



AHI Assessment of Country Reports On Terrorism 2019 Bureau of Counterterrorism

Country Reports on Terrorism 2019 is submitted in compliance with Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f (the "Act), which requires the Department of State to provide to Congress a full and complete annual report on terrorism for those countries and groups meeting the criteria of the Act.

AHI Assessment of the U.S. Department of State

Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey

The U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey describes counterterrorist efforts taken by Turkey in and outside its borders. The report details a list of terrorist incidents that occurred in Turkey in 2019, as well as actions taken by Turkey to counter such activities. Additionally, it touts Turkey's membership in international institutions like the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and NATO as signs of Turkey's commitment to combating terrorism.

The report does well to bring attention to Turkey's dismissal of personal freedoms and the rule of law under the guise of counterterrorism, the questionable repatriation process of captured foreign fighters, and the lackluster effort to counter the financing of terrorism. As a result of the country's broad terrorism definition, it allows the government to outlaw basic freedoms like the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly as terrorist-related activities. Likewise, the government continues to use these laws to imprison or dismiss journalists, military personnel, politicians, etc. for alleged national security risks. Additionally, the report notes that Turkey has deported suspected foreign fighters without providing notice or relevant information to the destination country. It also states that some repatriations were conducted despite the protests of the destination country. The report also points out that, oftentimes, these arrests are made on the basis of minimal evidence and with little due process. Furthermore, it also notes of a review conducted by the FATF that found serious shortcomings in countering the financing of terrorism.

Despite the acknowledgment of Turkey's questionable conduct in counterterrorism actions, the report highlights Turkey's activities while disregarding its links to terrorist organizations. The report identifies Turkey as a source and transit country for prospective terror fighters, and cites Turkish government reports on efforts to prevent fighters from joining terrorist organizations elsewhere in the Middle East. Also mentioned in the report are actions taken by Turkey either unilaterally or cooperatively through international institutions to combat ISIS and the PKK. It also notes steps taken by the Turkish government and various agencies to combat violent extremism and undermine terrorist messaging. The report also documents Turkish actions against "FETO," a Turkish (but not U.S.) designated terror group. While these actions seem to show that Turkey is a committed ally in combating terrorism, the report fails to mention that the Turkish government and President Erdogan have been identified as sponsors and enablers of known terrorist organizations.

Report Fails to Identify Turkey's Ties to Terror Groups

One such organization is ISIS, the very group that Turkey is supposedly committed to defeating. *The U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey* states, "Turkey is an active member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, co-chairs the Defeat-ISIS Coalition FTF Working Group, and continued to provide access to its airspace and facilities for Coalition CT operations in Iraq and Syria." It also describes various other actions taken by Turkey to combat ISIS and arrest and deport its fighters. However, the report fails to acknowledge Turkey's ties with the terror group. According to a September 2019 *New York Post* report, "Since 2012, the Turkish intelligence service, MIT, under Erdogan's direction, has been providing resources and material assistance to ISIS, while Turkish Customs officials turned a blind eye to ISIS recruits flowing across Turkey's borders into Syria and Iraq."¹ In addition to directly assisting ISIS, officials have also raised concerns that Turkish activities in the region increase the possibility of a resurgence of terror groups. In October 2019, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon raised concerns that Turkish intervention in Syria may give ISIS the opportunity to regroup and reemerge as a threat to the region and the world.² Whether directly or indirectly, Turkey's aiding of ISIS is undeniable.

Turkey's links to terrorism does not end with ISIS. Another such group who receives Turkish support is Hamas, which also is not mentioned in the *U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey*. Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. since October 1997 and continue to pose a serious threat to one of the United States' closest allies in the region, Israel. In the same United Nations Security Council debate where Ambassador Danon raised concerns about Turkey's invasion of Syria, the Israeli ambassador to the UN also brought attention to Turkey's links to Hamas, saying, "Erdogan has turned Turkey into a safe haven for Hamas (terrorists) and a financial center for funneling money to subsidize terror attacks."³ These are not simply empty accusations, but confirmed facts. A December 2019 *Telegraph* report describes how Turkey, particularly in Istanbul, has become a refuge for Hamas leaders where they can plan attacks without fear of being reprimanded.⁴ Erdogan and Turkey have not only allowed Hamas to operate within its territory, but also have labelled it a "legitimate Palestinian political party" in an attempt to appear as advocates for Palestine.⁵ However, these acts have serious implications which jeopardize the safety of Israel and the stability of the entire region.

¹ <https://nypost.com/2019/09/21/why-isnt-the-media-covering-turkish-president-erdogans-ties-to-isis/>

² <https://www.foxnews.com/world/israel-un-ambassador-danny-danon-erdogan-terror-support>

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/12/17/hamas-plots-attacks-israel-turkey-erdogan-turns-blind-eye/>

⁵ Ibid.

In addition to ISIS and Hamas, Turkey and the Erdogan regime also have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. In September 2019, Egypt called attention to Turkey's role in "supporting and sponsoring terrorism in the region."⁶ In line with other statements and reports, Egypt accused Turkey of allowing terrorists to freely pass through its borders, endangering the safety of the region, and opening a window of opportunity for terrorist organizations to regroup as a result of the exacerbated conflict.⁷ In addition, Egypt also charged Turkey with sheltering the Muslim Brotherhood. In various statements, Egyptian officials claim that Erdogan is allowing the Muslim Brotherhood to operate and coordinate against Egypt and the wider region from Turkish territory.⁸ While the Muslim Brotherhood was never officially designated as a terrorist organization by the United States, the links between the group and Turkey should have been documented in the *U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey* because of the implications such a relationship has on regional and global stability.

The U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism 2019: Turkey is a significant report which documents how Turkey has helped the counterterrorism cause. It also is crucial in informing officials and the public how Turkey has curbed civil liberties in the country under the guise of counterterrorism activities. However, the report should also acknowledge Turkey's undeniable links to and sponsorship of terrorism as they explicitly undermine counterterrorism objectives. Due to President Erdogan's policies that aid and abet known terror groups, such as ISIS, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood, Turkey should have been designated as a State Sponsor of Terrorism or as a Terrorist Safe Haven. The actions taken by Erdogan and Turkey threaten regional stability and jeopardize the safety of the United States and its allies, thus eliciting the need for proper recognition of the problem and a swift response.

⁶ <https://www.dailynewssegypt.com/2019/09/26/egypt-scolds-turkeys-erdogan-over-sponsoring-terrorism-in-the-region/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.