



**The Role of Foreign Intelligence in Turkey's Political and
Military Security**

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Abstract

Turkey is a state fighting for dominance in the Caucasus region, therefore intelligence activities are often carried out against the country. Analysis of recent history shows that Turkey, as a target state, is under the threat of intelligence penetration of a political and military nature by foreign countries. There is a practice that a political party created in Turkey is sometimes transformed into a terrorist organization and undermines the political and military stability of the country. In terms of political and military intelligence, there are

religious schools operating inside and outside the country, which are financed from foreign actors. Analysis of the processes taking place in Turkey, identification of threats in terms of intelligence and counterintelligence, and compilation of an adequate classifier in ensuring the political and military security of the state will be an important guide. It will also be useful for researchers in the field.

Keywords: Turkey; terrorism; intelligence; counterintelligence

Introduction

Aim of the study:

To investigate the role of foreign intelligence activities on Turkey's political and military security

Object of the study:

Intelligence activities

Subject of the study:

Intelligence activities of foreign states against Turkey within the country and in the international arena.

Hypothesis

Intelligence penetration of a foreign country can facilitate the process of organizing a military coup in the target country. For the successful completion of this process, it is possible to use religious schools funded by a foreign state inside and outside the target country, including in terms of spreading intelligence propaganda. For the political destabilization of the state, intelligence penetration of a political party created on an ethnic basis, its transformation into a terrorist organization, and moral and financial support are important.

Research Questions

1. What is the impact of intelligence on the political destabilization of the target country?

2. What is the connection between the military intelligence of the spying country and the military coup in Turkey?

3. What role did the religious schools play in the political destabilization of Turkey?

4. What role did the Kurdistan Workers' Party play in the political destabilization of Turkey?

Methods

The study uses the content analysis method.

Results

The hypothesis was confirmed. It was revealed that actions with signs of foreign intelligence penetration made it possible to facilitate the process of organizing a military coup in the target country. The political security of Turkey was adversely affected by the activities of religious schools controlled from a foreign country, which contained signs of intelligence activities. The political security of Turkey was adversely affected by the propaganda actions carried out by religious schools controlled from a foreign country and terrorist organizations, which coincided with the intelligence interests of countries hostile to Turkey. The actions inspiring the political destabilization of Turkey were carried out by the ethnically formed "Kurdistan Workers' Party", whose actions contained the coincident strategic interests of countries hostile to Turkey.

Discussion

The Republic of Turkey is one of the most interesting states in the world, given its unique geographical location and political traditions. The country, located on two continents, combines Asian values and European principles, which makes Turkey, as one of the leading and important states of both continents, a prominent member of the system of international relations. The last decade of the 20th century was characterized by political events of global importance, which forever changed the face of the international relations system that existed before. Of course, the Republic of Turkey, which was established back in 1923 (The Birth of the Republic of Turkey, 2016). After

the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was a direct result of its defeat in the First World War, did not lag behind the changing geopolitical processes. As a result of significant reforms and changes, Turkey has managed to occupy an important place in the "international community" and become one of the leading states in the Caucasus region and the Eurasian continent. Turkey joined the ranks of member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as early as 1952, along with Greece, as a result of the first wave of NATO expansion. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Verification date: 18.02.2025). Today, it is the only state in the organization that has territory on the Asian continent. At the same time, Turkey ranks second among the states in the alliance in terms of the size of the army. One of the main political interests of the republic is integration into the European space. Despite the fact that the Republic of Turkey is not yet a member of this organization, it remains one of the most important partners of the European Union in both political and economic matters.

When analyzing the political processes taking place in Turkey, we often encounter attempts to overthrow the state system through violence and military means and establish a new system of government. (AlJazeera, Verification date: 25.02.2025) It should be noted that there have been 4 successful military coups in Turkey (1960, 1971, 1980, 1997) and one unsuccessful attempt of the same nature (2016).

The failed coup attempt of 2016 can be considered a watershed event in the process of shaping the domestic political situation and foreign policy of the Republic of Turkey. The uprising, which lasted just one night and claimed the lives of hundreds of people, became a clear manifestation of the political imbalance caused by the existing disagreements and threats in the political space of Turkey. The organizer of the military coup was considered to be a part of the Turkish army that separated from the main units and established a council called "Peace at Home", which is a direct metaphor for the famous phrase of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Their main targets were the main governing bodies and inst-

institutions of the Turkish state, the president himself and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The fundamental reasons that the council named as the reason for the coup are interesting: the erosion of secularism; the elimination of democratic governance; disregard for human rights and the loss of Turkey's legitimacy and importance on the international stage. (AMB. W. ROBERT PEARSON, July 16, 2016). According to the generals and military personnel who were members of the council, Erdogan planned to establish an authoritarian regime in Turkey and create a cult of personality, which contradicted the democratic principles and values that are important to Turkey. For this reason, units under the command of the council tried to seize important buildings in the country's largest city, Istanbul, the capital of Turkey, Ankara, Marmaris, etc. It is also noteworthy that Erdogan was in Marmaris to celebrate a holiday during the coup, which indicates that the organizers of the uprising specifically chose a time when the country's president would not be in important cities such as Ankara or Istanbul and they would be able to overthrow the current government more easily and quickly by force. The uniqueness of the 2016 coup attempt is also emphasized by the active use of modern technology and social networks. During the process, Erdogan contacted his supporters using social media, urging them to take to the streets and oppose the traitors to the country. Motivated by the president's statement, the Turks occupied important places in Ankara and Istanbul and prevented the military units participating in the uprising from achieving their goal. Later, according to various information sources, they were called "guardians of democracy". (Klaus Jurgens, 2021)

While analyzing the 2016 coup attempt and its aftermath, special importance is attached to Mehmet Fethullah Gülen. He is a well-known Turkish businessman and scholar who was distinguished by his Islamist and neo-Ottomanist views. The religious figure has lived in Pennsylvania, USA, since 1999 and was stripped of his citizenship by the Turkish authorities in 2017. (TM, 2017)

Mehmet Fethullah is the founder and leader of the organization known as the “Gülen Movement.” The organization, which is based on the ideology of Sunni Islam, is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish government. According to statements made by the Erdogan government, they have accurate information and evidence that links the “Gülen Movement” to the 2016 coup attempt, and that Gulen was behind the plan, organizing the events from the United States. (Press, 2017) Gulen himself denies this accusation. Issues related to Fethullah Gulen have led to significant changes in both Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy. Relations between the Republic of Turkey and the United States have been particularly strained. According to the Turkish government, the US provided refuge to Gulen and Turkey continuously requested his extradition from the US, to which Turkey received a negative response from the US. (Amy La Porte, Ivan Watson and Gul Tuysuz, 2016). Over 77,000 people have been arrested in mass arrests being accused of links to Gulen, and over 160,000 have been dismissed from public sector positions. Particular pressure has been placed on military personnel, judges, and those involved in education. At least 10,000 soldiers have been arrested, as have around 2,750 judges, and the teaching licenses of over 35,000 people working in private and public education centers have been revoked after the Turkish authorities declared them to be loyal to Gulen. (Sanchez, 2016)

It is also interesting to note that some states have officially stated that they oppose Erdogan’s countermeasures. For example, in March 2017, the head of Germany’s intelligence service stated that Germany was “not convinced of the legitimacy of Erdogan’s accusation of Gulen’s involvement in the coup.” (Barigazzi, 2017) In the same month, a representative of the British Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Select Committee stated that while some Gulenists had participated in the coup attempt, there was no solid evidence that Fethullah Gulen was the main mastermind of the failed coup and there was no compelling

reason for the United Kingdom to designate the Gulen movement as a “terrorist organization.” (PARLIAMENT.UK, 2017)

In relation to the events and facts discussed, attention should also be paid to the information available in open sources. According to data obtained by the Turkish intelligence service, the organization “FETO”, which “operates in 170 countries, its main headquarters is located in the USA and works under the auspices of foreign intelligence services, participated in the coup d’état.” Of note is the conclusion made by the European Union Intelligence Center (EUINTCEN) in August 2016, published in The Times newspaper, which stated: “It is less convincing that Gülen played a direct role in the coup d’état.” (Euronews, 2017) Analysis of official statements from Germany and the UK also indicated that these countries lacked documentary evidence of Gülen’s participation in the coup. The above information indicates and reinforces the opinion about the participation of foreign intelligence services in organizing the coup in Turkey.

Terrorism has been and continues to be one of the greatest challenges to Turkey's statehood and to its political, economic, and military stability. Due to its geopolitical location, Turkey has repeatedly become the target of terrorist acts carried out by internal and external hostile organizations and groups.

It is interesting and important to discuss the characteristics of terrorist acts and their consequences on the example of a specific terrorist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which represents a fundamental threat and problem for Turkey and was formed by Abdullah Ocalan, a Turkish citizen of Kurdish nationality, born in 1949. It is the most active separatist-terrorist organization on the territory of Turkey, which, as an armed political association, is waging a guerrilla war in various countries of Turkey and the Middle East, especially Iraq. (IRANIAN KURDISTAN HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, Verified: 18.02.2025) The initial motive of the PKK was to establish a unified Kurdish state by uniting territories densely populated by Kurds, although their targets have changed since the 1990s. Today, the

organization operates with the argument of increasing the autonomy and political and cultural rights of the Kurds living in Turkey. During an extremely tense political situation in Turkey, the main reason for which was the confrontation between left-wing and right-wing political groups (this process ended with a coup in 1980), Öcalan seized the opportunity and officially founded the Kurdistan Workers' Party in 1978. His main ally was the Syrian state, a year later he fled to Syria and for the rest of his life he led the party he founded from there.

It is also worth noting that, in addition to political and military factors, ideological teaching was an integral part of the party's existence. The main guiding ideology of the Kurdistan Workers' Party is Marxism-Leninism, which is adapted to the example of the history and heritage of Kurdistan. The ideological philosophy of the Kurdistan Workers' Party is based on many ideas and trends, the most important of which are: Kurdish nationalism, democratic confederalism, anti-capitalism, progressivism, etc. Of particular interest is Jineology, an ideology created by the party's founder, Abdullah Öcalan. Jineology is a feminist movement that opposes the discriminatory ideas and rules that exist against women in the Middle East. According to Öcalan, "A state cannot be free unless its women are free first." (Benedetta Argentieri, 2015) It is important to note the military support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party from the Syrian government, through which Öcalan was able to establish two training bases in Lebanon, where Kurdish separatists could receive political and ideological training along with the military. Öcalan had to live in several countries for short periods of time during his career. After fleeing Syria, he initially hid in Russia, then Greek diplomats soon offered him political asylum, but Öcalan chose Italy. After changing his residence several times, he was finally arrested in the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, on February 15, 1999. (Ferhat Ünlü, Verified: 18.02.2025)

The special operation was carried out by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization with the assistance of the American intelligence service, the CIA. According to a Turkish source, the Ame-

ricans took Öcalan to Turkey for trial and handed him over to the Turkish authorities. (Hatice Kamer, 2024) Öcalan's arrest was followed by protests organized by Kurds in several cities in Europe, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Various humanitarian organizations have questioned Öcalan's trial. For example, AI (Amnesty International) has demanded a retrial, while Human Rights Watch considers the fact that witnesses presented by the defense were not present at the trial to be suspicious. (Hacaoglu, 1999) Finally, on June 29, 1999, the court found Öcalan guilty of treason and separatism and sentenced him to death, although after Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2002, Öcalan was sentenced to life imprisonment. He is still alive today and continues to be imprisoned in a completely isolated area, where visitors are allowed only in certain cases.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, founded by Öcalan, has been engaged in an asymmetric warfare with Turkey since 1984 and has carried out numerous terrorist acts since then. Its headquarters are located in the Qandil Mountains. The PKK is associated with organizations, groups, and political parties such as the Democratic Unity Party (PYD), the People's Protection Units (YPG), the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (MLKP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and others.

The issue of international recognition of the PKK is also interesting. It is recognized as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States, the European Union, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. It is noteworthy that this opinion is categorically opposed by some specialists and conflictologists. (Bloomberg News, 2014) The discussion on the status of the Kurdistan Workers' Party has been renewed since 2016, after the group again began to actively carry out frequent acts with terrorist characteristics. In 2018, the Court of Justice of the European Union recognized the PKK as a terrorist organization. (Prakken d'Oliveira, 2018) Over the decades, the activities of the party/terrorist organization have claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people, the vast majority of whom are members of the Kurdish

ethnic group. It should be noted that the Turkish government is forced to conduct special operations against the party/terrorist organization, during which “merciless destruction of the peaceful population” is recorded. (crisisgroup,2015) Against the Turkish government, the terrorist groups of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party have repeatedly bombed the centers of various cities. In parallel with these processes, they have also actively used the so-called “child fighters”. It should be noted that today the Kurdistan Workers’ Party ranks 6th among the highest-income terrorist organizations with a budget of 100-180 million, and its main source of income, like other terrorist groups, is the trade in drugs, in particular heroin and cannabis.

Conclusion

1. The Turkish Armed Forces were a vulnerable sector for intelligence activities of foreign countries. As the developments show, there are favorable conditions for military and political intelligence activities of states hostile to Turkey. The above-mentioned situation represented an identified threat, the neutralization of which / reduction of the risk of impact is the result of the successful activities of the Turkish intelligence and counterintelligence agencies. The activities of the terrorist organization "Kurdistan Workers' Party" have a destabilizing effect on the political security of Turkey. The main targets of this organization are the Turkish government and society. The actions of this organization are in line with the intelligence interests of countries hostile to Turkey.

2. Classifier to help identify threats from intelligence activities carried out by foreign states:

☞ In the absence of proper intelligence and counterintelligence control, the process of training a military person from the target country in the spying state, where the probability of his recruitment is high, can be a circumstance that can lead to detrimental consequences for the political and military security of the state;

☞ Political destabilization can be achieved:

a) when making a decision, the government is equipped with information identifying the threat and does not take it into account;

b) when making a decision, the government is not equipped with information identifying the threat and does not have the opportunity to take it into account;

☞ Religious schools and civil religious groups of the target country may represent a vulnerable segment for the implementation of the political and military intelligence interests of a foreign country, including for inspiring political destabilization;

☞ The formation of a secret organization in the armed forces may become the basis for the military-political destabilization of the country. The organization's activities may include the classification of politicians, military personnel and journalists, monitoring the current political processes in Turkey and protecting secularism;

☞ The memorandum proposed by the armed forces to the government may pose a threat of interference by the armed forces in the election process and inspiring a political crisis. This situation can be achieved when the government is guided by the "I" principle when making decisions, which excludes the organization of scientific research with the participation of special services, sectoral specialists, and scientists in the process to make a safe decision;

☞ Active use of mass media and social networks is important for military and military-political intelligence activities;

☞ The process of violent overthrow of the state government may be carried out through the intelligence services of foreign states, with the help of a person displaced by the country or religious organizations founded by the target of intelligence residing in the country of the spy;

☞ The political, economic and military security of a state is adversely affected by specific groups and ideological movements vulnerable to terrorism, driven by political, social and religious motives. The significant consequences of their actions may be the disruption of the constitutional order of the state, the creation of anarchic conditions at the expense of pursuing the interests of foreign countries;

☞ Political parties and terrorist organizations are targets of intelligence penetration by states. Before becoming a terrorist organization, it may have experience as a political party, which is why in order to prevent this threat, intelligence and counterintelligence services should establish control over possible criminal connections of a political party and carry out preventive measures;

☞ A favorable condition for inspiring political destabilization is the formation of public opinion in favor of the violent overthrow of the existing government and order, and the placement and dissemination of information in the media for this purpose. Accordingly, the intelligence and counterintelligence agencies of the target country should control the media working on the formation of public opinion in favor of the violent overthrow of the government and order in their own country and take appropriate preventive measures;

☞ Providing asylum to the leader of a terrorist organization by foreign states contains signs of intelligence penetration and facilitates the organizational process of criminal acts against the state of affiliation by the leader. Accordingly, it is the duty of the special services of the target state to establish control over the connections of the leader and members of the terrorist organization with foreign states and to take appropriate preventive measures;

☞ Protests in support of the leader of a terrorist organization in their own and foreign countries are carried out with the aim of discrediting and compromising the target country, and of politically destabilizing it, and contain signs of both intelligence influence and penetration. Accordingly, the direction of study of the special services of the target country should be the connections of the terrorist organization in their own and foreign countries, which are carried out for the purpose of discrediting and compromising the government of the state of affiliation;

☞ In order to provide cover for foreign intelligence support for a terrorist organization, it is possible to use a political party or terrorist

organization by providing access to sources of income (including drug trafficking).

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