

Renewed Threat

At the turn of the New Year, Turkey suffered a spate of deadly terror attacks conducted in different forms and by various terrorist groups. Why have such attacks erupted in Turkey in recent months and will the escalating violence affect Turkish stability? *Beijing Review* selects a few insightful opinions from Chinese media to provide some understanding.



The site of a blast in Turkey's coast resort city of Izmir on January 5, which killed two and injured seven

Defunct counter-terrorism

Kang Jie (PLA Daily columnist):

The tragic shooting in Istanbul's famous Reina nightclub on New Year's eve was a "lone-wolf" terror attack conducted by a gunman linked to the so-called Islamic State extremist group (ISIS), killing 39 and injuring 65 others.

"Lone-wolf" attacks have become a major terror threat to Europe. Since Turkey closed off its border with Syria and interdicted the channel ISIS used to recruit jihadists from Europe, the group has instigated more attacks in Turkey. Currently, ISIS is secretly trying to buy over Islamic extremists in Europe and incite them to launch deadly attacks on civilian targets. Attacks conducted by a single terrorist are more concealed, making it more difficult for intelligence and security forces to prevent and counter them.

In recent months, ISIS has been weakened substantially in both Iraq and Syria, as a result of the two nations being bolstered with international support. However it is difficult to eradicate the group in the near future.

The Iraqi Government remains too weak to govern the whole nation effectively; while Syria's civil war has made it tough for President Bashar al-Assad to control large territories. Economic hardship and widespread unemployment have pushed some young and middle-aged people to join various militant groups to make a living. Continual ideological and religious conflicts have also opened space for extremism to grow unchecked. Moreover, major powers never relent their meddling in the Middle East. The internal conflicts in the region have offered foreign countries a chance to wage proxy wars. All these factors combined have created a fertile ground for jihadists and terrorists.

Besides, migrant Muslims often find it hard to integrate into European and North American society. Many young people are confused about their identities and future. Under extremist incitement, some are pushed to join jihadist groups.

Police stand at alert outside the Reina nightclub in Istanbul on January 1, after a gun attack killed 39 people during a New Year eve party



In the long term, to eradicate terrorism, a comprehensive solution consisting of social governance, economic development and identity construction is needed. All countries should give up their double standards on counter-terrorism. Instead, the international community should work cohesively to establish a cooperation mechanism on the basis of pervasive and common security, as well as strengthening supervision and governance in cyberspace to prevent the spread of terrorism and radical thoughts globally.

Threats from Syria

Yi Aijun (Xinhua News Agency reporter):

After the failed coup in Turkey last July, Turkey-Russia relations and Turkey-U.S. relations have undergone dramatic change. Turkey and Russia put aside their differences on Syria's future and reached cooperation on combating terrorists. On the other hand, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticized the United States for sheltering cleric Fehullah Gulen, who the Turkish Government accused of organizing the coup attempt.

With the thaw in its relations with Russia, Turkey launched military actions against Kurds in north Syria in August 2016. The Turkish military has not only attacked Kurdish militants in border areas, but also cut off their northern access to external resources, including personnel, equipment and money, for ISIS. Turkish fighting on several fronts both at home and in Syria has incurred retaliation from Kurdish militants and ISIS.

Under such circumstances, Turkey's intelligence and security forces are not ready for more threats. The recent deadly attacks in Turkey have exposed the loopholes of its security networks in major cities.

Growing internal conflicts

Tao Duanfang (scholar of international relations and columnist with China.com.cn):

Over the last year, Turkey's security situation deteriorated significantly, as deadly terror attacks and rampant violence occurred frequently.

Aside from the terror threat from ISIS, Erdogan has repeatedly blamed internal forces—Kurdish separatists and political rivals—for the deadly attacks.

The Turkish Government has fought the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for decades. Since mid-2015, when the PKK announced the end of its unilateral ceasefire, it has launched attacks more regularly.

The Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), a splinter faction of the PKK, has been accused of bloody assaults on both governmental and civilian targets. For example, on March 13 last year, 37 people were killed in a TAK-related bomb explosion at a busy transport hub in Ankara. TAK has also claimed responsibility for a pair of explosions that killed 48 people in Istanbul on December 10.

In addition to military operations against the PKK and TAK militants, the Turkish Government has also taken actions against the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). As an official

political party, the HDP won parliamentary seats for the first time in 2015, becoming the third largest party in parliament. Meanwhile, Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) lost its simple parliamentary majority for the first time since 2003. Because of opposition from the HDP and other parties, the AKP had to suspend the constitutional amendment process which would have enhanced presidential power.

After Erdogan smashed the failed coup in July 2016, major opposition parties, except the HDP, yielded to the ruling party's pressure on constitutional amendment. Thus, Erdogan turned his attention to the HDP.

As early as November 2016, the Ministry of the Interior gave orders to arrest 13 HDP lawmakers in parliament and 11 other HDP members, claiming that these people had refused to testify whether they were linked to terrorist acts. The Erdogan administration also deprived the HDP parliamentary members of criminal jurisdictional immunity.

Although no evidence links the HDP to the recent terrorist attacks, the Turkish Government has intensified measures against the HDP under the excuse of counter-terrorism. On December 13, 2016, the police rounded up and arrested 235 HDP members in Istanbul and Ankara.

Erdogan has also blamed Fehullah Gulen, now living in exile in the United States, for the attempted coup and violence. ■

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