

From Coup Attempt to Dismantling Terrorism: Nine Years That Transformed Turkey



On this day in 2016, the Turkish people thwarted one of the most dangerous conspiracies in the country's modern history when they confronted a coup attempt carried out by a group of military officers and collaborators.

These plotters sought to dismantle Turkey's political structure, destabilize the

nation, and drag it back into an era of regression and darkness under the guise of reform cloaked in religious rhetoric.

Just four days ago, on July 11, thirty members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—fifteen men and fifteen women—burned their weapons in front of the Kasina cave in the Iraqi city of Sulaymaniyah.

This dramatic act was a direct response to a call by the group's imprisoned founder, Abdullah Öcalan—who has been serving a life sentence since 1999—to dissolve the organization ideologically.

The long-held dream of secession that haunted the PKK for nearly five decades appeared to have come to an end.

Between these two pivotal dates, Turkey has undergone a grueling and transformative journey—from a nation threatened by a coup and struggling to preserve its security, stability, and cohesion, to one that is increasingly free of terrorism, progressing steadily toward regional balance, economic prosperity, and a renewed role as a key global actor.

Over the past nine years, Turks have operated under a de facto state of emergency at all levels, rallying under the slogan “Turkey First.” They sought to turn the failed coup attempt into an opportunity, confronting the fissures that had led to that critical juncture, with a deep belief that what doesn't break you only makes you stronger. What began as an effort to overthrow the state became a catalyst for rebuilding and national revival.

A Comprehensive Renaissance: The First Lesson Learned

Although it failed, the coup attempt exposed the fragility of many Turkish institutions and the cracks in its wall of stability. It laid bare internal rifts and the domestic and international conspiracies woven around the state.

The first lesson was clear: the need for self-reliance, mending institutional fractures, reassessing the country's structural foundations, and addressing critical gaps across the economic, technological, educational, and defense sectors.

Defense Industries

Ankara has made significant strides in this sector, emerging as a global leader in defense manufacturing, exporting to nearly 180 countries. Among its major achievements are the locally produced drones “Bayraktar,” “Akinci,” “Aksungur,” and “Kızılelma,” the latter being the first indigenous jet-powered drone.

Other milestones include the development of the national fighter jet “KAAN” and the launch of the “TCG Anadolu,” Turkey's first domestically produced aircraft carrier.

Economic Revival

Despite global economic challenges—including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the devastating February 2023 earthquake—Turkey has seen unprecedented economic growth. Exports rose to \$260 billion in 2024, with projections exceeding \$270 billion this year. Meanwhile, per capita GDP surpassed \$15,000.

Tourism Recovery

Turkey has reclaimed its status as a premier global tourist destination after a brief post-coup decline. In 2024, the country welcomed over 60 million tourists and is executing well-calibrated plans to further boost this number by leveraging its vast tourism potential.

Energy Independence

The country continues to assert its sovereignty over its maritime economic zones, particularly through its exploitation of Black Sea natural gas reserves and ongoing Mediterranean exploration using state-of-the-art seismic and drilling vessels.

Educational Overhaul

After decades of allowing unofficial organizations to dominate education, often to disastrous effect, the Turkish state has since 2016 restructured its education sector, placing all institutions under the Ministry of National Education. This allowed for greater state oversight, curriculum reform, and standardization of teaching methods.

Internationally, the Maarif Foundation has become a key player in global education, operating 586 institutions across 55 countries, with over 70,000 students and official relations with 108 nations—an achievement that also enhances Turkey's soft power.

Diplomatic Expansion

Turkey has built a vast diplomatic network, now boasting 262 missions worldwide, ranking third globally. It has pursued balanced and respectful foreign relations, placing particular emphasis on the Arab world and the Gulf region through a “zero problems” approach, maintaining open channels even with states where relations have occasionally been strained.

This enhanced diplomacy enabled Ankara to mediate in major global crises, including prisoner swaps between Russia and Ukraine and the 2022 Black Sea grain export deal, which averted a global food shortage. Most recently, Turkey hosted Moscow-Kyiv negotiations aimed at ending the war.

What Talks Can't Solve, Confrontation Will

One of the most important lessons learned from the coup was the need to rethink counterterrorism strategies. Turkey pivoted from endless, fruitless negotiations to direct confrontation, targeting terrorist strongholds at home and abroad.

With significant intelligence gains, Turkey launched precise operations such as Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring in Syria, and Claw in Iraq, significantly weakening terror organizations. These blows forced PKK leadership to reconsider continued confrontation with the Turkish state.

Concurrently, Turkey enacted sweeping reforms in its security, defense, and judicial institutions to prevent infiltration and ensure institutional loyalty to the constitution and the people. This widened the gap between armed groups and their social bases, especially after years of military and ideological setbacks that culminated in the surrender of weapons and organizational dismantling.

At the PKK's conference held May 5–7, 2025, leaders announced the group's official organizational dissolution, following Öcalan's earlier ideological declaration. This was symbolically reinforced by the burning of weapons in Iraq. Nevertheless, Turkish authorities cautioned that the matter is not yet resolved.

Vice President of the ruling Justice and Development Party, Ömer Çelik, emphasized that the disarmament process must extend beyond the PKK to include its affiliates—PJAK in Iran, and PYD/YPG in Syria—as well as illegitimate ideological and financial structures such as the KCK.

Turkey is conducting this campaign alone, backed by its own sources of strength—most notably its national intelligence agency and armed forces. The country has recovered swiftly from the trauma of 2016, closing ranks before its adversaries could exploit internal instability.

Thus, as Turks mark the ninth anniversary of the failed coup, they do so with renewed national unity—transforming what could have been a devastating blow to democracy and stability into a springboard for revival and growth.

In doing so, the Turkish people—across the political spectrum—have offered a powerful model of national solidarity, thwarting any return to military rule or authoritarianism.