

Research Paper: ISIS-Turkey Links

By David L. Phillips

Introduction

Is Turkey collaborating with the Islamic State (ISIS)? Allegations range from military cooperation and weapons transfers to logistical support, financial assistance, and the provision of medical services. It is also alleged that Turkey turned a blind eye to ISIS attacks against Kobani.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu strongly deny complicity with ISIS. Erdogan visited the Council on Foreign Relations on September 22, 2014. He criticized “smear campaigns [and] attempts to distort perception about us.” Erdogan decried, “A systematic attack on Turkey’s international reputation, “complaining that “Turkey has been subject to very unjust and ill-intentioned news items from media organizations.” Erdogan posited: “My request from our friends in the United States is to make your assessment about Turkey by basing your information on objective sources.”

Columbia University’s Program on Peace-building and Rights assigned a team of researchers in the United States, Europe, and Turkey to examine Turkish and international media, assessing the credibility of allegations. This report draws on a variety of international sources — The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, The Daily Mail, BBC, Sky News, as well as Turkish sources, CNN Turk, Hurriyet Daily News, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, and Radikal among others.

Allegations

Turkey Provides Military Equipment to ISIS

- An ISIS commander told [The Washington Post](#) on August 12, 2014: “Most of the fighters who joined us in the beginning of the war came via Turkey, and so did our equipment and supplies.”
- Kemal Kiliçdaroglu, head of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), [produced a statement](#) from the Adana Office of the Prosecutor on October 14, 2014 maintaining that Turkey supplied weapons to terror groups. He also [produced interview transcripts](#) from truck drivers who delivered weapons to the groups. According to [Kiliçdaroglu](#), the Turkish government claims the trucks were for humanitarian aid to the Turkmen, but the Turkmen said no humanitarian aid was delivered.
- According to CHP Vice President Bulent Tezcan, [three trucks were stopped](#) in Adana for inspection on January 19, 2014. The trucks were loaded with weapons in Esenboga Airport in Ankara. The drivers drove the trucks to the border, where a MIT agent was supposed to take over and drive the trucks to Syria to deliver materials to ISIS and groups in Syria. This happened

many times. When the trucks were stopped, MIT agents tried to keep the inspectors from looking inside the crates. The inspectors found rockets, arms, and ammunitions.

- Cumhuriyet [reports](#) that Fuat Avni, a preeminent Twitter user who reported on the December 17th corruption probe, that audio tapes confirm that Turkey provided financial and military aid to terrorist groups associated with Al Qaeda on October 12, 2014. On the tapes, Erdogan pressured the Turkish Armed Forces to go to war with Syria. Erdogan demanded that Hakan Fidan, the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Agency (MIT), come up with a justification for attacking Syria.
- Hakan Fidan [told](#) Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, Yasar Guler, a senior defense official, and Feridun Sinirlioglu, a senior foreign affairs official: "If need be, I'll send 4 men into Syria. I'll formulate a reason to go to war by shooting 8 rockets into Turkey; I'll have them attack the Tomb of Suleiman Shah."
- Documents [surfaced](#) on September 19th, 2014 showing that the Saudi Emir Bender Bin Sultan financed the transportation of arms to ISIS through Turkey. A flight leaving Germany dropped off arms in the Etimesgut airport in Turkey, which was then split into three containers, two of which were given to ISIS and one to Gaza.

Turkey Provided Transport and Logistical Assistance to ISIS Fighters

- According to [Radikal](#) on June 13, 2014, Interior Minister Muammer Guler signed a directive: "According to our regional gains, we will help al-Nusra militants against the branch of PKK terrorist organization, the PYD, within our borders...Hatay is a strategic location for the mujahideen crossing from within our borders to Syria. Logistical support for Islamist groups will be increased, and their training, hospital care, and safe passage will mostly take place in Hatay...MIT and the Religious Affairs Directorate will coordinate the placement of fighters in public accommodations."
- The Daily Mail [reported](#) on August 25, 2014 that many foreign militants joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq after traveling through Turkey, but Turkey did not try to stop them. This article describes how foreign militants, especially from the UK, go to Syria and Iraq through the Turkish border. They call the border the "Gateway to Jihad." Turkish army soldiers either turn a blind eye and let them pass, or the jihadists pay the border guards as little as \$10 to facilitate their crossing.
- Britain's Sky News [obtained](#) documents showing that the Turkish government has stamped passports of foreign militants seeking to cross the Turkey border into Syria to join ISIS.
- The BBC [interviewed](#) villagers, who claim that buses travel at night, carrying jihadists to fight Kurdish forces in Syria and Iraq, not the Syrian Armed Forces.

- A senior Egyptian official [indicated](#) on October 9, 2014 that Turkish intelligence is passing satellite imagery and other data to ISIS.

Turkey Provided Training to ISIS Fighters

- CNN Turk reported on July 29, 2014 that in the heart of Istanbul, places like Duzce and Adapazari, have become gathering spots for terrorists. There are religious orders where ISIS militants are trained. Some of these training videos are posted on the Turkish ISIS propaganda website takvahaber.net. According to [CNN Turk](#), Turkish security forces could have stopped these developments if they had wanted to.
- Turks who joined an affiliate of ISIS were [recorded](#) at a public gathering in Istanbul, which took place on July 28, 2014.
- A video [shows](#) an ISIS affiliate holding a prayer/gathering in Omerli, a district of Istanbul. In response to the video, CHP Vice President, MP Tanrikulu submitted parliamentary questions to the Minister of the Interior, Efkani Ala, [asking questions](#) such as, “Is it true that a camp or camps have been allocated to an affiliate of ISIS in Istanbul? What is this affiliate? Who is it made up of? Is the rumor true that the same area allocated for the camp is also used for military exercises?”
- Kemal Kiliçdaroglu [warned](#) the AKP government not to provide money and training to terror groups on October 14, 2014. He [said](#), “It isn’t right for armed groups to be trained on Turkish soil. You bring foreign fighters to Turkey, put money in their pockets, guns in their hands, and you ask them to kill Muslims in Syria. We told them to stop helping ISIS. Ahmet Davutoglu asked us to show proof. Everyone knows that they’re helping ISIS.” (See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)
- According to Jordanian [intelligence](#), Turkey trained ISIS militants for special operations.

Turkey Offers Medical Care to ISIS Fighters

- An ISIS commander [told](#) the *Washington Post* on August 12, 2014, “We used to have some fighters — even high-level members of the Islamic State — getting treated in Turkish hospitals.”
- Taraf [reported](#) on October 12, 2014 that Dengir Mir Mehmet Fırat, a founder of the AKP, said that Turkey supported terrorist groups and still supports them and treats them in hospitals. “In order to weaken the developments in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), the government gave concessions and arms to extreme religious groups...the government was helping the wounded. The Minister of Health said something such as, it’s a human obligation to care for the ISIS wounded.”
- According to [Taraf](#), Ahmet El H, one of the top commanders at ISIS and Al Baghdadi’s right hand man, was treated at a hospital in Sanliurfa, Turkey, along with other ISIS militants. The Turkish state paid for their treatment. According to Taraf’s sources, ISIS militants are being

treated in hospitals all across southeastern Turkey. More and more militants have been coming in to be treated since the start of airstrikes in August. To be more specific, eight ISIS militants were transported through the Sanliurfa border crossing; these are their names: “Mustafa A., Yusuf El R., Mustafa H., Halil El M., Muhammet El H., Ahmet El S., Hasan H., [and] Salim El D.”

Turkey Supports ISIS Financially Through Purchase of Oil

- On September 13, 2014, *The New York Times* [reported](#) on the Obama administration’s efforts to pressure Turkey to crack down on ISIS extensive sales network for oil. James Phillips, a senior fellow at the Heritage Foundation, argues that Turkey has not fully cracked down on ISIS’s sales network because it benefits from a lower price for oil, and that there might even be Turks and government officials who benefit from the trade.
- Fehim Taştekin wrote in Radikal on September 13, 2014 about illegal pipelines transporting oil from Syria to nearby border towns in Turkey. The oil is sold for as little as 1.25 liras per liter. Taştekin [indicated](#) that many of these illegal pipelines were dismantled after operating for 3 years, once his article was published.
- According to Diken and OdaTV, David Cohen, a Justice Department official, [says](#) that there are Turkish individuals acting as middlemen to help sell ISIS’s [oil](#) through Turkey.
- On October 14, 2014, a German Parliamentarian from the Green Party [accused](#) Turkey of allowing the transportation of arms to ISIS over its territory, as well as the sale of oil.

Turkey Assists ISIS Recruitment

- Kemal Kiliçdaroğlu [claimed](#) on October 14, 2014 that ISIS offices in Istanbul and Gaziantep are used to recruit fighters. On October 10, 2014, the mufti of Konya said that 100 people from Konya joined ISIS 4 days ago. (See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)
- OdaTV [reports](#) that Takva Haber serves as a propaganda outlet for ISIS to recruit Turkish-speaking individuals in Turkey and Germany. The address where this propaganda website is registered corresponds to the address of a school called Irfan Koleji, which was established by Ilim Yayma Vakfi, a foundation that was created by Erdogan and Davutoglu, among others. It is thus claimed that the propaganda site is operated from the school of the foundation started by AKP members.
- Minister of Sports, Suat Kilic, an AKP member, visited Salafi jihadists who are ISIS supporters in Germany. The [group](#) is known for reaching out to supporters via free Quran distributions and raising funds to sponsor suicide attacks in Syria and Iraq by raising money.
- OdaTV [released](#) a video allegedly showing ISIS militants riding a bus in Istanbul.

Turkish Forces Are Fighting Alongside ISIS

- On October 7, 2014, IBDA-C, a militant Islamic organization in Turkey, pledged support to ISIS. A Turkish friend who is a commander in ISIS suggests that Turkey is “involved in all of this” and that “10,000 ISIS members will come to Turkey.” A Huda-Par member at the meeting claims that officials criticize ISIS but in fact sympathize with the group (Huda-Par, the “Free Cause Party”, is a Kurdish Sunni fundamentalist political party). BBP member claims that National Action Party (MHP) officials are close to embracing ISIS. In the meeting, it is asserted that ISIS militants come to Turkey frequently to rest, as though they are taking a break from military service. They claim that Turkey will experience an Islamic revolution, and Turks should be ready for jihad. (See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)

- Seymour Hersh maintains in the [London Review of Books](#) that ISIS conducted sarin attacks in Syria, and that Turkey was informed. “For months there had been acute concern among senior military leaders and the intelligence community about the role in the war of Syria’s neighbors, especially Turkey. Prime Minister Recep Erdogan was known to be supporting the al-Nusra Front, a jihadist faction among the rebel opposition, as well as other Islamist rebel groups. ‘We knew there were some in the Turkish government,’ a former senior US intelligence official, who has access to current intelligence, told me, ‘who believed they could get Assad’s nuts in a vice by dabbling with a sarin attack inside Syria - and forcing Obama to make good on his red line threat.’”

- On September 20, 2014, Demir Celik, a Member of Parliament with the people’s democratic party (HDP) [claimed](#) that Turkish Special Forces fight with ISIS.

Turkey Helped ISIS in Battle for Kobani

- Anwar Moslem, Mayor of Kobani, said on September 19, 2014: “Based on the intelligence we got two days before the breakout of the current war, trains full of forces and ammunition, which were passing by north of Kobane, had an-hour-and-ten-to-twenty-minute-long stops in these villages: Salib Qaran, Gire Sor, Moshrefat Ezzo. There are evidences, witnesses, and videos about this. Why is ISIS strong only in Kobane’s east? Why is it not strong either in its south or west? Since these trains stopped in villages located in the east of Kobane, we guess they had brought ammunition and additional force for the ISIS.” In the second article on September 30, 2014, a CHP delegation visited Kobani, where locals claimed that everything from the clothes ISIS militants wear to their guns comes from Turkey. (See [HERE](#) and [HERE](#).)

- Released by Nuhaber, [a video shows](#) Turkish military convoys carrying tanks and ammunition moving freely under ISIS flags in the Cerablus region and Karkamis border crossing (September 25, 2014). There are writings in Turkish on the trucks.

- Salih Muslim, PYD head, [claims](#) that 120 militants crossed into Syria from Turkey between October 20th and 24th, 2014.

- According to an op-ed [written](#) by a YPG commander in *The New York Times* on October 29, 2014, Turkey allows ISIS militants and their equipment to pass freely over the border.
- Diken [reported](#), “ISIS fighters crossed the border from Turkey into Syria, over the Turkish train tracks that delineate the border, in full view of Turkish soldiers. They were met there by PYD fighters and stopped.”
- A Kurdish commander in Kobani [claims](#) that ISIS militants have Turkish entry stamps on their passports.
- Kurds trying to join the battle in Kobani are [turned away](#) by Turkish police at the Turkey-Syrian border.
- OdaTV [released](#) a photograph of a Turkish soldier befriending ISIS militants.

Turkey and ISIS Share a Worldview

- RT [reports](#) on Vice President Joe Biden’s remarks detailing Turkish support to ISIS.
- [According](#) to the *Hurriyet Daily News* on September 26, 2014, “The feelings of the AKP’s heavyweights are not limited to Ankara. I was shocked to hear words of admiration for ISIL from some high-level civil servants even in Şanlıurfa. ‘They are like us, fighting against seven great powers in the War of Independence,’ one said.” “Rather than the [Kurdistan Workers’ Party] PKK on the other side, I would rather have ISIL as a neighbor,” said another.”
- Cengiz Candar, a well-respected Turkish journalist, [maintained](#) that MIT helped “midwife” the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria, as well as other Jihadi groups.
- An AKP council member [posted](#) on his Facebook page: “Thankfully ISIS exists... May you never run out of ammunition...”
- A Turkish Social Security Institution supervisor [uses](#) the ISIS logo in internal correspondences.
- Bilal Erdogan and Turkish officials meet alleged ISIS fighters.