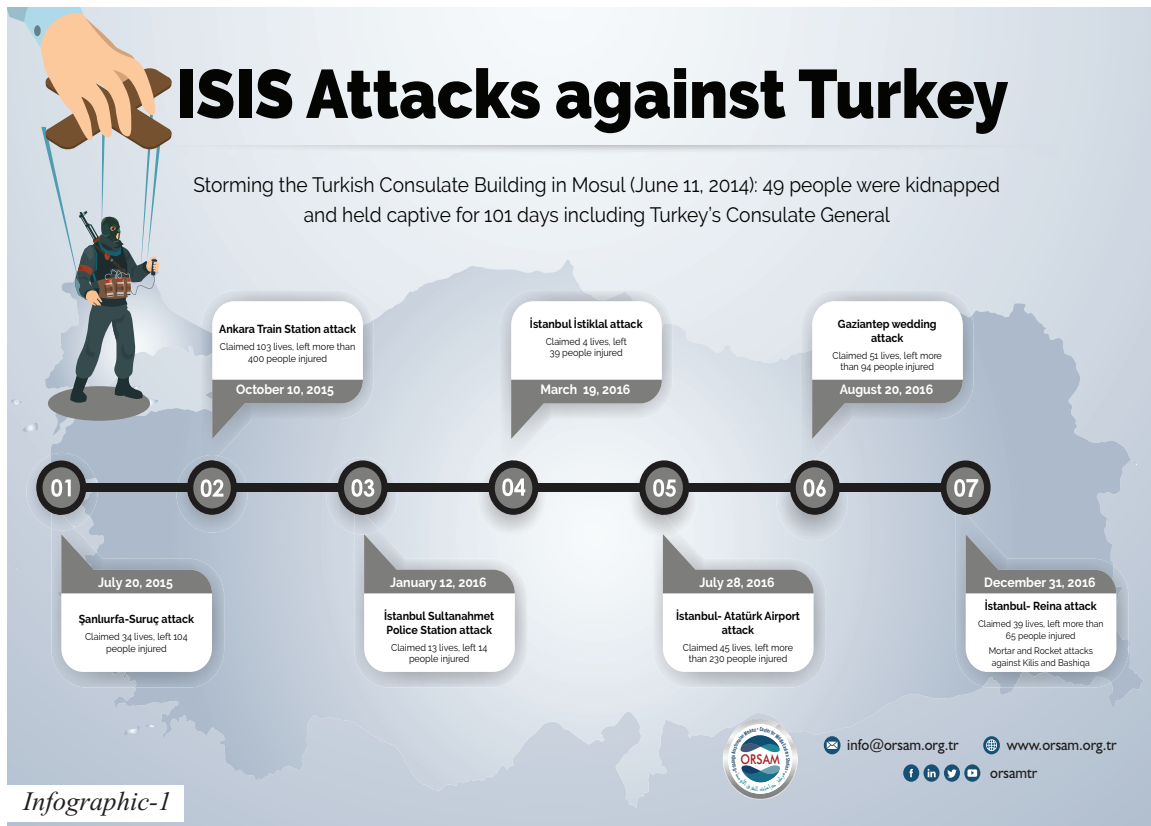
İstanbul- Reina attack (December 31, 2016): Claimed 39 lives, left more than 65 people injured

Moreover, between January and May 2016, in almost 20 mortar/rocket attacks, Kilis was hit by around 60 rockets/mortars, claiming the lives of 19 residents and 70 people were injured. In addition, ISIS, in the mosques it controls, in Friday sermons, repeatedly mentioned Kilis, Gaziantep, and Karkamış as high priority targets, further highlighting the terrorist group's intention to target Turkey and its border areas. Besides, Turkish military personnel positioned in the Bashiqa camp in Iraq were also targeted by the group.

3- Turkey's Fight at a glance

a-D-ISIS Coalition, Border Controls and the Operation Euphrates Shield

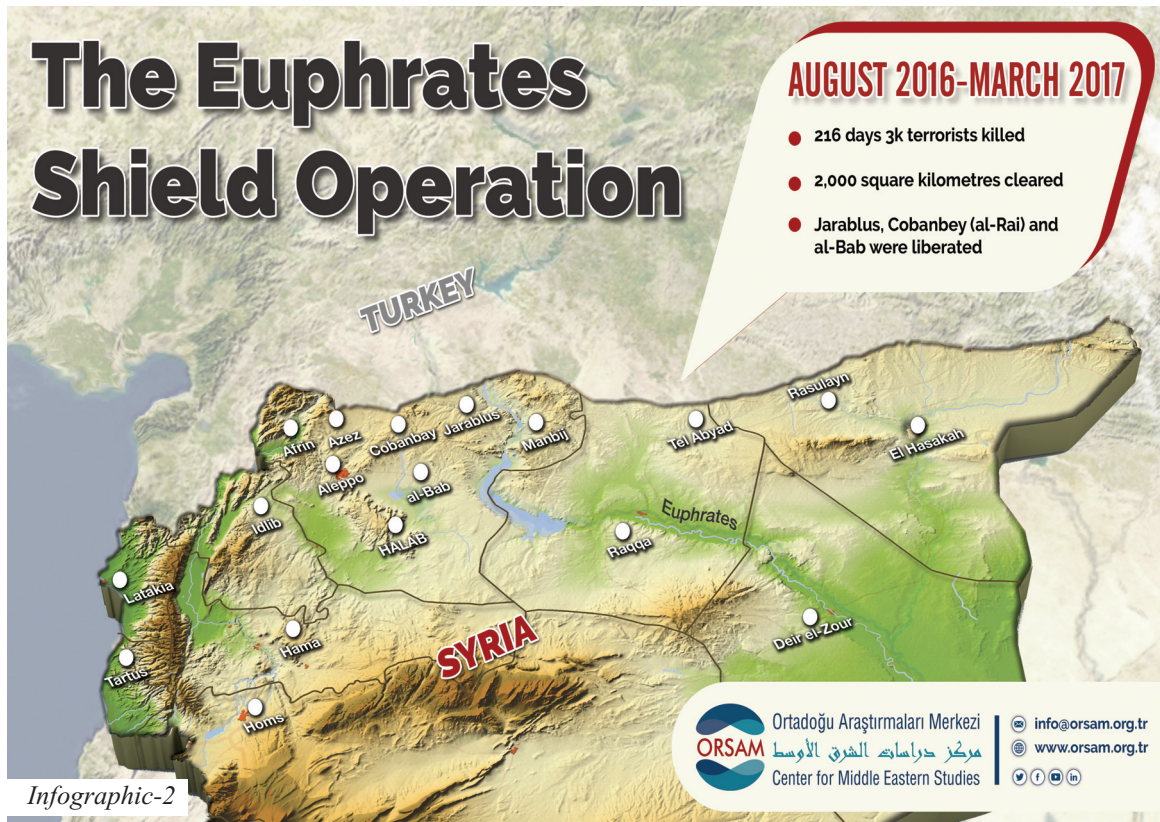
As one of the key institutional frameworks under the UN's roof, the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) has been initiated by Turkey along with the US, two first co-chairs of this body. GCTF was co-chaired by Turkey between 2011 and 2016 until the Netherlands and Morocco replaced Turkey and the US as co-chairs. Turkey also co-chaired the Horn of Africa Working Group within the GCTF with the European Union. It was also a key actor in terms of leading GCTF initiatives to Address the Life Cycle of Radicalization to Violence" and the "Antalya Memorandum on Good Practices on the Protection of Soft Targets in a Counterterrorism Context". Turkey is also an active member of D-ISIS Coalition or the



Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and co-leader of the Coalition's working group on FTFs. In terms of the implementation of UNSC 2178, Turkey has long been at the forefront of the fight. For instance, individuals suspected to have links to terrorist groups trying to have access to Turkey or travelling to other destinations through the country are transferred to Deportation Centers and expelled to their home countries. In addition, 22 Risk Analysis Units in 16 cities located in airports and bus terminals are quite central instruments in terms of preventing travels of such people. As the financial dimension of terrorism getting more and more attention, it should also be noted that Turkey is also a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-money laundering/countering terrorist financing body. In terms of the country's contribution to global efforts, along with the US, Turkey led the ini-

tiative to produce the FATF report on ISIS financing in 2015. Turkey's Financial Intelligence Unit (MASAK) actively contributes to FATF's efforts in line with UNSC 1267 and 1373, primarily focusing on terrorist financing and the measures to prevent and prosecute them. Besides these multilateral efforts, Turkey also concluded bilateral agreements with more than 70 countries within the context of the fight against terrorism. Only in 2017, total of 739 Daesh members were remanded in custody while 4,765 suspects were arrested for links to the terror group in 2017.

Turkey has allowed its airspace to be used by Coalition aircraft for both combat and non-combat roles, including intelligence gathering, personnel recovery, and has opened its facilities to the Coalition partners, allowing over 60 aircraft with over 1200 personnel to be deployed to support operations,



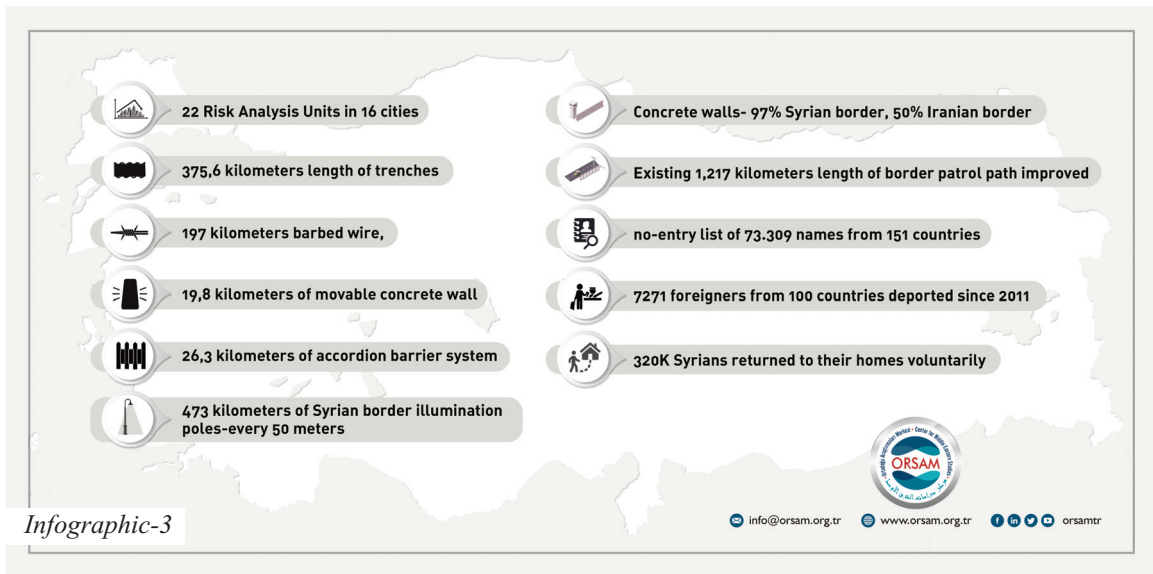
for the operations targeting ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and 90 percent of the operations of unmanned air vehicles are focused in Syrian border area to detect illegal crossing and smuggling activities.

With the Operation Euphrates Shield, started in August 24, 2016, Turkey directly engaged with ISIS' presence on the Syrian side of its borders. With the operation, it cleared its border from ISIS presence, controlled more than 230 residential areas and 1900 square kilometres, killing 3000 terrorists. In late February 2017, an important stronghold of ISIS in Syria, namely al-Bab was also controlled. The Operation, which began in August, 2016, had two main goals – clearing the Turkish border of Islamic State (IS) and preventing the merger of cantons controlled by the YPG in the same area. The latter had a further goal, which was to push the People's Protection Units (YPG) forces to the west of Euphrates River and in so doing clear Manbij of the PKK's Syrian branch YPG, which is still on Turkey's priorities list. Turkey's National Security Council announced the end of Operation Euphrates Shield on March 27, 2016.

Following the Operation, a key tool for ISIS' Online Propaganda, Dabiq e-journal ceased to be published by the group, further damage to the group's propaganda machine. The group's demise has been coupled with a decrease in its online presence and propaganda activities. ISIS has suffered from serious damage to its propaganda machine lately. In the summer of 2015, the group propaganda machine could produce “more than 200 videos, radio programmes, magazines and photo reports each week”, whereas as of now, the number diminished so significantly that it is around 20 outputs weekly.¹⁰ Whereas the groups could produce around 900 online content items in August 2015 at the peak of its online propaganda activity, as of late 2017, the number fell as much as around 100.¹¹ While the group was publishing several e-journals at the peak of its power, including Konstantiniyye (Turkish), Istok (Russian), Dabiq (English), Dar-al Islam (French) and Rumiya (English), none of them are published anymore including the last “survivor” Dabiq which was ceased to be published after Turkey's Euphrates Shield Operation.

ISIS, once able to satisfy around 90-95 percent of its economic needs by its own rev-





venues, had presented a unique case at the peak of its power as an almost completely self-sustainable terrorist organization. The group's oil revenues only were around \$40 million a month in 2015. Even though territorial losses resulted in a significant loss here, too, it is estimated that the group can still make \$4 million a month even after the loss of control over oil fields in Iraq and Syria, a figure far from ignorable for a terrorist group even though it is at best modest for an insurgency aiming at establishing and sustaining a state-like structure while at the same time fighting at different fronts.¹² Relatedly, in 2014, 79 million liters of smuggled oil was intercepted by Turkish law enforcement and customs authorities, in 2015 this amount decreased to 1,22 million liters due to effective measures taken to prevent oil smuggling. On the other hand, the amount of intercepted smuggled oil at the Syrian border, which was 12,6 million liters in 2014, decreased to 887 thousand liters in 2015. Additionally, 300 kilometers of illegal pipelines were also destroyed

Turkey has also strengthened its physical border control measures and security along its 911 kilometers border with Syria. Within this

context, Turkey has been putting a significant amount of effort into its "Syrian border physical security system" which includes construction of 192 kilometers of wall. Moreover, the number of the personnel of the existing 12 Border Battalions which was 12.000 in 2104, has been increased to 20.000. New units of air defense and reconnaissance have been added to the battalions. Within the context of the Border Physical Security System Project, the number of border patrol stations were increased along with 375,6 kilometers length of trenches, 197 kilometers of barbed wire, 19,8 kilometers of movable concrete Wall and 26,3 kilometers of accordion barrier system. 473 kilometers of Syrian border illumination poles installed at every 50 meters, and the existing 1,217 kilometers length of border patrol path has been improved.

b. Non-Military Efforts

In terms of non-military measures put forward by Turkey, there are several points which deserve a great deal of attention both in terms of best practices and efforts to reach out to people via direct contact as well as counter-narratives.

The Ministry of Family and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as the police and military within the context of briefing and information activities aimed at weakening the ideological and social base of radical groups. Social and cultural projects, which has have long been believed to be a key component of any smart power strategy aiming at inflicting a major blow to radical groups' especially young human capital succeeded to gather more than 65 thousand people.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs acts as a key institution to producing and publicizing a religious counter-narrative. In order to produce and publicise religious counter-narrative, 550 preachers are charged by the Presidency of Religious Affairs in prisons where radicalisation can produce and re-produce itself. Moreover, the Presidency of Religious Affairs published two reports, entitled "The Fundamental Philosophy and Religious References of ISIS" and "Exploitation of Religion and Terrorist Organization ISIS" in 2015 and 2017 respectively. Another piece, "DEAŞ: Dehşete Dayalı bir Din İstismarı/DEASH: Exploitation of Re-

ligion Based on Terror" is also produced and disseminated as booklets in 2018. The two reports published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs on making sense of the religious references and narrative used by ISIS are also an important endeavour. The reports not only cover ISIS's religious references and its historical background, but also show how the terrorist group distorts religious concepts and abuse them in order to gain legitimacy and how to respond to this distortion. Nevertheless, as mentioned in earlier sections, a state institution disseminating counter-messaging and a counter-narrative could easily suffer from legitimacy issues in the eyes of radical groups. The institution itself as well as the scholars, academics etc. who took part in the production of such reports would be labelled as the "state's mere tools" to fight "us" and "only serving the state's interests" which is the "enemy" itself. Moreover, even the inconsistency in the titles of the reports regarding ISIS/ISIS seems further weakening its intellectual reach.

Personnel in the prisons are also trained specifically to get better equipped in terms of



the ways that people can be radicalized and how to prevent them. “High Security” prisons are organized for the leadership of various terrorist organizations with cells containing 1 to 3 inmates. Hotlines 183 and 144 have also been in use. The Information Analysis Service is active since 2017 to monitor communication among inmates as well as their communication with the outside. Within the context of the “Dynamic Security” approach, not only prevention of future crimes is aimed for, but also psychological support, moral training, and personal development support are also provided to inmates for rehabilitation. In that respect several EU-funded projects are being carried out to improve counselling and support programmes such as DEPAR and R2PRIS. Turkey’s massive immigrant population has also been subject to education programmes and personnel in the refugee camps were also educated in areas including personal communication, law, economics, media and health. The youth camps organised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports succeeded in attracting around 60 thousand youth. In 352 projects directed at the youth run by the Ministry only in 2015, around \$9 million was spent and 328 thousand youth were able to benefit from them. Even though these youth camps and projects were not organised/run for the goal of preventing radicalisation, the youth camps are one of the key measures in the literature on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Therefore, either incorporating brief curriculums regarding the fight against radicalisation or designing individual camps or projects to that end could be quite useful measures which are absent in the case of Turkey for the time being.

Within the context of Turkey’s efforts to comply with the international regulations and effectively cooperate with its international partners, one of the most important documents related to FTF was conveyed by the Prime

Ministry to the Parliament on February 2, 2016, entitled “The Bill of Approval of the Ratification of the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism”. Here, in line with the UNSC 2178, travels with the aim of joining terrorist groups, organising and financing such travels and helping facilitation of such efforts were proposed to be subject to relevant legal regulations and to make amendments to include training for terrorist purposes, too the existing regulations in order to avoid any loopholes. It should also be noted that Turkey, which was the co-chair of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum with the US, played a quite active role in the production of the resolution 2178. By doing so, Turkey would not only have the chance to revise and if necessary, amend and improve its own capability, regulations, and practices, but also would contribute to the international and regional security with its experience and fight in the field.

c- International Information Sharing and Preventing Returnees’ Movements

In terms of Turkey’s international efforts and cooperation, even though the Brussels and Paris attacks and the information Turkey provided to the concerned European countries beforehand was surprisingly ignored, these two cases showed Turkey’s active efforts in terms of international efforts to fight radicalisation, violent extremism and foreign terrorist fighters. Turkey had officially warned the French government twice about one of the attackers, Omer Ismail Moustefai, who in 2013, entered Turkey. These warnings were made in December 2014 and June 2015, quite earlier than the attack. In response, let alone any precaution taken, no contact was made in return by the French government up until the “information request” they demanded after the attacks took place. Similarly, before the Brussels airport attack, Turkey informed not only Bel-

gium, but also the Dutch government about one of the attackers, Ibrahim El Bakraoui, who was in Turkey's suspected FTF list already, travelled to Turkey twice in July and August, 2015. He, being after detained in Gaziantep, was deported by Turkey (one of his two deportations) to the Netherlands from where he then moved to Belgium. Following his deportation, Turkey warned both governments' about Bakraoui's suspected attempt to access Syria. Turkey also warned the Belgian government about Najim Laachroui following his trip to Turkey as well as Ibrahim El Bakraoui's brother, Khalid. According to the Belgian government, both individuals were said to be "clean" and "had no terror links". The Belgian government issued an INTERPOL red notice only 3 weeks before the attack due to suspected "terrorist" links of Laarouchi and Khalid el Bakraoui.

Along with the question of remaining human capital of ISIS in general, which can well be utilised by Al-Qaeda and future ISIS-like groups, unless the deep socio-economic and political drivers are addressed on the ground, how countries would deal with their own citizens who fought in Syria and Iraq for terrorist groups and more particularly for ISIS and now trying to make their way back home stands out as a challenging aspect of the group's human capital. With the loss of its "state", ISIS has been producing a significant amount of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) considering the fact, that at its peak, the number of FTFs fighting for the group reached around 40,000.¹³

Disappointment with the gap between what is promised and what is the actual situation under ISIS' control, cessation of the once attractive financial flow, destruction of the "prestigious" image of being a "solider" of a "right and winning cause" and the "caliphate", falsification of the group's discourse about the fall

of its much propagated images of "unbeatable caliphate" and "capability to win forever", acceptance of the fact that the group will hardly survive this process are some of the reasons behind the tendency to return. However, it is also possible that in response to this "fall", many FTFs also return to their countries to carry the war with them to the "heart of the enemy" which played important roles in the destruction of the embodiment of his/her "cause".

United Nations Security Council Resolution numbered 2178 (2014), which is widely known for its emphasis on the conceptualization of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), focuses on the flight information and screening of suspicious individuals based on this information. According to Resolution 2178, the UN calls for the airline operators in the Member States to provide API information to the relevant institutions and thus to detect their departure from the country, their effort to enter the country or pass through it. This call was repeated in 2016 with the UNSC Resolution 2309. It is no coincidence that 2016 was the year when ISIS suffered losses on the ground and that the FTFs became increasingly important on the agenda.

The UN stressed the need for Member States to step up their efforts; thus, giving an important message to those countries which do not have the required level of awareness or the necessary technical capabilities. Resolution 2396 of December 2017 is the most recent decision within this context. In this resolution, the UN calls on Member States to strengthen their border security, their efforts for information sharing, and other means related to the return of FTFs. In this context, the Member States are urged to collect API, PNRs and biometric data of the people suspected of terrorist activities, developing monitoring lists and

matching the data with these lists, strengthening information sharing and increasing their capacities in order to match this data in coordination with the organizations such as INTERPOL, IATA, IOCA, and CTED under the roof of the UN.

In connection with this message, 56 UN Member States are currently using the API system. It is clear that the increase in this given number is quite vital for the global fight against terrorism. For monitoring the suspects' travel and the incorporation of this data to international information-sharing schemes in the countries except these 56 stands out as a major obstacle in this context. This number is particularly noteworthy in these days when returning FTFs, which legal processes to be followed about them, how to identify and disengage them from terrorists groups have been climbing up in the international security agenda.

Turkey, due to its geographic proximity to terrorist groups with various motives and the fact that these groups have also been active in the country along with the country's crucial geographical position in the context of travels, has a highly significant role in terms of data collection and sharing. Being one of the above-mentioned 56 UN Member States where the API system is in use, Turkey's critical importance was witnessed during the international information-sharing processes prior to the attacks in Brussels and Paris. In addition to those attacks, it is also valid to argue that Turkey is located in an even more critical security axis in the context of the question of "returnees". Within this framework, Turkey, the founding co-chair of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and one of the architects of the above-mentioned Resolution 2178 participated in the 9th Ministerial Meeting entitled "Detection and Intervention of Terrorists'

Travels through Strengthened Terrorist Tracking and Information-Sharing" in September, 2018, focused on "terrorists' travel initiatives".

The main issues discussed in this meeting were the "watch lists" in which the "matching" with the above-mentioned data pool will be carried out, the accessibility of these lists to the authorities at the borders, and the establishment of an internationally integrated database and doing all these by taking into consideration the legal rules and fundamental rights regarding privacy and protection of personal data. Turkey, to note in this regard, based on the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, currently holds a no-entry list of 73.309 names from 151 countries, 7271 foreigners were deported since 2011 in the context of measures against foreign fighters, and has active risk analysis units in 16 provinces at 22 points, more than six thousand suspects have been registered as Inadmissible Passenger (INAD), and about six thousand people have already been deported.

Combined, all these shows the international community that Turkey, aside from its significant geographical proximity, is well aware of the danger and puts a serious effort in terms of taking necessary steps in order to tackle it effectively. Turkey has also put in place a broad array of mechanisms to disrupt or stop the flow of foreign fighters. Turkey is continuously enhancing security measures to stop and intercept foreign terrorist fighters at airports and other border crossing points through Risk Analysis Units established specifically for this purpose. Turkey has begun to counter the threat of foreign terrorist fighters since 2011 and called for source countries to take necessary legal and administrative measures to prevent departure and travel of FTFs from their countries.

Conclusion

As a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS or D-ISIS in short, Turkey, despite having suffered from occasional indifference and/or lack of response of other members of the coalition both during the Euphrates Shield Operation and regarding its concerns about the PKK'S off-shoot YPG in Northern Syria, from the very beginning of the fight, both directly and indirectly and also in many cases individually took effective measures against the group. Along with the country's cross-border operations and support to the global coalition, the fight has been more and more intense inside the country with more than 4500 people were taken into custody and more than 700 people arrested for allegations about links to ISIS only in 2017. Turkey's efforts in terms of information-sharing and prevention of terrorists' travels have been exemplified in many cases including the tragic attacks in Brussels and Paris. Besides, as the Ministry of Interior announced recently, the country foiled around 700 terror plots in 2017 whereas the number is almost 350 in 2018. All in all, from

international cooperation to cross-border operations, Turkey stands out as a key actor in terms of global counter-terrorism efforts and P/CVE-related strategies. Nevertheless, ambiguities in terms of defining terrorism and designating terrorist groups result in setbacks in terms of international cooperation and jeopardize relations between NATO allies as in the case of YPG. While fighting a terrorist group does not make another terrorist group a legitimate actor on the ground, divergencies between NATO allies still exist on the subject. Whether the recent discussions about the US' withdrawal from Syria would result in a more strategically wise mid to long-term strategy and how this would affect Turkey's concerns need to be observed quite closely in the coming months. In any case, Turkey's position of standing against all manifestations of terrorism posing a national security threat and the ensued steps to be taken in order to materialise this approach would most possibly continue in the foreseeable future either against YPG's presence in Northern Syria or a resurgence of ISIS and/or like-minded groups.

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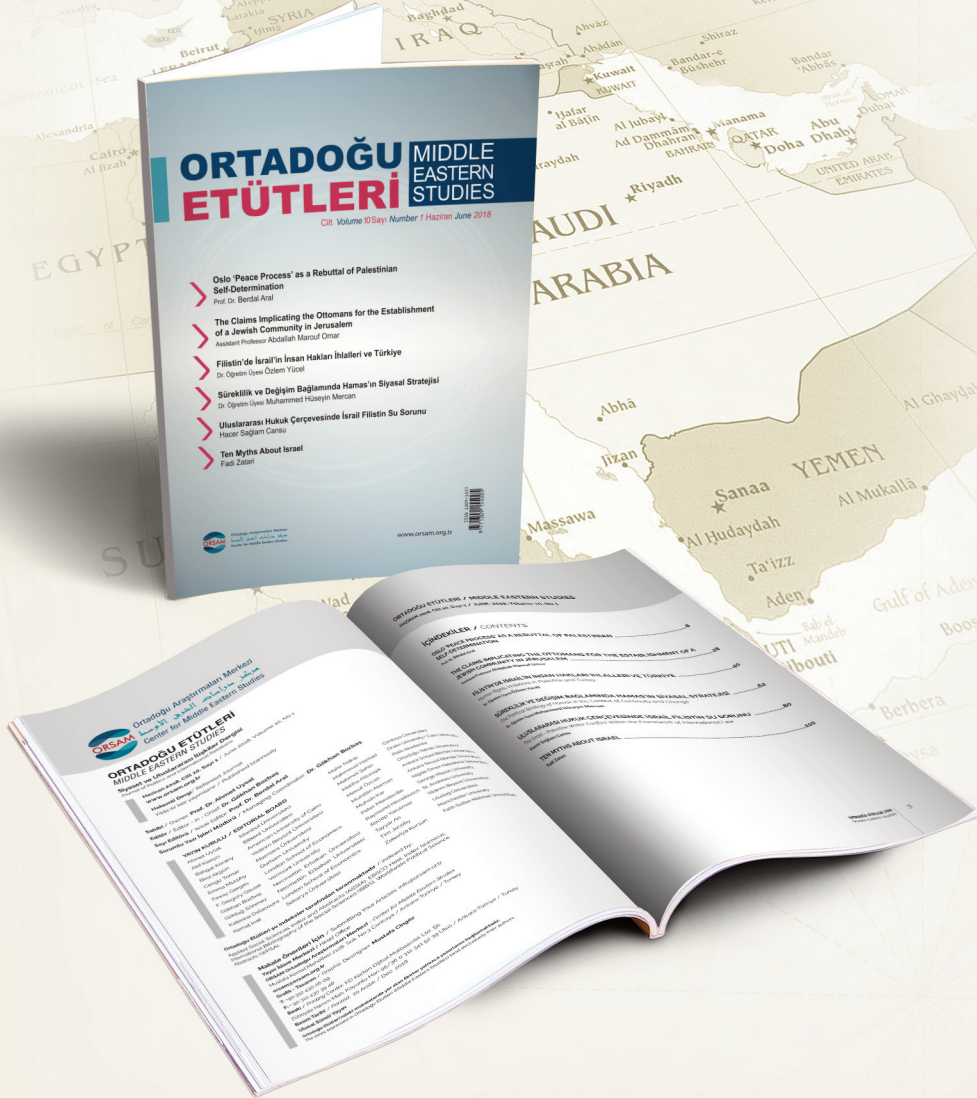
Endnotes

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