

ANALYSIS

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ONE YEAR AFTER JULY 15 TURKEY'S FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

NECDET ÖZÇELİK, RIFAT ÖNCEL, SİBEL DÜZ





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SETA | FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Phone:+90 312.551 21 00 | Fax :+90 312.551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Phone: +90 212 315 11 00 | Fax: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington, D.C., 20036 USA

Phone: 202-223-9885 | Fax: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Cairo

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No 19 Cairo EGYPT

Phone: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Necdet ÖZÇELİK

Necdet Özçelik received his Master's degree from the International Relations Department of Atılım University. He studies irregular warfare including terrorism, counter-terrorism insurgency, counter-insurgency and violent non-state actors. Özçelik has expertise in low-intensity conflicts as a former member of the Turkish Special Forces and has made tours of duty in southeast Turkey, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Germany, and the USA. Özçelik is also qualified in the U.S. Army Special Forces. He is working as a researcher at the Directorate of Security Studies at SETA Foundation.

Sibel DÜZ

Sibel Düz completed her BA in International Relations at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in 2013. She is currently working on her Master's degree at METU in Middle Eastern Studies. Her main research interests include Terrorism Studies, irregular warfare, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and insurgency. Currently, she is working as a research assistant at the Directorate of Security Studies at SETA Foundation.

Rifat ÖNCEL

Rifat Öncel graduated from the Department of International Relations at Dokuz Eylül University in 2014. He is currently working on his Master's thesis at the Middle East Technical University Department of International Relations. His areas of research include irregular warfare, terrorism and insurgency, violent non-state actors, and radicalization sociology. He is working as a research assistant at the Directorate of Security Studies at SETA Foundation.

ABSTRACT

Turkish security institutions faced a series of security challenges following the July 15 coup attempt in 2016. One of these challenges was terrorist organizations testing the combat readiness of the Turkish security forces. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) are the main security institution fighting terrorism within and beyond Turkey; their combat readiness was questioned due to the imminent discharge of 44% of the generals and admirals as a result of their involvement in the coup attempt. This paper aims to illustrate the combat readiness of the Turkish security forces in regard to their counterterrorism strategies against the PKK and DAESH in the past year, one year after the coup attempt of July 2016.



This paper aims to illustrate the combat readiness of the Turkish security forces in regard to their counterterrorism strategies against the PKK and DAESH.

ABBREVIATIONS

ATGM:	Anti-Tank Guided Missile
CT:	Counterterrorism
DAESH:	Arabic expression for “Islamic State of Iraq and Sham” (<i>al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham</i>)
FF:	Foreign Fighters
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
IED:	Improvised Explosive Device
KCK:	Kurdistan Communities Union (<i>Koma Ciwaken Kurdistan</i>)
MANPADS:	Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems
PKK:	Kurdistan Workers’ Party
SOF:	Special Operations Forces
SVEST:	Suicide Vest
SVBIED:	Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
UAV:	Unmanned Air Vehicle
VBIED:	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
YPG:	People’s Defense Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i>)
YPJ:	Women’s Protection Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Jin</i>)
YPS :	Civil Protection Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Sivil</i>)

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian Civil War and the ongoing clashes in Iraq introduced many challenging dimensions to Turkey's social, economic and security capacities. The chaotic security environment in both countries attracted different actors in the region, destabilizing Turkish security along its border and in its own territory. The PKK/YPG and DAESH became two important threats which increased the risks to Turkey's border security, and traditional threats against its border security were replaced by new unconventional threats. Concordantly, border security turned out to be an urgent issue as the PKK/YPG and DAESH engaged in conflicts in regions adjacent to Turkey, and Turkey became one of the target countries on the "transition route" for Foreign Fighters (FF). Turkish security was not only threatened by the PKK/YPG and DAESH with the classical threats occurring in metropolises and on its borders; it also experienced a large scale urban terror surge by the PKK until mid-2016 with the aim of prompting an insurgency in eastern Turkey. The vulnerable security situation in Turkey caused by the terror organizations was blamed for the disunity among the intelligence, police, and military agencies. Even though Turkish security forces succeeded in countering the PKK in urban centers by May 2016, the security situation in the country got more complicated as a result of the coup attempt in July.

The security handicaps which were imposed by the multiplicity of threats and the requirement for differentiation in countering them were observed by FETÖ members in order to be utilized to their advantage. The order of the operation of the attempted coup was built on the correlation of mission and situation.¹ As is known in military circles, all military activities are executed according to a military decision-making process that evolves along the axis of situation and mission. The chaotic situation before July 15, 2016 has been orchestrated by FETÖ generals in order to justify the coup attempt. Some of the generals and high-ranking officers in the provinces of Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Mardin, Şırnak, Hakkari and Iğdır were discharged and arrested on the allegation of taking part in the coup attempt by turning a blind eye to the terror activities in their area of responsibility before the coup attempt.

By July 31, 2016, the Turkish military had discharged 158 generals and admirals; 2,133 officers; and 731 NCOs on the charge of being FETÖ members. The cadres of strategic military decision-making lost considerable man power and know-how with the first wave of discharges. Beyond the generals and strategic officers, the air force and army aviation pilots who were discharged also raised concern over Turkish combat readiness. With the Decree Law No. 689 on April 29, 2017, the total number of discharges in the TAF reached 10,014 including generals/admirals, officers, NCOs, specialists, and military cadets.

The number of FETÖ members who were discharged was expected to have an impact on limiting the combat efficiency of the TAF. In contrast to expectations, Turkish security forces since mid-August 2016 have become more effective in countering the PKK and DAESH elements and even carried out a large scale cross-border operation in northern Syria. This operational efficien-

1. For Further Information See "Yurtta Sulh Konseyi Bildirisi" available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83mhwNV154A>

cy has been attributed to two factors: the absence of FETÖ members' hampering activities after their discharge from the security forces, and the government's swift reaction in reorganizing the security institutions. Even though the discharges brought a frequent rotation of duty for those who actively fight terrorism, operational sustainability was able to be maintained.

The FETÖ discharges helped the Turkish security forces gain intelligence supremacy. Police operations targeted the auxiliary members of terror organizations and the terror networks were compromised. Turkish security forces enjoyed operational supremacy by decoding the auxiliary network, and engaged against DAESH cell houses with SWAT operations in metropolises and against the PKK with special military operations in rural areas. The results of the operational supremacy led to DAESH's failure to organize attacks on Turkish territory and to the PKK dispersing into small tactical elements of 5-7 terrorists in the rural areas in eastern Turkey. However, information supremacy (public diplomacy) is still in need of improvement.

THE COUP ATTEMPT AND COUNTERING THE PKK AFTERMATH

PKK's Urban Strategy and Terror Paradigms before the Coup Attempt

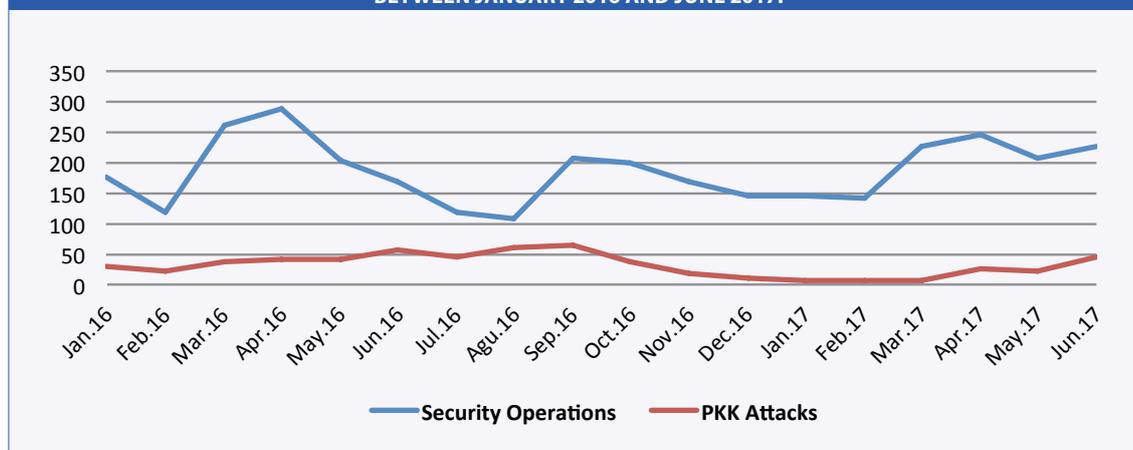
The PKK's strategy of transforming itself from a terror-based organization to one defined by its insurgency character as built on the pragmatic aspirations driven by the developments in Syria when the YPG assumed the role of fighting against DAESH. Based on the expectation of international support, the PKK attempted to create a people's war against the Turkish government on Turkish territory by prompting the urban standoff in the third and fourth quarters of 2015. While the PKK's urban strategy in

eastern Turkey was a transformation move, it also served as an operational program for the PKK with the following four objectives: ethnic radicalization, popular support, zone control, and administration in controlled zones. The PKK activities in urban areas escalated the violence and deepened the process of armed conflict in order to establish a kind of semi-sovereignty under the name of "self-governance" and "self-defense." Moreover, Bese Hozat, co-chair of the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union), pointed out in 2015 that the armed strategy in urban centers would be the "Revolutionary People's War."²

However, the complexity of the "conflict ecosystem" of urban warfare brought many setbacks for the PKK and it was not able to benefit from the ideological and methodological compatibility of insurgency with the current world order that could legitimize the PKK's terror character with the descriptive morality of insurgency. The PKK's strategy in Turkey backfired in the social, informational and security environments even if it enjoyed the direct and indirect support from state actors via the YPG in Syria. The government reaction, public criticism and environmental handicaps paved the way to the collapse of the urban strategy of the PKK and it had to return to its natural character of rural terrorism, fleeing to mountainous regions. Since April 2016, the Turkish Armed Forces reasserted their physical control in the southern cities of Turkey, while the PKK adopted more conventional rural tactics as opposed to the previous tactics of urban warfare. As evidenced by the attacks on military bases and installations, and the unification with left groups under the same roof, the PKK tried to reinforce the battle through opening new areas of activity in different geographical spheres.

2. Bese Hozat, "Yeni Süreç Devrimci Halk Savaşı Sürecidir", *Özgür Gündem*, July 15, 2015.

FIGURE 1: COMPARISON OF THE PKK ATTACKS AND TURKISH SECURITY OPERATIONS BETWEEN JANUARY 2016 AND JUNE 2017.



Furthermore, the PKK used TAK (Kurdistan Freedom Falcons) to carry out repeated mass-casualty attacks against soft targets during the course of its withdrawal to rural areas. When the number of attacks in the previous months is compared to the number of security operations, it becomes obvious that the PKK kept the momentum of attacks in an increasing trend, while the security forces continuously decreased the number of their operations leading up to July. This raises suspicions about the PKK's affiliation with FETÖ members within the security institutions.

The conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces was concentrated in the rural areas of southern Turkey. This resulted in a decline in civilian fatalities and in the diminished role in combat of the YPS (Civil Protection Units), known as the urban youth branch of the PKK, since April 2016.

Following the July 15 coup attempt, the operations by security forces have been downsized significantly, a fact that may critically affect the direction of the conflict. In the months that pave the way to the coup attempt, the security forces carried out 169 operations against the PKK, whereas they conducted 108 military operations against the PKK after the coup attempt to the end of August. Conversely, the

PKK has sustained its assaults at the same rate: 57 in June, 47 in July and 61 in August. For instance, on July 29, immediately after the coup attempt, in Tasbasi village of Hakkari/Cukurca, 5 soldiers were killed and 8 soldiers were wounded in an assault using small firearms and RPGs.³ Subsequently, Cemil Bayık, a senior figure in the ranks of the PKK, threatened Turkey with "spreading the war to the cities" in an interview with Fırat News Agency (ANF), the official news agency of the PKK.⁴ This was closely related with the PKK's evaluation of the Turkish Armed Forces as weak after the discharge of puchists and, ultimately, with the PKK's desire to take advantage of the ensuing chaos - like its Syrian affiliate in Syria.

While the PKK swore to escalate the violence with the intensive use of IEDs, SVBIEDs and assaults on public figures, the government tried to annihilate the social, political and military wings of the PKK through enlarging the area of operation both in city centers and rural districts and taking strict measures against PKK supporters in the public, political, intellectual and media orbits.

3. "Hakkari'den Çatışma Sesleri: 5 Şehit, 8 Yaralı", *Milliyet*, July 29, 2016.

4. "PKK's Bayık Threatens Turkey", *Hurriyet Daily News*, August 8, 2016.

PKK’s Modus Operandi after the Coup Attempt and the PKK Threat

Figure 2 shows the PKK’s attacks since the second half of July 2016 (after the coup attempt on July 15). The terror attacks in July 2016 are divided into two periods with July 15 as the separator. The figures of the two periods suggest no considerable difference in the PKK’s attack tempo: the number of attacks in the first period is 22, while the attacks in the second period are 25. The difference in the PKK attacks is seen in the multiple types of attacks in late July and the sharp rise of attacks in August. Directly after the coup attempt, the PKK’s preferred choices of attack were armed attacks, IEDs, VBIEDs, SVBIEDs, kidnappings and intimidations with road blockages and arson. The wide range of the PKK’s types of attack points to PKK’s pragmatism in abusing the vulnerability of the Turkish security forces. Far beyond being pragmatic, it could also be interpreted as the PKK being well prepared for the vulnerable post-coup security environment. Although armed and IED attacks dominated the early PKK attacks after the coup attempt, the most deadly means of attack were the SVBIEDs and VBIEDs. Such attacks cost the lives of both civilians and security personnel, and wounded hundreds as was the case in Elazığ on August 18, 2016. The multiple types of PKK attacks and the

wide target selection continued until December 2016. As the security forces reorganized, they regained intelligence and the operational supremacy and PKK attacks became fewer.

In addition to the winter conditions, the security operations against rural elements in Çukurca district of Hakkari in September, October and November put intense pressure on PKK elements; the PKK could do nothing but decrease its activities after its heavy losses (see Figures 1 and 8). Despite the fact that the PKK tried to dominate the security environment with SVBIED and VBIED attacks in November and December, the security operations succeeded in limiting the PKK’s capacity by March 2017. Owing to its experience in Syria, the PKK adopted new types of attack such as ATGM attacks against rural security posts with the easing of weather conditions. Since April 2017, armed attacks (raids against the border security posts and ambushes against the operations forces) and IED attacks became the PKK’s primary methods to sustain the armed aggression against the Turkish security forces while conducting assassinations against local politicians and kidnapping local village guards (now security guards), state officials (teachers), and civilians. The latest and newest type of attack is the kidnapping and execution of state officials and civilians.

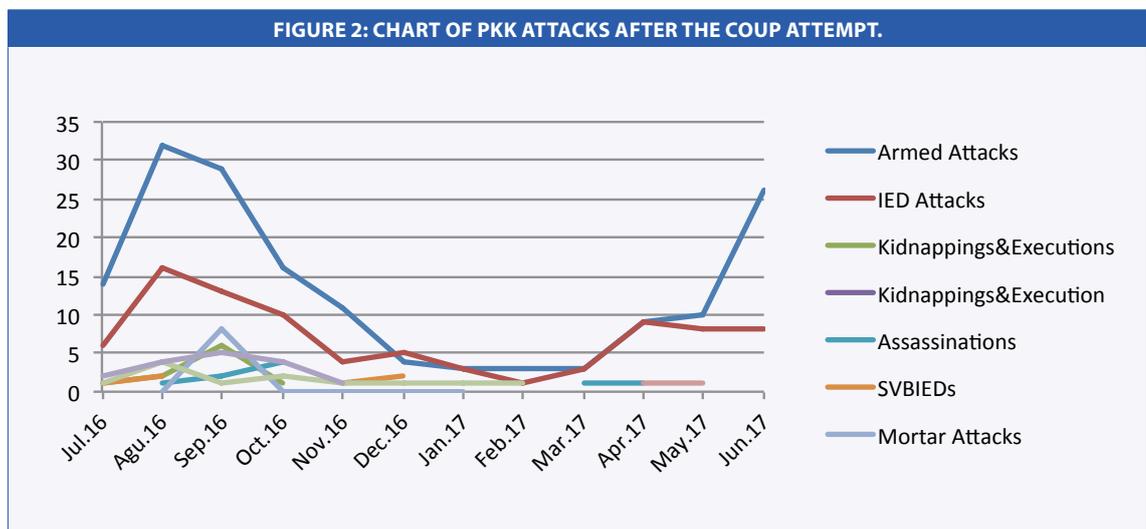


FIGURE 3: CHART OF PKK ATTACKS AFTER THE COUP ATTEMPT.

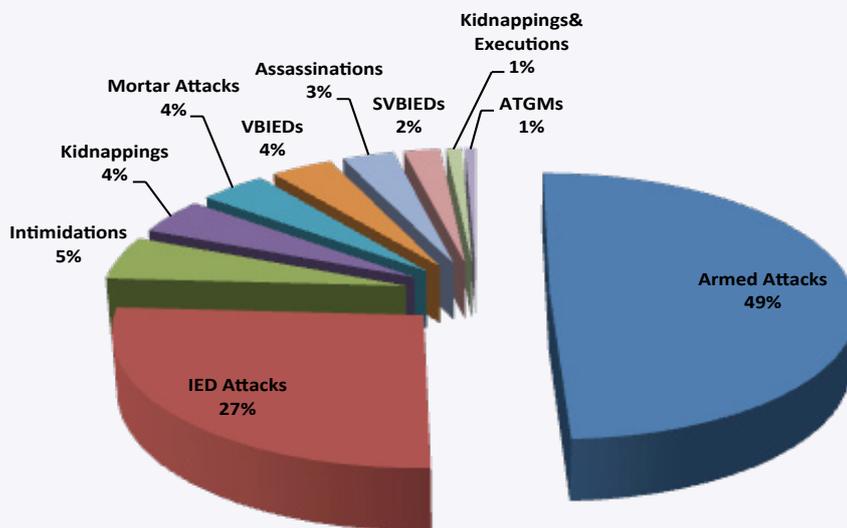


FIGURE 4: CHART OF SECURITY CASUALTIES BY PKK ATTACKS.

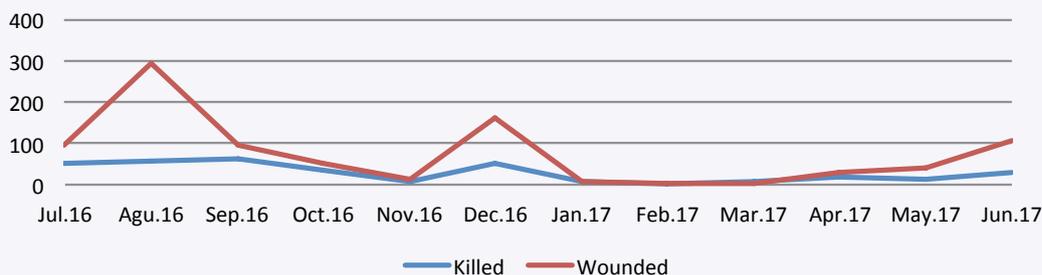
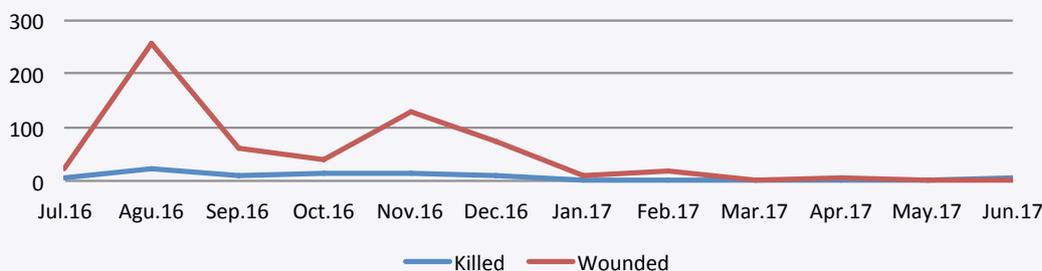


FIGURE 5: CHART OF THE CIVILIAN CASUALTIES BY PKK ATTACKS.



The PKK killed 425 people (346 security personnel and 79 civilians), and wounded 1,522 others (903 security personnel and 619 civilians)

since July 15 while pursuing a beneficiary role after the coup attempt.⁵

5. SETA/STM Terror Database.

Turkish Security Strategy for Countering the PKK after the Coup Attempt

Having gotten rid of FETÖ members, the Turkish security forces enjoyed the benefits of joint operations between intelligence, law enforcement and military institutions, thus extending the area of operation from homeland security to cross-border areas. The security forces adapted the concept on the strategic, operational and tactical levels by concentrating their collective efforts on centers of gravity which could be classified as activity-oriented efforts, geography-oriented efforts and target-oriented efforts. The security forces' actions and operational priorities seemed to be designed in accordance with these orientations. The PKK's infiltration of the Turkish territory was assumed to be a priority in terror activity and military intervention was planned for the infiltration locations. While the security operations continued against the PKK's operational elements in the infiltrations along Iraqi border, the security forces also targeted the PKK's operational and tactical strongholds in the rural areas of different provinces in eastern Turkey. Security forces targeted the PKK's tactical and operational elements, auxiliary cadres, financial sources and logistics systems by separate but coordinated operations in different locations

ranging from SWAT to mountain warfare operations. More importantly the operations had a continuous and steady tempo. Figure 6 shows the security operations which resulted in the killing and capturing of terrorists and auxiliary members; the surrendering of terrorists; the capture of arms caches; the detection of IEDs/VBIEDs and air strikes. The operations reached optimum effectiveness on the basis of the joint concept of mostly air-ground operations supported by technical and human intelligence. Domestically produced unmanned air vehicles have contributed to the success of the operations enormously.

The operations that have continued since the coup attempt have resulted in the death of 1,979 terrorists, 41 injuries and the capture of 414 terrorists, while 328 terrorists have been forced to surrender. Furthermore, 3,578 auxiliary members of the PKK were also captured in addition to large quantities of weapons, ammunitions, explosives, life supplies, narcotic substances and smuggled goods. Among that confiscated weaponry were sophisticated anti-tank ATGM weapons (AT-4, 9M113 Konkurs) which were issued to the YPG elements in Syria by the U.S. Special Operations Forces. Sophisticated MANPADS (SA-18) were also captured in these operations.

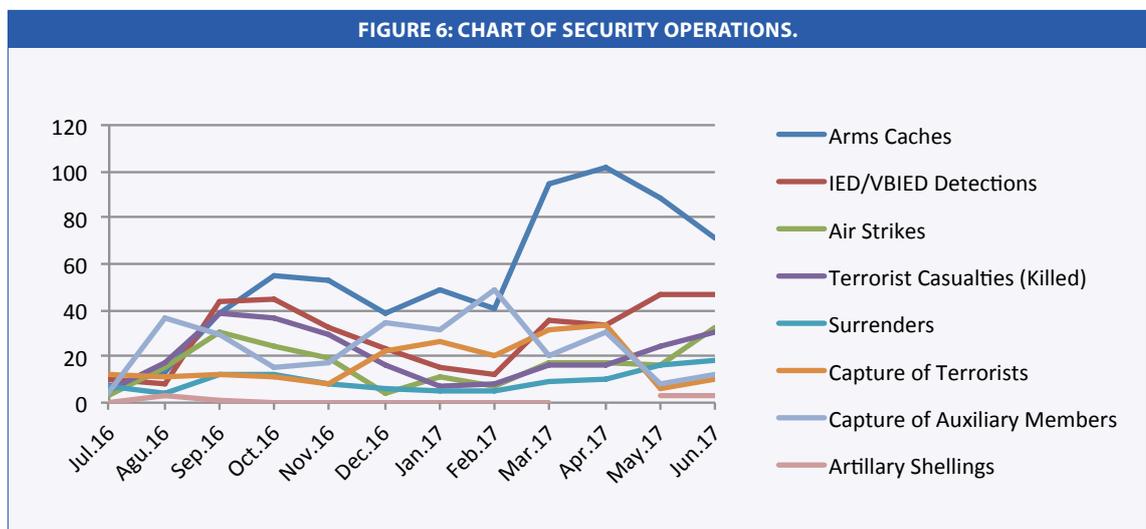


FIGURE 7: CHART OF THE SECURITY OPERATIONS.

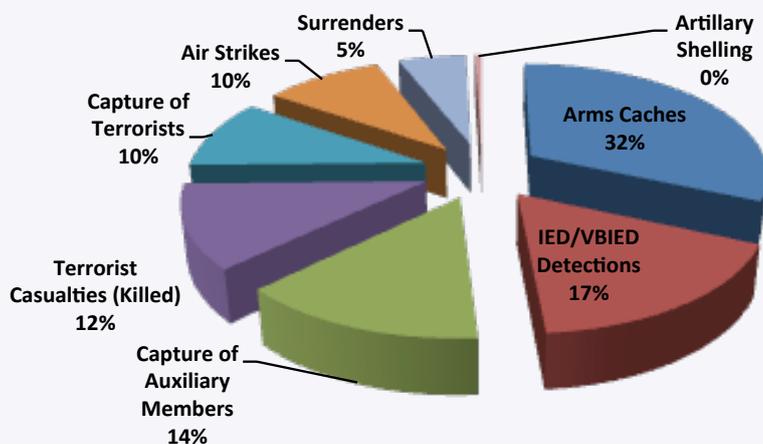
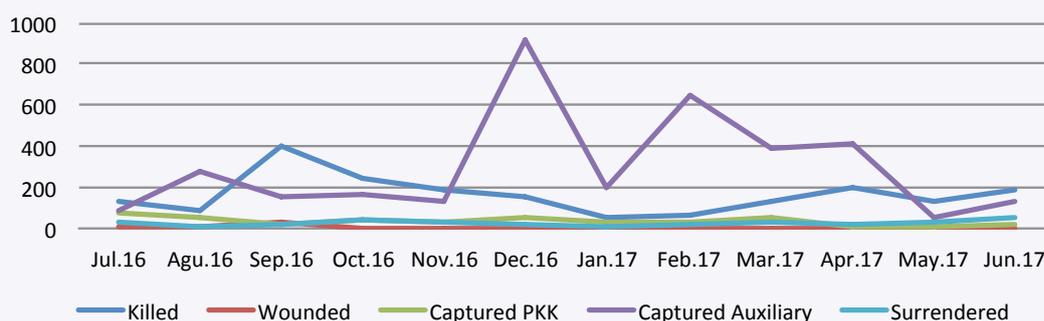


FIGURE 8: CHART OF ELIMINATED PKK FIGURES.



THE COUP ATTEMPT AND COUNTERING THE DAESH AFTERMATH

Summary of DAESH's Strategy before the Coup Attempt

DAESH's essential objective in the close regions surrounding its core areas in Iraq and Syria has been to create instability and chaos. DAESH concluded that the easiest way to achieve this objective is to target the societal and political grievances in the country under question. Thus, according to DAESH Turkey's political and social fragilities have been the country's first and foremost vulner-

ability. Secondly, DAESH targeted Turkey's prestige and reliability, particularly in the eyes of the West by carrying out suicide attacks in its symbolic touristic areas and international airports. DAESH implemented provocation, intimidation, and attrition strategies towards Turkey with its attacks in order to force the country to withdraw its support of the international anti-DAESH coalition and to condone DAESH terrorist activities both within and around the country by embracing a policy of inaction.

Turkey's fight against DAESH began as a criminal struggle and transformed into critical fighting, including a partial military interven-

tion. Some major emerging developments following the period of the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 have made game-changing impacts on the dynamics of the fight against DAESH. In the aforementioned period, Turkey has boosted its capacities and capabilities against the transformed DAESH threat by obtaining superior intelligence, enhanced operations, readiness, and awareness among security forces, and newly emerged military activism abroad. Thanks to these facilitating factors, Turkey has neutralized many key members of DAESH both within its homeland, and in Syria and Iraq. Many terrorist cells in the country crumbled as a result of the jointly conducted special security raids. DAESH has also lost its territory neighboring Turkey which effectively ended its logistical activities along the border which were vital for launching major attacks, while halting militants from slipping into Turkish soil from Syria. Since DAESH was not able to carry out a single attack logistically supported from Syria in Turkey after the initiation of the Operation Euphrates Shield on August 24, 2016, it is safe to state that Turkey's stronger measures in the last year seem to have been effective to a significant degree.

DAESH at first pursued an intimidation strategy towards Turkey, with the aim of engaging in a negotiation; this was evidenced by its rapid seizure of the Turkish Consulate in Mosul and the kidnapping of the Turkish mission members there, alongside taking Turkish soldiers as hostages in the border area. Establishing deterrence against DAESH has been the foremost principle of Turkey's security strategy towards the terror group from the very beginning in order to prevent this type of attacks in the future. In 2015 and 2016, Turkey faced the assassinations of Syrian journalists living and publishing in Turkey. DAESH has traditionally been sensitive in gaining and keeping hegemony over propaganda and information, and

has implemented an intimidation strategy to achieve this objective.⁶ The terror group sought to sow fears among dissident individuals publishing in Arabic because of their concern that these publications would weaken their influence on Syrian and Iraqi refugees, possible DAESH sympathizers, and sleeper cells in Turkey. In order to win the propaganda and information warfare, Turkey has developed an anti-DAESH discourse that has both political and religious dimensions.⁷

The Diyarbakır bombing in June 2015 and the suicide attacks in Suruç in July and Ulus in October were planned and conducted by DAESH's Adıyaman cell. It was no coincidence that these attacks came after Turkey changed its deterrence stance towards DAESH to a position of open fighting. DAESH implemented an attrition strategy with these terrorist attacks, reacting to Turkey's harsher standing by imposing costs on the country with attacks on its social harmony.⁸ DAESH suicide attacks in early 2016 at Sultanahmet Square and İstiklal Street were the continuation of the terror group's attrition strategy; however, with significant tactical shifts in its target selection. DAESH prioritized attacking foreign tourists with these terrorist acts and for the first time aimed at harming Turkey's prestige and reliability in the international arena so as to damage the country's tourism potential and isolate it especially from the West.

The major objectives of these five attacks were to force Turkey to change its policy to inaction towards DAESH activities, and to cut off its support for the international anti-DAESH coalition. However, rather than compromise,

6. Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (Summer, 2006), p. 51

7. For instance, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs published two reports in August 2015 and October 2016 in order to counter the DAESH propaganda.

8. Kydd and Walter, pp. 51, 59-63.

Turkey retaliated against the terror group by targeting DAESH territory, attacking the leadership cadres, cutting down financial revenues, intensifying preemptive security raids, and consolidating border security. Furthermore, by boosting the number and quality of security personnel, making legal arrangements, and increasing social awareness among people, Turkey diminished the availability of the possible targets for future DAESH attacks. Another key measure taken by Turkey was to detect the materials for building suicide vests, and to prevent DAESH militants from accessing them.

The rocket attacks, which started in January 2016 and reached a peak in May, were a provocation strategy by DAESH.⁹ The group incited Turkey to respond disproportionately, meaning an early military intervention into DAESH territories in Syria at a time when Turkey was alienated from U.S. support due to the ongoing crisis with Russia. Furthermore, the terror group expected irrational Turkish military strikes that would lead to collateral damage by harming innocent civilians in DAESH-controlled areas of Syria. However, Turkey adopted combined military, diplomatic, and social measures to protect its citizens in the short term, while preparing the ground for a military intervention that would eliminate DAESH elements in a reasonable depth into Syrian territory along the border. Furthermore, Turkey established an air alert system in Kilis and consistently shelled DAESH positions in Syria along its border line, while it also pressured the U.S. to take direct actions against DAESH elements by using the coalition armed drones.

Patterns of DAESH Terror Activities after the Coup Attempt

The general war strategy of DAESH towards Turkey did not change after the coup attempt;

9. Kydd and Walter, p. 51.

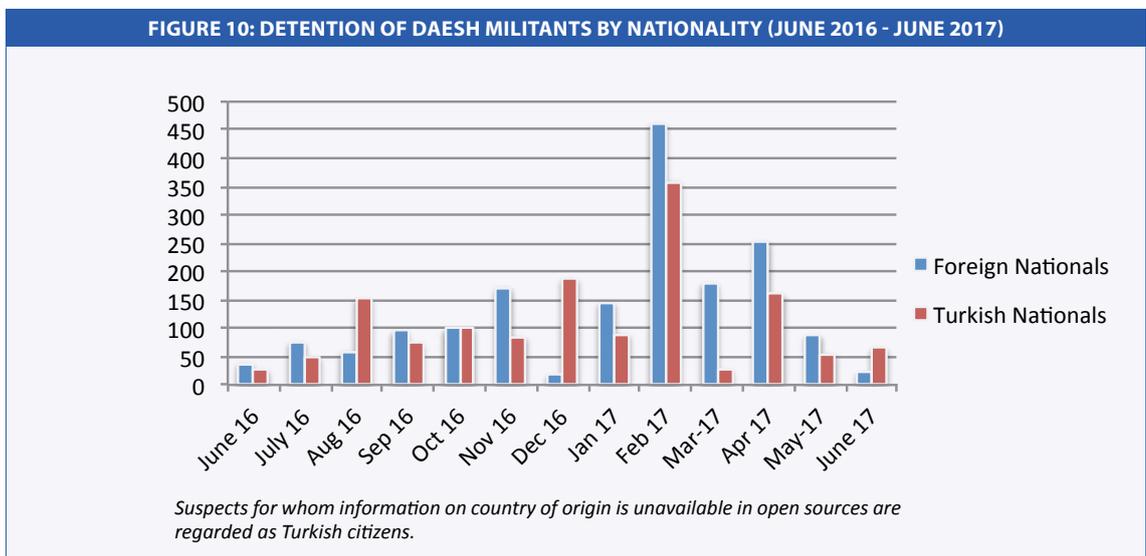
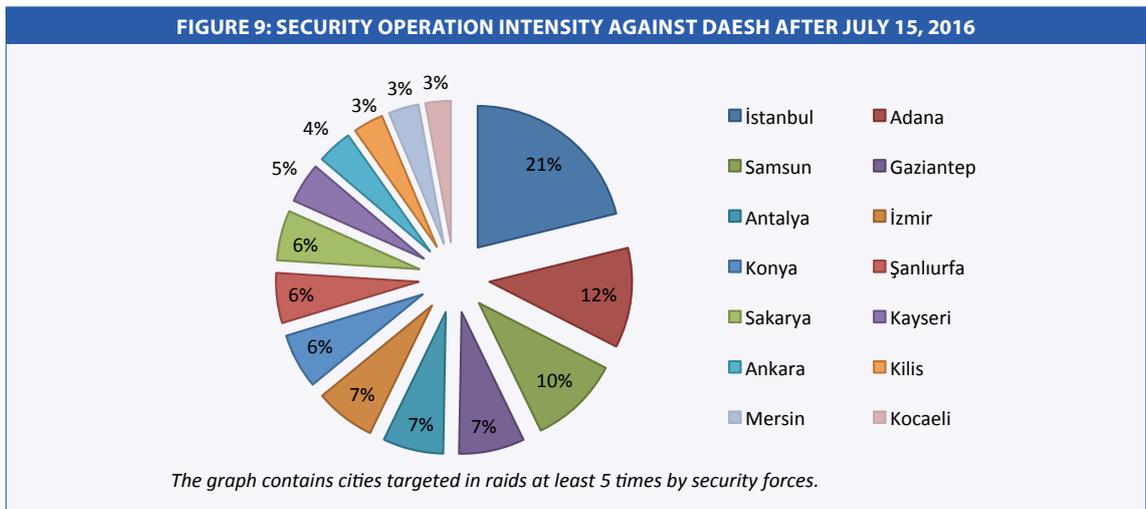
however, some tactical shifts have occurred. The terror group returned to targeting specific civilian populations, especially Kurdish groups, with a suicide attack at a traditional henna night in Gaziantep on August 21, 2016 after a series of attacks against foreign tourists. Nevertheless, the Gaziantep attack, on its own, cannot be described as a DAESH strategy change due to the fact that key DAESH figures in Turkey have always sought appropriate opportunities to launch major terror attacks against specific groups that DAESH perceives as pro-PKK.¹⁰ Therefore, rather than a certain change in attack patterns after July 15, concrete evidence suggests a gradual transformation of DAESH's strategy towards Turkey.

The liberation of northern Syria from DAESH and taking control of the region up to a certain depth towards Syrian territory effectively extinguished the activities of DAESH operatives.

It is better to argue that the current DAESH strategy towards Turkey is embodied in the Ataturk Airport Attack in June 2016.¹¹ This transformation of the DAESH threat grew out of two key trends. The first is the remarkable trend of the increasing use of veteran foreign fighters, especially Caucasians, in attacks in Turkey. The Caucasus cell that planned and executed the airport attack was the special operations unit of DAESH which was managed

10. It has been known from the evidence obtained by the Turkish Police and from the Ankara Train Station Indictment that Yunus Durmaz had consistently remained in contact and provided information to DAESH leadership in Syria and had asked to attack Kurdish civilian groups that he defined as PKK supporters.

11. For a detailed analysis of this terrorist incident see Murat Yeziltas, Rifat Oncel, and Bilgehan Ozturk, "Turkey's Fight Against DAESH," *SETA Analysis*, (November 2016).



by veteran foreign fighter Ahmet Catayev.¹² The primary reason for the rise of this foreign fighter problem is the dissolution of key terrorist structures such as the Adıyaman or Gaziantep cells managed by Turkish nationals and the elimination of key Turkish DAESH leaders such as Yunus Durmaz or Mehmed Kadir Cabael by decisive police operations.

Secondly, while significant territorial losses in Syria and Iraq facilitated the motivation of some of the experienced militants to leave the

conflict zone and to move to Turkey, the sleeper cells in the country were rapidly activated by the terror group in order to compensate the weakening logistics of terrorist activities after the loss of the Turkish border in Operation Euphrates Shield.¹³ It has been a noticeable trend since the beginning of 2016 that the ratio of foreigners to Turkish nationals detained in police operations has steadily risen. The Reina attack was the devastating result of this foreign fighter mobilization as well as of the activation of sleeper cells. This activation was directly related to the recast-

12. Hilal Öztürk, "Atatürk Havalimanı saldırısını Çeçen Ahmet Çatayev organize etti Özel Kafkas Hücresi gerçekleştirdi," *Karar*, July 30, 2016.

13. Rıfat Öncel, "The Threat of Daesh Sleeper Cells and How to Restrain It," *The New Turkey*, May 15, 2017.

ing of Turkey as a prioritized enemy by DAESH leadership, which asked its militants to punish Turkey at every possible opportunity.

TURKISH SECURITY STRATEGY FOR COUNTERING DAESH AFTER THE COUP ATTEMPT

Intelligence Superiority

The information superiority obtained by the Turkish security and intelligence bureaucracy is the major factor behind the successful dissolution of DAESH cells in Turkey after the coup attempt. Thanks to intelligence gathering efforts, many suicide bombers were prevented; they have been DAESH's most lethal instruments against Turkey for the past two years, killing hundreds of civilians. For instance, the Turkish Police raided an apartment in Etimesgut district of Ankara on October 19, 2016, neutralizing a DAESH suicide bomber after a firefight. The security sources named the militant as Ahmet Balık; he was trained in Raqqa and had conducted exploration activities around Anıtkabir, the mausoleum of Atatürk, and the older building of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.¹⁴ Especially after the Reina attack, Turkey significantly enhanced its intelligence capacity. The capture of the nightclub attack perpetrator Abdulkadir Masharipov and his enablers, both in leadership cadres and in sleeper cells, two weeks after the attack, rapidly boosted the level of information on DAESH terrorist cells and their activities.¹⁵

14. Yüksel Temel, "Ankara'yı Kana Bulayacaklardı," *Sabah*, 31 October 2016; "Ankara'da DAESH'li Bir Canlı Bomba Öldürüldü," *Yeni Şafak*, October 19, 2016

15. Murat Yesiltas and Rifat Oncel, "Türkiye'nin DEŞ ile Mücadelesinde İç Cephe," *SETA Perspektif*, February 2017.

High Levels of Operationality, Readiness, and Awareness

The counterterrorism branch of the Turkish Police has traditionally been responsible for the security raids against possible DAESH elements in the country when the perceived threat from DAESH was of a criminal nature. However, in time, the lethality and sophistication of the threats reached a peak and security forces encountered heavily armed militants who professionally combined small firearms with suicide vests. Turkey responded to this trend by changing its threat perception to a critical one, and taking steps to create and upsurge the readiness, awareness and operationality of security forces in order to effectively counter and eliminate veteran DAESH militants.

In the last year, the number of joint security operations in the form of special operations supported by the intelligence agencies has skyrocketed. It was remarkable that the Etimesgut Operation, where a DAESH suicide bomber was neutralized, was conducted jointly by the Counterterrorism, Special Operations, Intelligence, and Bomb Squad units of the Turkish Police, indicating the effectiveness of the coordination and collaboration in preventive strikes against terror cells. Most recently, on June 24, a joint operation conducted by the Turkish National Intelligence Agency (MIT) and Counterterrorism Police in the Hatay border area neutralized five members of DAESH, two of whom were defined as suicide bombers.¹⁶

Military Activism against DAESH: Operation Euphrates Shield

The terror attack in Gaziantep ended Turkey's strategic patience with DAESH and stepped up the country's incoming military activity deep inside the territories of northern Syria held by

16. "Hatay'da bombalı saldırı hazırlığındaki 5 terörist yakalandı," *Anadolu Ajansı*, June 24, 2017.

the terror group. Operation Euphrates Shield, initiated on August 24, 2016, just three days after the Gaziantep bombing, marked a turning point in Turkey's fight against DAESH. The operation has become a cornerstone of Turkey's general counterterrorism strategy against the terror groups in the region. In terms of DAESH, the group was not able to carry out a single attack on Turkish soil for four months, while the Reina attack was the sole attack in a total of ten months. The massive impact of the cleansing of terror groups from the border areas become much more meaningful considering the successive major DAESH attacks in Turkey in May, June, July, and August 2016, before the initiation of the Euphrates Shield.

The liberation of northern Syria from DAESH and taking control of the region up to a certain depth towards Syrian territory effectively extinguished the activities of DAESH operatives. The external operations branch of DAESH lost its ability to assassinate specific individuals such as the killings of Syrian journalists, and to launch information operations. It was known that members of DAESH's external intelligence branch were able to escape from Turkey to Raqqa after they assassinated Syrian journalists in late 2015.¹⁷ However, today, the group's external operations have been physically halted. Euphrates Shield Operation has also placed a strong obstacle for returning foreign fighters. Due to their experience in war, they would train and direct new potential recruits, establish new infrastructure and sleeper cells in Turkey. These critical dangers were substantially eliminated by the Turkish-backed FSA in northern Syria by cutting their transit routes and logistical hubs in Turkey.

17. "Urfa'da Suriyeli gazetecileri IŞİD'in dış istihbaratı öldürdü," *Gazetevatan*, October, 31, 2015; "Şanlıurfa'da Suriyeli Gazetecileri Öldüren Işid'liler Güvenlik Kamerasında," *Haberler*, February 16, 2016.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's counterterrorism strategy underwent a transformation after the strategic national security implications of the coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Turkey consolidated its upper hand over the terrorist organizations as a result of certain significant developments. These developments could be classified around three major themes: the intelligence superiority achieved by the security bureaucracy; increasing awareness, readiness, and operability among the security forces; and the newly emerged military activism abroad.

The discharge of thousands of FETÖ members from the Turkish security forces, intelligence agency and the prosecution branch seems to have boosted the efficiency of Turkey's struggle against national security threats. There are strong signs that FETÖ members within the state's security apparatuses did not take the necessary measures, disregarded incoming intelligence, and hindered the actions of specific units by abusing state power in recent years. In January 2017, Turkish Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu underlined that FETÖ is providing the PKK and DAESH intelligence and support. Eyyüp Pınarbaşı, Şanlıurfa police chief, argued that FETÖ member soldiers on duty at the border areas allowed DAESH militants to slip across the Turkish border and into the country. He added that DAESH militants transferred key weapons and materials into Turkey, especially via the border crossing in Akçakale.¹⁸ In the PKK case, the outcome of the security operations also suggests that FETÖ discharges from security institutions paved the way to countering PKK elements more effectively.

The efficiency of the Turkish fight against terror after the coup attempt illustrates both the integrity of the FETÖ discharges and Turkey's combat readiness. Turkish security agencies have taken advantage of the elimination of

18. "PKK ve DAESH'e sınırı FETÖ açtı," *Sabah*, August 15, 2016; "FETÖ DEAŞ'a göz yummuş," *Habervaktim*, December 22, 2016.

FETÖ members while fighting against terror organizations. The coup attempt, on the other hand, resulted in two important consequences in Turkish security architecture: enabling the capacity to cope with multiple threats, and disabling the capacity of self-threat. The first consequence was prioritized with the enhancement of the national capacity against conventional and hybrid

threats in regional security environments, and the integration of intelligence, law enforcement and military activities along the concept of counterterrorism. The success in the fight against the generation of a self-threat is bound to a series of reformist activities such as transparency in recruiting public officers and a nationwide merit system in promoting personnel.

Turkish security institutions faced a series of security challenges following the July 15 coup attempt in 2016. One of these challenges was terrorist organizations testing the combat readiness of the Turkish security forces. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) are the main security institution fighting terrorism within and beyond Turkey; their combat readiness was questioned due to the imminent discharge of 44% of the generals and admirals as a result of their involvement in the coup attempt. This paper aims to illustrate the combat readiness of the Turkish security forces in regard to their counterterrorism strategies against the PKK and DAESH in the past year, one year after the coup attempt of July 2016.



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