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Fighting Terrorism: A Chance to Improve Bilateral U.S.-Turkish Ties

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The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led all countries to assess the threat of terrorism and generate new perspectives on countering it. This is necessarily a global effort. Even when terrorist activity is executed in a single country, the preparatory training, planning, directing, financing, and logistical support are conducted in several.

Despite the fact that Turkey has long fought terrorism and called for all nations in every forum to cooperate in this fight, it took the September 11 attacks to open a worldwide cooperative dialogue. While there is no clear definition of terrorism in international criminal law, commonalities among terrorist movements provide a basis for the common international struggle against them. Turkey is fully aware of the gravity of the threat. Its painful past experiences inspire its significant contributions toward the international counterterrorism struggle.

Turkey's War against Terrorism

As flank country of NATO during the Cold War and as a frontline member today, Turkey has struggled against a variety of terrorist challenges. Among these, the terrorist Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) executed 153 attacks against Turkish citizens around the world and killed thirty-four Turkish diplomats between 1974 and 1984.

Turkey was also forced to overcome leftist terrorists, which reached a peak in the 1970s and still pose a threat today. Besides these networks, Turkey continues to struggle against groups that aim to convert its secular, democratic governmental structure into a religious fundamentalist order.

Still, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has caused more casualties and injuries than any other terrorist group in Turkey. The PKK conducts terrorist activities based on a micronationalist ideology, funding its violence through illegal activities such as the narcotics trade and arms smuggling. The PKK also collects money from Turkish citizens living abroad -- especially in the European Union (EU) -- by means of extortion and kidnapping. Currently, the PKK has approximately 1,850 armed terrorists in Turkey and 3,500 members abroad, with the majority in northern Iraq. In addition, its front network -- providing political, financial, and logistical support to terrorist activities -- is active in about thirty countries, many in Europe.

After the September 11 attacks, the PKK changed its name to the Kurdish Liberty and Democracy Congress (KADEK). Then, in 2003, it changed again to the Kurdish People's Congress (KONGRA-GEL) in order to subvert international terrorist designation and sanctions. However, its infrastructure, leadership, methods, armed elements, aim, and symbol remain unchanged. Under any name, the PKK has continued armed operations even after announcing a ceasefire on June 1, 2004. Since then, the organization has killed or injured more than 1,500 people. Therefore, any sympathy for the PKK has no grounds.

Since 2001, several nations have created lists of terrorist organizations in concert with agreements to combat

terrorism. The PKK, under both its original name and its more recent names of convenience, can be found on the terrorist organization lists of the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada. In 2002, NATO expressed its resolve to combat terrorist organizations, including the PKK.

Since January 2003, Turkey has sought support to remove the PKK from northern Iraq. Despite negotiations and meetings among government and military authorities at several levels, no substantial progress has thus far been recorded. Although the United States takes active military measures against many terrorist organizations considered a worldwide threat -- especially in Iraq and Afghanistan -- the fact that it does not take any compelling measures against the PKK contradicts its global war on terror. Further, the new Iraqi government throws its territorial sovereignty into question by permitting a terrorist organization to take shelter in northern Iraq. The United States should ensure that liquidating the PKK in northern Iraq is part of its efforts in the global war on terror.

Turkish Contributions to Fighting Terrorism

Turkey has ratified all thirteen international counterterrorism conventions, protocols, and resolutions adopted by the UN. Moreover, Turkey is a party to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism.

In Afghanistan, Turkey has contributed and continues to contribute to the U.S.-initiated Operation Enduring Freedom. It has participated in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) since the latter's inception, and undertook a leadership role in ISAF II in 2002 and ISAF VII in 2005.

Turkey firmly supports NATO's efforts to fight terrorism. Turkish forces can be of great help to future NATO missions. Moreover, Turkey hosted of the 2004 NATO Istanbul Summit, at which crucial decisions were made regarding ongoing NATO operations in various regions of the world and the transformation of alliance activities -- in addition to the announcement of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

In 2005, Turkey established the Center of Excellence-Defense Against Terrorism in Ankara in order to further contribute to the international struggle against terrorism. Turkey is actively participating in counterterrorism activities as a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Turkey builds regional peace, security, and prosperity by actively participating in regional organizations such as the Black Sea Cooperation Force; Black Sea Economic Cooperation; Confidence and Security Building Measures in the Black Sea; and Coast Guard Agreements in the Black Sea. Turkey works to expand the scope of these organizations by inserting issues related to counterterrorism into their agreements.

Conclusion

The deadly terrorist attacks around the world over the last five years have shown once again that the transnational character of terrorism cannot be limited by the borders of any nation. Terrorism has no language, religion, nationality, region, or ideology; it is an international phenomenon that threatens all people equally.

To succeed in the global war on terror, concrete progress is necessary in the following areas: a consistent approach to terrorists and terror organizations regardless of where they operate; prevention of the use of terrorism as a means of foreign policy; and goodwill and cooperation at the international level. Internationally accepted agreements should be written into national laws and acted upon accordingly, and the sanctions that could be imposed on nations that violate their commitments should be clearly indicated and firmly implemented by the UN.

Under any name, the PKK is a regional threat. Since its establishment, it has created trouble in Turkey as well as in Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, challenging peace and security across the Middle East. Turkey is doing its best to combat terrorism at the national, regional, and international levels, and it expects others to do the same. Other countries should take decisive action against the terrorist the PKK according to their international responsibilities.

An increase in PKK-led violence in Turkey would be a serious threat to the nation's stability. Because the PKK's main bases are in northern Iraq, most Turks would blame the United States and the Iraqi Kurds for any such violence. Washington's reluctance to take action against the PKK has already created much distrust. Action against the PKK would be a necessary first step in rebuilding U.S.-Turkish relations in the post-Iraq war environment, and would win Turkey's heart in the bargain. It would also gain the United States a stronger ally in Iraq and the global war on terror.

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