

Jerusalem issue brief



Vol. 15, No. 22 July 14, 2015

Egypt Accuses Turkey of Subversion

Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah

- The Egyptian military revealed on July 8, 2015, that it had captured Turkish intelligence officers who were actively involved in the guerrilla war waged by the Islamic State in Sinai and inside Egypt itself against the Sisi regime.
- The Turkish National Intelligence Organization (NIO) operatives named included Col. Ismail Aly Bal (described as a coordinator of battlefield operations), Daa al-Din Mehmet Gado, Bakoush al-Husseyini Youzmi and Abdallah al-Turki.
- On July 12, the Egyptian military spokesman announced the uncovering of a "terrorist cell" whose instructions were given by the Muslim Brotherhood headquartered in Turkey and whose mission was to destabilize Egypt.
- If the facts revealed by the Egyptian military are correct, this would dramatically confirm the links between the Turkish regime and the Islamic State militants, as well as with other *jihadist* groups fighting in Syria and Iraq.
- Israeli military intelligence said that Turkey allowed the establishment of at least three training camps for *jihadists* on its territory bordering Syria and Iraq under the supervision and guidance of Turkish intelligence.
- Turkey and Egypt have been at loggerheads since President Mohammed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood was ousted by Field Marshall Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in what Turkey considered a "coup d'tat." Part of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership found refuge in Turkey.

A further escalation occurred in the already over-strained relations between Turkey and Egypt when the Egyptian military revealed on July 8, 2015, that it had captured Turkish intelligence officers who were actively involved in the guerrilla war waged by the Islamic State in Sinai and inside Egypt itself against the Sisi regime.



Men captured in Sinai (*Egypt Daily News*)

The Egyptian website Egypt Daily News¹ provided the names of Ismail Aly Bal (described as a colonel in the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (NIO) and coordinator of battlefield operations), Diaa al-Din Mehmet Gado, Bakoush al-Husseyni Youzmi and Abdallah al-Turki -- also NIO operatives -- without any further comment by the Egyptian military on the Turkish role.

The only comment in the statement said that the names published leave no doubt of foreign involvement in the latest attacks in Sinai against the Egyptian Armed Forces. The statement also mentioned the fact that Kornet anti-tank missiles fired during the confrontations against the Egyptian army originated from Iraq, Lebanon and Syria, "which leaves now no doubt again of the countries and terrorist groups involved in the fighting against Egypt."² However, the statement stopped short of pointing a finger at Turkey, leaving, so it seems, the interpretation of the Turkish involvement to the reader.

Adding fuel to the flames, on July 12, the Egyptian military spokesman announced the uncovering of a "terrorist cell" whose instructions were given by the Muslim Brotherhood headquartered in Turkey and whose mission was to destabilize Egypt.³

Assuming the facts revealed by the Egyptian military are correct, this would dramatically confirm the often-denied fact by Turkish officials of the existing links between the Turkish regime and the Islamic State militants, as well as with other jihadist groups fighting in Syria and Iraq. Turkey has been accused of assisting the jihadists by facilitating fighters' border crossings to Syria and Iraq. Turkey has been tolerating jihadists' presence in Antakya wearing garments of the Islamic State, while some travelers to Istanbul reported seeing artifacts looted by the Islamic State on sale there.

Israel's military intelligence chief claimed that Turkey allowed, under the supervision and guidance of Turkish intelligence, the establishment of at least three training camps for the jihadists on its territory bordering Syria and Iraq; some sources indicated that Turkey had adopted a jihadist organization and trained it on an exclusive basis in order to fight the Assad regime. The Kurds have lately accused the

Turks of letting Islamic State fighters penetrate the Kobani defenses in northern Syria from the rear by letting the jihadists cross the border from Turkey and attack the Kurds from behind.⁴

However, unlike the rumors about Turkey's role in Syria and Iraq, the case in Egypt is different: Turkey and Egypt have been at loggerheads since President Mohammed Morsi, the faithful offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood, was ousted by Field Marshall Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Turkey, which had applauded the ascent of the Muslim Brotherhood to power, considered Sisi's move against Morsi as a "coup d'état" and qualified his regime as illegitimate.



Turkey's Erdogan (right) with former Egyptian President Morsi

Egyptian media have been adamantly critical of Turkey's diplomatic efforts against Egypt, pointing to the fact that part of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership found refuge in Turkey, from where it held hostile agendas meant to destabilize the Sisi regime.⁵

Since then, the two states have been waging a diplomatic war against each other, trading insults while drastically downgrading their diplomatic representations with the withdrawal/expulsion on November 23, 2013 of their respective ambassadors. Turkey consistently tried to isolate Sisi and his government from the international community using every forum possible, according to the *Middle East Eye*.⁶ In August 2013 Turkey asked the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on Egypt. Pope Francis had to listen to a lengthy lecture given to him by Erdogan telling him he should not have received Sisi because it boosted the Egyptian leader's international legitimacy.

Erdogan went as far as claiming in August 2013 that he had evidence proving Israel's involvement in the removal of President Morsi from power.⁷ In February 2015, following the Giza Criminal Court's sentencing of 183 defendants "to death on charges related to the deadly violence which broke out in the town of Kerdasa in August 2013,"⁸ Egypt submitted an official complaint to the Turkish Foreign Ministry accusing Turkey of facilitating the airing of "channels inciting terror."⁹

Bearing this in mind, and assuming that the facts reported by the military spokesman are correct, this could mean the two countries have reached an unprecedented degree of hostility. This would be the first time Turkey would have ever engaged

actively in efforts to destabilize and even topple the Sisi regime, going beyond the criticism of the Egyptian regime as unlawful and Turkey's Erdogan denouncing Sisi as an "illegitimate tyrant."

What are the implications of such a new reality?

a. Diminishing Turkey's role in the Middle East: Since the ousting of President Morsi, the *Middle East Eye* points out, Turkey has been isolated from other Arab leaders while "diplomatic exchanges virtually dried up in 2014, suggesting that Turkey, instead of fulfilling its ambition to be a leader of the Arab world," is left with almost no contacts, "particularly [with] the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia."¹⁰

b. The crisis in Turkish-Egyptian relations has had serious costs in the increased cooperation between Egypt and the Greek Cypriot government in Cyprus "over prospecting for oil and natural gas in the seabed of the eastern Mediterranean and setting up new transit routes and pipelines."¹¹

c. Being involved in subversive activities in Egypt while being accused as a sponsor and active assistant of the Islamic State and other jihadist organizations could have dire implications for Turkey's relations with the U.S. administration and in the U.S. Congress. Even if President Sisi's regime is not exactly what the U.S. administration would have wanted to see in Egypt, still, Sisi cannot be compared in any way to the Assad regime in Syria, and no justification exists to accept Turkish- IS cooperation in waging terrorist acts against civilian and military targets in Sinai and inside Egypt.

* * *

Notes

1 <http://www.egyptdailynews.com/news%20edn%208july%20Egypt%20captured%20foreigners.htm>

2 <http://www.egyptdailynews.com/news%20edn%208july%20Egypt%20captured%20foreigners.htm>

3 <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2015/7/11/قسريا-مختفون-المتهمون-خلية-اعتقال-مصر-تعلن>

4 <http://www.kurdishquestion.com/index.php/kurdistan/west-kurdistan/turkey-is-fond-of-the-black-flag/998-turkey-is-fond-of-the-black-flag.html>;

Personal testimony: "...from experience of crossing the Iraq Turkish border thrice, that if you are a jihadi, Turkey does not care and keeps the door open for you. They have two guards playing candy crush never looking at the metal detector and passport agents who need not see your face when you enter. Everyone smuggles. They love IS and aid them however possible..."

...According to Israel's military intelligence chief in January 2014, al-Qa`ida-linked groups allegedly have at least three bases in Turkey. A report in *al-Monitor* suggested that prior to 2013 fighters were thought to stay at specific hotels, such as the Ottoman and Narin hotels in the Turkish city of Antakya. In July 2012, a six-minute video titled *Turkish Mujahidin Who Are Conducting Jihad in Syria*, released by a Syrian opposition organization, showed a group of fighters apparently located in Syria speaking in Turkish and calling for Muslims to fight Syrian government forces.<https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/a-deeper-look-at-syria-related-jihadist-activity-in-turkey>

5 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/11/turkey-egypt-relations.html>

6 David Barchard, *Middle East Eye*, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/there-thaw-turkish-egyptian-relations-39146413>

7 <http://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-accuses-israel-of-engineering-egyptian-coup/>

8 Ibid.

9 <http://www.madamasr.com/news/egypt-accuses-turkey-allowing-tv-channels-ignite-terrorism>

10 <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/there-thaw-turkish-egyptian-relations-39146413>

11 Ibid.

* * *

Col. (ret.) Dr. Jacques Neriah, a special analyst for the Middle East at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, was formerly Foreign Policy Advisor to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Deputy Head for Assessment of Israeli Military Intelligence.

**This *Jerusalem Issue Brief* is available online at:
<http://www.jcpa.org>**

Dore Gold, Publisher; Alan Baker, ICA Director; Lenny Ben-David, Managing Editor. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (Registered Amuta), 13 Tel-Hai St., Jerusalem, Israel; Tel. 972-2-561-9281, Fax. 972-2-561-9112, Email: jcpa@netvision.net.il. In U.S.A.: Center for Jewish Community Studies, 7 Church Lane, Suite 9, Baltimore, MD 21208; Tel. 410-653-7779; Fax 410-653-8889. Website: www.jcpa.org. © Copyright. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Fellows of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

**The Institute for Contemporary Affairs (ICA) is dedicated
to providing a forum for Israeli policy discussion and debate.**

To subscribe to the Jerusalem Issue Brief list, please go to link:
<http://www.list-jcpa.org/brief-sub.html>

To unsubscribe from the Jerusalem Issue Brief list, go to link:
<http://www.list-jcpa.org/mail-brief/forms/optoutform.asp>
