

FETO in Africa and Turkey-Africa Relations

In February 1999, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured by Turkey's intelligence service, MIT, after a secret operation in Kenya's capital Nairobi. Ocalan had been hiding in Greek ambassador's residence for a while. According to the official statements, Turkey's MIT received some technical assistance from CIA agents in Nairobi to pinpoint the exact location of the PKK's leader. And then cooperation between MIT and CIA successfully resulted in his arrestment. According to another statement, it was not CIA but MOSSAD that assisted Turkey's secret operation. "You've come to the end of the road, we are going to Turkey" expression was the beginning of a new journey for PKK leader Ocalan.

It was definitely a strange turning point for a person rebelling and leading a terror organization against the Turkish state. But in his case, interesting question is that why Ocalan was kept in Kenya? After residing 15 years in Syria's capital Damascus Abdullah Ocalan left Syria as a result of Turkey's strong pressure. He went to Italy, Russia, and later to Greece in order to take refuge. However, hiding a terrorist leader in the middle of Europe might not have seemed a very clever route for Ocalan's mentors. For removing his trace, then, he was advised to stay somewhere out off Turkey's sphere of influence. And it was Africa. Regarding Turkey's influence in Africa during this period, it can be said that it was certainly a clever strategy.

It should be emphasized that prior to 2003, the sub-Saharan countries in Africa was not on Turkey's main agenda. For that, contradicting to today's atmosphere, Turkey's influence in the region was very limited in reality. I think, if same events occurred today no one could dare to make similar strategy. Turkey is now more influential in Africa than it used to be in 90's. It has nowadays more than 40 embassies throughout the continent and Turkey's influence is not only limited to diplomacy. One may witness Turkey's presence in various fields such as trade, humanitarian and development aid, security, health, education etc.

For Turkey, Ocalan case was a clear evidence of "terror without borders" concept or the fact that modern terrorism has no boundaries at all and it goes beyond national territories. Big contractors, sub-contractors, financiers, event organizers, buyers, sellers, collaborators, supporters, and operators might be united in different segments of a terror organization. Moreover, terror groups do not need to take arms as accepted in a classic way. Modern terror activities are getting more complex, flue and multilateral than ever.

Besides PKK's long-lasting terror activities, Turkey faced a new terror case after a coup attempt taken place on the 15th of July, 2016. Fethullah Gulen affiliated failed coup was the last straw that broke the humanitarian and democratic image of Gulen Movement which expanded its presence globally after the Cold War. Gulen's strategy of taking the state authority by hard power failed due to resisting soul performed by Turkish people at the night in which faithful army members to Gulen in the Turkish national army committed a massacre in the streets. It was definitely a historic moment in Turkey's near future.

Some FETO (Fethullah Terror Organization) members involving the failed coup succeeded in escaping from Turkey. As known, a group of commanders with a helicopter has taken refuge in Greece. Similar to Ocalan case, Greece once again became a shelter for Turkey's enemies. Today there are FETO cells in various African countries as well. In countries like Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and South Africa, FETO-affiliated groups operate under different covers. However, they carry the same intention which aims to provoke Turkey's relation with African nations.

However, one should note that circumstances have changed since MIT's Ocalan operation in Nairobi in 1999. From scratch, Turkey has reached the category of a strategic partner for African nations. As known, Turkey has been a strategic partner of African Union since 2008. Turkey's state or civic sponsored efforts in the way of Africa's development have been a clear sign of this partnership. In Africa, Turkey is not only an actor in the development or humanitarian fields but it is also an actor in the security sector. There are various bilateral agreements between Turkey and some African nations which cover special training programs for the police force or army units. Turkey is providing a wide range of training programs for African countries.

To capture the FETO fugitives, Turkey's security organs are now widening their fields of operation. In

November 2017, Turkey's MIT captured Memduh Çıkmaz, the safe box of FETO, in Sudan with a joint operation with Sudan's intelligence service NISS. Similarly, in the last March, six FETO members were captured by MIT's secret operation in Kosovo. And later, in the last April, three high-rank FETO executives were detained and brought from Gabon. And it is obvious fact that Turkey's intelligence will widen its presence in Africa as long as FETO cells exist.

As I already mentioned above, during the last 20 years Turkey-Africa relations have become more complex. Turkey's influence in Africa's security sector is already on the rise thanks to bilateral security cooperation agreements signed between Turkey and African states. After the failed coup attempt, collapsing FETO cells have become Turkey's number one priority. Nowadays, Turkey seeks more cooperation with African states in the security field to combat FETO and Turkey's strategic partnership with Africa provide an important stage for it.