

## *Chapter Twenty-Three*

# **Cooperation or Confrontation in the Fight against Terrorism: Turkey and the Transatlantic Alliance**

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Turkey has been an integral part of the transatlantic security architecture ever since its membership to NATO in 1952. During the Cold War-era, Turkey played a vital role to NATO's southern flank by deterring the Soviet Union's expansionist policies. NATO states felt threatened by Soviet ideology, and state-sponsored terrorism was regarded as a Soviet phenomenon. Although Turkey remained neutral during World War II (WWII), it chose to stay under the security umbrella of U.S.-led NATO in an attempt to join an economic and military modernization process following the war. Soviet demands for territorial concessions and bases on the Turkish Straits strongly influenced Turkey's decision to opt for a western orientation.<sup>1</sup> Declaring the Soviet Union a "common threat," Turkey's role was pivotal in neutralizing the expansionist communist threat. On the other hand, Turkey's NATO membership was crucial in implementing counter-terrorist policies and strategies. Unsurprisingly, this situation provided both political and military insurance for Turkey, at least until the first disagreement took place in Cyprus. While Turkey considered the aggressive behavior of the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) a terrorist threat against the Turkish population on Cyprus, the U.S. administration under President Johnson heavily criticized Ankara for its interference in Cyprus. Later on, the emergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) during the 1970s dramatically changed the nature of Turkey and its transatlantic relations in defining, cooperating, and fighting against terrorism. Until 1997, the PKK was not on the U.S.' foreign terrorist organizations list, and it was not on the radar for the European community either. However, this changed when the U.S. helped Turkey capture the PKK leader in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1999.

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1 Footnote 1 seems to be missing.

In the post-Cold War era, NATO became the key security architecture in the West, changing the strategic perception of newly emerged non-state threats. More importantly, the instability in Turkey's neighborhood once again proved Turkey's geopolitical significance in the eyes of the Western world. Nevertheless, the U.S. and EU perception of the PKK issue remains blurry. The West declined Turkey's demand for military assistance, which led Turkey to believe that the West, and particularly the U.S., was arming the PKK.

The 9/11 Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on U.S. soil also impacted the relationship between Turkey and the transatlantic community, particularly in the fight against international terrorism. The proliferation of terrorist organizations pushed the U.S. and EU to collaborate with Turkey to develop a comprehensive strategic framework to tackle the changing nature of terrorism. As the U.S. broadened its definition of terrorism and changed its strategies to counter this threat, Turkey's contributions to the "global war on terrorism" became more visible. In other words, in the post-9/11 era, cooperation between Turkey and the West had moved in a positive direction. The terrorist attacks in major European cities (Istanbul in 2003, Madrid in 2004, and London in 2005) accelerated the level of cooperation between Turkey and its allies.

However, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by a U.S.-led coalition force in 2001 and 2003 respectively, had a negative impact on Turkey's perception of its allies. The Arab uprising and its spillover effects across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) brought a completely different dimension to the terrorism threat in terms of the characteristics and tactical features of terrorist organizations. While this so-called revolution should have led to a deepening cooperation between Turkey and its allies, the reality over particular cases such as the PKK/YPG and ISIS threats brought the two sides at odds with each other. This divergence escalated in last months of the Obama administration, coinciding with turbulent times in Turkey-EU relations.

There are three different but closely related issues that are evaluated in this chapter to understand the cooperation and dynamics in Turkey's contribution to the transatlantic community in the fight against international terrorism. The first domain is normative, in which this paper analyses the contextual aspect of the common threat perceptions of terrorism between Turkey and the transatlantic alliance. The second domain is institutional, where this chapter focuses on the question of how and to what extent Turkey contributes to the strengthening of its institutional mech-

anisms on a regional and international level in preventing radical violent extremism and terrorist mobilization in the context of the foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) phenomenon. The third domain represents the policy-oriented level, including intelligence sharing, common security measures, and police facilities necessary in preventing potential terrorist activities. To analyze the interrelated impact of cooperation among the transatlantic community in the fight against international terrorism on a normative, institutional, and functional level, this paper sheds light on two main cases to unpack the very nature of cooperation and divergences among the transatlantic community. The first one is ISIS, which exemplifies the level of cooperation between Turkey and transatlantic countries, and the second is the PKK, which evolved from cooperation to confrontation on the regional and international level.

By critically analyzing the dimension of cooperation and confrontation, this paper argues that the relationship between Turkey and transatlantic countries in the fight against terrorism represent two different policy-orientations that could shape the future of the relationship.

### **Cooperation in the Fight Against Terrorism: Neutralizing the ISIS Threat**

Contrary to the disagreements within the Turkey-transatlantic alliance in the fight against terrorist organizations such as the PKK (or its affiliate in Syria, the YPG), the fight against ISIS is much more aligned. One of the main driving forces behind cooperation is the common threat perception that is shared by Turkey and the transatlantic countries. This common threat perception makes full cooperation possible. On a normative level, Turkey is an active partner in developing an international legal framework in counter-terrorism measures. Within this context, Turkey has played an active role in the development of a universal legal framework under the UN system. Accordingly, Turkey has become a party to all UN counter-terrorism instruments and strongly supports the global strategy and implements UN Security Council resolutions on international terrorism.<sup>2</sup> On an institutional level, Turkey has played a vital role in strengthening global and regional institutions to deter terrorism activities and recruitment mobilization, especially with regards to the issue of foreign terrorist fight-

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<sup>2</sup> "Turkey's Contributions to the Anti-Daesh Coalition." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-contributions\\_s-to-anti\\_deash-coalition.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-contributions_s-to-anti_deash-coalition.en.mfa).

ers.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Turkey has initiated, (along with the U.S.), the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and was its co-chair between September 2011 and April 2016. As a leading member of the international coalition force, Turkey is also co-chair of the coalition's working group on foreign terrorist fighters and the horn of Africa working group within the GCTF.<sup>4</sup> The UN Counter Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) report released in May 2015 named Turkey one of the most effective countries in contributing to the fight against terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

In the scope of cooperation between Turkey and the transatlantic community, Turkey is also a member of the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), the policymaking body for global anti-money laundering/countering terrorist financing. Turkey is reviewing legislation and implementing measures against terrorist financing, and has co-led, with the U.S., a report on ISIS financing in 2015 within the FATF framework. Turkey's Financial Intelligence Unit (MASAK) operates in cooperation and coordination with law enforcement authorities and prosecutors on the national level. MASAK also cooperates with other FIU's through the EGMONT Group<sup>6</sup> and actively contributes to FATF efforts. Turkey has created a legal framework in line with FATF recommendations to implement UNSC Resolutions 1267 and 1373, calling for the punishment of terrorist financing and the freezing of assets.<sup>7</sup>

Turkey has faced serious challenges to its national security as a result of the rapid emergence and spread of terrorist organizations on its southern borders. The process of the hyper-localization and radicalization of the armed conflict in Syria has accelerated and increased the terrorism threat

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<sup>3</sup> Boghaniw, Priyanka. "Who's Who in the Fight Against ISIS?" *PBS Frontline*, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/whos-who-in-the-fight-against-isis/>; "Turkey's Critical Role in the Global Coalition." <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/turkeys-critical-role-in-the-global-coalition/>.

<sup>4</sup> Co-chaired by the European Union and Turkey, the Horn of Africa (HOA) Capacity Building Working Group aims to build capacity to counter terrorism and violent extremism in the region, by identifying and bridging capacity-building gaps. For more information, see: <https://www.thegctf.org/Working-Groups/Horn-of-Africa-Capacity-Building>.

<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Security Council Report S/2015/338.

<sup>6</sup> The Egmont Group is a united body of 152 Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs). The Egmont Group provides a platform for the secure exchange of expertise and financial intelligence to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. For more information on the EGMONT Group, see: <https://www.egmontgroup.org/en/content/about>.

<sup>7</sup> Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) Concerning ISIS (Daesh) Al-Qaida and Associated Individual Groups Undertaking and Entities. <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267>.

against Turkey, in particular that of ISIS. In this context, there are three main reasons behind the radical transformation of the ISIS threat: The rapid escalation of ISIS attacks in terms of its frequency and havoc, the ISIS strategy of gaining ground in Turkey by forming and expanding associated actors, and the beginning of ISIS's direct targeting of Turkey because of its harsh measures against the terrorist organization, both within and outside of the country.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, ISIS has aimed to localize itself in Turkey with a desire to consolidate pro-ISIS discourse. Therefore, on both domestic and international operational level, Turkey contributes to the global fight against terrorism through military means and has conducted military operations to eliminate the ISIS threat from its Syrian border. It has done so under the scope of Operation Euphrates Shield, started on August 2016. This was the first time that the Turkish army launched a cross-border ground operation and as such directly engaged in the Syrian civil war with aim to push ISIS out from its southern border. Turkey has also played a role in the coalition's operational efforts, namely in terms of capacity-building.

To eliminate the ISIS threat and prevent the spread of terrorism, Turkey's struggle with ISIS has consisted of two essential components: First, measures taken at a domestic level with the aim of preventing terrorist activities against Turkey's national security; second, measures taken on an international level, aiming to contribute to international efforts taken by the global anti-ISIS coalition. The anti-ISIS coalition, GCTF, and UNCCT are the main pillars of international efforts against ISIS.

Turkey, in large part because of its geographic location, quickly recognized the ISIS threat and added the group to its list of terrorist organizations on October 10, 2013,<sup>9</sup> long before European countries had done so.<sup>10</sup> Turkey contributes to transatlantic alliance in the fight against ISIS on three levels: Preventing FTFs from traveling through the country, enhancing border security, and conducting large-scale security raids against ISIS's networks. Firstly, Turkey has adopted measures against the threats directed by FTFs and the related challenges, which emerged at its borders. Within this context, at the beginning of the Syrian civil war and during

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<sup>8</sup> Yeşiltaş, Murat. "Turkey's ISIS Problem." *The New Turkey*. <http://thenewturkey.org/turkeys-isis-problem/>.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on Turkey's terrorist organization list, see: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/06/20140603-16-1.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> "ISIS is a terror organization with bloody hands." *Sabah*, September 25, 2014. <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2014/09/24/isis-eli-kanli-bir-teror-organizasyonu>.

the proliferation of violent non-state military groups across the region, Turkey became a strategic transit country for foreign fighters.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Turkey was vulnerable to the possibility of returning FTFs from conflict zones, which rapidly escalated the danger of attacks within the country and across Europe. In this notion, Ankara has actively supported all decisions of the international community to prevent FTFs from crossing into Turkey from Syria. Turkey is defined as one of the “target countries” for FTFs on their way to and from conflict zones. In addition, Turkey’s threat perception encompasses two additional dimensions. Turkey’s concerns begin when any foreign terrorist fighter decides to leave the conflict zone, as he or she is likely to cross Turkey on the way back home, thus becoming a direct threat to Turkey’s security.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the foreign fighter may decide to stay in Turkey and not risk the journey home.<sup>13</sup> In this context, Turkey:

- Contributed to the formation of a list to prevent potential FTFs from entering Turkey,
- Established risk analysis units to detect and neutralize FTFs if they do enter Turkey;
- Undertook concrete measures to increase physical border security;
- Seized the properties of individuals who are involved in terror;
- Followed the international community’s strategy for the fight against ISIS.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of foreign fighters, the Turkish contribution to the international community is multi-dimensional. The first pillar of Turkey’s anti-ISIS strategy is to develop a common preventive strategy that must be developed by the FTF’s country of origin. This is the first step in which every country has its own responsibility to investigate and inform the secondary countries of the mobilization of foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>15</sup> There-

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<sup>11</sup> Bingöl, Oktay. “Foreign Fighters Problem and Turkey.” *SSPS*, (Vol 1, Issue 1, 2016): p.47. [http://scholar.google.com.tr/scholar?q=Turkey+and+Foreign+Fighters+threats&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0&as\\_vis=1&oi=scholar&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjS4dDB1vfTAhUnIpoKHb46DqsQgQMIIIDAA](http://scholar.google.com.tr/scholar?q=Turkey+and+Foreign+Fighters+threats&hl=en&as_sdt=0&as_vis=1&oi=scholar&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjS4dDB1vfTAhUnIpoKHb46DqsQgQMIIIDAA).

<sup>12</sup> Yalçinkaya, Haldun. “Turkey’s Struggle Against the Foreign Terrorist Fighters of DAESH.” *Perception: Journal of International Affairs* (Spring 2016, Vol 21, Number 1): pp. 27-44.

<sup>13</sup> Yalçinkaya, Haldun. “International Cooperation against Foreign Terrorist Fighters: The Experience of Turkey.” *ORSAM Review of Regional Affairs* (No 22, February 2015).

<sup>14</sup> The authors’ interview with members of MFA of Turkey, May 2017.

<sup>15</sup> ISIS’ Brussels attack is an example of the importance of intelligence sharing among countries. One of the terrorists who carried out the attacks that killed more than 30 people in Brussels

fore, cooperation on the level of information and intelligence sharing is vital in preventing violent extremist and terrorist mobilization. In accordance with UNSCR resolution 2178 (2014),<sup>16</sup> the source countries' primary obligation is to prevent such persons to join a terrorist organizations.<sup>17</sup> Until the FTF has reached its destination, all transit countries have a responsibility to prevent their further travel. Within this context, Turkey's main counter-terrorism effort is to develop a comprehensive framework and mechanism among the transatlantic countries to prevent recruiting networks and the dissemination of extremism propaganda. Therefore, especially between Turkey and the European countries,<sup>18</sup> there is a "necessity to develop timely, concrete, actionable and full intelligence sharing from source countries" about suspected actors of terrorism.<sup>19</sup> The main instrument for this purpose is the sharing of a no-entry list of potential FTFs. When looking at publicly available numbers, a remarkable increase is seen in the no-entry list after 2014. Also, the large increase in information-sharing to create this list has been extremely effective. The UN Security Council's resolution 2178 contributed to the international awareness about foreign fighters, which has helped add more names to the no-entry list.<sup>20</sup> Thus, insufficient cooperation leads to poten-

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was first caught in Turkey in June 2016 and deported to Belgium, but the Belgian authorities released him despite Turkey's warnings that he was "a foreign fighter." See: "Brussels suicide bomber el-Bakraoui 'caught in Turkey last June'—as it happened." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/mar/23/brussels-attacks-police-search-airport-bomb-suspect-live?page=with:block-56f2b9c9e4b0b17c6904b0a1>.

<sup>16</sup> Resolution 2178 adopted by the UN Security Council at its 7272nd meeting, on 24 September 2014. [http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/SCR%202178\\_2014\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/SCR%202178_2014_EN.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> The report underlines that foreign terrorist fighters are a growing threat against (i) their states of origin; (ii) the states they transit; (iii) the states where they are active; and (iv) those states' neighboring zones. Essentially, the UN CTC report identifies five urgent measures that need to be taken by member states: (i) Preventing inter-state travel of FTFs; (ii) law enforcement; (iii) countering incitement to terrorism, including through the Internet; (iv) criminalization; and (v) financing of foreign terrorist fighters. For the full text of the report, see: [http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/N1514129\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/sc/ctc/docs/2015/N1514129_EN.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Kardaş, Tuncay and Özdemir, Ömer Behram. "The Making of European Foreign Fighters: Identity, Social Media and Virtual Radicalization," in Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş (ed), *Non-state Military Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology and Strategy*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp.213-237.

<sup>19</sup> Swedish Interpol Units notified their Turkish counterparts on January 14, 2013 that individual "A"—a Bosnian citizen who lived in Sweden—was believed to be traveling to Syria. After investigation, it was established that "A" was in Gaziantep. He was arrested on January 15, 2013, merely 2 hours after the Swedish authorities' notification. See: <http://www.bern.emb.mfa.gov.tr/images/localCache/12/d5821c60-7b95-4548-9800-9fd15bf0aa43.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> "Measures against Foreign Fighters." TC Dışişleri Bakanlığı sunumu, ORSAM Çalıştay.

tial weaknesses in measures to be taken against foreign fighters.<sup>21</sup> At this juncture, Turkey's criticism is that European countries, in particular, have not shared sufficient information about foreign fighters who plan to join the conflict in Syria.

The number of FTFs on the no-entry list reached 14,515 persons from 101 countries by 2015.<sup>22</sup> This was a huge increase from the 5,000 persons in the summer of 2014 and around 7,000 in the fall of 2014. The increase in the number of foreign fighters listed is the result of cooperation between source countries. The number of foreign fighters expelled from Turkey upon entry jumped from 1,040 in late 2014 to a current of 1,471 from 81 countries.<sup>23</sup> According to Süleyman Soylu at the migration policies board meeting in February 2017, the number of foreign fighters expelled increased drastically in a short period of time. In this context, Soylu pointed out that authorities deported 4,369 people from 99 countries.<sup>24</sup>

The second pillar of Turkey's anti-ISIS strategy is to prevent FTFs to travel through Turkey. For this aim, Turkey has established a comprehensive no-entry list developed in partnership with other countries to prevent the transit of terrorists through Turkey. In this regard, Turkey is continuously enhancing security measures to intercept foreign terrorist fighters at airports and other border crossing points through the Risk Analysis Units (RAU). As of June 2017, about 40,000 foreigners were included in the no-entry list since the Syrian crisis erupted. More than 4,000 foreigners were deported since 2011.<sup>25</sup> To prevent FTF from reaching conflict areas via Turkey, security measures have been reinforced, including RAUs and enhanced passenger screening and security checks in regions adjacent to

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<sup>21</sup> "Davutoğlu: Suriye sınırını kapatırız ama mülteciler ne olacak?[Davutoğlu: We Close the Syrian Border but What will Happen to the Refugees?]" *BBC Türkçe*, January 12, 2015. [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/01/150112\\_davutoglu\\_suriye\\_sinir](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/01/150112_davutoglu_suriye_sinir); AK Parti Genel Başkan Yardımcısı Nebati: AB yabancı savaşçılar konusunda kendi ayıbını örtmeye çalışıyor, [The EU is Trying to Cover up its own Defects on Foreign Fighters]. *AB Haber*, July 9, 2015. <http://www.abhaber.com/ak-parti-genel-baskan-yardimcisi-nebati-ab-yabanci-savascilar-konusunda-kendi-ayibini-ortmeye-calisiyor/>; Çavuşoğlu daha çok istihbarat paylaşımı istedi [Çavuşoğlu Wanted more Intelligence Sharing]. *Al Jazeera*, March 13, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cavusoglu-daha-cok-istihbarat-paylasimi-istedi>.

<sup>22</sup> "Yabancı Savaşçılar [Foreign Fighters]." [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/yabanci-savascilar\\_363\\_378\\_4742\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/yabanci-savascilar_363_378_4742_icerik).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> "Migration Policies Board Gathered." GOC Turkey, April 5, 2017. [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/migration-policies-board-gathered\\_914\\_1017\\_10555\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/migration-policies-board-gathered_914_1017_10555_icerik).

<sup>25</sup> "Turkey's Contributions to the Anti-Daesh Coalition." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey\\_s-contributions\\_s-to-anti\\_deash-coalition.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-contributions_s-to-anti_deash-coalition.en.mfa).



the Syrian border. RAU has also been deployed to major bus terminals. Until now, around 7,500 people were checked by these units and more than 1,700 of them were denied entry into Turkey.

The third pillar of Turkey's struggle against ISIS is to make intensive security raids to eliminate the terrorists who did manage to enter. In these widespread police raids, several ISIS factions were uncovered and some prominent ISIS leaders were neutralized. Istanbul and Ankara, the border cities Kilis and Gaziantep, and Adyaman and Bingöl are the main areas where the group has sought to establish itself. As seen in Figures 1 and 2, the frequency of security raids has increased drastically since June 2016 and rapidly intensified after the Istanbul Atatürk Airport attacks.

The fourth pillar of Turkey's anti-ISIS strategy is the strengthening of border security by deploying more personnel and technologically advanced systems to prevent FTFs from entering Turkish soil. Another leg of Turkey's policy of border security is the physical measures that have been taken on the Syrian border since 2014.<sup>26</sup> A total of 317 border posts were gathered under a central command, and a third "border special forces commando brigade" was formed in the early stage of Syrian civil war.<sup>27</sup> Bringing border posts under the same roof is important to coordinate border security. Furthermore, Turkish land, security, police forces and other military institutions have introduced additional measures to tighten border security and fight against human trafficking along Turkish-Syrian border. In response to ISIS' advancements along the border,<sup>28</sup> Turkey strengthened physical security measures along its 911-kilometer-long border with Syria.<sup>29</sup>

According to a military, the number of people detained on the border jumped from 50 in 1,000 people detained (before the ISIS threat) to 950

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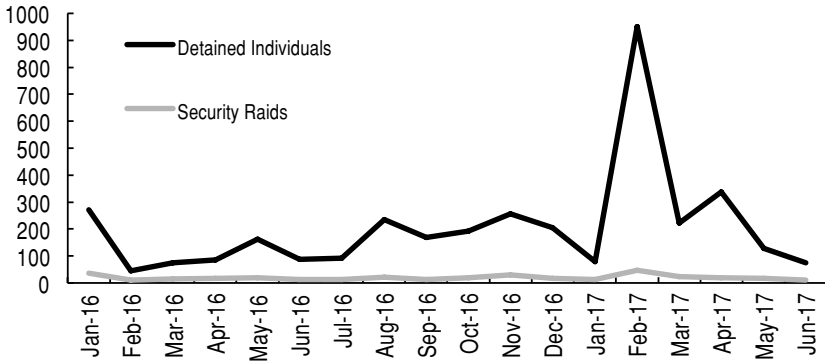
<sup>26</sup> Yeşiltaş, Murat. "Neighboring Civil War: Turkey's Border Security with Syria." *SETA Policy Report*, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> "Orgeneral Necdet Özel: İyimser öngöründe bulunmak güç [General Necdet Özel: Its is Difficult to Make an Optimistic Predictions]". *NTV*, March 25, 2015 <http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/orgeneral-necdet-ozel-iyimser-ongorude-bulunmak-guc,I1z-McWfI0a4V0yzi2MMOw>.

<sup>28</sup> "Karkamış gümrük kapısına duvar örüldü [The Wall was built in Karkamış Border Gate]." *Hürriyet*, January 1, 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Turkey increased the number of border patrol stations, dug 375.6 kilometers-long trenches, installed 153.3 kilometers-long barbed wire, constructed a 23.1 kilometers-long wall, positioned 26.3 kilometers of accordion barrier systems, installed 422.6-long border illumination poles, and created a border patrol path.

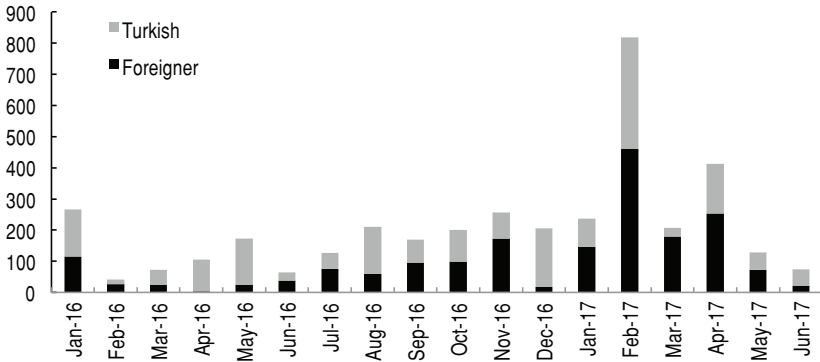
**Figure 1. Number of Security Raids and Detentions.**



\*The numbers given are based on media scan and may diverge with official data.

Source: SETA Terrorism Database.

**Figure 2. Detentions by Nationality.**

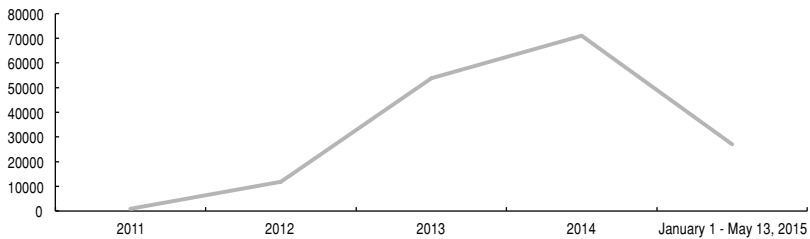


\*Militants whose country of origin data unavailable were considered Turkish citizens.

Source: SETA Terrorism Database.

in 1,000 detainees after 2014.<sup>30</sup> The figures do not include the flow of Syrian refugees that occurred after severe clashes near the border. Before 2014, the number of people detained near the border reached 70,000 according to the information released by Turkish general staff. The figure dropped owing to border security measures taken after 2014 (see Figure 3).

<sup>30</sup> The authors' interview. May 20, 2015.

**Figure 3. The Number of People Captured at the Syrian Border.**

\*Data in the graph does not include the figures of asylum seekers.

Source: SETA Terrorism Database

On an operational level, Turkey opened the Incirlik air base for anti-ISIS coalition warplanes. This is of crucial importance for the international air campaign because of its proximity to conflict zones in Syria, resulting in more effective air strikes.<sup>31</sup> In this context, Turkey has:

- Allowed its airspace to be used by coalition aircrafts for both combat and non-combat roles, including intelligence gathering and personnel recovery;
- Offered its military infrastructure to the U.S. and other coalition partners, allowing for over 60 aircrafts with over 1,200 personnel to be deployed on counter-ISIS operations in Syria and Iraq;
- Through airstrikes, artillery and other military campaigns, Turkey destroyed 487 ISIS targets.

A U.S. official defined the opening of Incirlik a “game-changing” development.<sup>32</sup> The U.S. deployed its Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), F-16 fighter jets, and military personnel to Incirlik. For example, six F-16s and 300 personnel were transferred there from the Aviano air base in

<sup>31</sup> Sly, Liz and DeYoung, Karen. “Turkey agrees to allow U.S. military to use its base to attack Islamic State.” *The Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-agrees-to-allow-us-military-to-use-its-base-to-attack-islamic-state/2015/07/23/317f23aa-3164-11e5-a879-213078d03dd3\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-agrees-to-allow-us-military-to-use-its-base-to-attack-islamic-state/2015/07/23/317f23aa-3164-11e5-a879-213078d03dd3_story.html); Özer, Verda. “We really can’t succeed against ISIL without Turkey: US.” *Hurriyet Daily News*. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/wereallycantsucceedagainstisilwithoutturkeyus.aspx?PageID=238&NID=86993&NewsCatID=510>.

<sup>32</sup> Zenko, Micah. “Is Flying Out of Turkey a “Game-Changer” in Destroying ISIS?” *Newsweek*, August 29, 2015. <http://europe.newsweek.com/flying-out-turkey-game-changer-destroying-isis-332233?rm=eu>.

Italy.<sup>33</sup> U.S. military personnel in Incirlik increased from 1,300 to 2,500.<sup>34</sup> Before the agreement, coalition war planes were taking off from bases in the Persian Gulf (such as al-Udeid in Qatar and al-Dhafra in United Arab Emirates) but these bases were too far from the conflict zones to be entirely effective. With the opening of Incirlik, flight times were reduced significantly because of the easier refueling while close air support supply capacities to ground forces were enhanced.<sup>35</sup>

Even though there are many levels of cooperation between Turkey and the transatlantic alliance, there is still some disagreement over the question of how the two sides synchronize their political and military action against ISIS. This is especially true regarding the definition of the concept of “Islamic terrorism.” While Turkey prefers to label terrorism without reference to Islam, the western alliance uses the terms “radical Islamic terrorism” or “Islamist terrorism” when defining ISIS. The last official meeting between Turkey’s President Erdoğan and Germany’s chancellor Merkel is a case in point. During a press meeting between the two leaders, Merkel defined ISIS terrorism as “political Islam-Islamic terrorism,” while President Erdoğan publicly opposed this definition.<sup>36</sup> U.S. President Trump has also referenced to “radical Islamic terrorism” during his inauguration in January 2017.<sup>37</sup>

The second issue between Turkey and the transatlantic alliance, and particularly between Turkey and the U.S., is their opposing views on strategy and tactics to defeat ISIS. From the beginning, Turkey supported developing a comprehensive strategy for solving the Syrian civil war, while the U.S. preferred to prioritize defeating ISIS while ignoring the regime’s brutality as the main driving force of ISIS’ emergence in Syria. The tactical differences between Turkey and the transatlantic community on how to organize the ground battle to defeat ISIS in Raqqa has created an obstacle

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Analysts: Turkey Unlikely to Follow Through on Threat to Close Coalition Airbase.” *VOA News*, February 23, 2016. <http://www.voanews.com/a/analysts-turkey-unlikely-to-follow-through-on-threat-to-close-coalition-airbase/3203689.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Wilkinson, Tracy and Hennigan, WJ. “Straddling East and West, Turkey is a critical U.S. ally in fight against Islamic State.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2016. <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-turkey-us-importance-20160715-snap-story.html>; Zenko, Micah. *Opt.cit.*

<sup>36</sup> “Erdoğan tells off Merkel for using phrase ‘Islamist terrorism.’” February 2, 2017. <https://www.thelocal.de/20170202/erdogan-tells-off-merkel-for-using-phrase-islamist-terrorism>.

<sup>37</sup> “The Inaugural Address.” *The White House*, January 20, 2017. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/inaugural-address>.

in making a full-scale cooperation against ISIS possible. In addition, the transatlantic community has viewed the PKK and YPG as partners in the fight against ISIS, which has become a source of severe disagreement within the coalition.

## From Cooperation to Confrontation: PKK and PYD/YPG

The coalition against ISIS and other Salafist terrorist organizations has been much more cooperative than their coherence on the issue of PKK terrorism against Turkey. Turkey has been fighting against the Marxist-Leninist PKK terrorism group since 1980. After more than thirty years of conflict between Turkey and the PKK, the two sides reached a *de facto* cease fire in 2013 and began to negotiate.<sup>38</sup> During this time, however, the Arab uprising and the Syrian civil war began to affect Turkey's domestic Kurdish issue and the Kurds in the entire Middle East.<sup>39</sup> The emergence of ISIS and its territorial expansion particularly in the Syrian territory fundamentally transformed PKK's military and political strategy not only in Turkey but also in Syria and Iraq, as the PKK wanted to fill the power vacuum in northern Syria.<sup>40</sup> At this stage, while ISIS became one of the most influential violent non-state military actors across regions, (especially in Syria and Iraq), PKK and its subordinate organizations PYD (and its armed wing YPG) were yet another influential non-state military actor, although tactically perceived as one of the main anti-ISIS forces following the Ayn Al Arab conflict, termed a "Kobane defense" by the PKK, referring to the Kurdish name of this Arab city. More importantly, U.S. and European political and military support consolidated PKK's geopolitical and military influence in the region and began to undermine Turkey's national security.

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<sup>38</sup> Balcı, Ali and Kardaş, Tuncay. "Inter-societal security trilemma in Turkey: understanding the failure of the 2009 Kurdish Opening." *Turkish Studies* (Volume 17, Issue 1, 2016). <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ftur20/17/1>.

<sup>39</sup> Dalay, Galip. "Kurdish Politics Amid the Fight against the ISIS: Can a Common Cause Surmount Old Rivalries," in Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş (eds.) *Non-state Military Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitical, Identity and Strategy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, June 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Yeşiltaş, Murat and Özçelik, Necdet. "PKK Terörünün Yeni Dinamikleri: Radikalleşme ve Şehir Çatışması (The New Dynamics of PKK Terror: Radicalization and the Urban Warfare.]." *SETA Policy Paper*, Nisan 2016, Sayı 157 [https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2016/05/20160426225231\\_pkk-terorunun-yeni-dinamikleri-pdf.pdf](https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2016/05/20160426225231_pkk-terorunun-yeni-dinamikleri-pdf.pdf)

Two PKK and YPG related-issues have negatively affected Turkey's transatlantic relations. The first issue relates to the transatlantic community's treatment of the PKK's fight against Turkey since July 2015 and its active political presence across Europe, even though the organization was labeled a terrorist organization by NATO, most EU countries, and the U.S. Secondly, the question of how Turkey and transatlantic countries can overcome the dilemma of supporting PKK/YPG in Syria and risking to undermine Turkey's national security. As was mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, Turkey and its transatlantic allies have different priorities regarding the PKK and YPG.

On a normative level, since the 1990s, both the U.S. and Europe have recognized the PKK as a foreign terrorist organization and criticized its terrorist activities against Turkey. In 1999, the U.S. helped Turkey find and capture PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. U.S. officials have acknowledged that its authorities shared intelligence that Öcalan was hiding in the Greek Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. The Greek government, under enormous pressure from the U.S., collaborated in tricking Öcalan to leave the embassy, letting him believe that he was about to fly to the Netherlands. However, the perception of the PKK among the European countries dramatically changed in the post-Arab Spring era, in particular the antagonistic conflict between PKK and the ISIS in the Syrian war zone. The PKK was perceived as a strategically reliable ally, and the PYD and YPG, a secular character of the PKK and its Syrian franchises played a vital role in constructing the new PKK image in Europe.

In terms of the normative aspect of defining terrorism, there is no difference between Turkey and the transatlantic community. However, the way in which European countries self-constructed discursive strategy in defining PKK's role within the context of the European public space is very problematic in the eyes of Turkish authorities. Therefore, Turkish authorities, (including former presidents and prime ministers), have often criticized Turkey's allies for not assisting in its fight against PKK terrorism. More importantly, European countries define PKK-related activities within the context of civil society domain and democratic civil rights. The treatment of PKK-activity across Europe is not limited to a normative aspect of divergence between Turkey and the transatlantic countries. There is also the process of institutionalization and de-securitization of PKK-affiliated organizations among the transatlantic community. Various organizations are playing a significant role in carrying out PKK activities in European countries despite the fact that PKK is recognized as a terrorist

organization and numerous intelligence agencies have referred to its illegal and criminal activities in Europe. However, many European countries are hosting different types of PKK-affiliated “civil” organizations and PKK-owned newspapers, journals, and magazines.<sup>41</sup> PKK members in European countries collect money from various communities, particularly from the Kurds, to finance the PKK’s fight against Turkey.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, PKK members are allowed to seek political asylum in European countries.<sup>43</sup> Intelligence reports have analyzed PKK’s varying strategies across Europe. One striking example is the German Domestic Intelligence Agency report of 2008, which states:

KONGRA-GEL has recently reorganized its structure in Germany. Instead of being divided into three regions, northern, middle and southern Germany, there are now seven so-called “Eyalets,” which each encompass 28 districts. The leaders of the units are appointed by the European PKK leadership. The authorities consider these organizational units and their officials to be acting in a conspiratorial manner. “Command and Obey” is their principle for implementing strategies.<sup>44</sup>

The level of cooperation between Turkey and transatlantic countries over the issue of PKK terrorism is limited. The main strategy for European countries is the normalization of the PKK-affiliated activities under EU institutions. This is especially true following the Arab Spring. Here, the normative differences meet the institutional-level disparities. Large platforms provide PKK-affiliated organizations with more space to consolidate its influence in the eyes of the European public. A striking example is EU’s changing definition of framing the PKK. Recently, a federal court in Bel-

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<sup>41</sup> Alper Sozer, Mehmet and Yilmaz, Kamil. “The PKK and its evolution in Britain (1984–present).” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2016, pp.1-19.

<sup>42</sup> According to recent EUROPOL report on terrorist activity across Europe, in France alone, the fundraising campaign of PKK is believed to have yielded 5.3 million euros. See: “European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report.” EUROPOL, June 2017. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/2017-eu-terrorism-report-142-failed-foiled-and-completed-attacks-1002-arrests-and-142-victims-died>.

<sup>43</sup> Witrock, Philipp. “Kurdish Propaganda and Patriotism: How the PKK Operates in Europe.” <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/kurdish-propaganda-and-patriotism-how-the-pkk-operates-in-europe-a-565298.html>; Onay, Abdulkadir. “PKK Criminal Networks and Fronts in Europe.” February 21, 2008. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/pkk-criminal-networks-and-fronts-in-europe>; Clerix, Kristof. “The PKK in Europe.” May 21, 2008. <http://www.mo.be/en/article/pkk-europe>.

<sup>44</sup> Witrock, Philipp. *Opt.cit.*

gium ruled that the PKK activities cannot be classified as terrorism, and fall under the definition of an “armed campaign.”<sup>45</sup> The example is not limited to the legal difference between European countries and Turkey. While there is little cooperation between Turkey and its transatlantic partners over PKK’s activities in Europe, there is also a lack of cooperation on a policy-oriented level. An example is the number of PKK-affiliated individuals listed by Turkey compared to the EU countries. EU countries are hosting more than 100 different persons that have joined terrorist-related activities in Turkey but were not extradited by European authorities.

In addition to the disagreement and conflict between Turkey and the transatlantic countries over PKK-affiliated activities in Europe, the former U.S. Defense Secretary<sup>46</sup> stated that PKK’s sister organization<sup>47</sup> in Syria (the YPG) symbolizes a political confrontation between Turkey and the transatlantic community. Turkey’s perception of the PKK and YPG as a threat is clearly an issue of confrontation between Turkey and its transatlantic partners. Firstly, the YPG is playing a vital role for the PKK’s ongoing terror attacks against the Turkish state since the cease-fire ended in 2015. It is known that the YPG is used by the PKK as an integral part of its irregular warfare strategy against the Turkish Armed Forces in the southeastern part of Turkey, both in terms of manpower<sup>48</sup> and military equipment.<sup>49</sup>

While pursuing its domestic security and national interest in overseas irregular warfare, the U.S. relies on several allies and partners. The two important irregular warfare instruments that caused the U.S. to get involved in the Syrian civil war are, 1) supporting insurgency movements against Syrian President Bashar Assad’s regime, and 2) countering ISIS terrorism. In the U.S. concept of irregular warfare, counterterrorism operations are presumed to support a counterinsurgency and stability, and this concept depends on coordination and collaboration with its allies. Hence, this type of operation is not supposed to bolster a possible insurgency

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<sup>45</sup> “PKK activities ‘armed conflict,’ not terrorism, rules Belgian court.” *Rudaw*. <http://www.rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=257679>.

<sup>46</sup> “US defense chief admits links among PYD, YPG, PKK.” *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 29, 2016. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/usdefensechiefadmitslinksamongpydyppgpk.aspx?pageID=238&nID=98499&NewsCatID=358>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> Ferris, Jared and Self, Andrew. “Dead Men Tell No Lies: Using Martyr Data to Expose the PKK’s Regional Shell Game.” *Defence Against Terrorism Review (DATR)*, Vol. 8, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> Acun, Can and Keskin, Bünyamin. “The PKK’s Branch in Northern Syria: PYD-YPG.” SETA Report, 2017, [http://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/04/PYDYPH\\_En.pdf](http://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/04/PYDYPH_En.pdf).



movement jeopardizing the homeland security of a traditional ally country. The U.S.' changing position regarding the PYD and YPG raises many doubts about its exact stance on Turkish security. While fighting against ISIS in Syria, the U.S. seems to create an insurgency movement supporting the PKK through the YPG. More importantly, while shifting its policy priority from supporting an insurgency to counter ISIS, the U.S. has created a space for undesired actors (such as the PKK and Russia) in Syria.

Secondly, the PKK recruits foreign fighters for the fight against ISIS in Syria, and against Turkey. While recruiting YPG soldiers for the fight against ISIS, the allies are turning a blind eye to YPG organizing against Turkey. Armed YPG fighters have carried out terror attacks against Turkish civilians and security forces with weapons that were most likely provided by the U.S. and Russia to fight ISIS. Moreover, enhanced with foreign military assistance, YPG fighters have also called for European citizens to take up arms and fight against Turkey, pointing to a PKK-oriented insurgency on Turkey. YPG fighters have announced many times that they are militarily ready to fight against Turkish security forces on Turkish soil.

Thirdly, in addition to Turkish border security, a PYD-controlled corridor along the Turkish border is a security concern for different ethnic groups living in northern Syria. By intentionally ignoring ethnic balances in northern Syria, the PYD is pushing offensive geopolitical ambitions on other ethnic groups.<sup>50</sup> Soon after the YPG capture of Tal Abyad in mid-June of 2015, some Arab residents had to leave their home, "we left because of the airstrikes—this was the main danger—but we were also told by the Kurds to leave. Some homes were taken by the YPG."<sup>51</sup> As the PYD and YPG consolidates and secures its territorial gains in northern Syria with the help of U.S. military assistance, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was crushed by Russian, Iranian, and Assad's military power and more refugees were forced into Turkey.<sup>52</sup> The YPG is also part of a collective military offensive with assistance from Russia, the Syrian regime, and Hezbollah in the fight against moderate opposition groups in the conflict in Aleppo.

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<sup>50</sup> See International Crisis Group's Report. "The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria." Middle East Report (Volume 4, Number 176 May 2017). <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/176-the-pkk-s-fateful-choice-in-northern-syria.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> Kafanov, Lucy. "Refugees from Syria's Tal Abyad face uncertain future." *Al Jazeera*, June 19, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/refugees-syria-tal-abyad-face-uncertain-future-150618101233030.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Yeşiltaş, Murat and Özçelik, Necdet. "Turkey, US and PYD: Strategic ally or local partner?" *Daily Sabah*, February 17, 2016. <http://www.setav.org/en/turkey-us-and-pyd-strategic-ally-or-local-partner/>.

Therefore, for Turkey, the U.S. and Western countries should be aware that the YPG is one of the main actors responsible for the refugees fleeing Aleppo toward the Turkish border.

More importantly, Turkey believes that supporting the YPG in the fight against ISIS is not a well-designed political or military strategy, and could result in a strategic pitfall for the future of the Syria and the U.S.-Turkey's long-standing strategic cooperation over regional security issues. ISIS will not be defeated completely, the Assad regime will become more powerful with Russia involved in Syria, the Syrian opposition is losing its belief in Western powers, and the PYD and PKK pose a threat to the people of Turkey and Syria. The U.S.' military and political engagement with the YPG will eventually be the main driving force behind potential instability in the entire Middle East. The U.S. may be able to suppress the ISIS threat by fronting YPG on the ground, but this strategy will likely result in the emergence of many more terror organizations in the Middle East.

Based on these dynamics, the PKK has pursued its operational and tactical goals of easy access to military equipment and instruments in Syria, geopolitical expansion attempts in Syria, and attacks in Turkey. Separating the YPG from the PKK can only be the result of an ignorant ally or an evil-minded enemy.

The U.S. points out that the rise in sectarian and ethnic conflict has increased hostilities in other countries and made terrorism widespread. Favoring the balance between a terrorist partner and a state ally will probably cause a loss in U.S. legitimacy in pursuing security in other countries. Therefore, using the YPG to defeat ISIS is not only a wrong strategy, it is also ethically problematic in countering global terrorism that will be main obstacle for the Turkey-transatlantic relations. Thus, while a cooperation between Turkey and the transatlantic alliance against ISIS is more concrete, the different security and political priorities among the transatlantic community with regard to PKK/PYD/YPG are hampering the fight against international terrorism.

Although the U.S. and Europe are expected to stand with their strategic ally, the clash of national interests depends on the difference of long-term goals and the threat perceptions in their own strategic environment. This might alter their attitude towards Ankara's counter-terror policies and strategies. In other words, policies leaning on understanding based on imposition and compulsion (with which national interests of an alliance

are protected unilaterally), will harm the principle of “common interest”; therefore, eliminate or at least weaken the probability of effective sustainability of alliance missions. Hence, determination and reconciliation of “national interests” of member states and “common interests” upon which they will become allies is among the leading issues that such alliances are faced with.

Certainly, following the country’s membership to NATO in 1952, there have been times when Turkey-NATO relations were strained and receded due to differences in strategic vision on defense and security. In fact, aside from political and military considerations that are continuously brought forward because of the arms transfer to PKK/YPG militants from NATO allies, several issues should be recalled. First, Russia has yet to enlist PKK as a terrorist organization. Second, the PKK satellite office in Moscow still conducts covert terrorist facilities. Third, apart from the U.S. and Germany, Russia is also being accused of supplying arms and transferring weaponry to the PKK. Intelligence recordings clearly show Russian soldiers with YPG militants, equipped with Russian arms.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the global threat stemming from extremist non-state armed groups (such as ISIS and PKK-YPG) and the changing nature of international terrorism, the international society and global institutions are still looking for an effective way to respond to the threat of global terrorism. While the international community is trying to understand the root causes of international terrorism, states are struggling to develop common normative, legal, institutional, and military means to counter this rising global threat. The global diffusion of terrorism threats and violent extremism requires a comprehensive response that provides solutions on national, regional, and international levels. Yet, the existing global counter-terrorism offense continues to suffer from three main weaknesses: The lack of a universal agreement on a normative level, the lack of multilateral action on an institutional level, and the lack of effectiveness in the techniques countering extremist ideologies and the de-radicalization on the policy-oriented level.

Taking into consideration the weaknesses of the global counter-terrorism regime and policy practices among the transatlantic countries, this chapter examined Turkey’s counter-terrorism efforts within the context of its struggle against ISIS and the PKK. There are three interrelated domains for

the level of cooperation and confrontation between Turkey and its transatlantic allies in the fight against international terrorism: Normative, institutional, and policy-oriented. While Turkey and its transatlantic partners are cooperating against the threats emanating from ISIS, the PKK-PYD case shows that the two sides have different priorities and framing strategies. More importantly, the PKK case represents a clear divergence between Turkey, the U.S., and the EU. The latter are practically undermining Turkey's national security priorities on the national and regional level. Therefore, to overcome the global terrorism issue, Turkey and its transatlantic partners should create a common agenda that could combine normative, institutional, and policy-oriented levels simultaneously.

In order to overcome the challenge of terrorism, Turkey and its partners should rethink their common principles and policies in the case of international terrorism. To this aim, the two sides should revitalize their *awareness* to enhancing the sharing of intelligence and strategic analysis. Another part of this principle is to promote a common understanding about counter-terrorism by creating strategic communication and specific rules of engagements. Moreover, both sides should improve their *capabilities* to preventing terrorist threats. Acknowledging terrorism as an asymmetric threat, with the assistance of NATO, the transatlantic countries should share their expertise and best practices. This may imply NATO's chance to play a leading role in counter-terrorism in reference to the constitutional framework of the United Nations. Last but not least, the two sides should develop a new strategy of *engagement* against terrorist organizations and violent non-state military actors.