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EMPIRICAL PAPER

Arming civilians as a counterterror strategy: The case of the village guard system in Turkey

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There are currently more than 60,000 Kurdish village guards in a system that has been fighting against the PKK in Turkey for almost three decades. This article offers the first evaluation of the effectiveness of the village guard system as a counterterror strategy. I argue that the village guards in Turkey proved their effectiveness as a deterrence-based and territory-focused counter-terror strategy between 1985 and 1999. From 1999 onwards, however, when the nature of the conflict changed, the costs of the village guard system in the political and socio-psychological domain have exceeded its value in the security domain. Evaluation of the village guard system in Turkey provides insights which may be useful in considering the formation of local militias in conflict zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

Keywords: village guards; PKK; counter-terrorism tactics; militia; COIN; CT effectiveness; arming civilians; Sons of Iraq

In any counterinsurgency strategy, the separation of “bad guys” from the rest of the population is a significant objective which has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the campaign.¹ To achieve this objective, forming, arming and using local militias may be a viable strategy, particularly in rural, remote, harshly mountainous and tribal contexts in which security forces face difficult challenges in reaching the local population. In recent years, the “Sons of Iraq” or the “Anbar Awakening” case in Iraq and the “Tribal Security Forces (*Arbakai*)” case in Afghanistan are contemporary examples of this strategy. In Iraq, for instance, irregular forces embedded in local communities, including the 100,000 Sunni gunmen paid by the Iraqi government to form “Awakening Councils”, played a crucial role in the US campaign in Iraq.²

Has the strategy of forming local militias yielded successful results in Iraq and Afghanistan? Unfortunately, insufficient information is available to provide a reliable answer to this question. The scholarly literature does not provide reliable sources addressing the short- and long-term effects of forming local militia forces from civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan. The fact that the existing literature is limited has opened the door to speculations and interpretations that are more journalistic than scholarly. To better elucidate the effectiveness of forming local militias, my study presents the case of the “Temporary Village Guard System” (*Geçici Köy Koruculuğu Sistemi*) in Turkey, which was first initiated in 1985 and has been fully active for 28 years.

Since its foundation, Turkey’s Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) has caused approximately 20,000 fatalities, including about 11,000 civilians and 9000 security

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personnel. In the meantime, about 20,000 terrorists were killed and about 6000 were captured and imprisoned.³ In order to thwart PKK-initiated violence, Turkish authorities have implemented many different countermeasures, ranging from repressive to accommodative strategies, including the village guard system. Initially, the village guards were regulated by the newly founded Turkish government by the Law of Temporary Village Guards in 1924⁴ under the rationale that villagers could protect themselves against the criminal gangs of the 1920s. These gangs had taken advantage of the weakness of the state during the Independence War, especially in rural areas.⁵ Indeed, the government evaluated the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) movement⁶ in its early stages as a group of a “few bandits and looters,” and the Village Guards were called into action in initially three provinces with a total of about 800 guards.

However, when the violation of the lives and properties of villagers increased in the following months, state security forces expanded the village guards system, which was based on an employment contract that included a salary. As of January 2014, the monthly salary is approximately the equivalent of US\$300,⁷ along with clothing expenses and some social security benefits that came with passage of the amendments between the 74th article and 82nd article of the Village Law on 26 March 1985.⁸ One of the most important features of the amendments to the original law was that the 1985 law allowed the village guards to become “temporary public employees” who are paid by the government within a legal framework that accepts them as “de-facto armed government employees” who have a right to use armed violence when necessary while working closely with the provincial Gendarmerie Commands.

With this legally founded, centrally appointed, and state-paid “security force,” the Turkish government created a civilian militia⁹ in the Kurdish populated southeast provinces of Turkey. To supplement the employed village guard system, a “voluntary village guard” program was added in 13 more provinces, which led to the expansion of this system to 22 provinces in 1993, the year in which violence reached its peak level over the course of the conflict with the PKK. The difference between the two programs is that while the employed village guards receive monthly salary and health benefits, the voluntary village guards do not receive salary but are entitled to health compensation and benefits. The size of the temporary and voluntary civilian armed force reached almost 60,000 by the end of the 1990s, accounting for almost one-third of the armed forces in the Kurdish region.

As of August 2013, Muharrem Güler, the then Interior Minister of Turkey, announced that there are currently 65,456 village guards, 46,113 of whom are employed (interestingly, 337 of them are women) and 19,343 of whom are voluntary (161 of them are women). Currently, the village guard system is implemented in 23 provinces.^{10,11} All village guards, whether voluntary or hired, work under the supervision of the provincial Gendarmerie Commands and receive two weeks of basic military training from their provincial governor immediately after joining.

This article focuses on a significant issue that has not been adequately addressed in the English literature: the effectiveness of the village guards against the PKK. Has the village guard system in Turkey worked as a counterterror strategy; in other words, contributed to the decline of PKK terrorism? If “yes”, how; if “no”, why not? In this Turkish case, what are the short- and long-term pros and cons of using militias in counterterror campaigns? To answer these questions, I analyze the evolution of the village guards system in an historical perspective that is based on a variety of sources including an events data set, in-depth interviews with state officials, guards, activists in the pro- and anti-guard system, and government and news in Turkish.

This article, the first to evaluate the village guard system in Turkey, argues that the strategy of forming, arming, using local militias would prove its effectiveness in raising security in the short term (between 1985 and 1999). In the longer run (between 1985 and 2013), however, as the conflict turns into a protracted one, and more importantly, changes its nature, the costs of this strategy in the political and socio-psychological domain may easily exceed its benefits in the security domain. It is worth mentioning that this study provides a perspective that could be applicable in Iraq and Afghanistan, where debates on forming, arming and using local militias in Iraq and Afghanistan may evolve in coming years.

To set the stage, the first section lays out the dilemma the Turkish government has faced particularly since the initiation of the “Kurdish resolution process” in 2013: to demobilize or not to demobilize the village guards. I review current arguments favoring and opposing the guards system. The second section divides the 28-year-long village guard system into six periods by considering the changes in the PKK’s struggle and the Turkish security forces’ counterterror strategies. Here I highlight the underlying conditions leading the Turkish government to initiate this policy, the existing legal structures providing a space for its implementation, the management of it by government officials and security forces, and its rapid success in limiting the PKK fighters’ movements, separating and isolating them from the rest of the population, and decreasing the number of attacks carried out by the PKK in the first five years. Importantly, I describe the gradual decrease in the effectiveness of the village guard system with the following years. The third section analyses the association between the evolution of the PKK’s struggle strategy and the village guards system, as represented in the literature and in interviews conducted with prominent figures in the pro-village guard and anti-village guard circles in Turkey. Here I introduce material from interviews conducted with government officials and high-ranking officers from the Turkish Military. The fourth and last section provides an overview and discussion of all periods in the 28-year history of the village guards. I end by presenting lessons learned in the Turkish case, some of which may be relevant to use of civilian militias in other asymmetric conflicts.

To demobilize or not to demobilize: that is the question

Today in Turkey, an interesting debate has been evolving about the fate of the village guard system as the conflict in the Kurdish region is winding down with a young and fragile peace process under way between the Turkish government and the PKK. Finally on 21 March 2013, after months of negotiations with the Turkish government, a letter from the PKK’s leader Abdullah Ocalan was read both in Turkish and Kurdish during *Newruz*¹² celebrations in Diyarbakır. The letter called a cease-fire that included withdrawal of PKK insurgents from Turkish soil, meaning a call for an *end to armed struggle* after almost three decades of violence. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan welcomed the letter, stating that concrete steps will follow PKK’s withdrawal. Consequently, on 25 April 2013, PKK announced that it withdraws all its forces within Turkey to Northern Iraq.¹³ According to both the government¹⁴ and the PKK, echoed in most of the press,¹⁵ this move marks the end of a 30-years-old conflict. A second phase which includes constitutional and legal changes towards the recognition of human rights of the Kurds starts simultaneously with withdrawal.

During these developments, the fate of the village guard system has turned into one of the biggest issues in the peace process.¹⁶ In April 2013, the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) proposed the abolition of the system as part of efforts towards the peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue,¹⁷ but so far the government has not addressed the problem. Some in the anti-village-guard camp suggest that, while by no means officially

endorsed by the Turkish governments, some village guards are reported to have been involved in “disappearances“, extrajudicial executions¹⁸ and torture,¹⁹ even sometimes dressing themselves up as PKK fighters in false flag attacks.²⁰ Some, going one step further, claim that the past of the village guards in Turkey is extremely “dirty” and thus should be exposed to meticulous legal scrutiny.²¹ After this legal scrutiny, the village guards found guilty should be punished and the village guard system should be abolished “dishonorably,” a demand which implies the official apology of the Turkish government for the agonies and miseries caused by the village guard system.²² Only by doing so, some claim, can the Turkish government reconcile with the Kurds and continue the peace process.²³

Despite the ongoing peace negotiations, the village guards are still standing and fulfilling their routine missions. Ata Altın, the general coordinator and the spokesperson of the non-governmental Village Guard Association based in the capital city of Ankara, suggests that, currently, all village guards are uncertain as to what the future holds for them. He then asserts that a great majority of the village guards might lose their rights and livelihoods despite having struggled to support the security forces for 28 years. Altın states that “they put their lives at risk thousands of times. 1658 village guards fell for the country and become martyr for the cause of the unity of the country. Roughly 3,000 of them have been severely injured so far.” Ata Altın then continues:

The village guards have paid the price of the conflict in Turkey, so severely proving their tenacity. That is why we should not accept any dishonorable solution on this issue. The government should respect our past, our struggle and fallen comrades, and should tailor a policy accordingly which should not shadow the honorable struggle of the village guards. The government should prove to us that we have not been deceived by the Turkish state and our martyred comrades did not fall in vain.²⁴

He also warns that “Some speak of retribution of the PKK execution teams that might follow once the village guards are disbanded and disarmed and if government does not protect us after taking our arms.” Indeed, this seems a grounded claim when considering the suspicious death of a reputable village guard named Hasan Caner in an armed attack in Şırnak province on 13 January 2014, which marks the suspicious killing of the sixth village guard in the last two years.²⁵ Ata Altın suggests that the village guards have been defined as “traitor” (*jash*)²⁶ by the PKK supporters. He, citing the threatening letter sent to Hasan Caner before the attack, states that “In the letter, the PKK announces that it may even forgive the Turkish soldiers and police but as it defines the guards in the execution list as traitors, ‘*Jash*’, it will not forgive the guards and will kill them sooner or later.”²⁷

Confirming Altın’s remarks regarding the village guards system in Turkey, *the European Union Turkey 2013 Progress Report* includes the following statement:

No steps were taken to abolish the village guard system, a paramilitary force of more than 50 000 paid and armed by the state. Some village guards, while expressing their support for the peace process, also noted concerns for their future and the need for severance pay, a pension scheme and social security.²⁸

The *Report* concludes with a warning “The village guard system remained a cause for concern.”

As seen in these remarks, with the initiation of the “Kurdish resolution” and the establishment of a relatively peaceful setting in the southeastern provinces of Turkey, the village guard system’s fate has been under fierce debate. Seemingly stuck between the pro-village guard and anti-village guard camps, The Turkish government’s handling of this issue will thus surely have drastic impact on the further developments in the fragile peace process in Turkey.

Theoretical background

In general terms, strategies aimed at shrinking or ending terrorist violence tend to have two contrasting approaches. The first approach is a deterrence-based approach of using extensive force, military action, economic sanctions, State of Emergency Rule, and so forth. The second approach is more accommodative in using social, political, and economic reforms seeking to remove the grievance or cause and mitigating the motivations of terrorism.²⁹ Deterrence rests on the assumption that individuals are rational actors who act in their own benefit for utility maximization and thus may be dissuaded from terrorist activities and terrorism through the imposition of costs.³⁰ This approach focuses on militants and sympathizers and punishes them with harsh repressive measures. In fact, deterrence can either be applied by punishment (imposition of costs) strategy or by a denial strategy that hardens targets to make any contemplation of attack impractical. In this sense, it might be argued that the village guard system contributes to the denial strategy of deterrence.

The accommodative approach, on the other hand, rests on defiance (a.k.a. legitimacy) theory, which focuses on the perceptions of civilian society. It suggests that counterterror strategies are more effective if and when they are perceived as legitimate and procedurally fair by the wider society.³¹ This approach conceptualizes the problem as extending beyond the core group employing violence and suggests removing legitimate grievances through public policies necessary to terminate the root cause of political violence.

As a deterrence-based approach emphasizing the denial aspect, the arming of local population and their employment for security in exchange for some material benefits and rights has been widely used by many political entities over the course of history. Militia organizations or paramilitary troops have been effective instruments when combating terrorist structures if either the state security forces are too weak to control the area of operation,³² or the emergent threat is so local and small that it is not considered to require the commitment of national security forces,³³ or the terrorist organization has particular weaknesses to be exploited in the spheres of recruitment, finance and logistics.³⁴ Regardless of the prime intention, however, the strategy of raising armed militias from the local population is designed to undermine the ability of hard-core insurgents to mobilize resources, isolate them from the local population, increase the quality and quantity of human intelligence, ease pressure on government forces, encourage the defection of insurgents, circumscribe collaboration between local communities and insurgents, and increase the ratio of counterinsurgents to civilians to permit deployment of regular counterinsurgent forces to areas in which they could have most effect.³⁵ Nonetheless, the strategy of arming civilians may also have some drawbacks or unintended consequences. Jeremy Weinstein, for instance, points out that local militias could easily escape the control of the state security forces if they are used in a prolonged fashion.³⁶ In the same vein, when writing about the local militias in his book which provides insights from the French experience in the Algerian civil war and Indochina, Roger Trinquier suggests:

Our organization [local militias and French officers serving with them] is a defensive one, the sole aim of which is to ensure the protection of the populace, particularly against the danger of terrorism. Once the war is won or the danger has passed, our organization will have no reason to exist. Abuses are always possible. The organization will have to be seriously controlled, so that it remains solely a means of protection against the external enemy and does not become a vehicle for internal political pressure. One should not lose sight of the fact that this is the sole means we have to assure the protection of peaceful citizens and to prevent terrorism from forcing them into a harsh and inhuman servitude.³⁷

Similarly, Kimberly Warten warns that the strategy of forming local armed militias may lead to the emergence of *de-facto* power structures that might cause the weakening of the state authority and legitimacy in the local context.³⁸

Furthermore, the formation of local militias may not only have pros and cons in the sphere of security, but also may lead to implications in the socio-cultural sphere. The persistent characterization of the village guards as “traitor,” and the prevalent use of the term *Jash* (a Kurdish slang word for *donkey*) by PKK supporters to refer to Kurdish village guards, indicates the significance of the local political structure when analyzing the local dynamics of the conflict in Turkey. Examining the dynamics of an ethnic conflict in a comparative perspective, Stathis Kalyvas points out that local political structures and rivalries among local groups have a great impact on shifting alliances, which are considered as acts of treason by rival factions.³⁹ Likewise, studies indicate that patriotic discourse becomes dominant during times of war and social conflict and when the presence of external threats to the social body tightens moral boundaries so that deviance is not tolerated. Hillel Cohen,⁴⁰ for example, demonstrates how a discourse of treason was rampant during the Palestinian struggle against the Zionist movement between 1917 and 1948. Putting emphasis on the “commemoration of treason” by the PKK supporters for nationalist mobilization in the region, Mustafa E. Gurbuz suggests that the “traitor” as a cultural archetype is not unique to Kurdish society; yet, it strikes a strong chord in Kurdish collective memory because of its traditional tribal local structure as well as its modern nationalist boundaries that are shaped by external threats.⁴¹ It is then likely to assert that the PKK construction of the village guards as “traitors” may strengthen the Kurdish nationalist mobilization in the region with renewed threat across intragroup boundaries. To the extent that peacetime political gains by Kurds are attributed by Kurds to PKK sacrifices, Kurds who fought the PKK may face new dangers.

Methodology and data

The main data used in this study were the longitudinal data set of the Turkish National Police which tracks numbers of violent attacks conducted by the PKK between 1984 and 2007,⁴² semi-structured interviews, and archival research in the records of the Turkish Gendarmerie.⁴³ I conducted semi-structured interviews with five groups of people to assess the opinions and explanations of all actors involved in the debate on the village guard system:

- 20 village guards from the provinces of Mardin, Sirnak, Hakkari and Van, and their representatives Orhan Kandemir, the head of the Village Guard Association in Turkey, and Ata Altin, the coordinator and the spokesperson of the same association;
- one provincial governor;
- six high-ranking officers from the Turkish Military who all have participated in the counterterror operations in southeastern Turkey as company, battalion and brigade commanders, and closely worked with the village guards in numerous operations;
- NGO representative Ozturk Turkdogan, the head of the Human Right Association, the biggest and deepest-rooted human rights association in Turkey. The HRA has directly been engaging in the debates on the village guards for years;
- four PKK sympathizers from the provinces of Sirnak and Mardin.

In sum, a total of 34 interviews were conducted in Ankara, Mardin, Hakkari and Şirnak between February 2013 and December 2013.

Arguments for and against the village guard system in Turkey

To better understand the following section presenting the historical analysis of the village guard system in Turkey, it is useful to start with the currently existing arguments for and against the system. As these arguments are, in fact, the reference points summarizing the 28-year-long system, making these arguments explicit not only provides an objective stance in relation to this highly politicized issue, but also prepares the reader to grasp later sections of the article.

Arguments favoring the village guards

1. Initially, the PKK, which followed classical Maoist–leftist rural guerilla strategy, aimed to gain legitimacy in rural areas. To achieve this, PKK started to attack villages both to terrorize local populations and to force the state to overreact. The PKK fighters were defined as “local bandits” by the state officials at the beginning because they were targeting remote villages out of the reach of the state security forces. Thus, with some legal amendments, the 1924 Village Law was updated and the village guards system was initiated as a result of the PKK terrorism.⁴⁴
2. The village guard system has been a success story in Turkey’s strategy against the PKK-initiated violence to such an extent that it has become one of the main pillars of counterterror strategy. If the village guard system had not been initiated, the state authority in the region would have eventually collapsed.⁴⁵
3. The village guards have first denied the mobility of the PKK terrorists both by separating them from the rest of the population as a bottom-up means of isolating them, and then prevented them from gaining territorial control.⁴⁶
4. “The primary motivation of the village guards is not money as some proposed. Who, in this world, can risk his life for a \$300 monthly payment? The village guards have been taking all these risks because they love their country and want to protect its unity.”⁴⁷
5. The village guards have provided intelligence to the security forces both on the territory and the activities of the PKK.⁴⁸
6. The village guards have not been forced by the security forces to join this system. The existence of more than 25,000 voluntary village guards, who are not paid by the government, is proof of this.⁴⁹
7. The number of the PKK terrorists has never exceeded the number of the village guards, even during the early 1990s, the period in which the number of the armed terrorists reached its peak level of 11,000. This is an indicator showing the low level of popular support to the PKK.⁵⁰

Arguments against the village guards

1. “The state pitched brother against brother. If it hadn’t been for the village guards, this conflict would have never reached this intensity.”⁵¹
2. The village guard system is a typical reflection of state tradition on the Kurdish issue. Enmeshed in the Kurds’ tribal networks, it exacerbated the tensions in the region. The equipping of the village guards, who were without even basic military training, increased instability in the entire region. The guard system introduced virtually extinguished social order in Kurdish daily life.⁵²
3. The village guard system was used by the state officials as a repressive mechanism to recruit villagers.⁵³

4. The village guards are poorly disciplined and inadequately trained.⁵⁴
5. The village guards have been accused repeatedly in past years of drug trafficking, corruption, theft, rape, and other abuses. Inadequate oversight exacerbated the problem, and in many cases the security forces allegedly protected village guards from prosecution.⁵⁵
6. Several reports document concerns regarding human rights violations resulting from the village guard system in Turkey.⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch and Freedom House have reported that village guards have obstructed returning families in the southeast.⁵⁷
7. The village guard system has been responsible for deepening mistrust and ethnic divisions in an already troubled region.⁵⁸
8. The village guards have moved with their families into villages that were evacuated in the 1990s and now the original villagers are returning to their villages to find the village guards already living there.⁵⁹
9. The establishment of village guards made civilians more vulnerable to attacks.⁶⁰
10. Because tribes exert political influence on the local branches of the ruling parties and maintain good relations with the state bureaucracy in the region, they can throw their weight behind their members during the recruitment process of the village guards, meaning that this system strengthens the feudal/tribal system in the region.⁶¹

It seems likely that the real picture of the village guard system is neither as black or gloomy as the anti-village guard camp asserts, nor as white or promising as the pro-village guard camp suggests. This study seeks not to judge or evaluate the village guards in terms of pre-existing biases (whether positive or negative), but rather attempts first to understand, then to describe and lastly to explain the effects of the guards system on the nature and the evolution of the conflict in Turkey. Because the village guard system was initially a result not a cause of the PKK movement, it is appropriate to present a brief overview of how PKK emerged, which sort of struggle strategy it embraced, and how the Turkish state responded it.

Six periods in PKK history

To better understand PKK's three-decade-long struggle, it is useful to consider six periods in its history.

First period: emergence and preparation of the PKK, 1984–1987⁶²

The PKK was officially founded under the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan on 27 November 1978 in the village of Fis located in the province of Diyarbakir-Lice with the PKK's initial and founding congress. As a result of the resolution of this initial assembly, the PKK declared its political aim as the establishment of an "Independent United Kurdish State" that would be comprised of the territories from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The PKK declared itself to be a socialist liberation movement that rests on Marxist–Leninist ideology. The PKK embraced the Maoist strategy of the "People's War" with a Stalinist organizational structure (i.e. top-down, centralized, and hierarchical).⁶³

For Coşar Ünal, founded on rural Maoist struggle strategy, the PKK, particularly in this period, struggled for the physical extermination of Turkish authority in the region through direct targeting of security forces (using both selective and indiscriminate violence) and government staff and by directly attacking the civilian pro-state population

to repress them.⁶⁴ Ümit Özdağ suggests that, in this first period, the Turkish government did not take the PKK attacks seriously and valued these attacks as the actions of a “few bandits.”⁶⁵ That is why, for him, the government did not launch a full offensive military attack, but reactivated the system of village guardianship in 1985.⁶⁶ Agreeing to Özdağ’s assertion, Orhan Kandemir, the head of the Village Guard Association in Mardin province, confirms this conceptualization of the PKK fighters as simple criminals between 1984 and 1987 by the state officials and the local population in Mardin.

In the middle 1980s, I was in my early twenties and my father had recently become a village guard to protect the remote neighbourhoods in Mardin from those criminal guys whom we then knew as “*Apoist* (Apocu)” who attempted to disturb the local population by asking for their money which they called revolutionary tax, children for recruitment and logistic support. But starting from early 1990s, we soon came to realize that those local bandits (*Eşkiya*) were in fact terrorists who sought to deny the state authority in the region.⁶⁷

One of the military interviewees, a high-ranking officer who was a battalion commander in late 1980s in the Şırnak province, states:

I was the battalion commander in charge of controlling the south of the Gabar mountain and was responsible for the security of the road which connects Cizre to Şırnak. I remember the debates about the involvement of the Turkish Military against the criminal activities of the Apoists. The local elders from the Kırkkuyu, Sucular and Kumçatı villages incessantly asserted that these guys were criminals and asked us not to intervene. I remember, in a hospital visit in 1988, Ömer Can’s requests, one of the first village guards in the Şırnak province who got severely injured in an engagement with the PKK terrorists, to us for not intervening in the fight between the local Kurds and the PKK fighters. Ömer did not want the involvement of Turkish military thinking that this involvement would get things more complicated. I also remember the upheaval that emerged just after the killing of Ali Şanlı, a well-respected village elder, with all his family members, by the PKK terrorists. In this upheaval against the PKK’s suppression which lasted for almost three days with the participation of the hundreds of the local Kurds, a group formed by the leading figures in the region visited me and incessantly asked for their arming against this emerging threat. For me, if the Turkish state had not initiated the village guard system, the local Kurds would have armed either this way or that way and attempted to meet the PKK threat personally, meaning the emergence of anarchy and chaos in the southeastern Turkey.⁶⁸

Second period: the peak in violence (1987–mid 1993)

As decided in the resolution of the fourth Congress held in 1990, the PKK, through its militias called Kurdish People’s Liberation Army (ARGK), shifted to a concept called “captured-controlled lands” in which it aimed to gradually take the territorial control of the region as part of the third stage of its Maoist strategy. As a result, the PKK fought for the territory (southeastern Turkey) that it claimed to be independent. In this period, there was an intense fight between the PKK and state forces until mid-1993, as shown in [Figure 1](#), with an increasing trend of violence. In this period, the Turkish Army led all state countermeasures against the PKK and harshly responded to the PKK and its sympathizers.

In this bloodiest period, PKK, to achieve its announced goals, strived for the physical extermination of the Turkish security forces through attacking military outposts with systematic guerilla attacks and the disruption of the state authority through repressing the civilian government officials such as teachers, doctors and engineers and threatening the local Kurds who did not cooperate with it. In her article published in 1995, Nur Bilge Criss summarizes the context in this second period with these remarks:

[In this period] The PKK increased hit-and-run operations in Turkish territory, with the odious result of now having killed nearly 8,000 people, the majority of whom were Kurds. The

PKK's objective in murdering its own kin has been threefold. First, it demonstrates to the people that the PKK is a strong force with whom they should side and rise up in rebellion against the Turkish state. This objective may defy logic, but it is nonetheless a traditional behavior in tribal power politics. Second, it sends people the message that as long as they remain passive, PKK will consider them to be on the enemy's side and therefore punish them. Third, PKK's wrath is mainly directed against village guards whom the state arms and employs against PKK attacks. They not only murder individual guards, but massacre entire families of guards, including women, children, and babies.⁶⁹

One should also note that, in spatial terms, a great majority of the conflicts that occurred in this period were concentrated only in the rural areas of the Kurdish populated eight southeastern provinces in which emergency rule was initiated.⁷⁰ Figure 1 indicates the location of PKK-initiated violent incidents, and as presented in the figure, a majority of the violent attacks carried out by the PKK (solid trend line) in this second period were in the rural areas of the emergency rule provinces that were predominantly filled with a Kurdish population, compared with the attacks carried out in other provinces (dashed trend line). The target locations of PKK attacks in this period conformed to its goal; the PKK's focus in violent attacks was the region for which it claimed secession.

To deny PKK's secessionist strategy, in 1991, the Turkish security forces had switched from "Doctrine of Areal Control," in which troops were stationed in many rural places, to a new doctrine to control the area named "Cordon and Search Doctrine." In this new counterinsurgency model, the Turkish army took the initiative of detecting PKK fighters and attacking them in large-scale military operations with the support of land aviation units and the village guards. Such a change in the military concept of the Turkish army resulted in PKK's military defeat in the field (in terms of territorial victory) and after three years of large-scale military operations, PKK had significant losses in its guerilla workforce. Between 1991 and 1994 alone, approximately 11,000 PKK militants were incapacitated.⁷¹ In 1994, Öcalan acknowledged the PKK's military defeat by the Turkish army in his statement to a pro-PKK newspaper in 1994 (*Serxwebun*, Vol. 148, April 1994) that the PKK would need at least force equal to size of the village guards (then 55,000 fighters) to reach an insurgent victory in the region where the PKK had between 8000 and 11,000 militants at the time.

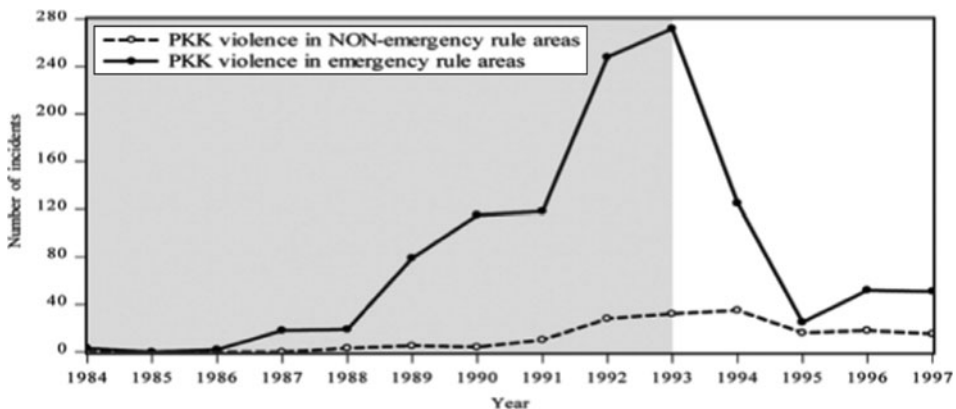


Figure 1. Frequency of PKK-initiated violent incidents in the emergency-rule provinces vs. other provinces (1984–1997). From official government databases of related departments of the Turkish National Police and the Turkish General Staff.

Moreover, the very same volume of *Serxwebun* published the headline of “in 1994, there could either be political or military solution.” The reason for Ocalan making this statement, and for *Serxwebun* (then official mouthpiece journal of the PKK) referring for the first time to a political solution with the aforementioned caption, was the counterinsurgency success in military operations of the Turkish army in rural areas in taking territorial control of the region. Since then, the PKK evolved into a strategy different from a solely guerilla war aimed at controlling territory in the southeastern part of Turkey. Therefore, the level of violence shows a steady decline beginning in 1994 after a lagged effect from three years of large-scale military operations beginning in 1991 (i.e. because of more confrontation during these three years on the battlefield). That military defeat of the PKK, however, did not mean the end of the PKK challenge, as the tactical success in the battlefield could not be translated into a political success at the national level, a failure of counterinsurgency efforts seen in many hotspots in the world such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

It should also be noted that, particularly in this period, the PKK began to look more like a terrorist than a guerilla organization. The Turkish military offensive began in 1991 and the PKK responded with increased attacks in other regions of Turkey to break the military focus imposed upon its militants in the Kurdish region. The PKK employed more selective violence towards non-combatant civilian targets in western provinces through bombings and suicide attacks in touristic cities and metropolitan cities. In addition, the PKK employed terror tactics from its inception by targeting Kurdish civilian villagers (especially the members and families of the village guards) to intimidate them in order to derive active and passive support. In addition, the PKK has used extortion and armed propaganda towards its own population to maintain financial, logistical, and electoral support in the region. The PKK has also applied selective violence against government officials assigned into the region (e.g. teachers, mayors, imams), to contest PKK authority. Thus, facing increased military pressure, PKK increased targeting of civilians, both Kurds and non-Kurds, in a turn from guerrilla warfare toward terrorism.

As a parallel to the drastic increase of PKK violence, the village guard system emerged as a strategic asset of the state. In this period, the Turkish state, which was fully aware that the power-sharing concerns of tribal elites had been the determinant factor in elite stances for or against the state’s authority, loosened its harsh treatment toward traditional elites (tribal leaders) as the local sources of authority in order to strengthen local support for the fight against the PKK. Seeing the state’s attempt to strengthen tribal leaders through the use of the village guard system, the PKK started to employ selected violence against tribes and their leaders who became part of the village guard system and cooperated with the security forces. That is why most civilian casualties were family members of the village guards as a result of PKK raids to enforce compliance with PKK authority.

Third period: the decrease in the level of violence (1994–1999)

In this period, mainly because the PKK’s strategic offensive capabilities were largely destroyed by the three-year-long military offense, the Turkish security forces turned back to the old doctrine of “area control” with a new understanding, which implied holding the cleared areas with gendarmerie forces and the village guards. To make this strategy work, the remote villages which could not be defended and were being used for logistics support, recruitment and intelligence gathering by the PKK were evacuated.

Öztürk Türkdoğan, the head of the Human Right Association (IHD) in Turkey, suggests that, particularly in this period, the consequences of the conflict were grim,

especially the acceleration of the forced village evacuations in which the village guards were deeply involved.⁷² Türkdoğan suggests that, in this period, the village guards consolidated their influence and started to exert it upon the Kurdish population in a more institutionalized fashion. For him, if the village guard system had not been initiated by the state, the internal immigration, the debates on the forced evacuations, illegal land seizures and many more allegations which have been creating tension and generating cleavages among people would not have happened.⁷³

Fourth period: PKK decapitated (1999–2005)

In February 1999, Abdullah Öcalan was caught in Kenya. Particularly after his capture, PKK violence declined further. PKK's remaining fighters withdrew to their safe havens in bordering states of Iran and Iraq, and PKK's leadership renounced armed struggle to reconstitute PKK as a political movement. In an attempt to guarantee its continuing existence, the PKK strove to modernize itself by introducing new organizational models, in line with various national and international developments.

Fifth period: resurrection of the violence (2005–2012)

Seeing that its control over its ethnic constituency was threatened by the rising appeal of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) among the Kurds, and making use of the political vacuum in Iraq after the invasion in 2003, PKK decided to remobilize its armed forces in 2005.⁷⁴ While the fight against the Turkish security forces between 2006 and 2012 failed to achieve any significant military progress, the PKK and its auxiliary organizations continued to enjoy substantial support among its sympathizers in the southeastern Turkey. Turkey's struggle against the PKK was marked by increased violence across Turkey after 2007. Figure 2 shows the increasing level of violence in this period.

Sixth period: from deterrence to accommodation (2012–)

On 31 March 2010, Öcalan declared that the PKK had evolved into a new period in terms of its struggle strategy. The main theme of the final period's strategy is to declare autonomy in the Kurdish populated southeast provinces through de-facto circumstances.

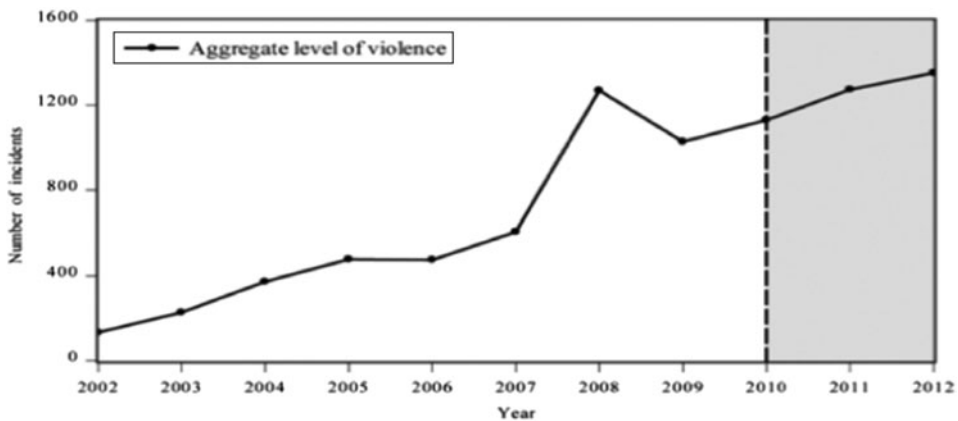


Figure 2. Frequency of PKK-initiated violence in the fifth period.

To ease the increased tension in the region, a reconciliation process with the PKK was launched by the current Turkish government under the rubric of “resolution process” in December 2012, which in fact implies a change of Turkish government’s strategy from deterrence to accommodation. The Turkish government’s effort to accommodate PKK’s political agenda and its integration to the legal political system is still ongoing. The gist of the issue with the process, however, had to do with the “withdrawal” of the PKK terrorists from Turkey into the northern parts of Iraq. The upside of the process has been that there has been no further killing of security personnel by the PKK. However, according to the government accounts, only a fraction (about 15%) of the PKK elements has left the country.⁷⁵ Some experts even say that the number of new recruits reached around 2000 during the resolution process, and these recruits have been trained to be used for an urban-based insurgency in the cities and big towns of the Kurdish populated southeast Turkey.⁷⁶

Indeed, on 27 August 2013, PKK announced its 4th Struggle Strategy,⁷⁷ which emphasizes the significance of the urban-based movements (*serhildan*) carried out by pro-PKK civilian activists. On the declaration of this strategy, it writes as follows: “Up until now, we have pursued a rural-based insurgency. This approach has made us invincible, kept our resistance firm, but has not allowed us to achieve final victory. So, it is high time to transform our struggle strategy from a rural one into an urban one.”⁷⁸ It is also worth mentioning that, in this declaration, the need to transition the struggle strategy from political movement to social movement has been emphasized. To achieve this transition, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an urban-based umbrella organization that includes the PKK, has been founded. KCK is indeed a new phenomenon of Kurdish struggle which may be defined as a move aimed at broadening PKK’s political appeal in urban settlements of Kurdish populated southeast Turkey. While the PKK was practical, political and one-dimensional rural-based movement aiming at confronting the denial of the Kurdish existence (ideological commitment) through armed violence, KCK seems to be a broader urban-based social and multi-dimensional movement (identity empowerment) to promote socio-cultural activism through the use of low levels of violence. Ertugrul Kürkçü, a parliamentary deputy for the pro-PKK Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) summarizes this new paradigm in the struggle strategy as follows:

The PKK is very sincere in their shift of strategy, which means civilian protest in the urban settlements is the basic element in the new Kurdish strategy and they will not resort to heavy arms in any sense. Rural guerilla times are over for the Kurdish movement.⁷⁹

Simply, with this shift in this last period, the classical model applied by the Turkish security forces, which is based on using armed force in rural areas, has become outmoded. The shift has meant that the village guard system, an integral component of this classical model, has become irrelevant in its current structure and its traditional way of usage. That is why, in the newly emerged socio-political context, the relevance of the guard system has become a hotly debated topic in Turkey.

Analysis of the evolution of the PKK’s struggle strategy and Turkish state’s counterstrategies through the lenses of the village guard system

It is possible to say that, in the first and second period, PKK had focused on the objective of attacking security forces and civilians strictly following the first stage of the Maoist–rural guerilla strategy. Between 1984 and 1987, state authorities had assessed the PKK terrorists as “a few bandits” harassing the villagers, who could be met with the village guard system. In the initiation phase of the system, it is clear that the legal framework was well regulated, and the responsibilities, rights, recruitment and training processes of the

guards were well defined. It is hard to say, however, that the village guards system was initiated with a strategic vision and in a well-planned fashion. Because the right to recruit was given to the local authorities, as a response to the rapidly increasing PKK-initiated violence, the numbers of village guards were expanded from 800 to 40,000 within 2 years. Given that the guards were recruited and employed by the local authorities with no overarching authority regulating the system at the national level, state officials found it difficult to manage the village guards in an effective fashion.

The officers and the village guards among the interviewees clearly suggest that the village guard system worked well as a counterterror strategy, because it more or less isolated the PKK from the Kurdish population and caused PKK difficulty in gaining active support. In other words, on the one hand, PKK could not expand its authority in the early 1990s and could not take control of the whole population in the southeast part of Turkey mainly because of the effectiveness of the village guard system. In her article which presents the interviews of the high-ranking generals in Turkey who actively participated in counterterror operations in early 1990s, Karen Kaya suggests that all generals hold that the development of asymmetric war techniques changed the tactical landscape in those years.⁸⁰ A new and more effective way to fight such armed groups, they argue, is the concept of “area control/dominance”, which entails dominating the area by leaving forces there after an attack. In this strategy which emphasized the “control of the physical territory in a 24/7 fashion,” the village guards played a key role and achieved “the impossible.”⁸¹ Thus, in the second period, the PKK’s objective of gaining and holding Kurdish territory was crushed both by the large-scale military operations and the resistance of the village guard system.

One should, however, note that, particularly in the second period, the extensive use of the village guards in large-scale military operations, including brigade- and corps-level offensive cross-border operations by the security forces, encroached on the guards’ initially defined defensive mission, which was to protect their village and its vicinity from the armed threat of the PKK. According to an interviewee who actively defends the PKK’s stance, this misuse of the village guards by the security forces in this period was a significant factor that “sowed the seeds of hostility,” the consequences of which have still been visible in the region.⁸² He then continues emphasizing that the other factor that sowed the seeds of the hostility and has led to many ongoing feuds in the region even today was “the allegations about the confiscation of land and pasture evacuated by others by some village guards.”⁸³

The period between 1999 and 2005, a six-year-long relatively peaceful period compared with the other periods, may be defined as a “missed opportunity”⁸⁴ for the state authorities to revise and modify the village guard system in relation to the PKK’s changing struggle strategy.

Particularly after the late 2000s, the PKK’s use of violence was changed dramatically when compared with the PKK’s struggle in the early years of the conflict. PKK switched to a different path which is dominated and led by political campaigns, and the PKK’s military effort has been rendered a secondary and supplementary tool rather than a primary asset.⁸⁵ With this paradigmatic shift, PKK’s struggle strategy has turned into a strategy of gaining “psychological territory,” meaning that it is not in the rural mountains of southeastern Turkey but in the social context to gain legitimacy with the populace. The pro-PKK parties rallying electoral support in the political arena resulted in providing certain advantages in terms of social mobilization of the PKK.⁸⁶ This shift in the PKK’s struggle strategy creates a difficulty in fighting them. This difficulty is PKK’s “invisibility,” meaning the difficulty of discerning the PKK terrorists from the population in the fourth and fifth periods. Their

invisibility has increased, first, by the fact that they operate in small, light groups, making them hard to spot in rural areas, and by the fact that they conceal themselves in urban areas in the human terrain.

To meet this new PKK strategy of dominating “psychological territory,” the Turkish government has changed its strategy from deterrence-based and territory-focused coercion to a more accommodative policy, particularly in the fourth period, to gain legitimacy with the local Kurds. The governor among interviewees summarizes this change as follows:

To address the Kurdish grievances, the Turkish government has accelerated the democratic reforms since 2005. Turkey’s committing to the full use of mother languages in education, the lift of the emergency rule in the Kurdish populated provinces, economic recovery projects implemented for the region, the formation of the wise man board on the Kurdish question, the initiation of a countrywide debate about the whys and hows of local governance, the debates about the lowering of the 10 percent electoral threshold would be sorted as prominent ones in the reform package. In this new period, we have been trying to win the hearts and minds of our fellow Kurdish people. Therefore, the deterrence-based and coercive strategies are outmoded and unnecessary in today’s context.⁸⁷

This new era in which the Turkish government emphasizes the use of the accommodative strategies rather than deterrence-based ones has caused problems for both the legitimacy and the functional effectiveness of the village guard system.

In the legitimacy dimension, there is still the question of whether the village guards as temporary public employees are defined as “public officials” or not. Veysel Erat, in his article (in Turkish) which analyses the village guard system in terms of the concept of the public official and within the scope of the public personnel regime, suggests that the village guards are not regarded as public officials.⁸⁸ However, every person working in the delivery of public services is a public official in the broadest sense. Temporary village guards are at the bottom when their rights and entitlements are taken into consideration among public employees.⁸⁹ According to Article 128 of the Turkish Constitution, for a person employed by the Turkish government to be considered a public official, his personnel qualifications, appointment, duties and powers, rights and liabilities, salaries and allowances and other personal affairs must be regulated through law.⁹⁰ Because of this constitutional article, the village guards whose employment has been carried out by executive decrees of the local governors – although they have been serving for almost 30 years – are not defined as “public officials,” and thus cannot claim the rights and privileges of public officials in Turkey.

In the functional effectiveness dimension, in this new era, as the state shifted from the deterrence-based strategy to accommodative strategy, questions have emerged about the recruitment practices and the role of the village guards in the grand counterterror strategy. In the first two periods, the institutional characteristics of the village guard system were well suited for the achievement of the objectives of localization of the security and pacification of the rural territories. In the new era, however, this system seems to be outmoded and needs urgently to be rehabilitated. Discussion of the honorable or dishonorable abolishment of the system is, however, outside the scope of this article.

As mentioned earlier, not all Kurds in Turkey embrace the PKK. In the light of the village guard system, assuming that the PKK conflict in Turkey is a Kurdish fight would be highly misleading. That is, assuming the Kurdish population is a group acting collectively and thinking in similar terms of ethnic consciousness (ethno-genesis) in support of the goals of the PKK would not be accurate. Simply, the 28-year-old village guard system indicates that Kurdish support in Turkey for the PKK is fragmented.⁹¹

In addition, the decline of the PKK-initiated violence first in 1994 and then in 1999 did not really signal the end of the PKK terrorist threat. PKK terrorism has significantly declined since 1992; however, it continued to survive and resurged from 2005 onward, meaning that the decline of violence and the end of a terrorist organization are two separate things. Perhaps the concept of the “learning cycle” may explain the fact that such a decline failed to produce the desistence of the PKK.⁹² As the Turkish government learned from its mistakes, the PKK also learned from their past failures and transformed into a new type of terrorist group operating in urban centers. If recent increase in violence is mostly urban, outside the old emergency areas, the government failed to anticipate this learning cycle of the PKK and needs to remain vigilant regarding terrorists’ persistence to survive and continue.

Conclusion

Despite its drawbacks and unintended consequences, the village guard system in Turkey worked well as a counterterror strategy between 1987 and 1999, and achieved the objectives of separation of the local population from the terrorists and denying the PKK control of their hoped-for secessionist territory. Considering the size of the voluntary village guards, the numbers of the guards killed and injured in the operations, and the risk they take and amount of salary they receive from the state, it is highly unlikely that all village guards have been doing this job solely for economic reasons or under pressure from state authorities. Since 1987, according to Orhan Kandemir, only about 600 guards (roughly 1% of the total number) have resigned and returned their arms to the state officials, although PKK has pressed them hard to do so.

Ata Altin suggests:

Please note that, in this struggle, the village guards have been the Kurdish group which has suffered the most, yet I fully recognize that there were a few guards who misused their state-given rights. All these guards, however, have been pinpointed and prosecuted by the judges. To protect our rights, homes and families, we have taken the arms offered by the states. The state officials say that this is a “temporary” system. Have you seen a “temporary” security system in the world which lasts 28 years? We also came to realize that, in this recent years, our armed struggle came to an end and our struggle of idea has started. The Turkish government should first rehabilitate the village guard system and then transform it respecting to our honorable struggle. The government may, for instance, employ the young guards as the private security guards in state-run enterprises and may pay a retirement pension to the elders. Unless they do, the Turkish government will lose the support of the village guards and their families, the biggest pro-state Kurdish population in Turkey.”⁹³

The fact that Ata Altin talks about roughly 600,000 Kurds here, including the 120,000 guards (the total number of all village guards still serving and retired ones) and their families, makes the debate on the village guard system more sensitive.

I turn now to consider what lessons about use of militias can be derived from the Turkish case for conflict situations like the ones in the Af-Pak region and Iraq where ethnic conflict also occurs in the context of rural Muslim villages.

First, in 1985, the village guard system in Turkey was initiated under the assumption that the emergent threat (PKK bandits) was so local and small that it was not considered to require commitment of national security forces. This perception of PKK fighters as “a few bandits” led the Turkish government officials to the authorization of the system in a temporally (the system was designed to be temporary) and spatially (only in three provinces) limited setting. It is, however, significant to note that, while the legal framework was adequate to support to system, there emerged many institutional problems

as the number of village guards was enormously expanded from 800 men to 40,000 men within only a one-year-long period. The primary sources of these shortfalls would be sorted as follows: the absence of comprehensive vision at the national level and the implementation of the planning and recruitment strategy of the system at the provincial level. The absence of a national-level institutional framework which would standardize the system led to the differentiating practices in the provinces. Simply, the dramatic rise within a short period of time, when combined with the attempt of government to micro-manage the village guard system at the provincial level, led not only to confusion about the rights, missions and responsibilities of the village guards, but also caused different (sometimes contradicting) practices in the following years. Fast expansion meant both weak control at the national level and different interpretations of the operational use of the guards at the provincial level.

Excessive use of the village guards in the region has hardened existing local enmities and feuds and caused the emergence of new ones, such as the contestations over lands in the evacuated villages. It is not hyperbole to suggest that the system has also changed the nature of conflict by first pushing the conflict into new areas and creating new micro-cleavages (whether tribal or at the family level) in the provinces. These results, which clearly emphasize the explanatory power of local political structures in an ethnic conflict, confirm Kalyvas's theorization. The definition of village guards as "traitor" (*jash*) by the PKK supporters, and guards' definition of the PKK fighters as the "bastards of Apo,"⁹⁴ and the clear hatred of one another expressed during the interviews is striking.

The allegation of human rights violations by militias seem to be inevitable (whether these allegations are true or not). The absence or lack of sufficient legal mechanisms to investigate accusations, especially in combination with low levels of transparency and accountability, may lead to structural legal problems and emotional conflicts over justice in the Afghan and Iraq cases as in the Turkish case.

One should also note that, as seen in the Turkish case, early success gained just after the implementation of the militia system needs follow-up before the enemy adapts. Between 1985 and 1993, the village guard system worked well as an effective counterterrorism strategy. In the following years, however, it has gradually waned in effectiveness when considering the increasing number of PKK attacks in the period 1993–1999, and caused increasing socio-economic and political micro-level cleavages in the region. As the big inertia in a dispersed system means resistance to change, the guards system could not easily be modified, meaning the strengthening of the existing micro-cleavages and the emergence of the new ones.

Lastly, as one may conclude from the article, the Turkish government has been in a dilemma when deciding on the fate of the village guard system. Opinions about this issue highlight two options for the government, each of which can take two forms.

The first option is demobilization. One form of this option is "honorable demobilization," which implies that government will end the guard system after providing all material and social rights and benefits to the retired and serving guards, and publicly elevating the history of the guards for their role in the Turkish state's armed struggle against the PKK. The other form, "dishonorable demobilization," implies that the government will end the guard system with few or small rights and benefits for retired and serving guards, and will meticulously search the history of the guards to bring to justice those who allegedly committed crimes. Interviewees who favor dishonorable demobilization argue the need to establish memorial sites for those crimes and brutalities allegedly committed by the guards, with periodic visits by government officials to these sites to keep the collective memory fresh.

The second option is to maintain and continue the guards system. In this option, there again appear to be two alternative forms. One form is the maintenance of the system after a comprehensive revision that examines the strengths, drawbacks and consequences of the system in the domains of security, law and politics so as to make it more effective and efficient. The other form is the maintenance of the status quo which implies the continuation of the village guards as an open-ended commitment not restrained by definite limits, restrictions, or structure.

Currently, the Turkish government seems to embrace the last alternative; that is, maintenance of the system as it is in an open-ended process. Or simply, leaving this system to time at the moment and seeking to maintain the existing status quo. With the information at hand, it is not easy to predict which option the Turkish government will embrace in the near future. Sooner or later, however, when the government decides on the village guard system, this decision will surely be a strategic one which directly affects the evolution of conflict and the fragile peace process in Turkey.

Notes

1. Please see “Chapter One: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency” of the FM 3–24 US Counterinsurgency Manual.
2. Dexter Filkins, “Afghans and U.S. Plan to Recruit Local Militias”.
3. Mustafa Cosar Unal, “The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)”.
4. Please see the full text (Turkish) of the still valid Law of Temporary Village Guards: <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.442.pdf> (accessed January 22, 2014). Please also see the law which regulates and sets the condition of the distribution of the rifles to the village guards (in Turkish): <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/Metin.Aspx?MevzuatKod=7.5.4572&MevzuatIlski=0&sourceXmlSearch=korucu> (accessed January 20, 2014).
5. Ibid.
6. PKK has been recognized as a terrorist organization by the Department of State of the US and by the European Union. Please see: <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> (accessed January 20, 2014).
7. “Yeni yıl zamları belli oldu”, *Bugün Newspaper*, December 13, 2013.
8. Please see the full text of the Village Law (in Turkish): http://www.nvi.gov.tr/Files/File/Mevzuat/Nufus_Mevzuati/Kanun/pdf/KoYKANUNU.pdf (accessed January 20, 2014).
9. Except for 300 Ulupamir Guards, who immigrated to the Van province from Kyrgyzstan, all village guards are ethnically Kurd.
10. Most of the village guards are employed in the borderline between Iraq, Iran, and in the extremely mountainous provinces of Hakkari, Sirnak and Van because PKK has been using safe havens in Iraq and Iran for years.
11. Nadir Gergin, Fatih Balci “Turkey’s counterterrorism policies against PKK”.
12. Newruz marks the first day of spring and the beginning of the year which usually occurs on 21 March.
13. “Kurdish Group to Pull Armed Units from Turkey”, *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 April 2013 (accessed January 20, 2014).
14. “Kandil açıklaması meclis’te tansiyonu yükseltti”, *İnternethaber*, 25 April 2013 (accessed January 20, 2014).
15. Hasan Cemal “Silahlara veda” (in Turkish). *T24*. 25 April 2013 (accessed January 20, 2014). Please see: <http://t24.com.tr/yazarlar/hasan-cemal/silahlara-veda,6592> (accessed May 20, 2014).
16. Constanze Letsch, “Kurdish guards fear for jobs and lives when Turkey and PKK make peace”, *The Guardian*, May 22, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/22/turkey-kurdsguards-peace> (accessed May 20, 2014).
17. “BDP suggests abolition of village guard system to help settlement”, *Todays Zaman*, April 15, 2013.
18. Human Rights Watch Briefing Paper, March 2003 – Turkey and War in Iraq: Avoiding Past Patterns of Violation.

19. US State Department, 2000 Country Reports, Turkey.
20. From the Interview with Ozturk Turkdogan, head of the Human Right Association in Turkey. The interview was conducted in Ankara on 13 December 2013 and 17 December 2013 as two different meetings.
21. Şemsa Özar, Nesrin Uçarlar, Osman Aytar, *Geçmişten Günümüze Türkiye 'de Paramiliter Bir Yapılanma: Köy Koruculuğu Sistemi*. Please see the review of the book (in Turkish) at <http://www.guneydoguguncel.com/mecliste-koruculuk-1495yy.htm> (accessed May 20, 2014).
22. Ibid.
23. “Militants will start withdrawing from Turkey on May 8, PKK says”, *Hurriyet Daily News*, April 4, 2013.
24. From the interview with Ata Altin which was conducted in Kecioren, Ankara on 14 January 2014. Please note that the interviews were conducted in Turkish by the author. He smoothed those interviews when translating from Turkish into English to be able to accurately provide the meaning.
25. “PKK has an execution list of the village guards” *Milliyet*, January 14, 2014.
26. “Jash” means “donkey” in Arabic/Kurdish and is used to refer “traitor” in the slang form. Please see: <http://rastibini.blogspot.co.uk/2006/06/jash-of-north.html> (accessed January 21, 2014).
27. Ibid.
28. The European Commission 2013 Turkey Progress Report, Brussel, October 16, 2013, p. 15. For the full report, please see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2013/package/tr_rapport_2013.pdf (accessed January 22, 2014).
29. Mustafa Cosar Unal, “The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)”.
30. Sandler and Enders, “An Economic Perspective on Transnational Terrorism”. Please also see: Martha Crenshaw, “On How Terrorism Ends”.
31. Andres M. Bock, “Negotiate with Terrorists or: Why Terrorism Cannot Be Deterred” (2007). Please see: http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipg/ipg-2007-1/12_re_bock_gb.pdf (accessed May 20, 2014).
32. Seth Jones, “The Strategic Logic of Militia”, *RAND National Defence Research Institute Working Paper*, (2012), p. 12.
33. Ariel Ahram, *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias* (Stanford Security Studies, 2011), p. 47.
34. Misra Amalendu, “Politics of Civil Wars: Conflict, Intervention and Resolution”, *Democracy and Security*, 8, no. 4 (2012), 406–414.
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36. Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 301.
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42. The author wants to thank Mustafa Cosar Unal for his permission to use his data sets.
43. The Headquarter assessment entitled “The Village Guard System” prepared by the Turkish Gendarmerie Command in 2012. The fact sheet entitled “The Terror Incidents between 1984–2013” prepared by the Turkish Gendarmerie Command in 2014. The report entitled “The Future of the Village Guard System and the Possible Precautions” prepared by the Turkish Interior Ministry in 1997. (Turkish – İç İşleri Bakanlığının 18 Eylül 1997 tarih ve 1300-383-13/GEN-SEK sayılı “Geçici Köy Koruculuğunun Geleceği ve Alınacak Tedbirler” konulu raporu, 1997).

44. Please note that these reports are not open to public access, but anyone interested in seeing these reports may apply to BIMER (Official request for info system [Turkish: Bilgi edinme] system run by the Turkish Primeministership by sending e-mail or writing an appeal).
45. **Mustafa Cosar Unal**, “Terrorism and Political Violence Strategist or Pragmatist”.
46. From the interview with Orhan Kandemir which was conducted in Kecioren and Cankaya in Ankara on 17 December 2013.
47. **Umit Ozdag** (2004), “The PKK and Low Intensity Conflict in Turkey”. Ankara Paper 5.
48. From the interview of Ata Altin.
49. From the interview of a major from the Turkish military.
50. **Ali Riza Ozdemir**, *PKK ve Korucular* (PKK and the Village Guards) [in Turkish]. (Istanbul, Altinpost, 2004).
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54. **Evren Balta Paker**.
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