Centre for Economics
and Foreign Policy Studies

edam

New Trends in the Terror Threat to Turkey:

Improvised Explosive Devices and Suicide Bombings[1]

Executive Summary

Along with socio-political fault lines in the Middle East, for a long time, the region's armed conflict trends have been challenging Turkey's national security through a menacing spillover. In this regard, improvised explosive devices (IED) and suicide bombings have come into the picture due to several non-state armed groups' new tactics-techniques and procedures that plagued Turkey's threat landscape.

In this respect, both the separatist terrorism threat emanating from PKK, and the Salafist-Jihadist terrorism threat posed by the Islamic State (ISIS) have been intensifying their methods of IED attacks and suicide bombings. In this report, EDAM presents the following assessments for Turkish decision-makers' considerations:

- ✓ Statistically, it is not a new issue that IEDs remains a more menacing threat compared to other terrorist methods. Especially in the 2000s, lessons-learned from Iraq and Afghanistan have verified this assessment.
- ✓ Recently, IED-inflicted casualties have become a bitter reality for Turkey.

- ✓ In theory, non-state violent groups could show significant adaptation to the shifts in low intensity conflicts. Recently, PKK terrorist organization has been following such a pattern.

- ✓ Confronting IEDs necessitates close cooperation between military-homeland security-intelligence bodies of any given state. Especially, maintaining information superiority and better situational awareness over the adversary both at tactical and operational levels remains key to succeed in countering the IED threat.

- ✓ As noted above, ensuring inter-agency cooperation is a must in counter-IED efforts. In this respect, as IED technology could rely on commercially available materials and chemicals, related bodies and institutions that are not primarily tasked with national security issues, such as energy and agriculture ministries, should be involved in the counter-IED efforts. Furthermore, the aforementioned inter-agency cooperation should be translated into effective coordination through a joint counter-IED body.

- ✓ Monitoring uncontrolled conventional munitions and ordnance in the regional flow of arms is critical in counter-IED efforts. In this respect, it is seen that the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East has made it easier for non-state groups to access arms and conventional munitions. This dangerous trend has already dragged Turkey into a vulnerable security environment.

- ✓ Due to the aforementioned threats, this EDAM report recommends establishment of a joint counter-IED body that would foster broader interagency cooperation. Therefore, the incumbent counter-IED bodies under the Turkish General Staff and the Land Forces Command should be transformed into Turkey's joint counter-IED center.

- ✓ This EDAM report recommends running a rapid acquisitions program in order to provide more security and safety to the units in the high-risk counter-terrorism operations zone. Such a program should cover more mine resistant & ambush protected tactical armed vehicles as well as rotary-winged army aviation assets to foster convoy and deployment security. The Executive Committee of the Turkish Undersecretariat of Defense Industries will be responsible for such a rapid acquisitions program.

- ✓ Rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East has brought about a dangerous uptrend in suicide bombings. Besides, PKK also has a suicide bombing terrorist record.

- ✓ Although the literature on suicide bombers focused on perpetrators' profiles in the past, today's complex socio-political and socio-economic parameters made it extremely hard to conclude a crystal clear profiling for suicide bombing terrorists. On

the other hand, the contemporary literature on suicide bombings focuses on potential targets in terms of victim group – place – time correlations.

✓ Although suicide bombings technically depend on IEDs, they result from more complicated radicalization processes.

✓ Turkey has been recently facing with a suicide bombings threat emanating from interrelated, internal and external terror cells and networks.

✓ In order to counter internal suicide bombing terrorism Ankara should initiate a series of de-radicalization measures through socio-political and socio-economic policies.

✓ For addressing the external suicide bombing terrorist threat Ankara has to promote border security and its intelligence capabilities in monitoring suspected terror networks. These measures should be coupled with preventive operational capabilities.

✓ Following the terrorist attacks in Diyarbakir, Suruc, and recently Ankara, the aforementioned recommendations remain high priority measures for the Turkish policy-makers' considerations to address the imminent and open threat.