

Fighting Terrorism and a Clashing Alliance: The Case of Turkey-U.S. Security Relations

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- **How U.S. support to the PYD/PKK in Syria will affect the Turkey-U.S. relationship?**
- **What will be the implications of the U.S. strategy to defeat DAESH for the region?**
 - **How is the PKK taking advantage of the U.S. military assistance to the YPG?**

INTRODUCTION

The multiplicity of players in irregular warfare demonstrates the ambiguous nature of struggle and makes the security problems more complicated as is the case in the low intensity conflict environment of Syria and the broader region. The policies of the states introduced the question of how reliable the alliances were in the fight against terrorism without the principles of partnership. This phenomenon raised the necessity of rethinking the concept of objective-centric security alliances in unconventional warfare. The problem of reliability surfaced in the strategic partnership between Turkey and the U.S. regarding the issue of the discrepancy while Turkey is fighting against terrorism and fighting for democracy. In the case of Turkey and the U.S., The problem goes far beyond the conflict spectrum in Syria.

Turkish Security Forces have been subject to a number of non-state threats in the various and unique security environments shaped by the terrorist organizations ranging from the PKK to DAESH since 2015. Each and every organization required different anti-and countermeasures to be defeated. In addition to

the plurality of traditional outlawed organizations, Turkish Security Forces also experienced a survival test during the thwarted coup d'état initiated by FETÖ. The thwarted coup became a turning point for Turkish Security Forces in comprehending the real threats on the ground and the real enemies behind the scenes. Following the failure of the July 15 coup attempt, Turkish intelligence, military and law enforcement institutions have engaged with terror groups, on the one hand, adhering to the concept of a unity of efforts, while, on the other, eliminating FETÖ members in the security structure. In the course of the counter-terror operations, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and their combat readiness became the focus of Western analysts and security circles after FETÖ members were dismissed from the military service. Apart from the Operation Euphrates Shield against DAESH, the fight against the PKK is the best index for measuring the combat readiness of the TSK against violent non-state organizations. The U.S. seemed not to cooperate with Turkey in fighting against the PKK; instead the U.S. exploited the nature of the conflict in Syria and indirectly supported the PKK.

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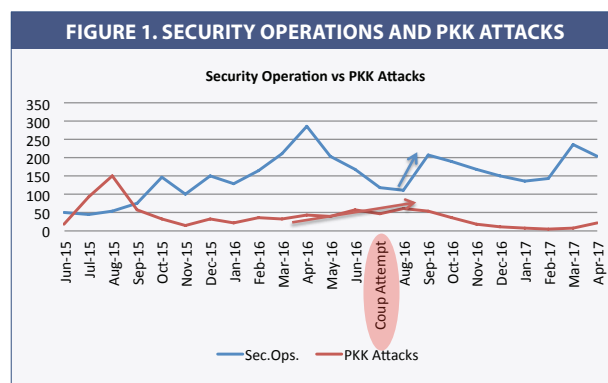
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THE US BOOSTED THE TERRORIST PKK TO ACT IN INSURGENCY CHARACTER

According to the U.S. military annuals, the U.S. supports selected non-state groups and coordinates with its friends and allies in areas of common interest. Because the support of non-state actors requires sensitivity, the U.S. supports the non-state actors covertly—an example of this is its support of the PYD/PKK. The U.S. normally relies on the symbolic act of people's mobilization within the country to successfully build an illusion of legitimacy. Then the efforts include political, social and military developments. Within the logistics of supporting a non-state group, U.S. forces assist in the recruiting, organizing, training and equipping of the fighting elements—this is true of the PYD/PKK case in Syria.¹ When supporting the PYD/PKK, the major point that the U.S. ignores is the lack of coordination with its strategic ally, namely Turkey, and the risks for Turkey's internal defense

Owing to the affiliation of the YPG and U.S. Forces (USSOCOM and CENTOM elements), the PKK learned how means of causing mass destruction can be less expensive and became more reliant on the theatrics of actions throughout Turkey. Then, the PKK replaced its prolonged rural tactics with terrorism of an urban character, thus introducing violence to peaceful and stable urban society in the wake of the PYD's gains in northern Syria. The figure 1 illustrates the PKK's surge and the security forces operations since July 2015. The PKK's presence in urban centers was obliterated by the TSK and other security institutions by March 2016. It was also during the last days of the PKK in city centers when the rumors of an intended military coup were first heard. Security operations seemed to be in a decreasing trend in April 2016; this decrease was assessed since the PKK terrorists were either neutralized or had to flee to rural areas. However, the decreasing trend could only be explained with the direct FETÖ-PKK affiliation and covert U.S. leverage.

¹ US Army Field Manual 100-20, Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict, p. 2-17.



During the course of approximately the last two years, U.S.-Turkish security relations remained unstable due to the U.S. support of the PYD and the suspected U.S. affiliation with the coup attempt. The public opinion in Turkey that the failed coup originated in the U.S. and that the U.S. supports the PYD/PKK in destabilizing Turkey is quite strong and Turkish perception of the U.S.-Turkish relations in terms of security has shifted considerably. Relations are expected to continue in this way as the U.S. continues to support the PYD and rejects the extradition of Fethullah Gülen, who was behind the coup attempt.

IS THE U.S. HONEST IN ITS EFFORTS TO DEFEAT DAESH?

Owing to mutual dependency in security, Turkish authorities have made efforts to reconstruct the relations with the U.S. by seizing the opportunity of Trump's state-centric alliance mindset in the geostrategic developments in the Middle East. Turkey, as the only state actor who fought and defeated DAESH in Syria, offered the U.S. to carry the Raqqa Operation with the force composition of anti-DAESH coalition and reasonable local actors as an option. Despite the Turkish efforts to find alternatives for the Raqqa Operation with the involvement of the Turkish military, the FSA and Arab elements of the SDF without the PYD, the Pentagon rejected these efforts and followed the politicized CENTCOM strategy. The defeat of DAESH in Raqqa is inevitable; however, the CENTCOM strategy is the cause of the future challenges of post-DAESH Raqqa. The rising threat of the PYD/PKK will be the

most important security issue to mobilize more state and non-state actors in the regional security environment. However, it seems that Obama's policy is still active in Syria in regards to the affiliation of non-state actors jeopardizing the survival of other local groups and Turkish national security. Focusing on the projected Raqqa operation, CENTCOM relies on the PYD's armed contribution and vitalizing the PYD elements with heavy weapons so that the involvement of a larger number of conventional U.S. troops can be avoided. It might be a rational cause to defeat DAESH with a proxy but the most problematic area is sustaining the stability during the post-DAESH era. Single battles are not enough to bring about security stability after a combatant victory; CENTCOM points out that the PYD elements are armed for a battle to defeat IS in Raqqa, not to let the PYD dominate in the Arab-populated area. However, CENTCOM does not seem to have any post-DAESH plan. In the case of Manjib, the U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter DAESH Brett McGurk tweeted that the PYD would withdraw to the eastern bank of the Euphrates River after maintaining security in the post-DAESH era.² President Trump will probably need to sign another decree to send a huge number of U.S. troops to enforce stability in Syria, as is the case in Afghanistan now.

HOW IS THE PKK TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE YPG?

The PKK envisioned intimidating Turkish Security Forces in Turkish territory with the huge employment of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) and Vehicle-borne IEDs (VBIED) while attacking the Turkish outposts along the Syrian border with YPG elements equipped with sophisticated U.S. weaponry. The YPG elements carried out a series of attacks against Turkish border security installations between April 26 and 28 with antitank guided missiles (ATGM), mortars and the high caliber sniper rifles provided by USSOCOM

² Brett McGurk, Twitter, 16 November 2016, https://twitter.com/brett_mcgurk/status/798787343243091973, (Access date: 12 May 2017).

elements. Attached to the weapons used against Turkey, a U.S. NATO ally, were high-tech night vision gear including thermal cameras. The U.S. authorities insist that weaponry was provided to the YPG to fight against DAESH in Raqqa city; however, the Raqqa city, where the U.S. weaponry is expected to be used against DAESH elements, is 100 km away from the nearest Turkish border outposts that the YPG terrorists attacked recently. Thus, the U.S. weapons are not only deployed to Raqqa vicinity, but along the Turkish border. Moreover, U.S. special operation soldiers now patrol the Turkish border to cover the covert activities of the YPG/PKK elements against Turkey. If CENTCOM did not send those soldiers to get killed together with YPG/PKK terrorists by Turkish border security forces in order to cause further aggression between two NATO countries, why are U.S. soldiers patrolling the Turkish border?. Turkish expectation was based on the fact that military success against DAESH and the security stability in Syria could be provided only by state armies. Armed non-state actors such as the YPG/PKK can play a role of deepening the instability in Syria.



Turkey's security agenda is now dominated by PYD/PKK terrorism in northern Syria, while Turkish threat perception was tested when the PYD reacted to Turkish air strikes with multiple attacks against the Turkish border outposts along the Syrian border. The YPG attacks introduced the YPG's military capacity and displayed how well the YPG was equipped with ATGMs, mortars and sophisticated small arms by the U.S. Forces on the ground. In the aftermath of a

possible victory against DAESH in Raqqa, the PYD/PKK is expected to export more terrorism into Turkey under the U.S. policy of supporting insurgency while harming Turkey's internal defense. This is contrary to U.S. principles of democracy and allegiance to strategic partnerships - but Turkey will find ways to overcome the U.S. treachery.

WHAT IS NEXT?

Beyond harboring PYD/PKK terrorism in Syria, the U.S. also became a safe haven for FETÖ members before, during and after the failed coup. Disappointing Western manipulators, the TSK proved its respect to the choice of people and that governments could be replaced only by the people's preference and that terrorism is defeated solely by the united efforts of the people and all state institutions. The Turkish Security Forces passed two important tests: a combat readiness test against terrorist organizations and a test of their true commitment to democracy. The lessons learned from the fight against terrorism and the discrepancies in the U.S. partnership embolden Turkey to adapt a postmodern security architecture for the irregularities of warfare. In this architecture, it is expected that more national defense systems and alternative allies will play an important role.

While clashing against the noncommittal U.S. alliance, Turkey should keep cross-border counterterror operations against the PYD/PKK elements in the form of small- and middle-scale special operations. The local groups in Syria should be educated in the awareness of the rising threat of the PYD/PKK. Border security should be reinforced with physical and technical surveillance and intervention systems to prevent terrorists' infiltration and transfer of weapons, ammunitions and military equipment. The PKK should be assaulted with all necessary hard power to contain its terrorist framework and to ease its pressure on the semi-peripheral Kurdish public space paving way for the people to have close ties with the political system. In regards to FETÖ, the Turkish government should reconsider the Treaty on Extradition and Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters with the United States.

The principles of U.S. foreign policy instruments are shifting towards power-centric methods while the U.S. is replacing its democratically elected government partners with military coup regimes and traditional state partners with non-state entities. The million dollar question is this: Is U.S. foreign policy falling under military tutelage?



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