

Turkey Overview January 2019

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Glossary

AOG	Armed Opposition Group
GoR	Government of Russia
GoS	Government of Syria
GoT	Government of Turkey
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (alliance of 'extreme' AOGs, notably Jabhat al-Nusra)
KSA	Kurdish Self-Administration
NLF	National Liberation Front
SDF	Syrian Democratic Force (mostly made up of and led by YPG forces, approximately 10% are from Arab tribes)
YPG	Peoples Protection Unit

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Locations	Risk Level	Comment	Forecast
Turkey except for those areas specified below	Low	<i>The number of terrorist incidents, especially those targeting civilians and internationals have reduced significantly over the last 2 years. Post-coup policing has been very effective in eliminating terrorist and militant activity.</i>	<i>Risk levels are expected to remain low. However, due to the political sensitivity in the country, visitors should refrain from openly criticising the government.</i>
With-in 5km of Syrian border	High	<i>Tensions are particularly high on the border with Syrian territory controlled by the Kurdish Self-Administration. GoT forces regularly shoot small and heavy weapons across the border at YPG targets and in recent weeks Turkey has built up its regular and irregular forces on the border.</i>	<i>Tensions on the border with the Kurdish Self-Administration will remain high & could increase should Turkey launch an offensive into the Kurdish region. On the border with areas controlled by Turkey & its aligned AOG, risk levels may reduce in the medium term as Turkey reinforces its control over the region it occupies in northwest Syria.</i>
Turkey South East: Sirnak, Hakkari, Diyarbakir, Van, Batman, Siirt, Bitlis	High	<i>Even though the threats in these areas are indirect, there are numerous Police/military checkpoints and often curfews. Visitors will raise suspicion with the authorities and visits must only be made if essential. There are few independent media reports from the region, most are from the government-controlled media.</i>	<i>PKK attacks and anti-PKK operations by the police & military will remain high. The risk-level is expected to remain high and may increase in some areas should the GoT launch an offensive against the Kurdish Self-Administration in Syria.</i>

1. Domestic News

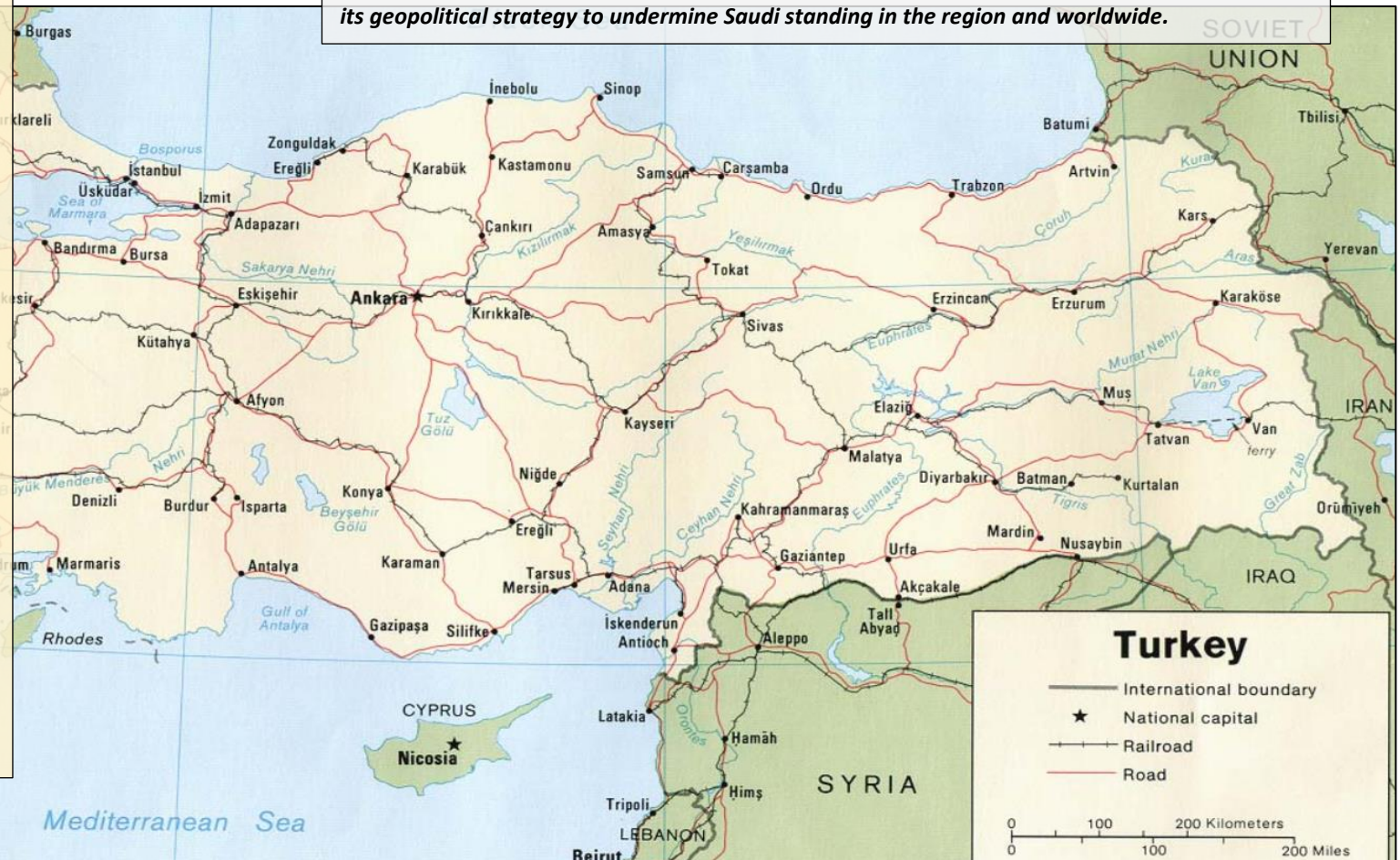
LOCAL ELECTIONS

Municipal elections take place across Turkey on 31 Mar 2019. The local elections are being viewed by all political parties as more significant than usual. All see the vote as the first electoral test of the new executive presidency system and President Erdogan's current political standing. Turkey is currently experiencing economic turmoil, a 2 ½ year purge, a war in north Syria, degrading relations with the US and EU, and hosting 3.5 million Syrian refugees. In a recent opinion poll by Potsdam Institute for Applied Research, the economy, unemployment and Syrians were the three top answers that respondents gave when asked what they saw as "Turkey's most important problem." When asked who they would vote for, Erdogan's party, AKP, got only 35% of respondents — a drop from the 42.56% vote it received in the 2018 elections.

Comment: A poor result for Erdogan's AKP party, especially in Istanbul and Ankara, could initiate calls for an early general election. However, because of the oppressive political climate in Turkey, commentators are questioning if the election will be fair and the opposition are already accusing the Government of planning election fraud to ensure victories for the AKP.

THE ASSASSINATION OF JAMAL KHASHOGGI

An investigation into the murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi was recently started by Dr. Agnes Callamard, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Summary or Arbitrary Executions, and is due to finish in early February. Callamard is joined by Helena Kennedy, a top British lawyer and Member of the House of Lords, and Duarte Nuno Vieira, a forensic scientist and professor at Portugal's University of Coimbra. On completion a report will be presented to the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, who will decide on any future actions by the UN. *Comment: The GoT is contesting with the Saudi Arabian regime for the lead Sunni influencer in the region. Turkey will push for a criminal investigation under the UN Security Council as part of its geopolitical strategy to undermine Saudi standing in the region and worldwide.*



2. Turkey's Involvement in Syria and Iraq

DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH SYRIA

Turkey involvement in Syria and its attempts to take an international lead in resolving the Syrian war took several blows in Dec 2018 and Jan 2019. In Idlib, rural west Aleppo and north Homs, the Turkey backed AOG National Liberation Front (NLF) were roundly beaten by the militant AOG Hay'at Tahrir al Sham (HTS). After 12 days of fighting HTS controlled nearly 70% of the opposition enclave and all the major highways and crossings. HTS are an alliance of 'extreme' AOGs, notably Jabhat al-Nusra, and are not part of the agreement that created a demilitarization zone around the opposition enclave. Part of the agreement was that Turkey would disband HTS which they have evidently failed to do.

The demilitarization zone is no longer in effect, although the Turkish military still maintain 15 observation posts in it. A new GoS offensive, with Russian support, on the enclave is increasingly likely. An offensive and the resulting displacement of refugees over the border to Turkey, is what Turkey was hoping to avoid.

However, this concern seems to be taking second place to the GoT's own desire to conduct a military offensive into northeast Syria against the Kurdish YPG and Self-Administration. Having had their hope raised in Dec 2018 that this would be possible when US President Trump announced troop withdrawals from the region, only for the announcement to be all but retracted by the US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor.

Comment: Turkey's President Erdogan finds himself in a difficult position concerning Syria, made worse by important local elections at the end of March. He needs a way-out that will allow him to save face and not damage his parties standing in the elections. Two months Erdogan warned of an imminent military operation into the northeast of Syria against the Kurds, but it looks less likely to happen now than it did then. On 23 Jan Erdogan met with Russia's President Putin; its reasonably assumed Erdogan was hoping Putin would give him a way-out. However, it's reported Putin was more concerned about the HTS situation in Idlib and only gave a partial solution to Erdogan's northeast Syria dilemma – the 1998 bilateral anti-terror protocol between Turkey and Syria. A way-out may still come from the US with Trump's proposal of 35 km 'safe zone' on Syria's border with Turkey. If this does develop it is Putin who will lose-out because the US will maintain a presence in the region and Turkey's geopolitical move from the west to the east will have stopped.

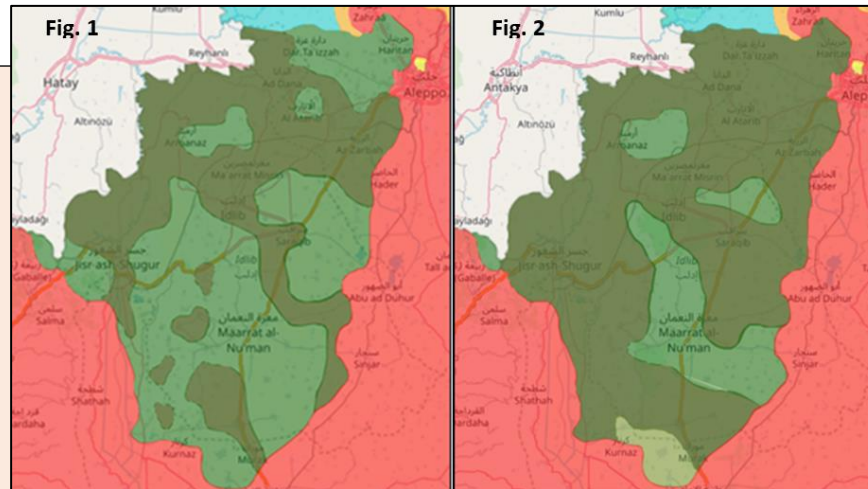


Fig.1 – Approx. HTS and NLF positions prior to 28 Dec 2018 HTS offensive.

Fig. 2 – Approx. positions on 10 Jan 2019.

● HTS
● NLF affiliated AOGs

THE PUTIN AND ERDOGAN MEETING

On 23 Jan 2019 Presidents Putin and Erdogan met in Moscow. Syria was reportedly top of their agenda with Putin concerned about the HTS success in the Idlib opposition enclave. Erdogan was more concerned about northeast Syria and his hope to launch an offensive against the YPG and Kurdish Self-Administration there. Little is reported on what was said about Turkey's failure to control HTS in Idlib, but in a statement concerning northeast Syria Putin did stress the 1998 bilateral anti-terror agreement between Turkey and Syria was still valid – this allows Turkey to conduct cross-border counter-terrorism operations in coordination with the Syrian military. In subsequent statements by Turkey's Foreign Minister it seems the GoT believes Putin is implying Turkey's military can intervene in northeast Syria. However, there is nothing to suggest the Russians will allow Turkey's air force to use Syrian airspace to support a ground offensive. *Comment: If Turkey's military is to be successful in the offensive, they need air support. Putin's use of the 1998 anti-terror agreement is a clever move; for Turkey to take full advantage of it they must liaise and coordinate with the GoS. Turkey has had little official contact with the Syrian regime since the start of the 8 years civil war. Putin is evidently trying to push the GoT into officially talks with GoS.*

VIOLENT PROTESTS AGAINST TURKEY'S AIRSTRIKES IN NORTH IRAQ

In 2018, Turkey's military conducted approx. 350 airstrikes against PKK targets in the mountainous areas of north and northeast Iraq. This level of activity continued in to 2019, but 3 airstrikes in Jan resulted in 7 civilian deaths and 2 civilians are missing. The civilians were fishing or bee keeping at the time and 5 were, reportedly, members of the KRG security forces.

On 26 Jan locals protested about the deaths and marched on a Turkish military post in Shiladze Town, north Dohuk Governorate, Iraq. The protest turned violent and protestors broke-in to the military compound burning several vehicles and buildings. In attempts to disperse the crowd Turkish soldiers fired weapons in the air, but killed 2 protestors. Whilst Iraq's central government condemned the Turkish military for the killing of protestors, the KRG blamed the PKK for the incidents.

3. Relations Between Turkey and the U.S.A.

WORSENING RELATIONS

Relations between the governments of Turkey and the U.S. continued to be up and down, but mostly down. Contradictory messages from the Whitehouse over the US troop pullout from northeast Syria is currently the main driver. US President Trump announced in Dec 2018 that US troops would be pulled-out in a month, but this was later changed to a longer gradual withdrawal by the US Secretary of State and National Security Advisor. The US National Security Advisor, John Bolton, went further whilst on a tour of the Middle East, and stated that Turkey must guarantee it won't attack "Kurdish fighters," referring to the YPG. Subsequently in January when Bolton visited Turkey for a meeting with President Erdogan, Erdogan snubbed Bolton by not attending and subsequently criticised him in a speech. Divisive rhetoric by both governments then followed. Another reversal came on 14 Jan 2019 after a phone meeting between Trump and Erdogan. Reportedly, Trump reaffirmed US troops would pull-out and discussed the establishment of a Turkey/US run 35-km-deep 'Safe Zone' in Syrian on the border with Turkey.

Additional issues that might add to the worsening relations between the two governments are:

- Washington is threatening action against Turkey should it break US sanctions on Venezuela. Three months ago, Washington introduced new sanctions aimed at disrupting gold sales from Venezuela. Venezuela exported more than 23 tons of gold, worth \$900 million, to Turkey in 2018 compared to zero the year before. President Erdogan has also stood by the Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro, whilst the US is publicly backing the opposition leader Juan Guaido.
- Several Turkish nationals who are US Government employees have been arrested by Turkish authorities. A translator for the U.S. Consulate in Adana was convicted of aiding terror groups and sentenced to 4½ years in prison. Another employee is under house arrest and a Turkish-American NASA engineer, is in prison. More recently a DEA employee of the U.S. Consulate in Istanbul is set to go on trial in March on charges of espionage and attempting to overthrow the Turkish government.
- US inaction on the murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi.

OPTIONS FOR A JOINT US-TURKEY SAFE ZONE

Reportedly talks between the US and GoT are ongoing on how to implement a Safe Zone on Syria's border with Turkey east of the Euphrates. The aim of the Safe Zone will be to protect the Kurdish Self-Administration from an offensive by Turkey's military, and to reassure the GoT that their southern border is secure and the YPG are not assisting PKK activity in Turkey. The US are pushing several options on how the Safe Zone could be implemented:

- YPG forces withdrawal from the designated Safe Zone that will be 35 to 40 km deep.
- Patrolling by Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army groups and some Sunni tribal units in areas where Kurds are not in the majority.
- Turkish troops will be in joint patrols with French or British forces. Turkish soldiers will not operate independently or in town/city centres.
- Using the Rojava Peshmerga to patrol parts of the Safe Zone. The Rojava Peshmerga are a 6,000 strong force based in north Iraq and allied to the Kurdish National Council (KNC) – the main opposition party to the PYD in northeast Syria. They are also closely linked to the leading Iraqi Kurdish party, KDP, who have close relations with the GoT.

Comment: Despite Erdogan's threats and rhetoric, a military incursion into northeast Syria is unlikely to succeed without air support, and for that he needs Russia and US approval. Time is not on Erdogan's side; the Kurdish Self-Administration is in talks with the GoS about the return of the Syrian army to the border. Another option for Erdogan is to enter into talks with the Syrian regime for joint border operations; this is an option being pushed by Russian President Putin and his suggestion to revitalise the 1998 bilateral anti-terror agreement.

4. Humanitarian Situation

OVERVIEW – FACTS & FIGURES

Majority of refugees & immigrants in Turkey are Syrians, Afghanis, Pakistani and Iraqis.

Number of Refugees & Immigrants: **Over 4 Million**

Total number of Registered Syrians: 3,640,466

Number of Syrians in Camps: 142,803

Number of Syrians Out of Camps: 3,497,663

Total number of Resettled Syrians to 3rd Countries (2014-2018): 14,915

Total number of Syrians Who Left Turkey in the Scope of One to One Policy: 18,438

4 Major Cities that Syrian Refugee population Highest:

1. Istanbul: 558,196
2. Şanlıurfa: 452,746
3. Hatay: 447,406
4. Gaziantep: 425,802

Total number of Irregular Migrants (2018): 265,169

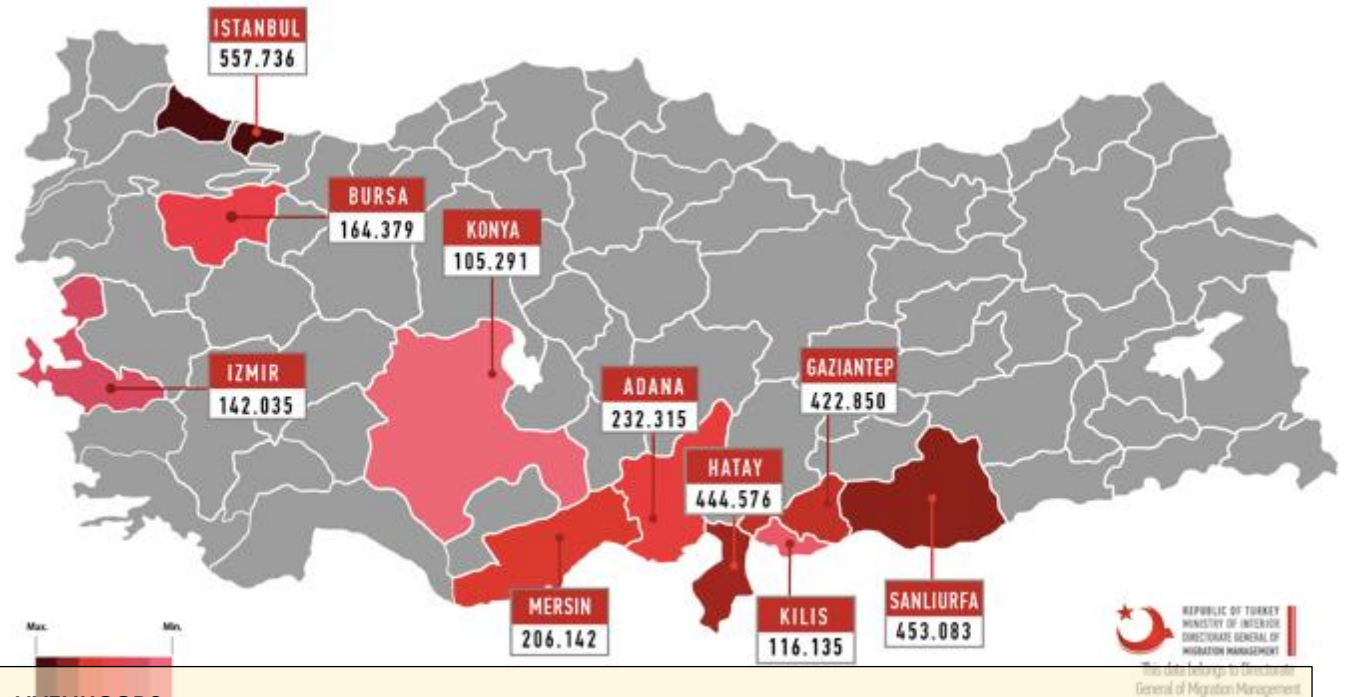
Irregular Migrants – Top 4 Country of Origin:

1. Afghanistan: 99,725
2. Pakistan: 50,147
3. Syria: 33,830
4. Iraq: 17,522

Source: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik

KEY FACTS

- Recent assessments show 12% of Syrian refugees live in extreme poverty, and 59% in moderate poverty.
- The contraction in the Turkish economy in 2018 and associated inflation placed additional burdens on refugees to provide for their families.
- UN Women organized a high-level international conference in Ankara, on 16 Jan, highlighted the importance of ensuring gender-sensitive refugee response and advocating for greater involvement of refugee women and women from the host communities in decision-making and planning processes.



LIVELIHOODS

- It is very difficult for Syrian refugees to obtain work permits, limiting livelihood opportunities. Only 22,000 of over 3.5 million Syrian refugees have been issued work permits since Jan 2016.

PROTECTION

- Refugee and migrant children are acutely susceptible to numerous protection risks, including isolation, discrimination, and various forms of exploitation. Moreover, years of conflict and displacement continue to have a significant impact on their psycho-social well-being which, if not addressed, can have a lasting negative impact on their development.
- Migrants face physical abuse and arrest for lack of documentation. Arbitrary detention and punishment, extrajudicial execution, suspension and dismissals are all risks for perceived opponents of the government.
- Many vulnerable families struggle to meet their basic needs, they are increasingly resorting to negative coping mechanisms – such as engaging in child labour and child marriage – instead of sending their children to school.

EDUCATION

- It's estimated that some 400,000 Syrian children remain out of school and face difficulties such as a lack of awareness of available services, language barriers, socio-economic obstacles, and dropout at the secondary school level.
- Language remains as a key factor for Livelihoods and accessing to services provided by local authorities.

Source: <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/08/needs-assessment-of-syrian-women-and-girls-under-temporary-protection-status-in-turkey>
<https://www.irinnews.org/special-report/2018/10/08/refugee-pushbacks-across-turkey-greece-border-Evros>
<https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unicef-turkey-2018-humanitarian-results>