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EDITORIAL OFFICE / YAYIN İDARE ADRESİ

Nenehatun Caddesi No: 66 GOP/Çankaya, 06700 Ankara/Türkiye

Tel: +90.312.551-2100 • Fax: +90.312.551-2190

editor@insightturkey.com • www.insightturkey.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

Several important internal and external dynamics have opened a new window of opportunity for resolving the terrorism problem and the Kurdish issue in Türkiye. The most significant development in Turkish domestic politics is the revolutionary improvements in the defense industry, particularly in the unmanned aerial vehicle sector. Following these developments in the Turkish defense industry, the PKK became unable to carry out its activities and was forced to lay down its weapons and to dissolve itself. Türkiye's increased capacity and capability in the fight against terrorism has minimized the impact of the PKK.

Meanwhile, two regional developments have required Türkiye to take measures against new regional dynamics. First, Hamas' Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023, and then Israel's genocide in Gaza shifted the regional balance of power. Israel's aggression against seven regional countries has led to regional instability and forced Türkiye to recalibrate its regional policy. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has openly declared his intention to "strengthen the domestic front" by eliminating the most influential political fault line within the country to deter any external threat emanating from the region.

On the other hand, Erdoğan called for the strengthening of the Turkish, Kurdish and Arab alliance to overcome regional challenges facing all peoples of the region. He warned those who attempt to collaborate with Israel against Türkiye, saying that only those who turn their face to Ankara will win. Erdoğan underlined that Türkiye will continue to oppose any destabilizing actor, namely Israel, in the region.

The second regional dynamic was the Syrian Revolution of December 2024, which brought an end to the long-standing Baath regime in Syria. Thus, the PKK has lost its main regional supporter, was left vulnerable, and it remained

defenseless in the region. It is important to emphasize that the PKK ended the first “resolution process” due to the developments in the northeastern part of Syria, where the Syrian branch of the PKK, the YPG/SDF, began controlling large portions of Syrian territory and aimed to establish a de facto state. The Turkish government, which played a decisive role in the overthrow of the Baath regime and maintains close ties with the current Syrian central government, supports the territorial integrity of the Syrian state and the Syrian central government.

The “terror-free Türkiye project” requires a long and gradual process. Naturally, resolving all the problems and overcoming all the challenges will take time. The first steps toward the “terror-free Türkiye” were taken by Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the junior partner of the People’s Alliance, when he shook hands with leaders of the Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), which has ties to the PKK.

The project was later adopted by the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) leadership and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has assumed responsibility. When different state institutions joined the process, it eventually turned into a state project. Although the ruling coalition initiated the process, President Erdoğan transformed it into a “state and national project” by calling on state institutions, including the Parliament, the intelligence and the security forces, to become involved. As a result, beyond the ruling political actors, many other stakeholders also began to take part in the process.

The terror-free initiative has occupied the central agenda of Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy for several months and is likely to remain a key issue. It is expected to be widely debated in Parliament and to continue shaping Türkiye’s relations with actors in the Middle East. The parliament, which represents more than 90 percent of the population, established a commission, the Parliamentary Commission on National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy, within the framework of the terror-free Türkiye process. After 19 separate sessions, the commission, led by the Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmuş, is expected to submit a report to the General Assembly.

As a response to these steps, the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan called on the PKK leadership to lay down its arms and to dissolve itself in February 2025. The PKK leadership responded positively to Öcalan’s call, convening its congress and declaring its dissolution last May. Then, the PKK burned its weapons in a symbolic ceremony in northern Iraq on July 11.

The most recent development on this issue is the announcement by the PKK leadership on October 25 that it has started to withdraw from Turkish territory, marking another step in Türkiye’s terror-free process. However, this

withdrawal is not particularly significant in terms of domestic politics, as Türkiye has already minimized the PKK's impact within the country by taking preemptive measures. Furthermore, the number of new recruits from Türkiye joining the PKK has also decreased dramatically. The PKK has recognized that, with no viable options left, violence is no longer considered a valid method for claiming rights.

The withdrawal can be seen as a concrete and crucial step that both sustains the resolution process and advances the completion of its first phase. Also, it will pave the way for the consolidation of democracy in the country. It is generally accepted by all political parties that Parliament is the main platform for finding solutions to Türkiye's problems. Following the resolution of the terrorism problem, the process will continue with the legal amendments regarding the future of the Kurdish issue. Ankara will initiate a political reform program to reach a final solution to the Kurdish issue.

The PKK's withdrawal from Türkiye means that the YPG/SDF is highly likely to be integrated into the Syrian national army. Türkiye is quite sensitive about the potential changes in Syria; it has repeatedly declared that it will not allow the YPG/SDF to divide the Syrian territory. The stability and security of the Syrian central government are of great importance for Ankara, which is determined to continue to monitor the situation. However, if the YPG/SDF heeds external powers to sever ties with Türkiye, Ankara will react harshly. All in all, the withdrawal of the PKK from Türkiye will generate positive results and increase hopes for the success of the Terror-Free Türkiye project. Thus, Türkiye will get rid of threats to its democracy and territorial integrity. This move will also make a great contribution to regional stability.

The project targets the transformation of the Turkish political perspective at two different levels. At the national level, it aims to "consolidate the national front," as explained by Turkish officials. The main objective of the project is to get rid of one of the most active political fault lines, the Kurdish problem, in the country.

At the regional level, it intends to eradicate terrorism from the Middle East to create a terror-free region, as the PKK and its branches are active not only in Türkiye but in several regional countries. In other words, Türkiye has been struggling to end the political instability in the whole region. It is well known that violent nonstate actors constitute the second most significant threat to the political independence and territorial integrity of regional states, ranking just after the interventions of global powers.

On the other hand, the project is designed to solve Turkish political problems in two different phases. It is perceived and planned as a gradual process. In the

first phase, it intends to end the violence and terrorism in the country. Therefore, the only actor that the state institutions negotiate with in the process is the PKK and its affiliates. Although there is no bargaining with the PKK, the state negotiates the management of the process with the PKK.

During the second phase, the state intends to initiate a large-scale political transformation through discussions with different political and social actors. The ruling coalition will try to reach a consensus in Parliament to pass the necessary resolutions to finalize the process. As a matter of fact, the Kurdish problem is expected to be solved within the context of a large-scale process of democratization. Therefore, different social and political actors are expected to contribute to the process.

There are many challenges facing the ongoing process. Different internal and external actors and dynamics try to prevent the smooth promotion of the process. Actors who oppose the process have been exploiting every small detail to halt progress. They also try to instrumentalize every development to criticize the authorities and force them to abandon the process. As the likelihood of success gets closer, the more interventions are witnessed. Below, I will underline some of the developments that are exploited by the opposition.

One of the recent developments that was used by the opposition and some political circles was the meeting with the PKK leader Öcalan. The National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Committee decided to send a delegation to the İmralı Prison to meet with Öcalan. However, several political parties, including the main opposition party, the CHP, refused to send a member to the committee. They went further and declared that meeting with Öcalan was unacceptable. After the delegation visited Öcalan, several political groups and parties demanded that the authorities disclose all notes from the meeting. However, requesting the full release of negotiation notes effectively means calling for the termination of the process. Once disclosed, certain statements made by the participants could easily be misused or taken out of context. In other words, the demand is not an innocent one; it aims to distort the process.

Another development that was exploited by some political circles was Mesut Barzani's visit to Şırnak to attend an academic event commemorating the renowned Kurdish poet, Molla Jazari. Some groups backed by the opposition exaggerated the visit and attempted to provoke the public to rise against the process by using images shared on social media. Those who overemphasize these developments are once more trying to halt the process.

The greater the possibility of achieving the aims of the process, the more those who oppose the process try to intervene to halt progress. At the beginning of the process, those who opposed it largely remained indifferent, assuming it

would ultimately fail on its own. Some even expressed conditional political support. However, as expectations for a solution grew, they began to intervene directly in the process and since then, they have attempted all means to sabotage it.

Political actors approach the issue from four distinct perspectives. The first group adopts a “let the problem be solved, whoever solves it” stance. They support the resolution of the problem without any condition. Since coming to power, AK Party governments attempted to solve this chronic problem, which consumes a large part of the state’s energy. The AK Party leadership has pursued a “service policy,” taking numerous significant measures to rid the country of terrorism and solve the Kurdish issue. Similarly, the MHP, the junior partner of the ruling coalition, seems ready to take all necessary steps to resolve the issue, being ready to meet and negotiate the process with all sides. Except for some red lines regarding the territorial integrity and political independence of the country, the MHP has no preconditions about the process.

The second group holds the view of “Let the problem be solved, but only if Erdoğan does not solve it.” Certain political parties and societal groups seek to prevent the ruling coalition, particularly President Erdoğan, from claiming credit for the process. They do not wish Erdoğan to come out stronger from the process. Therefore, they oppose the initiative to block the ruling coalition from benefiting from the process. In other words, they prioritize their own or their group’s interests at the expense of national interests. However, they struggle to provide a coherent rationale for their opposition. While their political rhetoric may express support for the process, they continue to explore alternative means to hinder its progress.

The third group argues, “Let the problem be solved, but only if I solve it.” This group wants the problem to be resolved exclusively under their own leadership, primarily so they can derive political advantage from the process. Therefore, they do not want any other actor to resolve the issue. Like the second group, they prioritize their individual or group interests over national interests. They also face difficulties in justifying their claims, as society can impose political costs on them. The costs of ongoing terrorism to the state and society remain very high.

The fourth group asserts, “Let the problem never be solved.” For various reasons, some political parties and groups oppose the process and the resolution of the issue. They represent the denial policy of the past. No mainstream political actors reject the resolution of the issue, but some small far-right, ultra-nationalist, and racist groups immediately sprang into action. The higher the probability of the process’s success, the louder their voices become. In this context, these politically motivated groups are attempting to incite different

segments of society against the Kurds. State institutions must take measures to counter these misleading groups and limit their influence on society.

In conclusion, political parties and societal groups take different positions toward the terror-free Türkiye initiative. Unfortunately, the last three groups mainly representing the national opposition try to challenge the process and exploit every opportunity to create barriers to halt its progress.

This issue brings together a diverse yet interconnected set of commentaries and research articles that collectively address one of the most critical questions of our time: how states, societies, and international actors navigate security, conflict resolution, and political transformation in an increasingly fragile global order. At the center of this issue lies the theme of a “Terror-Free Türkiye,” examined not as an isolated security policy but as a multidimensional political, social, and international process.

The issue opens with Nebi Miş’s detailed analysis of the foundations and institutional architecture of what is considered as the “Turkish model,” tracing its origins, critical thresholds, and the role of parliamentary mechanisms in shaping a new resolution framework. Complementing this perspective, Bekir Berat Özipek situates the current initiative, launched under the leadership of Devlet Bahçeli, within both domestic and regional dynamics, emphasizing accumulated experience from past processes and the evolving geopolitical environment. Together, these contributions invite readers to consider whether the aspiration for a terror-free Türkiye, and indeed a more stable region, represents not only a policy goal but an achievable political transformation.

The commentary by Hüseyin Oruç and Barış Oktay highlights the long-standing role of the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İHH) in both global humanitarian action and Türkiye’s internal social fabric. Founded in 1995, İHH has institutionalized humanitarian diplomacy alongside emergency aid and long-term development projects across 123 countries. Within Türkiye, the foundation’s sustained engagement with the Kurdish issue, particularly in the eastern and southeastern regions, demonstrates how civil society actors can contribute to peace-building, social cohesion, and initiatives such as the “National Solidarity, Brotherhood, and Democracy Process,” aligning humanitarian action with broader national visions such as the “Century of Türkiye.”

At the analytical core of this issue, Hüseyin Arslan’s research article provides a comparative examination of the life cycles of terrorist organizations through the cases of the IRA, ETA, LTTE, FARC, and the PKK. By contrasting political transformation, negotiated disarmament, and military defeat, the article positions Türkiye’s post-2024 “Terror-Free Türkiye” process as a distinctive, sovereignty-based model. Emphasizing unilateral organizational dissolution,

voluntary disarmament, and domestic legitimacy rather than external mediation, Arslan argues that Türkiye's approach constitutes a novel paradigm in international counterterrorism literature.

Several articles broaden the regional and theoretical scope of the issue. Halima Abdulkareem and Hasan Duran analyze Iran's Shiitization policies in Syria since the establishment of the Syrian-Iranian alliance in 1980, demonstrating how religious ideology, war conditions, and demographic engineering have reshaped Syrian society and deepened sectarian divides. Their findings offer crucial context for understanding the regional environment in which Türkiye's security policies operate.

Seher Bulut examines the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation, focusing on Israel's role amid maritime jurisdiction disputes, power asymmetries, and the geopolitical repercussions of the post-October 7, 2023 Gaza war. The study underscores how unresolved conflicts and unilateral policies undermine prospects for cooperation in strategically vital regions.

In a different yet complementary vein, Ahmet Turan explores the transformation of conference diplomacy through a comparative analysis of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum (ADF) and the Valdai Discussion Club (VDC). By assessing objectives, participation, formats, and agenda-setting capacity, the article sheds light on how contemporary diplomatic platforms shape narratives, influence policy debates, and reflect competing international visions.

The issue also engages with critical theory and global power shifts. Muhammed Beheşti Aydoğan revisits Celal Nuri's early 20th century critique of international law, drawing a compelling connection between Turkish intellectual history and Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAAIL). This contribution challenges Eurocentric positivism and calls for the revitalization of a critical, non-Western legal scholarship. Similarly, Özkan Gökcan offers a non-Western reading of Chinese foreign policy by analyzing Xi Jinping's discourse through the concept of *Tianxia*, questioning hegemonic assumptions prevalent in Western-centric analyses.

Expanding the comparative horizon further, Sujata Ashwarya analyzes India's evolving foreign policy and its strategic engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), highlighting India's balancing act between strategic autonomy and regional influence. Hacı Mehmet Boyraz, Maurizio Geri, and Cihaneri Erciyes Avşar examine Türkiye-Italy relations in the Mediterranean, emphasizing cooperation, competition, and emerging hybrid threats. Tolipov Farkhod and Izteleuova Yelena provide an in-depth analysis of foreign policy decision-making in Uzbekistan, revealing how internal and external variables shape policy choices in a complex geopolitical environment.

Finally, Hakan Köni's article addresses the relationship between religion and politics in democratic systems, with a particular focus on Türkiye. Through an examination of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), religious education, and religious recognition, the study highlights both progress and persistent structural limitations, offering important insights into democracy, pluralism, and state–religion relations.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue situate the idea of a “Terror-Free Türkiye” within a broader intellectual and geopolitical context, highlighting the deep interconnections between security, sovereignty, diplomacy, and social legitimacy. They underscore that durable peace demands not only military measures but also political participation and institutional renewal. We hope readers will find in these analyses a rigorous and reflective contribution to ongoing debates on security, conflict resolution, and the prospects for a more stable future in Türkiye and the region. ■