

TURKISH COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY AGAINST THE PKK

A Security-Oriented Perspective



Edited by
Caner Korhan Demir
and **Erol Bařaran Bural**



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Turkish Counterterrorism Strategy against the PKK

Türkiye's response to PKK terrorism stands as one of the most sustained, complex, and evolving counterterrorism efforts in the modern era. This book offers the first comprehensive English-language analysis of Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy, adopting a security-oriented perspective that integrates military, political, legal, economic, and social dimensions. It presents a holistic and critical evaluation of how Türkiye has sought to address terrorism across changing domestic and international environments.

Structured around strategic foundations, operational developments, and emerging threats, the book examines how Türkiye has adapted to the evolving landscape of terrorism. The first part provides a comprehensive view of Türkiye's strategy, addressing political, social, and economic measures as well as criminal justice approaches and the international legal framework. The second part focuses on operational fields, including urban security operations, cross-border missions, intelligence reforms, and advancements in defense and surveillance technologies. The third part explores new security challenges, including the PKK's transformation into organized crime and cyberterrorism, and evaluates innovative soft power initiatives such as persuasion processes and counter-narrative strategies.

KEY FEATURES

- Offers a comprehensive analysis of Türkiye's holistic counterterrorism framework, incorporating political, legal, and social measures
- Presents an in-depth exploration of operational strategies, including urban security, cross-border operations, and technological innovation
- Features a critical examination of intelligence roles, criminal justice models, and international law in supporting counterterrorism efforts
- Delivers an assessment of emerging threats, such as organized crime integration and cyberterrorism, linked to the PKK

- Discusses soft power approaches, de-radicalization strategies, and counter-propaganda efforts
- Includes strategic reflections on future directions, identifying key areas for strengthening multidimensional counterterrorism responses

Offering both theoretical and empirical insights, this book is an essential resource for scholars, students, policymakers, and security practitioners seeking a nuanced, comprehensive understanding of Türkiye's evolving counterterrorism strategy.

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Introduction

Turkish counterterrorism strategy against the PKK

Çenker Korhan Demir and Erol Başaran Bural

Terrorism stands as a formidable threat to both states and their populace, manifesting in significant loss of life and injury throughout history. This enduring challenge necessitates substantial governmental resources to address. From socio-cultural, economic, and political perspectives, terrorist activities impede societal progress, presenting formidable challenges and vulnerabilities not only within affected regions but also on a global scale, as evidenced by the proliferation of terrorism associated with groups like the Islamic State.

However, the field of terrorism studies received limited scholarly attention until the catastrophic events of 9/11 in the United States. Several factors contributed to this lack of academic focus, though an exploration of these reasons lies beyond the scope of this book. A significant challenge in this field, particularly within counterterrorism studies, is the difficulty of maintaining academic objectivity while navigating the value-laden and emotive nature of the subject, compounded by the grim realities of violent extremism (Demir and Avcı, 2018). The study of terrorism and counterterrorism has often been influenced by emotional responses and contentious debates, leading some to label it a “dangerous field” of research (Silke, 2020: 1).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the field of terrorism studies witnessed a marked increase in scholarly attention, which Shepherd (2007) characterized as the advent of a “golden age” for terrorism research. Numerous research centers and institutions dedicated to the study of terrorism and counterterrorism were established, with a corresponding increase in funding for related research initiatives. The academic output in this area experienced a significant rise, with over 100 scholarly works—including books, journal articles, and theses—being published daily. Additionally, universities offering graduate degrees in terrorism studies proliferated, with many integrating terrorism and radicalization issues into their curricula (Silke, 2020: 2).

Turkish counterterrorism studies are not immune to these challenges since Türkiye has been fighting the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*, PKK) for approximately four decades and suffering from more than 40,000 casualties attributed to its actions. Nevertheless, there exists a

body of literature and scholarly works addressing thematic elements related to Turkish counterterrorism policy. For instance, Ünal (2012) published *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)* which employs a quantitative evaluation to assess the efficacy of counterterrorism strategies while exploring the complex social and psychological dynamics underpinning the PKK conflict, focusing on the period from 1984 through the early 2000s.

Another significant contribution is Plakoudas's (2018) *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Turkey: The New PKK* which applies general theories of asymmetric conflict and examines how protracted conflicts can be resolved. The author emphasizes the "peace process" and its aftermath up to 2017.

There are also several book chapters and articles that explore various aspects of Turkish counterterrorism. For example, Ilbiz and Kaunert (2021) in *EU, Turkey and Counter-Terrorism: Fighting the PKK and ISIS* analyze the impact of the EU on Turkish counterterrorism policies regarding the PKK in the context of the ISIS threat, examining the role of the EU across four distinct periods: 1984–1999, 1999–2004, 2004–2015, and 2015–2020. Another book chapter by Aktan and Koknar (2002) provides an extensive analysis of Turkish counterterrorism strategy, incorporating discussions on human rights, military tactics, intelligence, and international cooperation.

The counterterrorism policy of Türkiye ranging from hard to soft measures has also drawn scholarly attention. For instance, Aydınli and Özcan (2011) explore Turkish governmental initiatives to address the Kurdish question by employing conflict resolution and counterterrorism approaches; Pusane (2015), pointing out the same issue within the broader counterterrorism policy, reveals the difference between hard and soft approaches, and Türkiye's inability to use the latter; Ünal and Uludağ (2022) emphasize the ineffectiveness of deterrence politics unless complemented by long-term and visionary politics. In addition to that, the recently implemented policy by the government, known as the "peace process" between 2009 and 2015, has become a hot topic. There are decent pieces addressing the underlying reasons for the failure of the peace process. The weak role of intermediaries (Kadioğlu, 2019; Akgül and Akgül, 2022), lack of transparency (Ünal, 2016; Kadioğlu, 2019; Akgül and Akgül, 2022), mistrust among the parties (Savran, 2020), reluctance to end armed struggle only through political means (Kadioğlu, 2019), being a top-down elite-driven initiative, and ignoring the problems at the heart of the question, such as identity and structural inequalities (Baser and Ozerdem, 2021), can be listed as some of them.

Despite these contributions, there remains a notable gap in the English literature regarding comprehensive analyses of Türkiye's counterterrorism policies and strategies. This book aims to fill this void by illuminating Türkiye's efforts in combating terrorism. Representing a collaborative effort among various academic and practitioner authors, the book seeks to provide a

thorough overview of Turkish counterterrorism initiatives. By maintaining impartiality and incorporating diverse approaches to the field, the authors aspire not only to advance academic discourse but also to offer insights that may inform effective counterterrorism solutions.

The book seeks to delve into Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy against the PKK. It entails an examination of Türkiye's predominant strategies, policies, and practices in countering PKK terrorism within a historical framework. Adopting a comprehensive approach, the study will encompass various dimensions, including political, social, and economic strategies, alongside the utilization of military force, implementation of legal measures, and endeavors within the international arena.

However, the broad area of studying terrorism has some inherent challenges. In order to reflect its position, this chapter begins its analysis on definitional issues faced in terrorism studies, which is followed by the discussions on counterterrorism terminology. It, later, brings a historical snapshot of counterterrorism strategy of Türkiye against the PKK, and the chapter ends with the structure of the book.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES ON TERRORISM

The conceptual challenges are one of the significant issues faced in the academic discourse since terrorism has been subject to various definitions and analyses. Thornton (1964: 73), for instance, by characterizing terror as “a symbolic act designed to influence political behavior through unusual means involving the use of violence or the threat” thereof points out its political nature. Hoffman (2006: 2–3) delineated terrorism as the utilization of violence or the threat to accomplish political objectives. Similarly, Wilkinson (1979: 49) defines terrorism as “the systematic use of killing, destruction, or the threat of death to intimidate individuals, groups, society, and the government to impose political demands”. He distinguishes “terror” from “terrorism” by emphasizing that the former could be an isolated act but the latter a systematic and organized one.

The salient aspect underscored in various definitions of terrorism is the utilization of violence or the threat thereof. Eugene Victor Walter (1964: 248), Brian Jenkins (1977: 1), Richard Shultz (1978: 8), and Paul Wilkinson (1979: 49) all posit terrorism as the use of violence, or the threat of violence, aimed at effecting political change. Consequently, Thomas Patrick Thornton (1964: 73), Richard Shultz (1978: 8), Paul Wilkinson (2000: 19), Audrey Kurth Cronin (2003: 32–33), Louise Richardson (2006: 4), Bruce Hoffman (2006: 2–3), and Alex Peter Schmid (2011: 86) collectively suggest that terrorism constitutes a method employed to influence political behavior and attain political objectives, thereby emphasizing its inherently political nature. Schmid (2011: 86) states that, through an exhaustive analysis encompassing over 250 definitions of terrorism is “a special form of

political violence, a tactic or calculated effect that produces fear and targets mainly civilians and non-combatants” and also emphasizes that terrorism entails “acts of violence carried out for their psychological effects”.

The psychological effects engendered by terrorism aligning with violence and fear are the prominent outcomes of the campaign of terrorism. However, Jenkins (1977: 1) broadens this meaning, defining terrorism as the use of violence or its threat to attract attention and instill fear. The propagation effect and advertisement of the cause, which is mostly stated as “propaganda by deed” (Miller, 1995: 42), are inherent within terrorism campaigns. These violent acts can also be defined as the communication method of politically motivated armed groups when peaceful ways are inhibited (Crelinsten, 1987; Nacos, 1994). As such, terrorism is a complex phenomenon rooted in various underlying causes and motivations.

1.2 DIVERSE TERMINOLOGY IN COUNTERING TERRORISM

Various perspectives manifest in the articulation of concepts, and this diversity extends to the notions surrounding countering terrorism. One such concept is the “war on terrorism,” also known as the “war model,” which denotes the policy initiated by US President Bush’s administration following the September 11 terrorist attacks in response to terrorism (Reese and Lewis, 2009: 781). Given the flexible framework of the war on terrorism, moral legitimacy is conferred upon pre-emptive military actions by engendering a perception of “good versus evil” (Lewis and Reese, 2009: 86). A similar approach in the field of combating terrorism is the “fight against terrorism”. In the study titled “Ongoing Fight against Terrorism”, the counterterrorism policies of the US, the principle of the rule of law, international cooperation against countries supporting terrorism, and terrorists’ utilization of technology are examined under the rubric of the fight against terrorism (Bremer, 1989: 81–87).

Another concept within the realm of countering terrorism is “confronting terrorism”. Gendron (2010: 492–495) addresses security operations, intelligence activities, the capture and detention of terrorist suspects, the prosecution of terrorists, measures to combat radicalization, and the combating of terrorism financing within this framework. A similar approach emerges in the form of “response to terrorism”. In a study evaluating practices of countering terrorism in Italy, legal regulations, the implementation of states of emergency, establishment of private prison systems, regulations regarding law enforcement, intelligence service activities, and changes made in the political sphere are discussed under the umbrella of “response to terrorism” (Porta, 1992: 156–167).

These approaches invoke two perspectives of countering terrorism: defensive and offensive actions (Newsome, 2006: 75). The former refers to measures undertaken to protect critical infrastructure and maintain the regular way of life, while the latter implies counterattack missions aimed at

neutralizing the capability of terrorist organizations. Although each perspective emphasizes a distinctive aspect, both contribute to a holistic approach in countering terrorism.

While the terms “war on terrorism”, “fight against terrorism”, “confronting terrorism”, and “response to terrorism” may vary in expression, they fundamentally encapsulate methods aimed at countering terrorism. Similarly, terms like “defensive” and “offensive” actions, as well as “hard” and “soft” policies, align with the concept of countering terrorism, serving as alternative perspectives for the same objective. Counterterrorism is portrayed as a multifaceted strategy aimed at preventing and combating terrorism through a blend of political, legal, diplomatic, security, and economic measures. Therefore, this study prefers “countering terrorism” as an encompassing terminology covering all aspects of the issue.

The methods employed in countering terrorism can be broadly categorized into two approaches: soft and hard measures. Soft measures address the underlying causes that contribute to terrorism, while hard measures involve decisive, punitive actions that preclude negotiation (Crelinsten and Schmid, 1992: 309). While it is challenging to categorize all counterterrorism tools strictly into either category, each tool can be positioned along a spectrum ranging from soft to hard approaches.

In liberal democracies, governments are confronted with an “inescapable dilemma” that often oscillates between hard and soft counterterrorism measures. On the one hand, democratic states are bound by the rule of law, the protection of life and property, and the guarantee of citizens’ ability to live “normal” lives free from security threats. This is necessary to maintain their legitimacy and authority. Conversely, government agencies must exercise restraint to avoid disproportionate or excessive responses, which could inadvertently serve the interests of terrorist organizations by provoking further radicalization or violence (Wilkinson, 2006: 189). The counterterrorism policy of a government oscillates between under- and over-reaction (Maor, 2019).

Various tools are utilized in the pursuit of countering terrorism, encompassing legal prosecutions within the criminal justice system, financial surveillance targeting terrorist organizations and their backers, law enforcement operations, military interventions, diplomatic endeavors, and covert intelligence activities (Carter, 2017: 15). Crenshaw (1999: 2) classifies counterterrorism methods into deterrence, employing coercive measures by the state; the criminal justice system, emphasizing legal procedures; and defense and negotiation tactics. Alternatively, countering terrorism tools include elements such as political and socio-economic measures, the criminal justice system, diplomatic efforts, the use of the military, and intelligence operations (Demir, 2017: 131–146).

Given that terrorism is a form of political violence, it can be argued that one of the most significant responses to it involves political tools. These

typically entail addressing the root causes of terrorism, which terrorist organizations may exploit, by either eliminating or minimizing them. Measures may include engaging in dialogue with representatives of terrorist organizations and taking steps to bring the organization into a legal and peaceful framework, which are among the first that come to mind.

In the social dimension, counterterrorism tools aim to sever the terrorist organization's connection with society. The methods employed here aim to isolate the terrorist organization, rendering it a marginalized movement. Programs and initiatives aimed at "winning the hearts and minds" of the people should be considered within this context, as public support represents a critical resource that both state and non-state actors vie for.

The communication model, which integrates the political and social dimensions of counterterrorism strategy, seeks to shape desired perceptions among members of terrorist organizations, their sympathizers, and foreign supporters. A key message conveyed through this model is that terrorism is counterproductive, and alternative means are more effective in achieving their objectives. Counter-narratives that foster cross-cultural and inter-ethnic understanding are crucial in undermining terrorist propaganda and ideologies that propagate hatred and demonize specific groups as "enemies". An essential aspect of this approach is raising public awareness without exacerbating insecurity, apathy, intolerance, or hate (Crelinsten, 2020: 366–367).

Economic measures can be implemented to target both the population and the terrorist organization itself. While the connection between economic factors and terrorism remains debated, addressing grievances through economic measures is crucial for alleviating the grievances faced by the populace. Additionally, taking precautions to disrupt the financial sources of terrorism will help diminish the economic resources necessary for their survival.

The criminal justice system serves as a framework encompassing activities from defining crimes and identifying perpetrators to apprehension, incarceration, rehabilitation, and the reintegration of offenders back into society after serving their sentences. In modern societies and democracies, terrorism offenses are also addressed within this framework, with the criminal justice system recognized as a fundamental tool in combating terrorism. Within this context, measures taken to combat terrorism encompass improvements at any stage of the system.

The use of military force primarily involves the application of hard power, aiming to suppress the violent aspects of terrorism and deprive terrorist organizations of the initiative to carry out attacks. When terrorist activities within a country exceed the capabilities of law enforcement agencies, the use of military force may be considered. Similarly, in operations beyond national borders, military forces are often the primary security elements employed. While utilizing military forces plays a significant role in addressing the immediate need for response to societal concerns, it may give

rise to issues concerning domestic and international law, as well as the protection of human rights. Furthermore, a military-centric approach to counterterrorism can provoke backlash among the civilian population and fuel recruitment into terrorist groups (Silke, 2005; Rodgers, 2002). If military actions escalate into repression, they risk undermining the legitimacy of the government conducting the counterterrorism campaign, thereby negating the tactical advantages gained (Cronin, 2009).

The role of intelligence in counterterrorism has become a central topic in contemporary discourse. Intelligence serves counterterrorism efforts in two key capacities. First, it functions as a crucial support mechanism, enhancing other aspects of counterterrorism initiatives by providing critical data that informs strategic policies and offers vital tactical insights. In proactive counterterrorism strategies, intelligence thus becomes an indispensable tool (Gill and Phythian, 2012). Second, intelligence is employed by operational units within intelligence agencies to conduct covert operations aimed at individuals or infrastructure of significant importance. The efficacy of these intelligence activities has been further enhanced by advancements in communication and transportation technologies, thereby improving counterterrorism capabilities.

Diplomacy, in its broadest sense, encompasses efforts directed toward fostering international collaboration in the fight against terrorism. These efforts include measures aimed at cutting off the financial, human, or physical resources of terrorist organizations and designating these armed groups as terrorist entities. Given that sustained external support often contributes to the success of insurgent movements, the significance of diplomatic endeavors in isolating terrorist organizations within the international arena becomes more apparent.

It is now widely acknowledged that counterterrorism policy cannot be confined to a few discrete policy areas; rather, it must be coordinated across a broad spectrum of domains. This integrated strategy has been termed the “comprehensive”, “whole-of-government”, or “whole-of-nation” approach. A comprehensive approach engages multiple levels of governance and societal involvement, including subnational, national, international, and transnational actors, both state and non-state. Furthermore, the blurring of boundaries between “inside” and “outside”, domestic and foreign, as well as public and private spheres, adds to the complexity of effective coordination (Crelinsten, 2020: 363).

The field of counterterrorism is one in which policymakers must operate under conditions of “bounded rationality” rather than “comprehensive rationality”. In addition, they frequently contend with incomplete information and uncertainty regarding the potential consequences of their political decisions (Renard, 2021). However, it would be erroneous to view counterterrorism policy as a mere response to terrorism. Rather, it reflects broader domestic political processes, involving multiple governmental

agencies, overlapping lines of authority, parochialism, competition, and the varied interests of different actors and coalitions (Crenshaw, 2001). Furthermore, national counterterrorism policies are often informed by pre-existing approaches and past experiences with terrorism and other security challenges, which may have a significant impact on the efficacy of these policies (Renard, 2021). This phenomenon, known as “path dependency”, elucidates how historical approaches and prior policy decisions engender consistency and continuity in public policy choices (Pierson, 2000; Cairney, 2020: 82).

1.3 WHY THE PKK IS CONSIDERED A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION

A terrorist organization is legally defined as any entity that engages in the preparation, planning, or promotion of terrorist acts, as determined by a court or government regulations. Different countries and international bodies have varying definitions of terrorism, resulting in discrepancies in the classification of terrorist organizations. This lack of consensus often complicates international efforts to label and combat such groups.

In practice, many states define terrorist organizations either directly in their anti-terrorism legislation or through specific definitions of terrorist offences. In the case of Türkiye, the Anti-Terror Law Nr. 3713 (1991) provides a comprehensive definition of terrorism, describing it as any act by one or more individuals belonging to an organization that aims to change the constitutional characteristics of the state, undermine national unity, or endanger state security through violence, force, or intimidation. Crucially, the Turkish legal framework emphasizes the need for organizational structure when defining terrorism, meaning that an individual’s violent act is only classified as terrorism if it is connected to a recognized organization.

In this context, the PKK has been classified as a terrorist organization in Turkish law due to its longstanding violent acts, which aim to establish a separate Kurdish state through armed struggle. The Turkish Court of Cassation, for instance, has ruled that the PKK, under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan, is responsible for numerous attacks that have resulted in the deaths of civilians and security personnel. This legal recognition is based on the group’s use of violence, separatist agenda, and structured organization, all of which meet the criteria outlined in Turkish law (Yıldız, 2023).

Internationally, the PKK is also recognized as a terrorist organization by multiple countries and entities. The UK, under the Terrorism Act 2000, proscribed the PKK in 2001, citing its involvement in terrorism, preparation for attacks, and encouragement of terrorist activities (UK Government, 2024). Similarly, the US designated the PKK as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in 1997, under the provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act, recognizing its international threat (US Department of State, 2024).

The European Union also classified the PKK as a terrorist organization in 2004 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025), following its broader definition of terrorism as acts intended to intimidate populations or coerce governments.

The legal framework for classifying the PKK as a terrorist group varies slightly among these countries, but they all converge on key factors: the use of violence to achieve political goals, the presence of an organized structure, and the threat posed to national and international security. The designation of the PKK as a terrorist organization has had significant legal and political implications, both for Türkiye and for its international relationships, particularly with Western countries that have collaborated with Kurdish forces in the fight against ISIS.

In conclusion, the PKK's classification as a terrorist organization is not unique to Türkiye but is widely accepted internationally, based on its long history of violence, separatist ambitions, and structured operations.

1.4 COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY OF TÜRKİYE: AN INESCAPABLE DILEMMA

Türkiye stands as a significant exemplar in the realm of counterterrorism. Wrestling with insurgent movements since the end of the Ottoman Empire, Türkiye has, following the establishment of the republic, become a target for diversely motivated terrorist organizations, including those with leftist, rightist, religious, ethnic-separatist, and nationalist inclinations. Among these, the PKK has occupied a prominent position, having engaged in armed activities for approximately four decades, thereby dominating Türkiye's security agenda.

The PKK, established in 1978, is recognized as a terrorist organization by Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the United States. Since its founding, the PKK has perpetrated numerous attacks, targeting not only military installations but also civilians (Kirişçi and Windrow, 1997: 130). Operating from the Middle East, a region rife with security challenges and political turmoil, the PKK has managed to survive by exploiting the instability prevalent in the area (Özcan, 1999). Hence, it becomes imperative to scrutinize Türkiye's historical strategy in combating this organization and assess both its favorable and unfavorable aspects.

The counterterrorism policy of Türkiye against the PKK has oscillated between hard and soft measures since its inception in 1984, which has been referred to previously as "inescapable dilemma" (Wilkinson, 2006). This oscillation is primarily driven by several underlying factors, with one of the most significant being security perceptions among both the public and policymakers. These perceptions, deeply rooted in historical experiences and geopolitical realities, have long shaped Turkish strategy. A sense of survival and fear of foreign interference—particularly concerning separatist movements—continue to dominate security considerations (Altunışık,

2007). The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic left a lasting legacy that prioritized national unity, territorial integrity, and border security (Aydın and Ereker, 2014). Consequently, Turkish security policy has historically focused on state survival, national independence, and the protection of national unity. As a result, the threat posed by the PKK has been predominantly framed from a security perspective, and counterterrorism policies have largely been constructed around this paradigm.

It has been argued that Türkiye's counterterrorism policy can be categorized into three distinct periods (Pusane, 2014): a hard-line approach until 2002, followed by a conciliatory policy centered in the government but accompanied by intermittent hard measures after 2002, and a resurgence of a hard-line policy beginning in 2011. However, Ünal and Uludağ (2022, 779) emphasize a broader pattern rooted in two principal approaches: an iron-fist (enemy-centric) strategy from the PKK's emergence until 2000 and a combined iron-fist and motive-focused (population-centric) strategy thereafter.

Building upon these assessments, this study contends that the history of Türkiye's counterterrorism policy can be divided into three distinct periods: 1984–1999, 2000–2015, and 2015 to the present (Demir, 2025). Each period is characterized by the employment of distinct counterterrorism instruments, reflecting an evolution in strategy over time and corresponds to varying intensities of armed conflict. The first period, especially between 1993 and 1994, was marked by intense clashes. The second period witnessed a relatively stable and secure environment, during which initiatives such as the “peace process” and “negotiation” efforts were undertaken. The third and current period, which began with violent urban conflict, has been defined by successive cross-border operations, ultimately leading to a more secure and stable environment than observed during the previous two phases.

The first period, often referred to as a “predominantly hard-line policy”, spans from the emergence of the PKK to the capture of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan. During this phase, the focus was on aggressive measures aimed at suppressing PKK activities. For example, Martial Law was declared between 1978 and 1987, followed by the proclamation of a state of emergency in 1987, which lasted until 2002 (Demir, 2025). Additionally, some villages were evacuated for security reasons (Aktan and Koknar, 2002: 277). While military measures dominated this period, there were also attempts at covert dialogue between government officials and PKK representatives in the late 1980s (Kadıoğlu, 2019: 920).

In contrast, the second period can be characterized as a “predominantly soft-line policy” which was marked by conciliatory measures that prioritized dialogue and negotiation over the use of military force (Demir, 2025). It is notable that a number of restrictions were lifted in the 2000s. For instance,

broadcasting and publishing in Kurdish in public and private media were permitted as of September 2003. Furthermore, the state of emergency, known as OHAL, was terminated by 2002. Additionally, the death penalty was removed from the Turkish Criminal Code in 2002. The State Security Courts were abolished in 2004. The practice of forced evacuations was also brought to an end, and the “return-to-village” project was adopted in the early 2000s (Ünal and Uludağ, 2022; Pusane, 2014).

The most recent period marks a return to a hard-line approach, characterized by the resurgence of aggressive counterterrorism tactics. Following the collapse of the “peace process”, military operations began in several urban centers, including Nusaybin, Yüksekova, Sur, Silopi, Cizre, İdil, and Şırnak, which had transformed to be strongholds of the PKK during the late second phase (Demir, 2025). The failed coup attempt in July 2016 further intensified the use of hard measures. A state of emergency was declared in July 2016, lasting until July 2018. During this period, the Turkish government also notified its derogation from certain provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Erem, 2018). Additionally, due to the PKK’s control or influence over bordering territories, Türkiye launched cross-border operations to establish a defensive belt along its southern borders (Kardaş, 2021: 8).

Despite this return to a hard-line approach, the government has also introduced novel measures. For example, a new piece of legislation was adopted that introduced “terrorist wanted lists” comprising five categories—red, blue, green, orange, and gray. These lists offer financial rewards for individuals providing information leading to the capture of wanted terrorists. This was the first such initiative in Türkiye’s long-term counterterrorism policy. The lists are updated regularly and published online by the Ministry of Interior (Ministry of Interior, 2024).

Another notable development is the introduction of the “persuasion process”, a distinct counterterrorism strategy overseen by the Ministry of Interior. Established in 2016, these persuasion teams aim to encourage PKK members to surrender by motivating them to disengage from the organization (Ministry of Interior, 2022).

The Turkish counterterrorism policy exemplifies a notable oscillation between hard and soft measures. However, Türkiye is not unique in this regard; other European countries confronting ethno-nationalist terrorism, such as the UK and Spain, have similarly implemented policies that range from hard to soft approaches. During periods of escalating violence, governments tend to favor hard measures aimed at suppressing the military initiatives of terrorist organizations, both domestically and internationally. Yet, once a more stable environment is secured, dialogue channels are often opened to explore non-military solutions (Demir, 2017). The study will delve into the counterterrorism instruments employed throughout these

three periods, providing insights into the shifting strategies and approaches adopted by Türkiye in combating terrorism.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of Turkish counterterrorism strategy, with a particular focus on combating the PKK insurgency. This in-depth examination spans four decades of struggle, necessitating a multidimensional approach that encompasses various perspectives. These perspectives include political strategies, the role of the criminal justice system, economic measures, the utilization of military force, and the international implications of these measures. By exploring each of these dimensions, the study aims to offer a thorough understanding of Türkiye's multifaceted approach to countering terrorism, especially in the context of its ongoing battle against the PKK.

In this context, the book has been divided into three main parts, titled "Strategic Foundations for Countering the PKK", "Counterterrorism Operations and Security Capacity Enhancement", and "Emerging Threats and Evolving Countermeasures".

The first part, "Strategic Foundations for Countering the PKK", aims to demonstrate to readers that Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy against the PKK is not solely reliant on the use of force but also encompasses political, economic, social, and legal measures from a holistic perspective. This section addresses the national and international legal frameworks, the criminal justice model, and the broader comprehensive approach to countering the PKK.

- In the opening chapter, "A Holistic Perspective to Türkiye's Fight against PKK Terrorism", Dr. Öztürk poses two key questions: Does the comprehensive approach, as claimed, provide a roadmap for winning the war on terrorism? And, if so, where does Türkiye's fight against PKK terrorism fit within this framework?
- The second chapter, "Examining the Political, Economic, and Social Dimensions of Countering the PKK" by Dr. Begüm Çardak and Dr. Arman Sert, emphasizes that, alongside security approaches, it is essential to address underlying factors such as poverty, social inequality, social exclusion, and political discontent, which are believed to contribute to the emergence of terrorism.
- The third chapter, "Criminal Justice Model in Countering the PKK" by Dr. İlcut Taha Taşlı, analyzes the role of the criminal justice system in Türkiye's fight against the PKK, reviewing the Turkish Penal Code, Martial Law, Anti-Terror Law, State Security Courts Law, and other relevant frameworks.

- The fourth chapter, “The International Law Perspective in Countering the PKK” by Assoc. Prof. Burak Güneş and Murat Turpçu, examines Türkiye’s struggle against the PKK within both domestic and international legal contexts, focusing on the legal arguments deployed and their practical applications.

The second part of the book, “Counterterrorism Operations and Security Capacity Enhancement”, concentrates on the operational and technological aspects of Türkiye’s counterterrorism strategy.

- The fifth chapter, “Urban Terrorism Strategy of the PKK and Türkiye’s Fight against It” by Assoc. Prof. Mehmet Kurum, delves into why and when the PKK adopted an urban terrorism strategy, how it was executed, and how Turkish security forces responded.
- The sixth chapter, “A Legal and Operational Analysis of Türkiye’s Cross-Border Counterterrorism Operations against the PKK” by Assoc. Prof. Emrah Özdemir, examines Türkiye’s cross-border operations against the PKK and its affiliates after 2016 in terms of legitimacy, operational success, and geopolitical effects.
- The seventh chapter, “Developments in Turkish Defence/Security Technology and the Fight against the PKK” by Arda Mevlütoğlu, examines the transformative impact of technological innovation in the Turkish defence and security sectors on counterterrorism effectiveness.
- The eighth chapter, “The Role of Intelligence in Countering the PKK” by Prof. Cenker Korhan Demir and Elif Merve Dumankaya, highlights the pivotal role of intelligence operations in counterterrorism, noting how, after legal reforms in 2014, the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) emerged as the principal coordinating body for national and transnational intelligence efforts.

The third part, “Emerging Threats and Evolving Countermeasures”, addresses the PKK’s evolving tactics, including its involvement in organized crime, cyberspace activities, and its propaganda efforts, while analyzing new soft power initiatives.

- The ninth chapter, “Fighting against the PKK and Its Organized Crime Capabilities” by Dr. Haydar Karaman, examines the PKK’s shift toward organized criminal activities such as drug trafficking and extortion, and discusses strategies to counter these threats.
- The tenth chapter, “Combatting the PKK as a Cybersecurity Threat” by Dr. İlyas Fırat Cengiz and Assoc. Prof. Mehmet Emin Erendor, analyzes the PKK’s use of cyberspace for propaganda, recruitment,

and operational purposes, and explores countermeasures in the digital realm.

- The eleventh chapter, “Persuasion Processes as a De-Radicalization Strategy in Counterterrorism against the PKK” by Dr. Merve Önenli Güven, introduces the innovative persuasion processes developed in Türkiye to facilitate voluntary disengagement from the PKK, framing these processes within a theoretical and empirical context.
- The twelfth chapter, “Narrative in Combatting the PKK’s Propaganda” by Dr. Ferit Malkara, explores the PKK’s propaganda strategies and outlines approaches to building effective counter-narratives.

The book concludes with a critical evaluation of Türkiye’s security-oriented counterterrorism strategy and provides insights into future directions and emerging challenges in countering the PKK, while emphasizing the role of multidimensional approaches in achieving long-term success.

CONCLUSION

One of the principal aims of this study is to present a detailed analysis of the counterterrorism strategy employed by Türkiye, with particular attention paid to its security implications and historical context. While a substantial body of academic literature has examined various aspects of this topic, the lack of a comprehensive study in this context, coupled with the significance of recent developments in Turkish counterterrorism strategy, has motivated the creation of this book.

Despite the book’s attempt to encompass a comprehensive range of pertinent subjects, the constraints of both available data and word count have necessitated the exclusion of certain topics. Of particular note, crucial areas such as the financing of terrorism, radicalization, and the political economy of terrorism were omitted due to these limitations.

Consequently, this book examines the almost 40-year history of Türkiye’s fight against PKK terrorism. In doing so, it thoroughly analyzes a wide range of methods, including both hard and soft policies, as well as economic, social, and political tools, providing the reader with a comprehensive perspective for the first time. In particular, the more recent instruments employed in the third period of counterterrorism policy would provide a novel and comprehensive perspective on Turkish counterterrorism studies. By bringing together scholars and practitioners in the field, it claims to offer an authentic account of Türkiye’s counterterrorism strategy against the PKK.

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Turkish Penal Code No. 5237
Turkish Penal Code No. 765
Criminal Procedure Law No. 5271
Code of Criminal Procedure No. 1412
Law No. 6514 on Prevention of Financing of Terrorism
Law No. 6526 on Amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Law, Criminal Procedure Law and Certain Laws
Law No. 5190 on the Amendment of the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Abolition of State Security Courts
Martial Law No. 1402
Law No. 5275 on the Execution of Criminal and Security Measures
Law No. 6352 on the Amendment of Certain Laws with a view to the Efficiency of Judicial Services and the Postponement of Cases and Penalties Regarding Crimes Committed through the Press and Publications
Law No. 5235 on the Establishment, Duties and Powers of the Courts of First Instance and Regional Courts of Appeal
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