

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

PKK Attacks in Turkey

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Q1: What is the significance of the recent PKK attack on Turkey?

A1: On October 3, an estimated force of 350 belonging to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is based in northern Iraq, attacked a Turkish military outpost in southeastern Turkey and killed 17 Turkish soldiers. The raid was the deadliest in over a year and brings into question yet again the efficacy of the military campaign against the threat of PKK terrorism as well as Turkish cooperation with the U.S. administration, the Iraqi government, and the Iraqi Kurds. It will also raise difficulties for the governing Justice and Development Party, which narrowly avoided closure by the Turkish Constitutional Court in July and is grappling with the implications for Turkey of the global financial crisis.

Q2: What are the implications for the U.S.-Turkey relationship?

A2: After a similar attack that killed 12 Turkish soldiers in October 2007, the United States agreed to provide intelligence to Turkey on PKK activities in northern Iraq. Turkey then carried out numerous airstrikes on PKK targets beyond its southern border and a limited land operation in February. Despite a statement by the Turkish deputy chief of staff that there was no problem in intelligence sharing, the failure to detect and forestall a major terrorist attack emanating from northern Iraq seems certain to renew questions in Turkey over the seriousness of Washington's commitment.

Q3: What are the implications for Turkey's relations with Iraq and the Iraqi Kurds?

A3: Turkish president Abdullah Gul called Iraqi president Jalal Talabani soon after the attack to stress the need for additional measures to prevent such incidents. This was followed by a diplomatic demarche to the Iraqi government, which has very little power in northern Iraq—an area that is controlled by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) headed by Massoud Barzani. There is renewed Turkish criticism of the Iraqi Kurds for failing to support Turkey in its struggle against the PKK, and it seems likely that the current effort to develop a dialogue between Turkey and the KRG will be curtailed.

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