

## ***Turkey: Extremism & Counter-Extremism***

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On April 15, 2020, Turkey launched airstrikes in northern Iraq, seeking to target members of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), an internationally designated terrorist organization that has been in conflict with the Turkish government for decades. The military drone struck the Makhmour refugee camp—which the Turkish government claims as a hotbed of the PKK—killing two refugee women in the process. According to Iraq's Foreign Affairs Ministry, the strikes were a violation of Iraq's sovereignty. On April 13, Turkish security forces prevented Syrian "terrorists" from entering Mardin state, southeastern Turkey. According to intelligence gathered from Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT), the suspects allegedly sought to carry out a bombing in Turkey. The suspects manage to escape and leave behind explosives and detonators. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [1], [Asharq Al-Awsat](#) [2])

On March 11, 2020, Turkish security forces launched the "Kapan-7 Garisa" counterterrorism operation in the country's eastern Siirt province. The operation deployed almost 500 personnel to the region in order to undermine the threat of the PKK. Currently, the PKK has a relatively strong presence and a number of bases in Turkey's eastern and southeastern provinces where the operation will largely be concentrated. (Source: [Daily Sabah](#) [3])

On October 9, 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the start of Operation Peace Spring. The campaign launched a cross-border offensive into northeastern Syria using airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and a ground invasion against Kurdish forces. Turkey views any Kurdish entity as part of the PKK. Operation Peace Spring follows the abrupt announcement made by U.S. President Donald Trump on October 7, 2019 that declared the withdrawal of U.S. troops from northern Syria and the end of U.S. protection for Kurdish fighters. The White House added Turkey would now be responsible for all captured ISIS fighters who are currently being held by U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria. Within a month of conducting Operation Peace Spring, Turkey captured over several hundred people affiliated with ISIS. Turkish interior minister, Suleyman Soylu, later announced that Turkey would send captured ISIS militants back to their home countries within 72 hours, without providing further details on militants whose home countries have nullified their citizenship. Following talks with the United States, Turkey agreed to pause its offensive on October 17, 2019 to allow Kurdish forces to withdraw from a safe zone that Ankara sought to capture. Upon complete withdrawal of YPG forces on October 29, Operation Peace Spring was suspended. (Sources: [The Soufan Group](#) [4], [Council on Foreign Relations](#) [5], [The Hill](#) [6], [Washington Post](#) [7], [CNN](#) [8], [New York Times](#) [9], [Reuters](#) [10], [Al Jazeera](#) [11])

### **Overview**

Turkey is a predominantly Sunni Muslim country and the only Muslim-majority country in NATO. In recent years, Islamist terror groups including [ISIS](#) [12] have consolidated on Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq. Large numbers of foreign fighters have also crossed through Turkey, hoping to join these groups. Following decades of attempted Kurdish secession, Ankara has nervously witnessed the formation of a Kurdish statelet in northern Syria. Meanwhile, refugees have flooded into Turkey from conflict areas in Syria and Iraq, with some three million in the country as of April 2018. (Sources: [Independent](#) [13], [UNHCR](#) [14], [Guardian](#) [15], [European Commission](#) [16], [Washington Post](#) [17])

Extremist groups inside Turkey subscribe to Kurdish separatist, far-left, and Islamist ideologies. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karekera Kurdistan or PKK) has fought for the establishment of a Kurdish state since 1984. The Turkish government classifies the PKK as the most dangerous terror group inside Turkey. Critics have argued that Turkey's longstanding issues with the country's Kurds, and especially the PKK, have driven Ankara to target the PKK more heavily than ISIS. Nonetheless, the PKK and its offshoots have claimed responsibility for a spate of high-profile terrorist attacks, including the deadly March 13, 2016, car bomb attack in Ankara that killed 37 people and wounded over 125. (Sources: [Australian National Security](#) [18], [BBC News](#) [19], [Reuters](#) [20])

ISIS has also become increasingly active within Turkey. Authorities believe that the terror group has been behind several major domestic terrorist attacks, including the October 10, 2015, suicide bombings at a peace rally in Ankara that killed 201 people and wounded more than 500; the January 12, 2016, suicide bombing in the central district of Sultanahmet in Istanbul; the June 28, 2016, suicide bombings at Turkey's Ataturk international airport; and the August 20, 2016, suicide bomb blast at a Kurdish wedding in Gaziantep that killed 57 people. ISIS claimed responsibility for the January 1, 2017, nightclub shooting in Istanbul that left 39 people dead. The shooter, Abdulkadir Masharipov, was an Uzbek national who authorities believe had contact with Syrian-based ISIS operatives. (Sources: [CNN](#) [21], [Guardian](#) [22], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [23], [Guardian](#) [24], [Wall Street Journal](#) [25])

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In addition to executing numerous terrorist attacks within Turkey, ISIS has used the country as a base for recruitment and facilitation of foreign fighters. An ISIS cell called Dokumacilar in southern Turkey has recruited young Kurdish Turks to fight for the terror group in Syria and wage attacks in Turkey. As of November 2015, between 2,000 and 2,200 Turkish fighters have left the country to fight alongside extremist groups. More than 600 are believed to have returned to Turkey. According to September 2015 government estimates, approximately 900 fighters are believed to have joined ISIS, whereas 200-300 are suspected to have joined the [Nusra Front](#) [26]. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [27], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [28], [Soufan Group](#) [29])

In addition to ISIS and the PKK, Islamic extremist groups reportedly operating in Turkey include [al-Qaeda](#) [30], Turkish Hezbollah (separate from Lebanese Hezbollah), the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) [31], and  [Hamas](#) [32]. A far-left terror group called the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) has targeted U.S. interests in Turkey in its mission to topple the Turkish government and erect a Marxist state. (Sources: [Oxford Islamic Studies Online](#) [33], [Long War Journal](#) [34], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [35], [YNet](#) [36])

Up until 2015, Turkey had responded permissively to the threat of Islamic extremism. That appeared to change in mid-2015 when Turkey announced a major crackdown on terrorist organizations, including ISIS. The government also finally allowed NATO jets to use its airbase at Incirlik, previously an issue of long-standing contention. (Sources: [CNN](#) [37], [Carnegie Europe](#) [38], [Politico](#) [39])

The U.S. State Department, in its 2015 Country Reports on Terrorism, confirmed that the Turkish government served as a "critical geographic chokepoint in the flow of foreign terrorist fighters" to Syria by stepping up border security, establishing "risk analysis units" to stop suspected foreign fighters at airports, increasing information sharing with foreign countries, and increasing "detentions, arrests, and prosecutions" of foreign fighters. Nonetheless, the U.S. State Department noted in its 2015 report that Turkey remained the "main transit point" for foreign fighters in 2015. In its 2017 report, the State Department noted that Turkey remained "a source and transit country" for foreign fighters. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [40], [U.S. Department of State](#) [41])

### **Radicalization and Foreign Fighters**

Homegrown extremism in Turkey is tied to Kurdish nationalism, Islamism, and far-left and far-right ideologies. Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, outside jihadist elements operating in Turkey include ISIS cells, as well as foreign fighters crossing the country seeking to enter Syria.

#### *Homegrown Radicalization*

Far-left, Islamist, and far-right extremist groups emerged in Turkey in the late 1960s. What began as the promulgation of socialism on college campuses and mass demonstrations against Turkey's NATO membership soon turned into guerilla warfare in the name of Marxism. Student-led groups launched numerous terror attacks starting in the early 1970s—including against American soldiers—in the belief that Turkey was culturally, economically, and militarily dominated by the United States. These groups believed that violence was the means to expel American influence and inaugurate a socialist Turkey. Many of these early extremist leaders were eventually handed the death sentence or killed by security forces in battle, and the groups ultimately lost power. (Source: [Terrorism in Turkey \(Dr. Atilla Yayla\)](#) [42])

Another wave of terrorism hit Turkey in 1975. In 1980, the Turkish military launched a coup d'état in an attempt to clamp down on the violence. This resulted in several years of relative peace. But by the mid-1980s, old extremist organizations were regrouping and waging violent attacks, and new groups were forming. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw an increase in Kurdish separatism, specifically with the creation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karekeren Kurdistan, or PKK) in 1987. Today, Kurdish separatism and Islamism are the most prominent ideologies among Turkey's extremist groups. (Sources: [Terrorism in Turkey \(Dr. Atilla Yayla\)](#) [42], [Terrorism in Turkey \(Ulkumen Rodoplu, Jeffrey Arnold, Gurkan Ersoy\)](#) [43])

#### *Kurdish Separatism*

The primary goal of Kurdish separatist groups in Turkey is to establish an autonomous Kurdistan. The proposed area would

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cover current day southeastern Turkey, western Iran, and northern Syria and Iraq. Factors driving Kurdish separatist groups include a struggle to retain Kurdish cultural identity, as well as grievances stemming from economic disparities between Turkey's Kurdish population and the Western Turkish population. Kurdish separatists were further incited following the formation of the de facto Kurdish state in northern Iraq at the end of the first Gulf War. (Source: [Terrorism in Turkey \(Ulkumen Rodoplu, Jeffrey Arnold, Gurkan Ersoy\)](#) [43])

The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency estimates Turkey's Kurdish population at approximately 15.2 million, or 19 percent of the country. (Source: [CIA World Factbook](#) [44])

### ***PKK***

The Turkish government classifies the secular Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karekeren Kurdistan, or PKK) as the largest and most powerful terror group inside its borders. The PKK seeks the creation of an independent Kurdish state comprising autonomous regions of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, and promotes violence to achieve its goals. It has been involved in an armed struggle since 1984, but was officially established in 1987 by Abdullah Ocalan. Since then, it has waged terror on military, government, and civilian targets, resulting in the death of at least 40,000. (Sources: [Australian National Security](#) [18], [PISM \(2015\)](#) [45], [BBC News](#) [19])

The PKK has Marxist-Leninist roots, but its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, disavowed socialist ideology when he was imprisoned in 1999. During this year, the group quieted its demands for an autonomous Kurdish state and instead called for greater autonomy within Turkey. The PKK and Turkish government entered a fragile ceasefire, which was broken in 2004 when the PKK resumed its terrorist campaign. An additional ceasefire in 2009 came to an end in 2011. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [19], [Australian National Security](#) [18], [PISM \(2015\)](#) [45])

In March 2013, the PKK called for a unilateral ceasefire and entered into peace talks with the Turkish government. Despite continued calls by Ocalan for disarmament, PKK elements have continued to wage intermittent terror attacks inside Turkey. PKK insurgents have targeted police and military interests, sabotaged infrastructure such as dams, pipelines, and power plants, and kidnapped civilians and military personnel. The attacks have been largely concentrated in the country's southeast, though PKK attacks have reached Ankara and Istanbul. The group is also known to have training camps in northern Iraq. (Sources: [Australian National Security](#) [18], [BBC News](#) [19])

The ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish government ended in July 2015. According to the Turkish government, more than 1,000 government security personnel have since died in fighting with the PKK. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [40])

PKK forces and the affiliated Syrian-based People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, or YPG) battled ISIS in northern Syria in July 2014. Hundreds of Turkish PKK members crossed into Syria to join the fight. The PKK has accused the Turkish government of tacitly backing ISIS's fight against the Kurds by failing to take action against ISIS. Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has said that "There is no difference between PKK and Daesh," using an Arabic acronym for ISIS. (Sources: [Gulf News](#) [46], [Associated Press](#) [47], [Newsweek](#) [48])

The Turkish government has prosecuted hundreds of PKK terrorists under the country's counterterrorism laws. The PKK has been designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Canada, Austria, Azerbaijan, Iraq, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Kazakhstan, Moldova, New Zealand, and the Philippines. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [19], [Australian National Security](#) [18])

### ***TAK***

The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (Teyrebazen Azadiye Kurdistan, or TAK) is a terrorist organization affiliated with the PKK, according to the January 2008 U.S. Department of State designation of the group. The TAK was reportedly established by PKK leaders in 1999, following the arrest of PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan. In 2004, however, the TAK accused the PKK of pacifism and publicly split from the group. The PKK offshoot is purportedly comprised of young urban recruits and has carried out a series of terrorist attacks in Turkish cities. The TAK has conducted more than a dozen deadly attacks throughout the country, including the February 2016 bombing of a Turkish military convoy in Ankara and the December 2016 bombings outside of a sports stadium in Istanbul. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [49], [Terrorism Research and](#)

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[Analysis Consortium](#) [50], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [51], [Reuters](#) [52], [Al-Monitor](#) [53], [Guardian](#) [54])

The Turkish government, however, denies the TAK split from the PKK and claims that it is a terrorist proxy for its parent organization. Security analysts report that the TAK is linked to the PKK through ideological doctrine, military training, recruitment, and the supply of weaponry but that it independently coordinates and conducts attacks. The TAK has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, Turkey, and the European Union. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [54], [Middle East Eye](#) [55], [Combating Terrorism Center](#) [51])

### *ISIS Islamists in Turkey*

Turkish authorities have held ISIS responsible for multiple largescale terrorist attacks within the country since mid-2015. In July of that year, suspected ISIS member and Turkish Kurd Şeyh Abdurrahman Alagöz carried out a suicide bombing in the southern town of Suruç, killing 32 leftist activists. That October, Alagöz's brother, Yunus Emre Alagöz, was one of two suicide bombers who killed 102 people and wounded more than 400 at a peace rally in Ankara. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [56], [NTV](#) [57], [Telegraph](#) [58], [Guardian](#) [59], [Guardian](#) [60])

Turkish authorities [connected](#) [27] the Alagöz brothers to an ISIS unit known as Dokumacılar, believed to operate in Turkey's southeastern province of Adiyaman. Its members reportedly train in Raqqa, Syria, as suicide bombers before returning to Turkey to carry out attacks. The unit is believed to have waged attacks in Ankara, Istanbul, Suruç, and Gaziantep. (Sources: [International Business Times](#) [27], [Medya 365](#) [61])

In October 2015, suspected ISIS militants murdered two Syrian activists in the Turkish border city of Sanliurfa, slitting the throat of one and beheading the other. One week later, Turkish authorities arrested 20 suspected members of ISIS in Antalya, southwest Turkey, one week before the city hosted the G20 summit attended by then-U.S. President Barack Obama. In mid-November, Turkish authorities in the southern province of Adana detained 38 foreign nationals suspected of traveling to join ISIS in Syria. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [62], [BBC News](#) [63], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [64])

ISIS attacks in Turkey continued into 2016 and 2017. On March 19, 2016, an ISIS suicide bomber killed four people in Istanbul's popular shopping district, Istiklal Street. According to Turkish and U.S. officials, ISIS also played a role in the June 28, 2016, suicide bombings at Ataturk international airport, though no group formally claimed responsibility for the attack. Turkish authorities also linked ISIS to an August 2016 suicide bombing at a wedding in Gaziantep that killed 57 people. ISIS claimed responsibility for a shooting at Istanbul's Reina nightclub on the morning of January 1, 2017, that left 39 dead and dozens more wounded. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [65], [BBC News](#) [66], [CNN](#) [67], [BBC News](#) [68], [New York Times](#) [69], [Reuters](#) [70], [Reuters](#) [71], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [72])

Analysts have criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for a lack of action against ISIS, voicing concerns that the government targets the PKK more actively than it does ISIS. Ankara launched a new round of airstrikes against the PKK in July 2015, officially ending peace talks that started in 2013. But the PKK and its Syrian-based Kurdish allies, the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, or YPG), have been instrumental in fighting ISIS in Syria. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [73], [Atlantic](#) [74])

Out of 1,300 terrorist suspects arrested by the Turkish government in or around August 2015, 137 were linked to ISIS while 847 were linked to the PKK. Erdoğan has said that Turkey "will never allow the establishment of a new state on our southern frontier in the north of Syria." The counterterrorism policies of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party's (AKP) have led some analysts to speculate that Turkey may prefer ISIS to an independent Syrian Kurdish state on its border. (Source: [New York Times](#) [73])

Pressure from the United States combined with ISIS's growing strength on the Syrian border have caused Turkey—a member of the U.S.'s anti-ISIS coalition—to increase airstrikes against the extremist group. In July 2015, the Turkish government agreed to open southeastern bases—including the Incirlik airbase—to the U.S. military to target ISIS positions in Syria and Iraq. (Sources: [Time](#) [75], [BBC News](#) [76], [International Business Times](#) [77])

### *Kurdish Hezbollah*

Kurdish Hezbollah (KH), also known as Turkish Hezbollah, is a Kurdish Sunni Muslim extremist group operating in

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southeast Turkey, directing violence against the PKK and the Turkish government. Founded in 1978, its leaders were heavily influenced by the Iranian revolution and reportedly received training in Iran. It has violently clashed with the PKK in southeast Turkey. Today, KH continues to battle the PKK and Turkish security forces in an effort to erect an independent Islamic state in southeast Turkey. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [78], [Oxford Islamic Studies Online](#) [33])

In January 2000, the Turkish military cracked down on KH, killing the group's founder, Huseyin Velioglu, in a shootout in Istanbul. The military arrested nearly 6,000 KH members in subsequent operations. Isa Altsoy assumed leadership of KH and renounced violence in an attempt to regain popular support. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [78], [Oxford Islamic Studies Online](#) [33])

KH promotes Islamic identity first and Kurdish identity second. It believes that all Kurdish groups, including the staunchly secular PKK, should address Kurdish issues inside an Islamic framework. Under an Islamic state, KH believes, the "Kurdish problem" will be solved. The group has reportedly been influenced by the works of the Egyptian Islamist Sayyid Qutb as well as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder and former leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [78], [Oxford Islamic Studies Online](#) [33])

KH does not directly support ISIS, but a KH splinter group is reportedly fighting alongside the terror group in Syria. (Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [78])

### *Al-Qaeda*

[Al-Qaeda](#) [79] operatives in Turkey have carried out numerous attacks, including the Istanbul synagogue and British consulate bombings in 2003, as well as the 2008 bombings of the U.S. consulate in Istanbul. Turkish security has also foiled al-Qaeda plots targeting Turkish and American interests inside the country. A document seized in a July 2011 raid on a Turkish al-Qaeda cell near Ankara reportedly read, "It is more advantageous to wage jihad against Turkey than the United States." (Sources: [Long War Journal](#) [34], [Eurasia Review](#) [80])

In November 2015, Turkish authorities detained 18 suspected members of al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front. These individuals were reportedly recruiting for the terror group inside Turkey. (Source: [Reuters](#) [81])

### *Muslim Brotherhood*

The international [Muslim Brotherhood](#) [82] reportedly regrouped in Istanbul following the ouster of Egyptian President [Mohammed Morsi](#) [83] in July 2013. Turkey has also reportedly provided the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood with weaponry and activists. Analysts have posited that Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood highlights Erdoğan's ties and ideological closeness to the Islamist group. However, Turkey's relations with the Brotherhood weakened after staunchly anti-Brotherhood Abdel Fattah el-Sisi assumed the Egyptian presidency in June 2014. Turkey feared alienation and economic reprisal from el-Sisi's [Egypt](#) [84] and the anti-Brotherhood Gulf states—on which Turkey remains highly economically dependent—and cooled its open support for the Brotherhood. In the months following el-Sisi's inauguration, the Turkish government refrained from condemning el-Sisi's actions and officially congratulated him on his election to office. (Sources: [Al Arabiya](#) [85], [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) [35], [Washington Institute for Near East Policy](#) [86])

### *Hamas*

[Hamas](#) [87], the U.S.-designated Palestinian terror group active in the Gaza Strip, created a bureau in Istanbul in 2012 under the direction of [Saleh al-Aroui](#) [88], a senior Hamas leader and military commander. In an August 2014 Islamic conference in Istanbul, Aroui claimed responsibility on behalf of Hamas for orchestrating the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers earlier that summer. (Sources: [Haaretz](#) [89], [Washington Post](#) [90], [Al-Monitor](#) [91], [Times of Israel](#) [92], [Times of Israel](#) [93], [YNet](#) [94], [YNet](#) [36])

Turkish authorities have reportedly overseen Hamas military training exercises in the country. Hamas operatives working in Turkey actively recruit Palestinians living in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and other Arab countries. The recruits are sent to the bureau in Istanbul, where they reportedly receive security clearances and begin training outside of the city under the

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auspices of Turkish officials. In addition, many of the weapons used by Hamas operatives in the West Bank were reportedly supplied by the group's Istanbul bureau. (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [95], [Al-Monitor](#) [96], [YNet](#) [36], [Gatestone Institute](#) [97])

During the July 2014 conflict between Hamas and Israel, Turkey was considered one of Hamas's closest international allies. Because of its close ties to Hamas, the United States invited Turkey to a Paris meeting in mid July 2014 to discuss a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. In December 2014, then-Hamas leader [Khaled Meshaal](#) [98] spoke at an AKP event in Konya, Turkey, and congratulated the crowd on having Erdoğan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as leaders. The crowd responded with shouts of "Down with Israel!" In August 2015, Meshaal met with Turkish leaders in Ankara, though the specifics of the meeting were not publicly revealed. (Sources: [Middle East Eye](#) [99], [Al-Monitor](#) [100], [Time](#) [101], [Foreign Policy](#) [102], [Jerusalem Post](#) [103])

The Obama administration repeatedly appealed to the Turkish government to end its relationship with Hamas, without success. An Al-Monitor report in August 2014 posited, "The Turkish government has been rather frank and 'proud' of its engagement with the organization despite all financial and political repercussions." Erdoğan regularly refers to Hamas militants as "freedom fighters." (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [96], [Today's Zaman](#) [104])

Arab media reported in December 2015 that Turkey had expelled Arouri under U.S. and Israeli pressure as the Turkish and Israeli governments moved toward reconciliation. Hamas denied the reports. In the June 2016 reconciliation agreement between Israel and Turkey, the Turkish government agreed not to allow fundraising for Hamas within its territory. Hamas has rejected the reconciliation agreement, but reportedly acceded to Turkish demands that it not react. In February 2017, Turkey hosted the "Conference for Palestinians Abroad," which included several members of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood among its speakers. (Sources: [Jerusalem Post](#) [105], [Times of Israel](#) [106], [Jerusalem Post](#) [107], [Times of Israel](#) [108], [Middle East Monitor](#) [109], [Times of Israel](#) [110])

Despite Turkey's agreement with Israel, Hamas has continued to use Istanbul as a planning base for terrorist activities. At least a dozen Hamas members moved to Istanbul in 2019, according to Israeli and Egyptian intelligence. This includes U.S.-designated financiers such as Kamal Awad, and military leaders who planned spats of suicide bombings in Israel in the 1990s. Turkey has continued to deny that Hamas is a terrorist organization and Turkish intelligence agents reportedly maintain close contact with Hamas operatives in Istanbul. (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [111], [Jerusalem Post](#) [112])

The Turkish government has also continued to welcome Hamas's leadership in the country for high-level meetings with Turkish officials, including Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In December 2019, Erdoğan met with a visiting Hamas delegation that included political leader [Ismail Haniyeh](#) [113] on his first trip out of the Gaza Strip in three years. Arouri also attended the meeting, though both he and Haniyeh are under U.S. sanctions and have reward offers for their arrest. Nonetheless, they moved about freely in Turkey. Following the meeting, Erdoğan told media that Turkey "will keep on supporting our brothers in Palestine." (Sources: [Telegraph](#) [111], [Jerusalem Post](#) [112], [Jerusalem Post](#) [114])

### ***Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front***

Formed in 1978, the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) has led a violent campaign in Turkey for more than three decades. Designated as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States, and the European Union, the DHKP/C has killed dozens of police officers and military personnel as well as over 80 civilians. The organization's goals include the overthrow of the Turkish state, establishment of a Marxist government, and removal of U.S. and NATO influence from Turkey. The party opposes U.S. imperialism and has targeted U.S. military personnel and diplomatic missions. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [115], [National Counterterrorism Center](#) [116])

The group was originally established under the name Devrimci Sol or Dev Sol but splintered in 1994 due to factional infighting, resulting in the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front. The party has recruited from high schools and universities, but today draws most of its members from the urban poor. After generating mass appeal in the 1970s and 1980s, it lost influence partially as a result of the fall of Soviet communism at the end of the Cold War. Turkish police raids caused many DHKP/C leaders to flee and disperse across Europe in 2004. Founding leader Dursun Karatas died from cancer while in exile in the Netherlands in 2008. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [115], [National Counterterrorism Center](#) [116])

Members of the organization have included students, lawyers, and reporters. In 2000, DHKP/C inmates staged a long-running hunger strike in protest of high-security jails. During that decade, the group began imitating tactics used by al-

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Qaeda including suicide bombings and targeted assassinations. The suicide bombing at the U.S. embassy in Ankara in February 2013 was the terror group's most notable attack. The blast killed the bomber and one security guard. Analysts have argued the group may be experiencing a revival due to increased U.S.-Turkish cooperation on foreign policy. In its 2018 Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, EUROPOL reported that DHKP/C maintains a logistical and support network within the European Union. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [115], [National Counterterrorism Center](#) [116], [EUROPOL](#) [117], [Washington Post](#) [118])

### ***Fethullah Terrorist Organization***

The Fethullah Terrorist Organization (FETO) is the Turkish label for followers of Fethullah Gülen, a U.S.-based Turkish cleric whom President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan blames for inciting riots and terrorism against the Turkish government. Gülen, who promotes a moderate, pro-Western style of Sunni Islam, left Turkey for self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania in 1999. Turkey designated FETO as a terrorist organization in May 2016. Erdoğan blamed Gülen and his followers—also referred to in Turkey as Gulenists—for instigating a July 2016 coup attempt. At least 290 people were killed and more than 1,400 wounded during the fighting, during which bombs exploded around Turkey's parliament building and Turkish tanks entered Ankara and Istanbul. Erdoğan believes Gulenists have infiltrated Turkey's military, judicial, and governing authorities in order to influence the government. Human rights organizations have accused the Turkish government of orchestrating the unlawful arrest, imprisonment, and torture of Gulenists in Turkey. According to the Turkish interior ministry, 35,145 suspected Gulenists were detained between January 2, 2017, and October 30, 2017. By November 2017, the Turkish government had dismissed 150,000 civil servants since the coup attempt for alleged links to FETO or terrorism. (Sources: [CNN](#) [119], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [120], [U.S. Department of Justice](#) [121], [U.S. Department of State](#) [40], [Fethullah Gülen](#) [122], [Reuters](#) [123], [CNN](#) [124])

Erdoğan has demanded Gülen's extradition, which the U.S. government has so far refused. In September 2018, Erdoğan called on Germany to designate FETO a terrorist organization. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said her government needed more evidence before it would act against the movement. (Sources: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [120], [Reuters](#) [123], [Reuters](#) [125])

### ***Foreign Fighters***

Turkey shares a 775-mile border with Syria over which thousands of foreign fighters have crossed. As of April 2017, approximately 2,100 Turks have left the country to fight with extremist groups, according to official government counts. More than 600 are believed to have returned to Turkey. According to September 2015 government estimates, approximately 900 fighters are believed to have joined ISIS, whereas 200-300 are suspected to have joined the Nusra Front. By July 2017, the Turkish government said it had banned 53,000 foreign fighters from entering the country and deported 5,000 people linked to terrorism. (Sources: [Time](#) [126], [Soufan Group](#) [29], [International Business Times](#) [127], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [128], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [129])

Huseyin Mustafa Peri is one such Turkish citizen who joined ISIS in September 2014. He was captured in June 2015 and held by the YPG in Syria. In a video shared with Al-Monitor, Peri claimed the average age of fighters in ISIS's Turkish unit is 20 to 22. According to Peri, many Turks travel to Syria to join ISIS after doing "research" or attending madrassas (religious schools) in which they are taught by jihadist preachers. Other Turks are recruited by jihadist recruiters in cities like Ankara, Istanbul, and Konya. (Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [130])

Meanwhile, a notable number of young Kurds from southern Turkey have joined the PKK and the YPG's fight against ISIS in Syria. Factors influencing this decision may include unemployment, a lack of educational opportunities, and Turkish discrimination against Kurds. (Source: [Atlantic](#) [131])

## **Major Extremist and Terrorist Incidents**

### ***Istanbul Nightclub Shooting***

In the early morning of January 1, 2017, ISIS operative Abdulkadir Masharipov, a.k.a. Ebu Muhammed Horasani, killed 39

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people and injured dozens more at Istanbul's Reina nightclub. ISIS claimed responsibility the following day, characterizing the gunman as a "soldier of the caliphate." After a two-week-long manhunt, Turkish authorities arrested Masharipov, an Uzbek national, in his Istanbul apartment, seizing weapons, ammunition, drones, and nearly \$200,000. Authorities believe Masharipov trained in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and had contact with Syrian-based ISIS operatives. He reportedly illegally entered Turkey from Iran in January 2016. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [69], [Reuters](#) [70], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [132], [Reuters](#) [133], [BBC News](#) [134])

### ***December 10, 2016, Vodafone Stadium Attack***

On December 10, 2016, two bombs exploded outside of a soccer stadium in Istanbul, killing 44 people and wounding 155 others. A car bomb detonated near the stadium's main entrance, hitting a police vehicle, and a suicide bomber exploded in a nearby park while surrounded by police. The twin bombings occurred approximately two hours after the end of a soccer match between Turkish teams Bursaspor and Besiktas. The TAK claimed responsibility for the attack. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [135], [CNN](#) [136], [BBC News](#) [137], [Telegraph](#) [138], [ABC News](#) [139], [Guardian](#) [140], [CNN](#) [141])

The bombing came after several other TAK attacks across Turkey in 2016. On June 8, a TAK bomb attack targeting a police bus in Istanbul killed 11 people, including seven police officers. On March 13, a TAK militant detonated a car bomb in Turkey's capital of Ankara, killing 37 people and wounding over 125 more. In April, TAK militants detonated a bomb next to a military convoy in Ankara, killing 28 people and injuring more than 60 more. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [137], [BBC News](#) [142], [CNN](#) [143], [New York Times](#) [144], [Al-Monitor](#) [145], [Reuters](#) [20])

### ***June 28, 2016, Ataturk International Airport Bombings***

On June 28, 2016, three suicide bombers attacked Turkey's Ataturk international airport, killing 45 people, including foreign nationals, and wounding more than 230 others. Among the killed were at least five Saudi citizens and two Iraqi citizens, as well as at least one Tunisian citizen, one Uzbek citizen, one Chinese citizen, one Iranian, one Ukrainian, and one Jordanian. (Sources: [Wall Street Journal](#) [25], [BBC News](#) [66], [Guardian](#) [146], [Reuters](#) [147])

According to media reports, the assailants opened fire at the entrance to the airport. Two of the attackers then made their way inside, where one reportedly blew himself up in the arrivals area on the ground floor and the other detonated his suicide vest in the departures area on the second floor. As people fled the building, the third bomber detonated his explosives in the parking lot near the entrance to the terminal. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [148], [CNN](#) [67], [Telegraph](#) [149], [Reuters](#) [150])

Turkish authorities believe the assailants were affiliated with [ISIS](#) [151]. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim and CIA Director John Brennan have also indicated their suspicions that ISIS was behind the attack, although no group claimed responsibility. (Sources: [CNN](#) [67])

According to Turkey's Anadolu News Agency, the suicide bombers were from Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Reports indicate that the organizer of the attack was [Akhmed Chatayev](#) [152], a U.N.- and U.S.-sanctioned Chechen who trained Russian-speaking recruits for ISIS, and whose current location is unknown. Former Guantanamo Bay detainee Airat Vakhitov (a.k.a. Salman Bulgarsky) was reported to be among those arrested. Two of the bombers suspected to have carried out the attacks were ISIS fighters Vadim Osmanov and Rakim Bulgarov. (Sources: [Fox News](#) [65], [BBC News](#) [66], [Wall Street Journal](#) [25], [CNN](#) [153], [Associated Press](#) [154], [Wall Street Journal](#) [155], [NBC News](#) [156], [BBC News](#) [157], [Voice of America](#) [158])

According to Turkish officials, the militants crossed the border into Turkey from Raqqa, Syria, on May 25, 2016, and rented an apartment in the Faith district of Istanbul to prepare for the attack. The explosives used in the attack were a military-grade manufactured combination of Research Department eXplosive (RDX), trinitrotoluene (TNT), and pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN). (Sources: [Fox News](#) [65], [BBC News](#) [66], [Wall Street Journal](#) [25], [CNN](#) [153], [USA Today](#) [159], [Associated Press](#) [160])

The June 28 attacks came after several deadly car bomb, suicide bomb, and improvised explosive device (IED) attacks in Turkey earlier in June, including a suicide car bomb attack targeting a police bus in Istanbul. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [161], [Reuters](#) [162], [Associated Press](#) [163])



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### *May 2016 PKK Bombings in Southeast Turkey*

In May 2016, the PKK allegedly carried out a string of small-scale bombings in Turkey's southeast. Car bomb attacks in Diyarbakir province on May 1 and May 10 killed one Turkish soldier and three people, respectively. The Turkish government held the PKK responsible for both attacks. On May 24, the Turkish government blamed the PKK for a roadside bomb attack in Van province that killed six Turkish soldiers. On May 30, two purported PKK roadside bomb attacks in Sirnak and Van provinces killed six people, including four civilians and two police officers. The May 30 attacks occurred hours after Turkish warplanes bombed PKK positions in northern Iraq. (Sources: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [164], [Associated Press](#) [165], [Al Arabiya](#) [166], [Reuters](#) [167])

### *January 12, 2016, ISIS Bombing in Istanbul*

Ten people were killed by an ISIS suicide bomb attack in the central district of Sultanahmet in Istanbul on January 12, 2016. Eight of the victims were German tourists. The bomb also injured 15, including a Norwegian man. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [168], [Guardian](#) [169])

According to the Turkish deputy prime minister, the suicide bomber was a person "of Syrian origin" born in 1988. Turkish officials later identified the bomber as Nabil Fadli and reported that he had entered Turkey posing as a Syrian refugee on January 5, 2016, though he raised no red flags at the time. According to Syrian opposition activist Adnan Alhussen, Fadli had belonged to a Syrian jihadist group that joined ISIS in 2014. Fadli was reportedly born in Saudi Arabia, but left the country with his family at the age of 8. He grew up in Syria in the northern town of Manbij. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [168], [Wall Street Journal](#) [170])

Following the attack, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey was "the top target for all terrorist groups in the region." (Sources: [BBC News](#) [168], [Guardian](#) [169])

### *October 10, 2015, ISIS Bombing in Ankara*

In the deadliest attack in modern Turkish history, two suicide bombers attacked a peace rally outside of Ankara's Central railway station, killing 102 people and wounding more than 400. The perpetrators—reportedly linked to ISIS—were equipped with TNT and metal balls to maximize casualties. One of the perpetrators was identified as Yunus Emre Alagöz, the brother of a suicide bomber responsible for the July 2015 ISIS attack in Suruç. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [59], [Anadolu Agency](#) [171], [Economist](#) [172])

The Turkish government named ISIS as the main suspect in the bombings, but no group claimed responsibility. In response to the attack, Turkish authorities carried out raids in southeastern Gaziantep, seizing the vehicle used for the bombing, 2,500 kilograms of ammonium nitrate, 10 suicide vests, explosive materials, rifles, bullets, hand grenades, and numerous detonators. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [173], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [174])

Among the participants at the Ankara peace rally were members of Turkey's pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP). The rally was held to protest the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish government. Both major ISIS attacks in Turkey in 2015 targeted Kurds. (Sources: [Economist](#) [172], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [174], [CNN](#) [21])

### *July 20, 2015, ISIS Bombing in Suruç*

On July 20, 2015, an ISIS suicide bomber killed 32 leftwing activists in the southern town of Suruç, close to the Syrian border. The bombing occurred at the Amara Culture Center, where pro-Kurdish activists were speaking to the press about their plan to travel across the Syrian border to "rebuild" Kobani, the Kurdish town where PKK and YPG militants have battled ISIS. A video released on social media showed the students shouting, "We defended it together, we are building it together," followed by a large explosion. (Sources: [BBC News](#) [175], [Guardian](#) [56])

The Turkish government immediately blamed ISIS for the attack, and the terror group later claimed responsibility. The perpetrator was identified as Şeyh Abdurrahman Alagöz, a Turkish Kurd with ties to ISIS. He was from Turkey's Adiyaman province—Dokumacılar's recruiting grounds—and had reportedly traveled to Syria earlier in 2015 with his brother Yunus

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Emre Alagöz, implicated in the October 2015 attacks. (Sources: [T24](#) [176], [Euronews](#) [177], [Telegraph](#) [58], [Telegraph](#) [178], [BBC News](#) [175])

- **March 11, 2020:** Turkish security forces launched the “Kapan-7 Garisa” counterterrorism operation in the country’s eastern Siirt province.  
The operation, which deployed almost 500 personnel, specifically targets undermining the PKK. Currently, the PKK has a relatively strong presence and a number of bases in Turkey’s eastern and southeastern provinces where the operation will largely be concentrated. Source: [Daily Sabah](#) [3]
- **March 5, 2020:** The interior ministry announces the commencement of Operation Kapan-3 against the PKK terrorist group in Kazan Valley—a territorial addition to the Operation’s original focus in Hakkari province which was initiated on January 13, 2020.  
The operation aims to identify areas used as shelters by the PKK and by rendering those shelters and warehouses unusable. Also that day, Turkish police intercept a truck driver in Istanbul that was transporting explosives into al-Bab in northwestern Syria. The police arrest the truck driver and the owners of the transportation company. It is assumed that the aim of the suspects was to bring raw material to al-Bab to produce explosives. It is uncertain if the suspects were affiliated with any terrorist group. Sources: [Daily Sabah](#) [179], [Daily Sabah](#) [180]
- **February 18, 2020:** Turkish anti-terrorism and intelligence units arrest three ISIS militants in Bursa.  
One of the suspects is believed to be an intelligence operative for the group. Also that day, Hakkari local police arrest 23 suspects with alleged ties to the PKK. The suspects allegedly either campaigned for PKK on social media, were members of the group, or tried to aid the terrorists in some capacity. Sources: [Anadolu Agency](#) [181], [Anadolu Agency](#) [182]
- **January 29, 2020:** Anti-terror police carry out raids in Ankara, and arrest 10 suspects linked to ISIS.  
The suspects were in contact with militants in conflict zones and were allegedly plotting terrorist attacks. Sources: [Anadolu Agency](#) [183], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [184]
- **January 7, 2020:** Turkish security forces deport seven Iraqis and one U.S. citizen back to their respective countries due to their links to ISIS.  
The suspects were arrested following an anti-terror operation on December 31, 2019 in the Black Sea province of Samsun. Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [185]
- **January 6, 2020:** Border forces in Erdine province, which borders Greece and Bulgaria, arrest three suspects with alleged ties to the PKK.  
The suspects sought to cross into Greece via Turkey. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [186]
- **December 30, 2019:** The Turkish police announces that they are holding 147 suspects across the country with alleged ties to ISIS.  
In Ankara alone, over 50 foreign nationals suspected of connections to terrorist organization abroad. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [187]
- **December 23, 2019 - December 25, 2019:** On December 23, Gendarmerie forces launch a narco-terror operation in conjunction with Operation Kiran-11 Narco-Terror to neutralize the PKK’s presence in the region as well as eliminate the terror group’s financial resources.  
On December 25, Turkish forces destroy 19 caves used by the PKK to store bomb-making materials in Diyarbakir province, southeast Turkey. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [188]
- **September 25, 2019:** An improvised explosive device detonates in Yuregir district, southeastern Turkey.  
The explosion, which targeted a bus carrying police personnel, injures a police official and four bystanders. No group claims responsibility for the attack. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [189]
- **September 12, 2019:** Security forces in Mardin province arrest two PKK members allegedly sent to Turkey to carry out bomb attacks in cities and start forest fires across the country.  
A Turkish court remanded the suspects, who were said to have been trained in Syria by the Civil Protection Units (YPS), an affiliate of the PKK. In a written statement on a pro-PKK website, YPS, calling itself “the Children of the Fire Initiative,” took responsibility for starting 27 separate forest fires in western Turkish cities, between July 11 and August 24, including the one in western Izmir province, which affected more than 500 hectares of forest in the Karabağlar, Menderes, and Seferihisar districts. Source: [Daily Sabah](#) [190]
- **July 17, 2019 - July 20, 2019:** Three gunman attack and flee a restaurant in Erbil, a Kurdish-controlled region of Iraq. Three people are killed, including one Turkish diplomat and two Iraqis. It was not immediately clear who carried out the shooting or why. Source: [New York Times](#) [191]
- **March 26, 2019:** A Turkish employee of the U.S. consulate in Istanbul stands trial on charges of espionage, terrorism, and playing a role in an attempted overthrow of the government.  
Metin Topuz is facing life in prison if convicted for ties to the outlawed network of Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based cleric who is accused by the Turkish government of masterminding the failed coup attempt in 2016. Topuz denied the accusations. Topuz’s arrest had sparked a diplomatic spat with the United States, prompting Washington to temporarily suspend visa services in Turkey. At the time, Topuz testified that he traveled to the U.S. with members of Turkey’s police, who were involved in a 2013 corruption probe that was allegedly backed by Gulen’s network against Erdoğan’s government. Source: [Bloomberg](#) [192]
- **March 18, 2019:** A Turkish-born man, Gokmen Tanis, boards a tram in Utrecht, the Netherlands, and subsequently

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goes on a shooting rampage.

The attack kills three people and wounds five others. Police later arrest Tanis and claim the shooting appeared to be a terrorist incident, but could also have been motivated by “family reasons.” Sources: [Telegraph](#) [193], [BBC News](#) [194]

- **March 15, 2019:**A Turkish court convicts an Australian-born ISIS militant of belonging to a terror group and sentences him to more than seven years in prison.  
Neil Prakash, has been in a Turkish prison since 2016 when he was arrested near the Syrian border for attempting to cross into Turkey with fake documents. Turkish prosecutors said the 27-year-old had illegally crossed into Syria in 2013 where he joined ISIS. He was featured in ISIS videos, been linked to several attack plans in Australia and has urged lone wolf attacks against the United States. Source: [Associated Press](#) [195]
- **February 6, 2019:**The Trump administration escalates its dispute with Germany over the transfer of a terror suspect sought by the United States.  
Senior U.S. and German officials had a heated argument over the fate of Adem Yilmaz, a Turkish man convicted of belonging to a terrorist cell, after he was deported to Turkey despite a U.S. extradition request. Yilmaz was convicted in 2010 of plotting to bomb American targets in Germany and sentenced to 11 years in prison. U.S. officials had filed an extradition request for Yilmaz over the killing of two American service members, but a German court allowed him to be deported to Turkey instead. Source: [Bloomberg](#) [196]
- **November 14, 2018:**A Turkish court sentences singer and German citizen, Saide Inac, to six years and three months in jail for membership of an armed terrorist organization.  
An image of Inac alongside a senior member of the outlawed PKK had circulated on Turkish media, following her detention. Inac had denied being a member or a sympathizer of an illegal organization and had requested her acquittal. Source: [Reuters](#) [197]
- **November 11, 2018:**A handmade explosive device, suspected to be planted by the PKK, detonates in a rural area of Gormec in the Gabar Mountain region.  
The attack kills two Turkish soldiers and injures five others. Source: [Daily Sabah](#) [198]
- **October 26, 2018:**A Turkish court sentences a German man, only identified as Patrick K., to six years and three months in prison for membership in a terrorist organization.  
Turkish authorities arrested the defendant while he was on a hike on March 14, 2018 near the Turkish-Syrian border and claim to have found an email that Patrick K. sent to the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG), the armed faction of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), offering to fight for the group. The case was based on the testimony of Patrick K.’s cellmate, who allegedly recognized the German man. The witness claimed to have seen Patrick K. in a YPG uniform working as a doctor at a hospital in Syria in January 2018. There was no evidence in the indictment, however, that shows that Patrick K. traveled to Syria. Source: [Deutsche Welle](#) [199]
- **October 12, 2018:**A Turkish court in Aliaga frees American pastor, Andrew Brunson, after he spent nearly two years in jail on charges related to terrorism and espionage.  
Turkey’s government faced threats of further U.S. sanctions over its treatment of the pastor, who denies all charges against him, but Erdoğan insisted that the Turkish judicial system be allowed to function. Prosecutors accused Brunson of committing crimes on behalf of terror groups, linking him to outlawed Kurdish militants and a network led by a U.S.-based Turkish cleric who is accused of orchestrating the coup attempt. The U.S. maintained that he was being held unjustly and repeatedly called for his release. Source: [CBS News](#) [200]
- **October 9, 2018:**Turkish police detain 90 people over suspected links to PKK rebels.  
The arrests come days after Erdoğan warned he would replace any mayors elected in next year’s local elections if they were deemed to have links to terrorism. Erdoğan accuses the main pro-Kurdish party, the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), of links to the PKK. The HDP denies this and says it is unjustly targeted by the government. One prominent HDP lawmaker, Garo Paylan, said the arrests were politically motivated, and were part of the governing party AKP’s campaign strategy for the 2019 election. Source: [Reuters](#) [201]
- **October 4, 2018:**A roadside bomb kills at least seven Turkish soldiers and wounds three others in the Batman province.  
Turkish officials blame the PKK and promise revenge against the group. Sources: [Middle East Eye](#) [202], [Reuters](#) [203]
- **August 20, 2018:**Several shots are fired at the U.S. embassy in Ankara but no casualties are reported.  
The Turkish government calls the attack an attempt to spread chaos. Source: [Reuters](#) [204]
- **July 31, 2018:**A roadside IED in the Hakkari province kills a woman and her 11-month-old son.  
Authorities suspect the PKK. Source: [Times of India](#) [205]
- **June 19, 2018 - June 20, 2018:**On June 19, a roadside bomb in the Siirte province kills one soldier and wounds two others.  
On June 20, militants fire a rocket at a passing military convoy coming from a military command in the Çukurca district bordering northern Iraq. The attack kills two soldiers and wounds one other. Security sources blame the PKK for both attacks. Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [206]
- **June 4, 2018:**Militants attack a group of members of the ruling AKP in the Sanliurfa province, killing four and wounding eight.  
There are no immediate claims of responsibility but the government blames the PKK. Source: [Anadolu Agency](#) [207]
- **February 1, 2018:**Militants attack Turkish positions in the Hakkari province and in northern Iraq, killing three and wounding seven.

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- The Turkish military blames the PKK. Source: [Reuters](#) [208]
- **November 2, 2017:** Militants from northern Iraq clash with Turkish soldiers while trying to cross into Turkey's Hakkari province.  
At least eight are killed, including six Turkish soldiers and two village guards from Hakkari. The Turkish military blames the PKK. Source: [Daily Sabah](#) [209]
  - **August 1, 2017:** A Turkish military vehicle in Diyarbakir province is hit with an improvised explosive device, killing two soldiers.  
Security sources blame the PKK. Source: [Reuters](#) [210]
  - **July 30, 2017:** A gunman attacks the Çilek Beach Club and the Sess Beach Club in the resort town of Bodrum along the Aegean Sea, killing one and wounding four.  
There are no immediate claims of responsibility. Sources: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [211], [BBC News](#) [212]
  - **July 17, 2017:** Kurdish militants detonate an improvised explosive device as a military vehicle passes by in the Hakkari province, wounding 17 soldiers.  
The Turkish government blames the PKK. Source: [Voice of America](#) [213]
  - **July 8, 2017:** The PKK attacks a construction envoy in the Hakkari province, killing four and wounding two.  
Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [40]
  - **April 11, 2017:** An explosion at a police station in the largely Kurdish city of Diyarbakir kills three people and wounds four.  
According to Turkish Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly, militants had dug tunnels beneath the station and placed explosives beneath the facility, which is used to repair police vehicles. One armored police vehicle under repair was damaged in the attack. The PKK claims responsibility, alleging it had planted 2.5 tonnes of explosives. Sources: [Associated Press](#) [214], [Reuters](#) [215]
  - **March 29, 2017:** A bomb explodes in a parked car early in the morning in the Çamlıkule neighborhood of the Buca district, killing the militant in the car and wounding another nearby.  
When an ambulance arrives, a second bomb explodes in a nearby garbage can. Police blame the PKK. Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [216]
  - **March 15, 2017:** A mine explodes beneath an army vehicle on a highway linking Diyarbakir and Mardin, killing at least two soldiers.  
The military blames the PKK. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [217]
  - **February 17, 2017:** A remotely detonated car bomb outside a judicial housing building in Viransehir near the Turkish border kills a 11-year-old child and wounds 17 people.  
There are no immediate claims of responsibility but officials suspect the PKK. Sources: [BBC News](#) [218], [Reuters](#) [219]
  - **February 9, 2017:** In a massive raid, Turkish authorities seize 150 kilos of explosives and arrest four suspected ISIS militants in Gaziantep, near the Syrian border.  
According to authorities, the suspects were plotting a major terrorist attack inside Turkey. Source: [Voice of America](#) [220]
  - **January 20, 2017:** Militants fire RPGs at the Istanbul police directorate and the Justice and Development party's provincial office.  
There are no casualties reported. The Revolutionary People's Liberation Front claims responsibility. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [40]
  - **January 16, 2017:** A roadside bomb in the Diyarbakir province kills at least four police officers and wounds two.  
There is no immediate claim of responsibility. Source: [Al Jazeera](#) [221]
  - **January 5, 2017:** Three militants clash with police and detonate a car bomb outside of a courthouse in Turkey's Aegean coastal city of Izmir, killing a police officer and a court employee.  
According to Deputy Prime Minister Veysi Kaynak, it appears that a much larger attack was being planned based on the weapons found at the scene. The TAK claim responsibility. Sources: [BBC News](#) [222], [Reuters](#) [223], [Associated Press](#) [224]
  - **January 1, 2017:** At approximately 1 a.m., Uzbek national Abdulkadir Masharipov, a.k.a. Ebu Muhammed Horasani, opens fire at Istanbul's Reina nightclub filled with New Year's revelers.  
The attack leaves 39 dead and dozens more wounded. ISIS claims responsibility the following day, characterizing the gunman as a "soldier of the caliphate." Turkish authorities arrest Masharipov after a two-week-long manhunt. Sources: [New York Times](#) [69], [Reuters](#) [70], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [132], [Reuters](#) [133]
  - **December 19, 2016:** A gunman opens fire at the Contemporary Arts Center in Ankara, killing Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov.  
The assailant is identified as off-duty Turkish police officer Mevlüt Mert Altıntaş. According to news reports, Altıntaş shouted, "Don't forget about Aleppo, don't forget about Syria." There is no immediate claim of responsibility. Source: [BBC News](#) [225]
  - **December 17, 2016:** A suicide car bomb explodes next to a bus carrying off-duty soldiers outside of the entrance to Erciyes University in the central Turkish city of Kayseri.  
The attack kills 14 soldiers and wounds 55 people. There is no immediate claim of responsibility, but Turkish officials suspect the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Sources: [CBS News](#) [226], [Anadolu Agency](#) [227]
  - **December 12, 2016:** Turkish authorities arrest 235 people in anti-terror operations across Turkey.

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- According to the Turkish interior ministry, the suspects allegedly have links to the PKK and are accused of spreading terrorist propaganda on social media. Sources: [Anadolu Agency](#) [228], [ABC News](#) [139]
- **December 10, 2016:**Two bombs explode outside of a soccer stadium in Istanbul, killing 44 people and wounding 155 others.  
A car bomb detonates near the stadium’s main entrance, hitting a police vehicle, and a suicide bomber explodes in a nearby park while surrounded by police. The TAK claims responsibility for the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [135], [CNN](#) [136], [BBC News](#) [137], [Telegraph](#) [138], [Associated Press](#) [229], [CNN](#) [141]
  - **October 23, 2016:**PKK militants detonate a car bomb near a passing police vehicle in the eastern Turkish province of Bingol, killing two police officers and 19 people.  
Source: [Reuters](#) [230]
  - **October 6, 2016:**A motorcycle bomb explodes near an Istanbul police station, wounding at least 10 people.  
Turkish authorities believe the PKK to be responsible for the attack. Sources: [New York Times](#) [231], [Associated Press](#) [232]
  - **September 12, 2016:**A car bomb explodes outside the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) headquarters in the eastern Turkish city of Van, wounding 48 people.  
Turkish authorities blame the PKK for the attack. Source: [Independent](#) [233]
  - **September 9, 2016:**A car bomb explodes at a checkpoint outside of a police headquarters in the southeast city of Cizre, killing 11 policemen and wounding 78 others.  
The PKK claims responsibility. Source: [BBC News](#) [234]
  - **August 20, 2016:**A suicide bomb blast during a Kurdish wedding reception in Turkey’s southern city of Gaziantep kills 57 individuals and wounds more than 90 others.  
Turkish authorities believe ISIS is responsible for the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [68], [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [72]
  - **August 17, 2016 - August 18, 2016:**Three separate bomb attacks in eastern Turkey target security forces, killing 14 people and wounding more than 220 others.  
The first car bomb explodes at a police station in the eastern province of Van on the evening of August 17. The next morning on August 18, another car bomb explodes at the police headquarters in the eastern city of Elazig. Later, in the southeastern province of Bitlis, attackers detonate a roadside improvised explosive device explodes as a Turkish military vehicle passes by. Turkish authorities believe the attacks were carried out by the PKK. Sources: [New York Times](#) [235], [Fox News](#) [236], [Independent](#) [237]
  - **August 9, 2016:**PKK militants reportedly open fire on Turkish soldiers outside the town of Kulp in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, killing two soldiers and wounding two others.  
Source: [Reuters](#) [238]
  - **July 18, 2016:**An unidentified gunman assassinates Istanbul’s deputy mayor, Cemil Candas.  
It is not clear if the incident is related to the failed military coup against President Erdoğan. Source: [Reuters](#) [239]
  - **July 15, 2016 - July 17, 2016:**A faction of the Turkish military attempts a coup in the Turkish capital of Ankara. The failed coup leaves 294 people dead and more than 1,400 people injured.  
President Erdoğan and his government quash the uprisings and reassert control by July 17, 2016, and detain more than 7,500 suspects in connection to the coup. Sources: [Los Angeles Times](#) [240], [New York Times](#) [241], [Wall Street Journal](#) [242]
  - **June 28, 2016:**Three suicide bombers open fire at Istanbul’s Ataturk airport before blowing themselves up, killing 45 people and wounding more than 230 others.  
Sources: [Reuters](#) [150], [Telegraph](#) [149], [Wall Street Journal](#) [25], [Reuters](#) [147]
  - **June 23, 2016:**A purported PKK car bomber kills one civilian and wounds six military personnel in Turkey’s southeast province of Mardin.  
Source: [Associated Press](#) [243]
  - **June 14, 2016:**Six police officers are wounded from a roadside improvised explosive device (IED) in Van province.  
Turkish authorities believe PKK is responsible for the attack. Source: [Associated Press](#) [163]
  - **June 13, 2016:**A car bomb wounds nine people in Tunceli.  
No group claims responsibility. Source: [Reuters](#) [162]
  - **June 7, 2016:**A TAK suicide car bomber targets a police bus in Istanbul, killing seven officers, four civilians, and wounding 36 others.  
Sources: [BBC News](#) [161], [Reuters](#) [244]
  - **May 30, 2016:**Two purported PKK roadside bomb attacks kill six people—including four civilians and two police officers—in Turkey’s Sirnak and Van provinces, respectively.  
The attacks occur hours after Turkish warplanes bomb PKK positions in northern Iraq. Source: [Reuters](#) [167]
  - **May 24, 2016:**An alleged PKK roadside bomb attack kills six Turkish soldiers in Turkey’s southeast Van province.  
Source: [Al Arabiya](#) [166]
  - **May 10, 2016:**A car bomb attack in Diyarbakir province kills three people.  
The Turkish government holds the PKK responsible. Source: [Associated Press](#) [165]
  - **May 1, 2016:**A car bomb attack kills one Turkish soldier in Diyarbakir province.  
The Turkish government blames the PKK. Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [164]
  - **March 19, 2016:**An ISIS suicide bomber in central Istanbul kills three Israelis (two of whom hold dual U.S.

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citizenship) and one Iranian, wounding 36 others.

Turkish authorities cancel a soccer match the following day due to the ongoing security threat. Source: [Reuters](#) [71]

- **March 13, 2016:**A car bomb in central Ankara kills 37 and wounds over 125. The Turkish government blames the PKK and retaliates by striking PKK targets in northern Iraq. A PKK offshoot, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), claims responsibility in the days following the attack. Sources: [BBC News](#) [142], [Reuters](#) [20]
- **February 17, 2016:**A suicide car bombing in Ankara’s parliamentary district kills 29, at least 20 of whom are believed to be military personnel. The Turkish government immediately blames the YPG, and alleges that the Syrian-based militia was aided by the PKK. Turkish fighter planes bomb YPG and PKK bases within hours of the attack. Both the YPG and PKK deny involvement. The bomber was later named as Abdulkaki Somer, a Turkish-born member of the PKK. Sources: [BBC News](#) [245], [Reuters](#) [246], [BBC News](#) [247]
- **January 12, 2016:**Ten foreign nationals, including eight Germans, are killed in an ISIS suicide bombing in central Istanbul. Fifteen others are wounded. The bomber is identified as Saudi-born ISIS member Nabil Fadli who entered Turkey from Syria on January 5, 2016. Sources: [BBC News](#) [168], [Wall Street Journal](#) [170]
- **December 30, 2015:**Turkish authorities arrest two ISIS members suspected of planning to murder merrymakers in Ankara during New Year’s Eve festivities. Police confiscate a suicide vest, bomb-making equipment, and ball bearings. Source: [Wall Street Journal](#) [248]
- **December 23, 2015:**Assailants purportedly operating on behalf of PKK splinter group TAK carry out a mortar attack at Istanbul’s Sabiha Gokcen International Airport, killing one individual and wounding another. Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [41]
- **December 1, 2015:**A pipe bomb intended to target policemen—explodes on an overpass near Istanbul’s Bayrampasa metro station. Five are injured. No group claims responsibility. Sources: [Al Jazeera](#) [249], [Reuters](#) [250]
- **October 30, 2015:**ISIS militants murder two Syrian activists in the southern Turkish town of Sanliurfa, slitting the throat of one and beheading the other. Source: [Huffington Post](#) [251]
- **October 10, 2015:**In the deadliest attack in modern Turkish history, suspected ISIS suicide bombers kill 102 and wound more than 400 at a peace rally in Ankara. Rally attendees had been calling for reconciliation between the Turkish government and the PKK. After the attack, thousands of Turkish citizens demonstrate against President Erdoğan, blaming his government for a lack of security measures that they argue led to the attack. Sources: [CNN](#) [21], [Guardian](#), [22][Hurriyet Daily News](#) [23]
- **July 23, 2015:**ISIS militants open fire on Turkish border soldiers in Kilis, killing one noncommissioned officer. Turkey responds with “Operation Martyr Yalcin,” a series of airstrikes against ISIS positions in Northern Syria. Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [41]
- **August 10, 2015:**Two assailants purportedly from the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) fire weapons at the U.S. consulate in Istanbul. Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [41]
- **July 20, 2015:**A suspected ISIS suicide bomber kills 32 leftwing activists in the small town of Suruç, close to the Syrian border. The activists had planned to travel to the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobani—which ISIS militants failed to wrest from Kurdish control in 2014—to plant a memorial forest, deliver toys, and build a library and playground. Sources: [Guardian](#) [56], [NTV](#) [57]
- **June 5, 2015:**A suspected ISIS assailant kills four civilians and wounds 100 more with two bombs blasts during an election rally for the People’s Democratic Party in Diyarbakir. Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [41]
- **June 2015:**PKK militants wage at least six attacks on military installations and infrastructure, and carry out at least one kidnapping, in southeast Turkey. Source: [Australian National Security](#) [18]
- **January 6, 2015:**A female Russian citizen affiliated with ISIS detonates a suicide vest inside a police station in Istanbul’s Sultanahmet district, killing one police officer and injuring another. Source: [U.S. State Department](#) [41]
- **October 25, 2014:**Suspected PKK militants shoot dead three Turkish soldiers in southeast Turkey. Four days later, PKK militants shoot dead a Turkish military officer in a bazaar. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [252]
- **October 9, 2014:**PKK militants open fire on police in the eastern province of Bingöl, killing two policemen. Source: [Australian National Security](#) [18]
- **March 30, 2014:**Three suspected members of ISIS murder two Turkish military personnel and one truck driver at a checkpoint near Nigde, Turkey. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [252]
- **September 30, 2013:**Two members of the DHKP/C attack the Turkish National Police headquarters with rockets, resulting in zero casualties.

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Source: [Al-Monitor](#) [253]

- **May 11, 2013:**In the then-deadliest attack in Turkey’s modern history, twin car bombings in Reyhanli, Hatay Province kill 52. Turkish intelligence blames the attacks on Turkish operatives with ties to Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Sources: [Bloomberg Business](#) [254], [U.S. Department of State](#) [255]
- **April 2013:**Turkish police report evidence of an al-Qaeda plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Ankara. Source: [New York Times](#) [256]
- **March 19, 2013:**Three members of the DHKP/C synchronize hand grenade attacks on the Ministry of Justice, resulting in zero casualties. Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [257]
- **February 11, 2013:**A pro-Bashar al-Assad operative detonates a car bomb at the Bab al-Hawa border crossing on the Turkish-Syrian border, killing 13 people and injuring approximately 30 others. Turkish security blame the attack on Mihrac Ural, a Turk belonging to al-Assad’s Alawite sect. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [255]
- **February 1, 2013:**A member of the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C) explodes a suicide vest at the U.S. embassy in Ankara, killing himself and a Turkish guard. Source: [CNN](#) [258]
- **September 2, 2012:**Approximately 100 suspected PKK militants attack government buildings in the small town of Beytüssebap, close to the Syrian border. The attacks kill at least 10 soldiers and wound seven more. Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [259]
- **October 19, 2011:**Approximately 100 PKK militants launch simultaneous attacks on Turkish army outposts in Hakkari province in southeastern Turkey. The attack kills 24 Turkish soldiers. Turkey responds with air and ground assaults against the PKK. Source: [Reuters](#) [260]
- **July 2011:**Turkish authorities carry out a raid on suspected al-Qaeda operatives near Ankara. In December 2011, authorities reveal that a Turkish al-Qaeda cell had been plotting a wide-scale bombing attack on churches in Ankara, as well as on the Turkish parliament and U.S. embassy. Source: [Eurasia Review](#) [80]
- **July 9, 2008:**Suspected al-Qaeda insurgents attack the U.S. consulate in Istanbul, killing three Turkish police officers. Source: [Guardian](#) [261]
- **November 15, 2003:**Al-Qaeda suicide bombers in cars attack an Istanbul synagogue, killing 23 and wounding over 300. Five days later, a powerful bomb rips through Istanbul’s British consulate and a nearby HSBC Bank branch, killing 27 and wounding another 450. Al-Qaeda is found responsible. Osama bin Laden had reportedly given the perpetrators his “blessing” to wage the attacks. Sources: [BBC News](#) [262], [CNN](#) [263], [NBC News](#) [264]

### **Domestic Counter-Extremism**

According to then-Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Sinirlioğlu, “Turkey stands at the forefront of the terror threat...fighting on not one but three fronts”: against religious extremist organizations such as ISIS, Kurdish PKK separatists, and radical leftwing groups. Officially, Turkey does not distinguish between these designated groups. In July 2015, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said, “there is no difference between PKK and Daesh [ISIS].” (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [265], [Independent](#) [266])

Following the March 13, 2016, bombing in central Ankara, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan demanded that the definition of “terrorist” be expanded to include those who support terrorism. According to Erdoğan, such individuals might include activists, lawmakers, or journalists. He said: “Their titles as an MP, an academic, an author, a journalist do not change the fact that they are actually terrorists. An act of terror is successful because of these supporters, these accomplices.” (Sources: [BBC News](#) [267], [Turkish Weekly](#) [268])

In an April 5, 2016, speech, Erdoğan announced that his government would consider stripping Turkish terrorists of their citizenship. Justice Minister Bekir Bozdag confirmed the following day that the Turkish government was actively working to institute these measures. (Source: [France24](#) [269])

Although Turkey has adopted a hardline approach toward ISIS and the PKK, its leaders have reportedly granted asylum to jihadists from other extremist and terrorist groups. Following the 2013 coup in Egypt which toppled the newly elected Muslim Brotherhood government, many exiled Brotherhood senior members were given refuge in Turkey. Turkey has also reportedly provided refuge to members of internationally sanction-designated terrorist organizations, including members

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of Hamas, the Khorasan Group, the Nusra Front, and Gamaa Islamiya. During a June 2016 dinner with NGO representatives, Erdoğan said in a speech that labeling groups such as the Nusra Front “terrorists” was improper since they are also fighting against ISIS. Despite condemnation from the U.S. and Egyptian governments over these remarks, Erdoğan insists that he “rejects terrorism and seeks only to protect Muslims’ right to peaceful self-determination.” (Source: [Washington Post](#) [270])

On January 13, 2020, Turkey launched operation “Kapan” to eliminate PKK fighters from the country’s south. The operation was launched in the rural area of Hakkari province and includes a little over 800 security personnel, which includes police forces and gendarmerie. On March 11, 2020, Turkish security forces launched the “Kapan-7 Garisa” counterterrorism operation in the country’s eastern Siirt province. The operation deployed almost 500 personnel to the region in order to undermine the threat of the PKK. Currently, the PKK has a relatively strong presence and a number of bases in Turkey’s eastern and southeastern provinces where the operation will largely be concentrated. (Sources: [Middle East Monitor](#) [271], [Republic of Turkey Ministry of the Interior](#) [272], [Daily Sabah](#) [3])

### ***Government Programs***

Turkey has several government programs to counter extremism. The first is an outreach program administered by the Turkish National Police (TNP) that seeks to prevent radicalization through early contact with at-risk communities. This program aims to reach vulnerable populations before they are exposed to extremist propaganda and messages. The U.S. embassy in Ankara describes the TNP program as “similar to anti-gang activities in the United States” using intervention to prevent recruitment. (Source: [U.S. Embassy in Turkey](#) [273])

The second program seeks to “undercut violent extremist messaging” and is administered by the Turkish government’s Directorate of Religious Affairs, known as the Diyanet. The Diyanet “oversees Turkey’s 85,000 mosques” and is tasked with promoting a more moderate version of Islam and weakening radical Islamist messaging. The Diyanet tries to accomplish this aim by reinterpreting religious texts and teaching religious education under a more modern framework, and by staffing mosques with Diyanet officials. The Diyanet has 20 centers throughout Turkey. It was founded in 1924 and has been a public institution since 1964, when its role was enshrined in the Turkish constitution and placed under government auspices. The Diyanet functions in accordance with the official secular character of the Turkish constitution “by staying out of all the political views and mentalities and adopting a goal of solidarity and integration as a nation....” Foreign Diyanet branches exist in several countries serving the Turkish diaspora, including the Diyanet Center of America at Lanham, Maryland. The foreign branches focus on exertion of Turkish influence and promoting a Turkish version of Islam, rather than counter-extremism. (Sources: [Diyanet](#) [274], [Independent](#) [266], [U.S. Embassy in Turkey](#) [275], [U.S. Department of State](#) [276], [U.S. Department of State](#) [277], [Foreign Affairs](#) [278])

In August 2015, the Turkish Ministry of Interior implemented a program that rewards citizens who come forward to the government with information about suspected terrorists or terrorist-related activities. An individual can receive a monetary reward of up to \$69,000 if their information leads to the arrest of a suspected terrorist. Information that either leads to the capture of a high-level terrorist or prevents a terrorist attack is eligible for a reward of up to \$1.38 million. (Source: [U.S. Department of State](#) [41])

### ***Domestic Military Raids***

Turkey continues to employ domestic military raids against suspected terrorist targets. During an August 2017 raid in two Turkish provinces, for example, government forces arrested 42 suspected of ties to ISIS or the PKK. Security forces arrested 440 alleged ISIS supporters in a February 2017 raid in 18 provinces. During a series of July 2017 raids, security forces arrested 213 suspected PKK members, 46 ISIS-linked suspects, and eight people allegedly linked to “leftist terrorist groups.” Security forces also arrested 831 alleged followers of U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen. According to Turkish officials, authorities have detained 5,000 suspected ISIS members in the country and deported 3,290 foreign militants. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [279], [Slate](#) [280], [Newsweek](#) [281], [Reuters](#) [282])

### ***Allegations of Human Rights Abuses***

Following the July 2016 coup attempt, the Turkish government instituted a two-year-long state of emergency. Human



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rights organizations have accused the Turkish government of orchestrating the unlawful arrest, abduction, imprisonment, and torture of Gulenists and other terror suspects in Turkey. According to the Turkish interior ministry, authorities detained 35,145 suspected Gulenists between January 2, 2017, and October 30, 2017. Human Rights Watch has accused Turkey of torture of terror suspects, particularly those accused of affiliation with FETO or the PKK. The U.S. State Department has corroborated that Turkish detentions of terror suspects often rely on “scant evidence and minimal due process.” (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [40], [CNN](#) [124], [Human Rights Watch](#) [283], [Amnesty International](#) [284])

### **International Counter-Extremism**

In August 2017, the Turkish government said it was taking steps to secure its border with Idlib, Syria, because of the presence of terrorist groups along the Syrian side of the 90-mile border. According to Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, Turkey would limit the movement of non-humanitarian goods across the border. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that the border would remain open for humanitarian purposes but weapons would be forbidden. (Source: [Reuters](#) [285])

Turkey has also increased its military response to cross-border terrorism. In February 2017, for example, the army claimed it had hit 250 ISIS targets on the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border, killing 33. (Source: [Slate](#) [280])

In January 2018, Turkey launched an offensive against a Kurdish enclave in northwest Syria targeting the People’s Protection Units (YPG) Kurdish militia, which Turkish officials accused of posing a “real” threat to Turkey. The Turkish government warned that the YPF would be “cleansed” from the area. The U.S. government had supported the YPG during the fight against ISIS in Syria. The Syrian government warned it would shoot down any Turkish jets flying over Syrian territory. Turkey announced that it would coordinate its offensive with Russia. (Sources: [Associated Press](#) [286], [Reuters](#) [287], [Reuters](#) [288])

On October 9, 2019, Erdoğan announced the start of Operation Peace Spring. The campaign launched a cross-border offensive into northeastern Syria using airstrikes, artillery bombardments, and a ground invasion against Kurdish forces. Turkey views any Kurdish entity as part of the PKK, an internationally designated terrorist group. Operation Peace Spring follows the abrupt announcement made by U.S. President Donald Trump on October 7, 2019 that declared the withdrawal of U.S. troops from northern Syria and the end of U.S. protection for Kurdish fighters. Kurdish forces have done the bulk of the fighting against ISIS in Syria and lost an estimated 11,000 fighters in the years-long campaign to neutralize the terrorist group. Training, equipping, and assisting those Kurdish forces has been a primary mission of the U.S. military inside Syria. The decision by Trump to draw back on U.S. presence in northeastern Syria gave the Turkish government the green light to attack the Kurds. The group, long considered one of the United States’ most reliable partners in Syria, has played a key strategic role in the campaign against ISIS in the region. The White House added Turkey would now be responsible for all captured ISIS fighters who are currently being held by U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in northern Syria. Within a month of conducting Operation Peace Spring, Turkey captured over several hundred people affiliated with ISIS. Turkish interior minister, Suleyman Soylu, later announced that Turkey would send captured ISIS militants back to their home countries within 72 hours, without providing further details on militants whose home countries have nullified their citizenship. Following talks with the U.S., Turkey agreed to pause its offensive on October 17, 2019 to allow Kurdish forces to withdraw from a safe zone that Ankara sought to capture. Upon complete withdrawal of YPG forces on October 29, Operation Peace Spring was suspended. (Sources: [The Soufan Group](#) [4], [The Hill](#) [6], [Washington Post](#) [7], [CNN](#) [8], [New York Times](#) [9], [Reuters](#) [10], [Al Jazeera](#) [11])

On March 1, 2020, Erdoğan declared that Turkey would launch a counteroffensive against the Syrian government. The declaration of Operation Spring Shield Turkey’s largest military loss—more than 36 soldiers killed and 30 wounded—in a single attack, and was the first time Turkey openly declared war on the Syrian central government. Turkey claims the show of force will not be directed towards Russian forces who are backing Assad’s regime, and instead hope that the counteroffensive will prevent large-scale massacres in the region as well as prevent the flow of Syrian refugees into Turkey. On March 5, 2020, Turkey and Russia—who back opposing sides in Syria’s war—agreed to halt fighting in Syria’s Idlib, the last stronghold of Syria’s rebels. On March 13, Turkey and Russia officially agreed to start joint patrols in Idlib, with the new measures to take effect on March 15. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [289], [Al-Monitor](#) [290], [Defense Post](#) [291])

### *ISIS and Syria*

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The Turkish parliament approved military intervention against ISIS in Syria and Iraq in 2014. In October 2018, the parliament extended the country's military mandate in Syria and Iraq for another year. Until late July 2015, Turkey pursued a policy of noninterventionism regarding ISIS. This meant it declined to permit coalition jets to fly from its airbase at Incirlik, despite being a NATO member. It also meant Turkey was reluctant to allow PKK-affiliated Syrian forces to help the residents of Kobani, who were being targeted by ISIS. The international community has also charged Turkey with maintaining lax border policies and accepting an ISIS presence inside Syria. In 2014, then-Vice President Joe Biden publicly disparaged Turkey's reluctance to degrade ISIS, flouting the White House's official line of not criticizing Turkish non-action. Turkey's permissiveness could be explained by its larger focus on the "Kurdish problem," in which Turkey appeared to allow ISIS to carry out activities that weakened the PKK and the Kurdish independence movement. Biden later apologized for his remarks after Turkey's government took offense. (Sources: [Agence France-Presse](#) [292], [U.S. Department of State](#) [293], [New York Times](#) [294], [Atlantic Council](#) [295], [CNN](#) [37])

Since the ISIS-linked suicide bombing in Suruç in July 2015, the Turkish government has assumed a more active role against the terror group. In August of that year, Turkey carried out 20 raids in 19 different cities and deployed more military forces to known ISIS transit routes along the Turkish-Syrian border. The Turkish air force also began carrying out airstrikes against the group in Syria. Ankara also permitted U.S.-led coalition forces to use Turkish bases when conducting strikes against ISIS. On November 6, 2015, the U.S. deployed six F-15 fighter jets to Incirlik air base. (Sources: [Guardian](#) [56], [NTV](#) [57], [Atlantic Council](#) [295], [Carnegie Europe](#) [38], [Independent](#) [296])

On July 16, 2016, as part of its effort to fend off an attempted military coup, Turkish authorities implemented a 24-hour shutdown of Incirlik Air Base, including U.S. counterterrorism operations. The following day, Turkish authorities reportedly arrested General Bekir Ercan Van and 10 other service members at Incirlik Air Base for allegedly participating in the failed coup. Turkish officials claimed the soldiers at Incirlik provided defectors with vital support, including air-to-air refueling to defector fighter jets in Ankara. The U.S. Central Command was reportedly forced to temporarily adjust its plans for anti-ISIS sorties. Following the resumption of U.S. counterterrorism operations on July 17, then-U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stated, "[Turkish officials] assure me that there will be no interruption of our counter-[ISIS] efforts." According to the U.S. Department of Defense, the Incirlik Air Base is critical to NATO's mission in the region. (Sources: [Los Angeles Times](#) [240], [Washington Post](#) [297], [Wall Street Journal](#) [298], [USA Today](#) [299], [ABC News](#) [300], [Huffington Post](#) [301], [U.S. Department of Defense](#) [302])

On August 24, 2016, the Turkish military sent tanks, special forces, and warplanes into northern Syria in a U.S.-backed operation dubbed Operation Euphrates Shield. The offensive allowed Syrian rebel groups to seize control over Jarabulus, an ISIS-held Syrian border town. Jarabulus had reportedly been ISIS's last major foothold near the Turkish border. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavosoglu said the offensive was "not going to stop there at the border" and that Turkey "will provide any necessary contribution to cleanse [ISIS] from our neighbors in Iraq and Syria." The following day on August 25, 10 more Turkish tanks crossed the Syrian border to support the anti-ISIS offensive. Turkey concluded the operation on March 29, 2017. According to the Turkish government, the operation succeeded in neutralizing 3,060 ISIS fighters. (Sources: [Washington Post](#) [303], [NPR](#) [304], [Agence France-Presse](#) [305], [Reuters](#) [306], [New York Times](#) [307], [U.S. Department of State](#) [40])

On September 19, 2016, Erdoğan announced at a news conference his plan to create a "safe zone" in northern Syria along the Turkish border. According to Erdoğan, the safe zone will be used to shelter and train Turkish-backed rebels and resettle refugees. In January 2018, Turkey began a military campaign against U.S.-backed Kurdish forces in Afrin, Syria, to secure an area for the first safe zone. Turkey views the Kurdish militias as a threat to Turkish security and warned that the People's Protection Units (YPG) would be "cleansed" from the area. The following month, an ex-ISIS fighter claimed that Turkey was recruiting former ISIS jihadists to fight against the YPG. Turkey captured Afrin in March 2018. That August, Erdoğan announced Turkey's intention to create more so-called safe zones to allow refugees to return to Syria. (Sources: [Bloomberg](#) [308], [Washington Post](#) [303], [Associated Press](#) [309], [Guardian](#) [310], [France24](#) [311], [Independent](#) [312], [Associated Press](#) [286], [Reuters](#) [313])

On February 29, 2020, Erdoğan declared that he had opened his country's borders for migrants to cross into Europe. Erdoğan claimed that Turkey did not have the capacity to handle the numbers of refugees fleeing the war in Syria, which resulted in his decision to break the 2016 pact under which the European Union promised to pay 6 billion euros in return for Turkey curbing migration flows. European leaders have not kept their promises to assist Turkey in supporting the 3.6 million Syrian refugees already in the country. Additionally, Erdoğan claims the EU has had a lack of solidarity with his

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military operations in Syria. It is uncertain if any of the refugees heading towards the EU were former members of ISIS, but the possibility will potentially lead to amended security measures taken on by border forces. (Sources: [New York Times](#) [314], [Guardian](#) [315])

### *International Organization Membership*

Turkey is a founding member of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), “an informal, multilateral counterterrorism (CT) platform” launched in September 2011 “to reduce the vulnerability of people everywhere to terrorism by effectively preventing, combating, and prosecuting terrorist acts and countering incitement and recruitment to terrorism.” The GCTF comprises 30 members: 29 countries plus the European Union as a single member. Turkey is co-chair alongside the Netherlands. (Sources: [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#) [316], [U.S. Department of State](#) [317])

Turkey is also a member of Hedayah (meaning “Guidance” in Arabic), one “of three GCTF-inspired initiatives.” Hedayah is headquartered in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. It was formed in 2012 “to serve as the premier international institution for training, dialogue, collaboration, and research to counter violent extremism...in support of long-term, global efforts to prevent and counter terrorism.” (Sources: [Global Counterterrorism Forum](#) [318], [Hedayah](#) [319], [The National](#) [320], [Hedayah Newsletter](#) [321])

In Europe, Turkey is an observer of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, as well as a member of the 47-member Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER), established by the Council of Europe in 2003. According to the Turkish National Police, Turkey also has bilateral security cooperation agreements with 59 countries. (Sources: [Committee of Experts on Terrorism](#) [322], [Turkish National Police](#) [323])

In mid-December 2015, Saudi Arabia announced the establishment of its “Islamic military alliance” against terrorism, and included Turkey as a member. Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu hailed the coalition, stating: “The raising of Muslim countries’ voices together against terror is the best response to those who try to associate terror with Islam.” (Source: [Washington Post](#) [324])

### *Legislation*

Turkey’s Anti-Terror law defines terrorism as any act that seeks to change or damage – among other things – “the characteristics of the Republic as specified in the Constitution, its political, legal, social, secular and economic system...the internal and external security of the State, public order or general health” using “pressure, force and violence, terror, intimidation, oppression or threat.” The U.S. State Department describes Turkish legislation as focused on confronting internal threats—notably from the PKK—to the detriment of global counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. government has also expressed related concerns that legislation defines terrorism too narrowly as a crime targeting the Turkish state or Turkish citizens, thus hindering efforts to combat international terrorist organizations such as ISIS. (Sources: [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) [325], [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) [326])

The European Union has also criticized Turkey’s anti-terror law for violating human rights and freedom of expression. Humanitarian organizations and international institutions, including the EU, have raised concerns that the law has been broadly applied to target political opponents, journalists, and activists. In April 2013, Turkey passed changes to anti-terror laws that brought it closer to EU freedom of expression standards. These amendments included a narrower definition of terrorist propaganda, and criminalized illegal group declarations only if they incited violence or threats of violence. The EU continues to harbor concerns that Turkish anti-terror laws are applied too broadly, leading to the detention and prosecution of thousands of politicians, reporters, and activists throughout 2014. (Sources: [Reuters](#) [327], [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) [326])

Turkey signed the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism in October 2015 in Riga, Latvia. The Protocol is especially relevant to Turkey because it will “criminalize the movement of those who transit through the country in order to join the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant...” This 2015 Protocol builds on the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, and other supplemental protocols since ratified. It will also criminalize the act of receiving training for terrorism as well as funding or organizing travel for terrorism. However, Research Center for Security Strategies (GÜSAM) President Ercan Taştekin has expressed skepticism that Turkey will implement the Protocol. A former senior police officer and deputy chief of the Turkish branch of the International Police

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Association (IPA), Taştekin pointed to past instances in which Turkey had signed global agreements “but failed to carry out its duties,” such as on cyber-crime and children’s rights. (Sources: [Today’s Zaman](#) [328])

Turkey maintains a banned persons list, “with a view to prevent travel into Turkey by individuals identified by foreign governments and internal security units as potential foreign terrorist fighters.” Turkey has sought technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on developing an automated Advanced Passenger Information/Passenger Name Record system. (Sources: [U.S. Department of State](#) [252], [U.S. Department of State](#) [329], [CODEXTER](#) [330])

### ***Combating Terrorist Financing***

Since 1991, Turkey has been a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an intergovernmental organization that works to combat the financing of terrorism. Until October 2014, Turkey was the only NATO member on the FATF “gray list,” a group of countries with significant deficiencies in Anti-Money Laundering (AML) and Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) strategy. In its fifteenth follow-up report published in October 2014, the FATF commended Turkey for making “significant progress” since the 2007 mutual evaluation. According to the FATF, “Turkey has reached a satisfactory level of compliance with all core Recommendations.” (Sources: [Today’s Zaman](#) [331], [Financial Action Task Force](#) [332], [Financial Action Task Force](#) [333])

However, the FATF report pointed to lingering problems in Turkey’s definition of “terrorism financing” and poor compliance with Customer Due Diligence (CDD) standards. Enhanced CDD guidelines for “sensitive countries, sensitive businesses and higher risk customers” remained an unaddressed deficiency, according to the FATF. According to [reports](#) [326], Turkey is resistant to certain FATF standards. In particular, Turkey’s financial support of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and assistance to Hamas precludes blanket acceptance of the FATF requirement to freeze funds automatically, if requested by a foreign country that classifies those groups as terrorist organizations. In October 2014, the FATF reportedly cited improvements in Turkey’s counterterrorism finance operations, however no cases of terrorist financing were reported to the FATF in 2015. (Sources: [Financial Action Task Force](#) [333], [Institute for Strategic Dialogue](#) [326], [U.S. Department of State](#) [41])

In April 2015, the Turkish Customs and Trade Ministry issued new guidance on the carrying of cash over its borders. It said that the value of carried cash “is not required to be declared and passengers cannot be forced to make declarations.” This caused a flurry of domestic concerns that the move might facilitate terrorist finance. Republic People’s Party (CHP) Umut Oran warned parliament that the new wording—which specified that it was not mandatory to declare cash—might encourage tax evasion, money laundering, and terror financing. Oran stated his concern that Turkey may become a “money laundering paradise.” Similarly, economist Ugur Gurses stated that there was “no rational explanation” for the new code, adding “[a]ll banking transactions over \$50,000 have to be reported to the Treasury. Theoretically, that is no longer the case.” Citing the threat posed by ISIS specifically, Gurses also emphasized that with the removal of customs controls, “[y]ou eliminate your deterrent.” A high-ranking Turkish Customs official speaking to *Al-Monitor* reportedly also characterized the new code as “unenforceable,” adding “I cannot tell you what is punishable and what is not.” (Sources: [Al-Monitor](#) [334], [Hurriyet](#) [335])

In December 2015, Turkey ratified the Council of Europe’s Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism. The convention seeks to heighten international cooperation in investigating and disrupting crimes related to terrorist financing. (Source: [Hurriyet Daily News](#) [336])

### ***Peacekeeping Operations***

According to Bilkent University Assistant Professor Nil S. Santana, Turkey’s peacekeeping priority is involvement with NATO, “as Turkey perceived contributions to NATO peacekeeping missions as a way to show its usefulness to the U.S. and to NATO’s security umbrella.” (Sources: [World Politics Review](#) [337], [Today’s Zaman](#) [338])

Turkey also participates in several U.N. peacekeeping operations, especially in the missions in Africa. It has forces in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), in Darfur, Sudan (UNAMID), South Sudan (UNMISS), Liberia (UNMIL). Turkey withdrew its land troops from the mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in 2013. In September 2015, then-Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced plans to supplement existing U.N. peacekeeping missions with additional Turkish military officers and aircraft. (Sources: [Turkish National Police](#) [339], [Today’s Zaman](#) [338], [World](#)

## ***Turkey: Extremism & Counter-Extremism***

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[Politics Review](#) [337], [World Bulletin](#) [340])

### **Public Opinion**

#### *View of the United States*

A majority of Turks (74 percent) believe U.S. power and influence to be a threat to their country, according to a 2017 Pew Research Center poll. The finding represented a 28-point increase from 2015 results. According to the 2017 poll, 72 percent of Turks believe U.S. power and influence to be the top threat to their country, while refugee displacement from Syria and Iraq ranked second. The poll did not ask about ISIS attacks because of security concerns. (Source: [Pew Research Center](#) [341])

According to an October 2014 Pew poll, “it is hard to find any country or organization the Turkish people really like, except, of course, Turkey itself.” A majority of Turkish people view the United States, the European Union, and NATO negatively. Such unfavorable perceptions may partially explain the result of a Spring 2015 survey, which found that only 36 percent favored Turkey joining the anti-ISIS coalition. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [342], [Pew Research Center](#) [343])

#### *Extremism*

An August 2017 Pew Research Center poll found that 73 percent of Turks held negative views of ISIS, while only 8 percent held favorable views of the terror group. Another 19 percent held no opinion of the group. The percentage of Turks with negative views of ISIS remained the same from Pew’s 2015 survey. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [344], [Pew Research Center](#) [345])

Similarly, the October 2014 Pew poll found that 85 percent of the Turkish population had negative views on al-Qaeda and on Hezbollah. A small majority of 58 percent said that targeting civilians with violence such as suicide bombing was never justified. An earlier survey from 2010 found that 51 percent of the population viewed Islamic extremists as a threat to their lives. (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [342], [The International Republican Institute](#) [346])

#### *Islam and Sharia*

Although 98 percent of Turks are Sunni Muslim, their overall rejection of extremist groups appears to point to a prevailing secularism in the public sphere. A survey conducted by the International Republican Institute in May 2010 found that 72 percent believe the activities of Islamic foundations should be closely controlled and that 77 percent believe sharia (Islamic law) should not be adapted as a new government model. An August 2017 Pew Research Center poll found that only 12 percent of Turkey’s population favored the implementation of sharia (Islamic law). (Sources: [Pew Research Center](#) [344], [The International Republican Institute](#) [346])

#### *Kurds*

According to polling data from the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, Turks did not view Islamic extremism as the biggest threat in 2013. At that time, only 12 percent of those surveyed viewed Islamic extremists in Syria as the top threat against Turkey. The Kurdish issue still appears to dominate Turkish public opinion. The survey found 36 percent of Turks viewed the establishment of an independent Kurdish state as the country’s biggest threat. Moreover, 66 percent did not support negotiations with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. (Sources: [Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies \(EDAM\)](#) [347], [Transatlantic Trends](#) [348])