

# Terrorism Monitor

In-depth analysis of the War on Terror

VOLUME XIV, ISSUE 21

p.1

*Alexander Sehmer*

**BRIEFS**

p.3

*Sudha Ramachandran*

**'Surgical Strikes' Mark Change in India's Stance on Cross-Border Attacks**

p.6

*James Potheary*

**Why al-Nusra's 'Break' With al-Qaeda Poses a Problem for the West**

p.8

*Göktuğ Sönmez*

**Do Turkey's Counter-Extremism Efforts Offer Lessons for the West?**

## MYANMAR: GROWING FEARS OVER ROHINGYA FIGHTERS

*Alexander Sehmer*

Gunmen killed nine police officers in a series of raids on border posts in Myanmar's Rakhine state on October 9, an area where tensions run high between Myanmar's Buddhists and its Muslim Rohingya population. The raids have prompted violent reprisals by the military, as well as the subsequent displacement of large parts of the local population and the withdrawal of aid workers from the area (Myanmar Times, October 11; Myanmar Times, October 18).

It has also raised concerns that the plight of the Rohingya could become a growing focus for regional jihadist networks. In the days following the attacks, videos circulated online, apparently showing militants in Myanmar declaring jihad on the government and calling on fighters around the world to join their struggle (Channel NewsAsia, October 14).

Local government officials originally blamed the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) for the attacks on the outposts bordering Bangladesh (Myanmar Times, October 10). While there is some suggestion the group

wishes to claim responsibility for the attacks – this was indicated in a somewhat ambivalent Facebook post attributed to the group – the RSO has for years been largely dormant. Instead, the attacks have been attributed to the Aqa Mul Mujahideen (AMM), a little-known band of Rohingya fighters, which Indian intelligence officials say has links to Pakistan (Mizzima, October 19). AMM appears to have originated from Harkat ul-Jihad Islami Arakan, which is linked to the Pakistani Taliban and has operations in Bangladesh.

Militant jihadist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba periodically make mention of the Rohingya's plight, suggesting there is a potential for greater links with regional extremist groups (Express Tribune, July 26, 2012). Further, Islamic State has been actively building its capacity in Southeast Asia, and harsh treatment in Myanmar makes the Rohingya vulnerable to such advances. The sizeable and frequently persecuted Rohingya refugee population also provides a pool of potential recruits already spread around the region. Their involvement in regional conflicts, such as Kashmir, has so far been fairly limited, but that could change (The Tribune, November 13, 2015).

Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi has made efforts to address the Rohingya's situation, including appointing an advisory commission headed by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to make recommendations on ways to end the tension and communal violence that has wracked Rakhine state (Myanmar Times, August 25). Even so, her government has generally been slow on the issue.

In light of recent events, they will need to move faster. So too, the crackdown by Myanmar's military, which has followed the October 9 attacks, must be tempered as it can only serve to further alienate the country's Rohingya population.

## **NIGER: SECURITY FORCES REPEL ISLAMIST PRISON ATTACK**

*Alexander Sehmer*

Gunmen mounted a failed attack on a high-security prison in Niger on October 17, in an apparent attempt to free Islamist fighters. Despite a sustained gun battle, the attack was repulsed, with one attacker killed. The man was found wearing a suicide belt he had been unable to detonate, according to Mohamed Bazoum, the interior minister (Twitter, October 17). No prisoners appear to have escaped during the attack (Afrika News, October 17).

In early reports, an unnamed official attributed the attempted prison break to the Mali-based Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA), which split from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in 2011 (Tamtam, October 17). Mali-based militants have targeted the prison before, helping to free 22 inmates, including convicted terrorists, in an attack in 2013 (al-Jazeera, June 23, 2013). It also follows just days after an American aid worker was abducted in Abalak. The attackers killed the aid worker's bodyguard, apparently intending to sell the aid worker to militants across the border in Mali (eNCA, October 16).

Suggestions also have been made that the prison attack was the work of Boko Haram. The prison at Koutoukale, about 30 miles northeast of Niamey, is overfull with more than 500 inmates, many of them Boko Haram members. Most of them were transferred recently from the Diffa region, close to the border with Chad and northeastern Nigeria (Tamtam, October 17).

Diffa has seen a months-long joint military campaign waged by Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria in a push to mop up Boko Haram fighters who have infiltrated the region. Attacks in Diffa began in February 2015, but have escalated this year as Boko Haram operations in Chad and Cameroon have declined and potentially at the behest of Islamic State (see Terrorism Monitor, August 19). In recent months, Boko Haram fighters destroyed a medical facility in Yebi and raided another in Ngarwa (CAJ News, May 26).

The Diffa campaign has been slow, and it has struggled with poor coordination between the regional allies. More recently, however, it has seen some relative suc-

cess, with scores of militants killed and others sent to join the overcrowded inmates in Koutoukale (eNCA, October 1). This success, however, is limited to the targeting of Boko Haram fighters; hundreds of thousands of people – more than 302,000 according to estimates from the UN refugee agency – remain displaced in the region as a result of the conflict, many of them Nigerians who have fled across the border to escape the militant group.

## 'Surgical Strikes' Mark Change in India's Stance on Cross-Border Attacks

*Sudha Ramachandran*

On September 29, India announced it had carried out "surgical strikes" on terrorist "launch pads" in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK), in an operation aimed at "neutralizing terrorists" and pre-empting their infiltration beyond the Line of Control (LoC).

According to Lt. Gen. Ranbir Singh, India's director general of military operations, "significant casualties" were inflicted on the "terrorists and those who are trying to support them" (Hindustan Times, September 29). Islamabad, however, played down the incident, with the Pakistani military claiming it was simply an "episode of cross-LoC fire" (Dawn, September 30).

Pakistan is partially correct, as the Indian attack on the night of September 28-29 cannot be described as "surgical." It was not "an aerial attack with precision-guided weapons, launched aircraft or UAVs," but more in the nature of "a commando raid" or a "quick and shallow insertion" of Indian forces that involved "assault and return" (Observer Research Foundation, October 5). Still, a well-targeted assault on terrorist staging posts did take place, according to a report in *Indian Express*, which drew on classified intelligence documents and accounts of eyewitnesses in POK (Indian Express, October 7).

Of key concern now is whether these strikes, which could herald a new robustness in India's response to cross-border terrorism, will deter attacks emanating from Pakistan.

### 'Pre-Emptive' Strikes

India has termed the strikes pre-emptive, but they are also a response to recent attacks by Pakistan-backed terrorist groups, the immediate trigger being the attack on the Indian Army camp at Uri, near the LoC, on September 18. The Uri attack, which left 18 soldiers dead, was the deadliest on an Indian military facility in over a

decade. It triggered immense outrage across the country, prompting Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to vow some form of retaliation (The Hindu, September 18). For over a decade, Modi has promised strong action against Pakistan's backing of terrorist attacks in India. Though since his government took power in May 2014, there has been little in the way of a robust response, despite several major attacks, including that on an Indian air force base in Pathankot in January.

The army's assault on terror camps in POK has been widely welcomed in India. Political parties across the spectrum have backed military action, despite also criticizing the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government's chest-thumping nationalism in the wake of the strikes (The Hindu, September 30; Hindustan Times, October 9).

The strikes have been praised as an "operational necessity" and a "fitting reply" to "Islamabad's unrestrained [and] unrepentant use of proxies to strike on Indian soil" (Times of India, September 29; Hindustan Times, September 29). Abroad too, the attacks drew little criticism. The United States and Russia appeared to sympathize with the Indian position and acknowledged the strikes in terms of India's right to defend itself (The Quint, September 30; Times of India, October 14). Even China, a long-standing ally of Pakistan, did not condemn Indian military action, instead simply calling on both India and Pakistan to "exercise restraint" (India Today, September 30).

### **Possible Strategic Shift**

In the past, India has opted for strategic restraint in response to attacks (Scroll, October 1). Attacks from Pakistan-backed groups would draw angry condemnation from India, dialogue with Islamabad would be suspended and in some instances Pakistan's role would be raised at international forums. Before long, however, talks would resume. India, it seemed, was averse to military action, perhaps keen to avoid an escalation of conflict with its unstable, nuclear-armed neighbor.

With the recent strikes, that appears to have changed. Delhi has signaled instead that it has the "political will to face up to the risks of escalating the confrontation with the Pakistan army" in order to deal with cross-border terrorism (Indian Express, October 3).

However, the change in India's response to terrorism emanating from Pakistan may not be as dramatic as the Modi government would have India believe. In recent weeks, it has emerged that – on at least three occasions between 2009 and 2014 – the previous government carried out similar strikes (Times of India, October 4). As India's Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar confirmed before a parliamentary panel, the army had carried out "limited-caliber, target-specific, counter-terrorist operations" across the LoC on several occasions in the past. The difference was that this time, the Modi government publicized its actions (Indian Express, October 19).

### **Public Messaging**

While the Modi government's decision to make public its assault on militant bases in POK was partially motivated by domestic concerns – it wanted to be seen to be taking visible action on terrorism – the announcement was "intended, equally, to communicate to Islamabad and to the world's capitals that India will use all instrumentalities, political, economic, social, diplomatic, and if necessary, military, to confront and counter Pakistan backed terrorism" (Scroll, October 1).

Through the strikes, India has sent a message to Pakistan that terrorist attacks, which were hitherto viewed by Islamabad as a low-risk and low-cost strategy to "bleed India," will carry a high cost for Pakistan (Indian Express, October 9). Analysts have called for cross-border military attacks to become "a regular [Indian] response to terror attacks from across the LoC," indicating that robustness in dealing with Pakistan-backed terrorism would be the new norm (Indian Express, October 3). There remains a question over just how successful such strikes will be in deterring Pakistan-based terrorism. It would seem unlikely that Pakistan will allow the strikes to go without a response. Retaliation should therefore be expected.

Pakistan's generals could back terror attacks on Indian civilian and military targets in India and elsewhere, intensify instability in Kashmir and escalate tensions along the LoC and the International Border (Indian Express, October 3). Already the Jamaat-ud Dawa, a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which is close to the Pakistan military establishment, has warned of a "befitting response" (Hindustan Times, September 30). The warning is perhaps unsurprising as it was LeT that suffered the worst

losses in the Indian action in POK (India Today, October 9).

Since the assault in POK, Indian army camps in Baramullah and Kupwara, a police post in Shopian, and a government building in Pampore (all in Kashmir) have all come under terrorist fire. Cross-LoC firing and shelling has also surged over the last fortnight (Indian Express, October 18).

### **Dangers of Escalation**

A breakdown of the 2003 ceasefire would undermine India's security. Not only would it facilitate the Pakistan military's infiltration of terrorists into India under the cover of cross-LoC artillery fire, as has been the case in the past, it also would hamper India's construction of a fence along the LoC. The fence has played an important role in controlling infiltration. Should the ceasefire collapse, however, it would enable Pakistan to target and destroy it (The Wire, September 29).

Some have argued that one-time strikes are unlikely to bring about a change in Pakistan's outlook and that such actions should become a "routine affair," with India targeting terrorist camps in POK every time Pakistan-backed terrorists carry out attacks in India (Indian Express, October 3).

That would put India on a slippery slope. While there has been international acquiescence to India's recent "surgical strikes," there is always a danger that such strikes could go wrong and risk injuring or killing civilians. That would turn global opinion against India and contribute to a surge in anti-India sentiment in Pakistan. It would enhance support for the military in Pakistan, and the possibility of an Indian strike in POK at some point eliciting a Pakistani nuclear response cannot be ruled out.

Surgical strikes and targeted attacks on terrorist launch pads and camps are useful primarily to destroy infrastructure or eliminate terrorists. But they will not change the mindset of the militants or their sponsors. When used frequently, such strikes have had the opposite effect.

India's targeted military action on terrorist staging posts in POK can be expected to escalate the conflict, at least in the short term. The Pakistani military is likely to de-

ploy its affiliates to carry out attacks in India and/or breathe fresh life into militancy in Kashmir. An unraveling of the nearly 13-year-long ceasefire looms – a boon for Pakistan-based terrorist groups, but of little benefit to either country.

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# Why Al-Nusra's 'Break' With Al-Qaeda Poses a Problem for the West

*James Potthecary*

In July, the leader of Syrian Islamist militant group Jabhat al-Nusra, Abu Mohammed al-Julani, announced his faction had changed its name to Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) and was amicably splitting from al-Qaeda (Hurriyet Daily News, July 29).

The move is genuine, insofar as al-Qaeda has ceded formal organizational control of the group. However, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (JFS) remains ideologically aligned with al-Qaeda, and the West has taken little notice of the move. This split and rebranding has made JFS more palatable to potential rebel partners in Syria, and that in turn has the potential to make the situation in Syria more difficult for the West.

## Conscious Uncoupling

Al-Nusra was founded in 2011, as the Syrian civil war began, by al-Qaeda's central command to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad's government and exploit the emerging chaos to implement its brand of sharia (Islamic law) wherever possible in Syria. Since then, it has been a major non-state armed group and a key component in the rebel movement, despite being targeted by international forces as a terrorist organization.

On July 28, in a video disseminated by the al-Jazeera news channel, al-Julani announced that the newly named JFS was no longer affiliated with any external entity. Flanked by senior deputies and wearing military fatigues, he talked about jihad and the establishment of sharia, but purely within the context of al-Sham, the Arabic term for the Levant. This formal dissociation with al-Qaeda was authorized by Ayman al-Zawahiri, the al-Qaeda leader (Middle East Eye, July 28). In the long-term, however, it is likely that JFS will formally re-join the group's global network.

JFS' operations are concentrated in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo and the governorate of Idlib. It has also launched kinetic operations abroad – in January 2014, it claimed responsibility for a vehicle-borne IED attack in the Lebanese capital Beirut (The Daily Star, January 21,

2014). Although its precise force levels are difficult to verify, an offer by the UN special envoy for Syria to escort 900 JFS fighters out of the northern city of Aleppo suggests it possesses a large fighting force (Middle East Eye, October 11). JFS's contingent likely represents approximately 10 percent of rebel forces in Aleppo, which is roughly analogous to its national strength.

## International Impact

Thus far, foreign powers have declined to use the group's new name. The U.S. State Department, as of October 11, continues to refer to JFS as al-Nusra (Daily Press Briefing, U.S. Department of State, October 2). Russia also continues to publicly refer to JFS by its former name (BBC, September 30).

Rhetoric aside, international military action against JFS continues apace. In October, the United States killed a senior JFS commander (al-Jazeera, October 4). Russia, meanwhile, has maintained its operational tempo against JFS (AFP, October 10). The July 28 announcement, therefore, has not led to any marked change in JFS's perception by Russia or the United States. The perceived links between JFS and al-Qaeda are too deeply embedded in both countries' foreign affairs and defense establishments to be undone by any single speech.

However, it is unlikely al-Julani expected anything more. Rather, the dissociation with al-Qaeda will give diplomatic cover to sympathetic actors, such as elements within the Qatari state, to continue to provide some support for JFS without the baggage of association with an al-Qaeda affiliate. The links between Qatar and JFS, although murky, are extensive. It was Qatari mediation that freed three Spanish journalists kidnapped by al-Nusra in May this year (Alaraby, May 8). Qatari involvement was also crucial in organizing al-Nusra's release of 13 Christian nuns on March 10, 2014 (al-Monitor, March 2014). Both show there is some degree of interaction between Doha and JFS, and the rebranding will likely allow Qatar and other sympathetic actors to escalate their support.

## Domestic Implications

Foreign capitals, however, were not al-Julani's primary audience. Instead, the announcement was aimed at the commanders of the other Syrian rebel groups. Only days

after the announcement, JFS participated alongside a multiplicity of other rebel factions, in a dramatic military push that attempted to break the Syrian regime's siege of east Aleppo (al-Monitor, August 2). Although the advance faltered and the Syrian army responded with a vicious counter-offensive, the message was clear – JFS had positioned itself firmly in the mainstream rebel opposition to al-Assad.

The group's new standing within the rebel community is apparent. In October 2016, the jihadist group Jund al-Aqsa, under attack by various other Islamist groups for a suspected alliance with Islamic State (IS), pledged loyalty to JFS (al-Arabiya, October 9). Jund al-Aqsa calculated that the newfound "respectability" of JFS, along with its combat capability, would protect it from further attack by other Islamist groups. Whether this strategy will prove effective is less important than the fact its high command perceived the move as a legitimate course of action.

JFS's dissociation with al-Qaeda, then, is a play for an improved domestic position among the Syrian rebel community, one which appears to be paying off. By representing itself as an organization entirely focused on Syria, rather than an affiliate of a global network, JFS can market itself more effectively to other rebel forces, cementing its position in the center of the anti-Assad movement.

JFS's symbolic break with al-Qaeda has had some minor manpower consequences. Local media sources have reported a number of defections from JFS to IS over the issue. Certainly, extreme hardline Islamist fighters might continue to withdraw support for JFS out of theological distaste for its now more moderate image.

However, such defections are likely to remain small-scale, and it will not reduce JFS's capability. Instead they demonstrate the seriousness with which the rebranding is being taken, both within JFS and the wider rebel movement (al-Monitor, August 5).

The move also reflects al-Qaeda's adaptability. Al-Qaeda's ability to reorient itself based on its operational interests in advancing the cause of militant Islamism, rather than rigid hierarchical principals, is to the network's benefit. Furthermore, al-Qaeda's actions will be perceived positively within Syria as an act of generous pragmatism. Rebel forces will be more sympathetic to

al-Qaeda, should, as seems likely, it formally return to Syria. There will likely be little to stop it re-assimilating JFS when the operational and strategic situation in Syria is more favorable.

### **Increased Complexity of Syria Conflict**

By giving itself nominal space from al-Qaeda, JFS is entrenching its domestic position, and Washington must respond more carefully to the group as a result.

Despite the dissociation, JFS has not changed its ideology and there has been no shift in the group's use of political violence – it remains a terrorist group. The rebranding has, however, had some appeal to groups such as Jund al-Aqsa. While Jund al-Aqsa is, likewise, a terrorist group, the concern is that JFS may grow in appeal to other rebels, especially as efforts in Syria focus on Aleppo.

Any attempt to scale-back anti-JFS operations would likely be met by a backlash in Congress, and lay the White House open to accusations it was being hoodwinked by jihadist propaganda. But if more palatable rebel groups intensify military and logistical cooperation with JFS, it will become increasingly difficult to strike at the organization without alienating partners on-the-ground.

At the same time, Washington must be weary that if (or when) JFS formally returns to the al-Qaeda fold, it will be in a stronger position than ever to advance the group's violent agenda.

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# Do Turkey's Counter-Extremism Efforts Offer Lessons for the West?

*Göktuğ Sönmez*

Turkey's 900 kilometer shared border with Iraq and Syria has increasingly made it a target for terrorists in both countries. With the internationalization of the Syrian civil war, Turkey has become a particular target for Islamic State (IS).

In order to maintain its own security and stability, Turkey responds forcefully to cross-border activities – whether carried out by IS or the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). That has included military and logistical support for the Free Syrian Army in its fight in Jarabulus and beyond, as well as opening Turkish air bases for use by the anti-IS coalition.

It has also seen the government take steps to combat radicalization at home and tackle the cross-border movements of foreign fighters.

Though Turkey's international partners have sometimes overlooked its efforts, Turkey has increasingly shown its determination to deal with the threat of foreign militants and played a significant role in international efforts to do so (The Global Coalition, June 27).

## **Dealing With Cross-Border Threats**

Turkey's experience in combating terrorist groups stems from the 1970s and 80s, when the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) carried out a series of attacks, including bombings at the Orly and Esenboğa airports that claimed the lives of 42 Turkish diplomats and injured more than 250 people from 21 different countries (Hürriyet, June 14, 2014).

Turkey has further experience from dealing with the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C), an extreme leftist terrorist group also founded in the early 1970s, which assassinated a number of political figures, including the Israeli Consul General in Istanbul Efraim Elrom, the former Minister of Customs and Monopolies Gün Sazak, and former Prime Minister Nihat Erim. The group, formerly known as the People's Libera-

tion Party-Front of Turkey, was renamed in 1994 to DHKP-C. It was behind a failed attack on Hikmet Sami Türk, a former justice minister, as well as two aircraft hijackings (al-Jazeera Turk, February 14, 2014).

The PKK, for its part, has claimed more than 35,000 lives – including more than 5,000 civilians and 7,000 civil servants – in over three decades of conflict (Radikal, January 28, 2013).

While ASALA, following its split in the 1980s and assassination of its leader in the late 1980s, dissolved in the mid-1990s, Turkey's fight with the DHKP-C and PKK continues, with the PKK at the top of Turkey's priority list. Following a series of bloody attacks in Suruç, Ankara, İstanbul and Gaziantep, they have been joined there by IS.

Since 2014, when the group captured Mosul and stormed Turkey's consulate in the city, holding 49 consulate personnel for 101 days, IS has carried out a number of operations in Turkey, with more than 300 people killed in attacks including suicide bombings (Hürriyet, June 11, 2014; Radikal July 21, 2015; Milliyet June 29). Moreover, between January and May 2016, around 60 rocket or mortar attacks were carried out against Kilis along Turkey's Syrian border. Around 20 people lost their lives and 70 others were injured in the mortar attacks (BBC News, May 9). Meanwhile, during Friday sermons in IS-controlled mosques in Syria, IS imams frequently argue that Kilis, Gaziantep, Karkamış and Nizip in Turkey should be key targets for the group and should be captured by any means possible.

## **Boosting Security Measures**

In its efforts to curb cross-border militant activities, Turkey – which listed IS as a terrorist group in 2013 and has been a member of the anti-IS coalition since 2014 – has built a 300 kilometer (km) wall and constructed 161km of barbed wire fencing along its border. It has dug 356km of ditches, erected 74km of barriers and installed or upgraded lighting along all 422km of the Turkey/Syria border so that it can be patrolled more effectively (Hürriyet Daily News, September 8; Anadolu Agency, April 7; Habertürk, March 23).

Recent figures show that Turkey, since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, has a no-entry list of 37,000 people; has banned almost 52,000 terror suspects from entering



the country; prevented 7,500 people coming to Turkey from Europe; has deported 3,719 people and detained 700 more; prevented 40,000 people from joining IS; and stopped 223,000 people entering Syria illegally. Turkey has also established Risk Analysis Units at its border with Syria, which have investigated 6,000 people and added 1,300 of them to a no-entry list (Hurriyet Daily News, September 8; Anadolu Agency, April 7; Habertürk, March 23).

### **Anti-Radicalization Projects**

Turkey has also put significant effort into anti-radicalization strategies. The police, through “briefing and prevention activities” and “family policing,” aim to weaken the ideological and social base of radical groups by reaching out to the people vulnerable to radicalization or the parents of those who have been radicalized. Through conferences, seminars and cultural visits, the police have taken steps to warn – or in many cases have experts inform – people about possible radical influences (Son Sayfa, April 15, 2013; Hürriyet, February 14, 2013).

The Presidency of Religious Affairs (DIB) is also a key official state institution through which Turkey has been able to tackle radicalization. In order to produce and publicize a religious counter-narrative, the DIB has sent 700 preachers into prisons deemed hotbeds of radicalization (Habertürk, January 18). It has also released two reports – one entitled “The Purposes, Activities, and Islamic Understanding of the Terrorist DAESH Group,” which came out in August 2015, and a second in October this year on “Religious Exploitation and the Terrorist Organization ISIS.” The reports examine the religious references and narrative used by IS, showing how the group distorts religious concepts in an attempt to give itself legitimacy, as well as making recommendations on how to respond to such distortions. They also investigate and publicize the persecution and human rights violations carried out by the group on people including the Yazidis, and women and children. [1]

The authorities have set up hotlines to combat radicalization. For example, Hotline 183 is for social support allows parents, coaches, teachers and others to contact the authorities at the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs. Hotline 144, also managed by the social affairs ministry, addresses the potential economic root causes of radicalization and deals with social aid, including

food, health, education and coal. Hotline 140, meanwhile, operates as a “tip line,” and since August 2015, 115,000 people have called the hotline to alert the authorities to possible terror attacks and the whereabouts of individuals wanted by the state (Hürriyet, March 25).

Turkey also operates educational programs that have been extended in particular to the country’s substantial immigrant population. Around 53,000 young people participated in youth camps organized by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2015. The Ministry spent about \$9 million on 352 projects only in 2015 within the context of Youth Projects Support Program (İHA, December 30, 2015). Not all of these youth camps and projects were directed at countering radicalization, but youth camps are key measures in current thinking on preventing violent extremism and countering radical groups’ appeal to vulnerable young people.

### **Working With International Partners**

Ankara is a founding member of the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF), a multilateral initiative to devise an effective strategy to facilitate international cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Along with the United States, Turkey co-chaired the initiative for five years before the positions were handed over to the Netherlands and Morocco. Turkey also played a major role in the production of the UN Security Council Resolution 2178, which focuses on the question of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and how to define and fight them.

Turkey adopted the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism in March 2016 (Star, March 28). According to the Protocol, which is in line with UNSC Resolution 2178, legal reforms are required to prevent radicalized individuals travelling to a foreign country to join a terrorist group, as well as to tackle those who finance or organize such travel. The document further states that receiving training from a militant group, even without joining any particular organization, should be included in the list of criteria to detect and punish FTFs (TGNA, February 24).

Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Resolution 1071, which provides the legal basis for Turkey’s cross-border operations in Syria, directly refers to dealing with IS and the PKK. It states that the Turkish military can be sent abroad, and that foreign armed forces can be de-

ployed in Turkey in the context of the anti-IS coalition (TGNA website, October, 2, 2014).

It should also be kept in mind the unprecedented flow of refugees in just a few years has seen almost three million displaced refugees in Turkey of which almost 300 thousand are in refugee camps, many more than the 1.3 million asylum applications made to EU countries (Hürriyet, March 10; BBC News, March 3).

### **Intelligence Sharing**

Although political relations with the EU are sometimes strained, those tensions are far less evident in terms of intelligence sharing. Turkey officially warned the French government twice about Omer Ismail Moustefai, one of the Paris attackers who travelled to Turkey in 2013. Although it cannot be known whether the tragic events in Paris could have been prevented, Turkey's European partners would do well not to overlook the intelligence Turkey gathers as part of its anti-extremism efforts.

The warnings about Moustefai were made as early as December 2014 and June 2015, but the French government made no follow-up until after the attacks when it submitted an "information request" (IBTimes, November, 16, 2015). Similarly, before the Brussels airport attack in March this year, Turkey informed not only Belgium but also the Dutch government about Ibrahim el-Bakraoui, who was already on Turkey's suspected FTF list and travelled to Turkey twice in July and August 2015.

On the second occasion, he was detained in Gaziantep and deported to the Netherlands, from where he later moved to Belgium. Turkey had warned both governments about el-Bakraoui's suspected attempt to access Syria.

Ankara also warned the Belgian government about Najim Laachraoui following his trip to Turkey, and it issued a warning about el-Bakraoui's brother, Khalid. At that point, however, Belgian authorities deemed both individuals to have "no terror links" and only issued an Interpol red notice for Laachraoui and Khalid el-Bakraoui three weeks ahead of the attack (Hürriyet, March 24; Star, March 24).

### **Stamping out the Threat**

A decisive military defeat of IS on the ground is clearly a necessity, but it must be part of a comprehensive multi-dimensional approach that looks to the long-term and seeks to end the threat posed by violent extremism. Simplistic military-only approaches offer only short-term solutions, and similar groups will easily find fertile ground either in new theatres or in those that already exist.

Similarly, while both state and non-state actors are producing counter-narratives against IS, Islamophobia in the West frequently plays into the group's hands and must be addressed as part of anti-radicalization efforts.

Given Turkey's long experience in fighting violent extremism at home, the country has considerable experience with the cycle of radicalization and can make a valuable contribution to make to global anti-terrorism efforts. Turkey's European partners would do well to work more closely with the country's security services.

Intelligence sharing, financial tracking and security cooperation are essential, but they too are not enough on their own. A smart counter-extremism strategy must find a delicate balance between security and liberty, punishment and rehabilitation, all within the boundaries of the rule of law and while upholding human rights.

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### **NOTES**

[1] Reports available on the website of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (August 10, 2015 and October 17, 2016).