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# The Tactics of Terror: Variation and Rational Adaptation in the Strategy and Tactics of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

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THE TACTICS OF TERROR

*VARIATION AND RATIONAL ADAPTATION IN THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE  
KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY (PKK)*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in Political Science

By

Rebecca Lucas

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

April 2014

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Since its founding in 1979, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known popularly by the acronym PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*), has become the dominant group fighting for the interests of Turkey's Kurdish population. This paper examines the PKK's strategy in the last three decades. Throughout its existence, the PKK has had variation in its ideology, political engagement, and use of violence. This thesis seeks to explain such variation within the framework of the party's intentional strategic and tactical choices.

I have found strong evidence that the PKK is a rational organization that evolves its strategy and tactics to adapt in different contexts and to temporal and geographic movement. The party has primarily adapted and acted with an interest in maintaining its legitimacy and cultivating public support. The group and its leaders have used legal and illegal means in parallel to become advocates for Turkey's Kurds and have effected significant change.

### **The Rationality of Terrorism**

Focus on the use of violence by extra-governmental groups is frequently concentrated on outrage. In the current world order, national governments have a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence; even the use of force by most national governments is closely monitored and often sharply criticized by the international community. This leads most people, including scholars, to leave aside the question of whether violence is a useful strategic and tactical tool for non-state actors. This becomes increasingly true when that violence is directed at uninvolved parties or civilians, as is often the case with terrorism. However, Clausewitz recognized the political utility

of war over a century ago, and he was hardly the first; just as violence can be an effective tool for governments, it has proven its value to other actors as well.<sup>1</sup>

Most definitions of terrorism acknowledge that terrorists frequently act to further political or social objectives.<sup>2</sup> Among those who study terrorism, however, there has been disagreement in recent years regarding the motivation and rationality of terrorist groups. Particularly in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, there have been an increasing number of scholars who argue that the actions of terrorist organizations are not truly a reflection of political ideals, but instead are acts of aimless, wanton violence.<sup>3</sup> Terrorism's lack of conventional military objectives such as immediate territorial control or victory in a war of attrition only further these views.<sup>4</sup> Despite sometimes acknowledging their political motives, many scholars and international actors deny the rationality of terrorists.<sup>5</sup>

Among others in the field, however, there has been an increasing effort to understand acts of terrorism as the result of rational, politically motivated calculations.<sup>6</sup> Scholars who study terrorism, including Max Abrahms and Martha Crenshaw, often make the argument for rationality by demonstrating whether organizations meet the assumptions that make up the "strategic model".<sup>7</sup> The strategic model requires that terrorists meet three requirements in order to qualify as rational: motivation by relatively consistent preferences; decisions made through an evaluation of the political risks and rewards; and adoption of terrorism when it is the option

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<sup>1</sup> General Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War: A Modern Military Classic* (Virginia: Wilder Publications, 2008), 34.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver P. Richmond, "Realizing Hegemony? Symbolic Terrorism and the Roots of Conflict," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2008): 290.

<sup>3</sup> Richmond, "Realizing Hegemony?" 290.

<sup>4</sup> Ariel Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5 no. 4 (Winter 1993): 23.

<sup>5</sup> Max Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want: Terrorist Motives and Counterterrorism Strategy," *International Security* 32 No. 4 (Spring 2008): 79.

<sup>6</sup> see: Merari, Richmond, Crenshaw, Pape

<sup>7</sup> Abrahms, "What Terrorists Really Want," 79.

promising the largest return.<sup>8</sup> The assumption that terrorist organizations are rational allows analysis of their actions as political behavior, rather than merely aimless destruction or random criminal activity.<sup>9</sup> For actors that meet the criteria of the strategic model, scholars can focus on the objective, pragmatic conditions that define their strategy, rather than purely ideological or emotional concerns.<sup>10</sup> Though these scholars acknowledge that there are acts of terrorism that are simply what Ariel Merari classifies as “expressive”, motivated by sheer frustration or a desire for revenge rather than political calculation, they are the exception rather than the rule.<sup>11</sup> For groups that conform to the assumptions of the strategic model, the scholars posit that their actions are driven by strategic and pragmatic concerns.

PKK fulfills the criteria of the strategic model. It demonstrates its motivation by relatively consistent principles through its dedication to Kurdish ethno-nationalist ideals, even as the precise form of its demands has adapted in the face of changing political realities.<sup>12</sup> Though some critiques question this consistency due to its varying devotion to Marxism, and their relatively recent emphasis on liberal values, these motivations are secondary to its ethno-nationalist priorities.<sup>13</sup> The PKK’s evaluation of political risks and rewards is evident in the shortage of other available options for advocating for Kurdish rights in Turkey.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the period of PKK activity, Turkish law has consistently made it a crime to even discuss the

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<sup>8</sup> Abrahms, “What Terrorists Really Want,” 79.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Crenshaw, “The Causes of Terrorism,” *Comparative Politics* 13 No. 4 (July 1981): 380.

<sup>10</sup> Richmond, “Realizing Hegemony?” 292.

<sup>11</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 23.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Radu, “The Land of Many Crossroads: The Rise and Fall of the PKK,” *Orbis* (2001): 48. *Chapter Two* will discuss this in more detail.

<sup>14</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 192.



surrounding issues, all but eliminating the feasibility in other courses of action.<sup>15</sup> The repeated exclusion of Kurdish politicians from the political scene further reinforced the conviction that only violence offered sufficient returns. Thus, a close examination of the strategic model demonstrates that the PKK is a rational organization.

Though this specific debate is relatively recent, the underlying concepts are hardly novel. In the 1980s, Schelling argued at length about the diplomatic nature of violence, explicitly laying out the ways in which violence can be used for the purpose of inflicting pain to motivate changes in behavior; he refers to this as the “power to hurt” as opposed to the use of violence for “brute force.”<sup>16</sup> He then defines the power to hurt as bargaining power. Given his early description of diplomacy as bargaining, consequently, the “power to hurt” or coercive violence becomes defined as diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while viewing terrorism as diplomacy provokes an instinctive condemnation, and it’s hardly an orthodox definition, the theoretical underpinnings of the concept, and the argument for the potential rewards of violence, are well established in existing literature.

There are valid arguments against the rationality of terrorist groups. Perhaps the strongest empirical argument is the allegation that terror simply does not work; therefore, rational risk and reward analysis would never result in violence. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan support this argument with an empirical study, concluding that nonviolent means are more effective than violence, and that nonviolence achieves the stated goals of a group more often.<sup>18</sup> Their study of groups pursuing violent or nonviolent political action between 1900 and

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<sup>15</sup> Kemal Kirisci and Gareth Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict*, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 200.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 240.

<sup>17</sup> Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 240.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, “Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict,” *International Security* 33 No. 1 (Summer 2008): 7.

2006 indicated that nonviolent movements have succeeded 53 percent of the time, as opposed to the 26 percent success rate of violence.<sup>19</sup> They attribute the higher efficacy of nonviolent methods to two primary factors: the ways in which nonviolent movements generate legitimacy and participation; and the difficulty governments have in justifying their utilization of violence against nonviolent civilians. Many have used Chenoweth and Stephan's argument to support the claims of terrorist irrationality; however, regardless of the veracity of Chenoweth and Stephan's broader claims, their arguments do not account for the circumstances surrounding the PKK.

First, Chenoweth and Stephan argue that the international community is more likely to view nonviolent movements as legitimate and, consequently, to provide them with outside aid. In the case of the PKK, however, support coming from outside countries including Syria, Iraq, Iran and, arguably Greece, was precisely because of their violent tactics.<sup>20</sup> Syria used the PKK in its negotiations with Turkey, sheltering and supporting the PKK for almost two decades as a way to put pressure on the Turkish state.<sup>21</sup> The PKK was well aware of the tensions in the region; it was common practice for countries in the region to use neighbors' Kurdish populations against them, particularly during contentious bilateral negotiations.<sup>22</sup> The increased likelihood of support because of the PKK's use of violence eliminates this advantage of nonviolent conflict and further supports the rationality of the PKK's violent tactics.

Second, Chenoweth and Stephan argue that states risk losing legitimacy when they attack peaceful movements, as opposed to when they pursue and persecute terrorism, which increases

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<sup>19</sup> Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," 8.

<sup>20</sup> Kevin Alger, "Lessons from Contemporary Insurgency: The PKK's Enduring Fight." (Fort Huachuca, AZ: University of Military Intelligence, 2008), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question: Critical Turning Points and Missed Opportunities," *Middle East Journal* 51 No. 1 (Winter 1997): 75.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 98.

the efficacy of nonviolent movements.<sup>23</sup> In Turkey, however, it had become clear by the end of the 1970s that, regardless of the consequences, the Turkish military and the Turkish government were more than willing to use violence. A history of brutally repressing Turkey's Kurdish citizens, the mass imprisonments following the 1971 and 1980 coups and the frequent use of torture had not cost either one enough to affect their actions. The state only continued to support this belief in its use of excessive violence against both violent and nonviolent actors throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Chenoweth and Stephan's theory does not account for the PKK's analysis of risks and rewards. Indeed, after contextual analysis, this powerful argument in favor of the irrationality of terrorists only strengthens the assertion that the PKK is a rational actor.

Even if one agrees that such groups are rational political actors, the decision to treat them as such remains contentious. There is an understandable concern that speaking with such groups could teach them that violence is rewarded; unfortunately, this lesson has already been well learned. Groups such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the African National Congress (ANC), have already established the ability of violence to lead to recognition and legitimacy on the international stage.<sup>25</sup> There are also multiple ways in which groups and their supporters define success: for example, Merari defines the four potential definitions of success for terrorist organizations as recruitment, international attention, international legitimacy, and partial concessions.<sup>26</sup> By these standards, groups like Al-Qaeda or Boko Haram, who remain outcasts in the international community, have still achieved certain degrees of success.<sup>27</sup> These varied definitions of success affect the risk-benefit

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<sup>23</sup> Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," 9.

<sup>24</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," 28; Richmond, "Realizing Hegemony?" 308.

<sup>26</sup> Merari, "Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency," 26.

<sup>27</sup> Erica Chenoweth, Nicholas Miller, and Elizabeth McClellan, "Correspondence: What Makes Terrorists Tick," *International Security* 33 No. 4 (Spring 2009): 182.

calculations performed by rational actors, particularly if the situation is one in which other avenues seem to yield minimal, if any, rewards.<sup>28</sup>

Such issues lead to the larger concern that negotiating with terrorists or including them in existing political structures requires concessions regarding political and moral norms. Many governments argue that treating such groups as legitimate political actors would establish political violence as a tool of diplomacy, rather than an unacceptable act of aggression.<sup>29</sup> As such violence is the tool of marginalized actors, often employed against those who establish global norms, these concessions become even more complex. However, it is also true that between 1968 and 2009, 43 percent of terrorist groups ultimately entered the political process, usually by way of negotiations with those who held power in the existing structure.<sup>30</sup> This figure does not include organizations that declared unilateral ceasefires, bringing conflict to a close, or at least a long-term halt.<sup>31</sup> Whether or not the idea is palatable, the evidence suggests that recognition and incorporation of groups that utilize political violence is an important avenue of exploration in counterterrorism efforts.

### **Views of the PKK**

Overall, the literature regarding the rationality of terrorist organizations is extensive, accounting for multiple situations and perspectives. The debate has large policy implications, particularly for negotiations like those ongoing between the Turkish government and the PKK. Unfortunately, very little of the literature on rationality deals specifically with the PKK, and

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<sup>28</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," 383.

<sup>30</sup> Chenoweth, Miller and McClellan, "What Makes Terrorists Tick," 182.

<sup>31</sup> Chenoweth, Miller and McClellan, "What Makes Terrorists Tick," 182.

what there is often affected by adamant efforts to censor news of the conflict.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, discussions of rationality pertaining to the PKK are highly polarized, even within American and European academic communities.

Most popular literature, and even a large portion of academic literature, treats the PKK as cold-blood killers, describing it as a group with no focused ideology. Instead, such writers portray it as a group of common criminals, motivated only by opportunism and a lust for power.<sup>33</sup> The primary engine of this lust for power is Abdullah Ocalan, who has led the PKK since its inception. Many scholars further describe him as a Stalinist and a megalomaniac, who has shaped the PKK into a personality cult.<sup>34</sup> Some go so far as to deny the PKK's nationalist aspirations or its popular Kurdish support entirely.<sup>35</sup> Scholars with these views often attribute the PKK's widespread popularity among Kurds to intimidation, extortion, and harassment.<sup>36</sup> As evidence, they point to inconsistent aspects of its ideology and a high number of civilian casualties to demonstrate the organization's inherent tendency towards violence, rather than its identity as an actor for whom violence is the means to achieve political aspirations.<sup>37</sup>

Historically, the Turkish government has insisted that conflict with the PKK and the government's difficult relations with the Kurds are not about nationalism at all; rather, such issues are entirely due to the economic inequities that exist in the predominantly Kurdish southeast.<sup>38</sup> In response, the government has invested billions in the southeastern portion of Turkey; the most famous example of this is the \$20 billion Southeastern Anatolian

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<sup>32</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 48.

<sup>34</sup> Lesser, et al., "Countering the New Terrorism," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 106.

<sup>35</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 51.

<sup>36</sup> Lesser, et al., "Countering the New Terrorism," 105.

<sup>37</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 52.

<sup>38</sup> David L. Phillips, "Disarming, Demobilizing and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Worker's Party," *Foreign Policy Interests* (2007): 13.

Project/*Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi* (GAP).<sup>39</sup> It is undeniably the case that economic inequality disproportionately impacts Turkey's Kurdish citizens.<sup>40</sup> However, academic studies on the broader impact of economic factors on terrorism have been inconclusive.<sup>41</sup> Specifically in Turkey, as the economic situation overall and the southeast in particular have improved, the extent of PKK efforts have not abated. In recent years, when Turkey had its best economic performance in decades, the PKK also increased its violence to its highest levels since the 1990s.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the conflict with the PKK is part of the reason why many predominantly Kurdish districts have suffered economically, precluding a simple cause and effect narrative.<sup>43</sup> Thus, temporal comparison and close examination demonstrate that economic inequality alone is an inadequate explanation for the PKK's actions.

Only recently have some scholars, most of whom have spent extensive amounts of time in the region, begun to examine the issue in a different light. Such analyses take into account popular support for the PKK, and certainly for the ideas it espouses, has been and remains strong among many in Turkey.<sup>44</sup> Some suggest that this is due to its apparent impact: since the start of the PKK's military actions, there has been an increasing awareness of and space for the Kurdish identity in Turkey's public sphere. Many attribute this change to Ocalan and the PKK, pointing out that these developments have been highly correlated with the PKK's militant actions.<sup>45</sup>

While coincidence or alternative causation is certainly possible, the pattern deserves closer

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<sup>39</sup> "Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP)," (Washington DC: Foreign Agriculture Service, United States Department of Agriculture).

<sup>40</sup> Metin Ozaslan, Bulent Dincer, and Huseyin Ozgur, "Regional Disparities and Territorial Indicators in Turkey: Socio-Economic Development Index (SEDI)," (Pamukkale, Turkey: State Planning Organisation, Pamukkale University, 2000): 14.

<sup>41</sup> See Lyall, Gause, and Li regarding democracy and Piazza, Ehrlich and Krueger regarding economic determinants of terrorism

<sup>42</sup> "Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, September 2011), 5.

<sup>43</sup> Kirisci, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 185.

<sup>44</sup> Phillips, "Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Worker's Party," 18.

<sup>45</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 181.

examination. This thesis will discuss both the PKK's efficacy and its popular support in greater depth.

### **Strategy and Tactics**

If one accepts that the PKK is a rational actor, it necessarily entails that, like any other actors, the party strategizes and plans tactics in order to achieve its ends; furthermore, it is possible to consistently trace related decisions. In order to better understand these, it is important to specifically define of strategy and tactics within the context of this paper.

The U.S. Department of Defense defines a strategic plan as one that dictates “the overall conduct” of a conflict.<sup>46</sup> Strategy determines long-term objectives and provides guidance as to the appropriate use of resources in pursuit of these objectives.<sup>47</sup> Such objectives are not immediate, but rather at the theater, national, or multinational level.<sup>48</sup> Strategy, in other words, is the long plan.

Tactics, in contrast, are the immediate actions implemented in order to achieve long-term goals.<sup>49</sup> Tactics are applied in the short-term; military definitions refer to individual engagements and the authority over fire, “limited to detailed direction of movements or maneuvers.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, tactics establish immediate goals and priorities, as well as the way in which they should be achieved. Such goals and priorities contribute to the achievement of strategic objectives; however, they are only a partial step.

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<sup>46</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms I-02,” (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2010), 251.

<sup>47</sup> Joint Chiefs, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms I-02,” 251.

<sup>48</sup> Joint Chiefs, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms I-02,” 251.

<sup>49</sup> Joint Chiefs, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms I-02,” 258.

<sup>50</sup> Joint Chiefs, “Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms I-02,” 257.

In order to better understand the PKK, one must understand both the strategic and tactical levels of planning. Tactics reveal the reasons why someone uses a specific weapon at a particular time and place, while strategy can inform the audience regarding the ultimate goal of a particular action. While Chapter 2 primarily addresses strategy, all three chapters explore tactical decisions.

### **Terminology**

In order to better understand violence and its utility, I intend to momentarily set aside questions of morality. That is not to say such questions are not important; however, I am hardly qualified to draw conclusions in this area. Instead, I intend to take advantage of the relative impartiality and objectivity I gain with distance. To this end, several pieces of terminology become important, specifically the term “terrorism” and certain geographic descriptors.

The word ‘terrorist’ is often used for its generic meaning, one that carries value judgments and strong associations especially after 9/11. Such subjective connotations and broad meaning are not constructive in achieving a better understanding of the objective determinants of a given act. Some scholars in their work on the PKK avoid using the term at all, as it carries so many connotations.<sup>51</sup> With that in mind, I will seek to refer to groups by their names as much as possible, and by more general terms such as ‘party’, ‘group’, or ‘organization’ where a specific name may not be appropriate. ‘Terrorism’ carries similar connotations, making it difficult to better examine violent political action. Where possible, I will seek to refer to events as ‘political violence’ or merely ‘acts of violence’ rather than ‘terrorist attacks’.

On occasions where using the term ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorism’ is appropriate and unavoidable, I use it in accordance with its specific definition in international law. For the

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<sup>51</sup> Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom* (Oxford: Praeger, 2011), 9.



Convention on Financing Terrorism, 194 of 197 signatory states agree that “attacks by freedom fighters and other combatants in armed conflict...[targeting] civilians...amount to terrorist acts.”<sup>52</sup> Similar definitions acknowledge that the motivation of terrorist groups is often “grounded in an underlying political or ideological purpose, which thus differentiates terrorism from criminal acts similarly designed to spread fear.”<sup>53</sup> Many of the PKK’s actions fall within the parameters of this admittedly broad definition, and it is in keeping with this definition, rather than with a particular value judgment, that I will employ the term.<sup>54</sup>

There is also a great deal of overlap between terrorist actions and guerilla warfare; the two terms are often conflated.<sup>55</sup> Conceptually, they are distinct descriptors, particularly as they relate to desired ends and utilized means: while guerilla warfare often involves a war of attrition, conducted with tactics similar to those of conventional armies, terrorism is almost entirely about coercion.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the easiest ways to distinguish the two relate to the number of participants and the importance of territory. Guerilla warfare requires large groups of people and involves considerably more violence over a wider geographic area. Terrorism, in contrast, involves very small groups conducting very targeted acts.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, to those involved in guerilla warfare, command of territory is extremely important; it ensures access to resources and the implementation of effective logistics.<sup>58</sup> Terrorism, in contrast, has no interest in claiming territory as a direct consequence of the violent act; rather, it aims to convince governments or other actors that such a concession would be in their best interest. Further parsing of the two

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<sup>52</sup> A. Cassese, et al., *Cassese’s International Criminal Law*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2013), 148.

<sup>53</sup> Cassese et al, *Cassese’s International Criminal Law*, 151.

<sup>54</sup> See Crenshaw, Merari, Abrahms for a more detailed discussion of definitions of terrorism

<sup>55</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 3.

<sup>56</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 14.

<sup>57</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 7.

<sup>58</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 7.

terms is an important academic exercise; in reality the two are often simultaneous. While it can be extremely difficult to distinguish between the two, due to their operational similarity and frequent proximity, I will try to apply each term in the most specific manner possible, and will endeavor to avoid conflation.

Finally, I will be referring to the region of “Kurdistan.”<sup>59</sup> This is not intended as a political statement; rather, I am following the example of previous scholars in the field who have concurred that it is the most accurate way to refer to a particular geographic region not defined by internationally recognized boundaries.<sup>60</sup> “Kurdistan” refers to parts of Iran, Syria, Turkey and Iraq that are primarily inhabited by Kurds. “Turkish Kurdistan” or Northwestern Kurdistan refers to those provinces in the southeast of Turkey in which Kurds have historically made up the majority of residents. This region is also where the majority of the PKK’s activity has taken place.<sup>61</sup> Though the Turkish government is notorious for refusing to record ethnic statistics among their population, it is well established that the majority of residents in these particular provinces continue to claim Kurdish identity.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Figure 1: Map of Turkey and Kurdistan.

<sup>60</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 190.

<sup>61</sup> See Figure 1: Map of Turkey and Kurdistan

<sup>62</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 12.



Figure 1: Map of Turkey and Kurdistan. The purple lines outline the official Southeastern Anatolian region. The blue outline indicates those provinces of Turkey that have historically held the majority of the Kurdish population.

### Turkey's Kurds

According to the most common estimates, there are currently approximately 15 million Kurds living in Turkey; due to the lack of ethnic self-identification on the Turkish national census, it is impossible to know exact numbers.<sup>63</sup> Turkey contains approximately half of the Kurdish population in the region; the remaining half is split between Syria, Northern Iraq and Iran. Within Turkey, Kurds are approximately twenty percent of the population, yet their existence has been denied throughout much of Turkish history.<sup>64</sup> Today, the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Turkey are the poorest in the country and have been under military rule for the majority of their existence.<sup>65</sup> Any numbers pertaining to the conflict are difficult to obtain because the government has been loathe to disclose what goes on in its southeastern provinces; casualty numbers are difficult to come by and often vary greatly depending on who is reporting

<sup>63</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Ozaslan, et al. "Regional Disparities and Territorial Indicators in Turkey," 16.

them. According to all estimates, however, it is undeniable that the Kurdish population in Turkey has been oppressed and persecuted since the Republic was founded, if not before.

The Kurds have been fighting for independence since the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Historically, the Turkish military has met Kurdish uprisings with bloody retribution. Repression has not only been military; political and cultural expression was also suppressed, often harshly. Even the acknowledgement of Kurdish identity was anathema in public arenas: until the 1990s, Kurds were referred to as “mountain Turks” in official parlance, when they were discussed at all.<sup>66</sup>

### Pre-Republican History

Turkey’s refusal to recognize Kurds as a minority has its precedents in Ottoman law. During the Ottoman Empire, the legal code, based originally in Islamic shari’a, only recognized religious minorities.<sup>67</sup> Particularly during later portions of Ottoman rule, Islam was seen as a binding commonality that transcended ethnicity.<sup>68</sup> This was one of the bedrocks of Ottoman rule, as the sultan was not only a secular leader, but the caliph as well, with the right to rule over all true believers in the faith.<sup>69</sup> Throughout much of the Empire’s history, this was a fairly effective system that Kurdish subjects accepted fairly readily; unlike many Ottoman subjects who began gaining a strong sense of national identity at odds with imperial rule in the Balkans

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<sup>66</sup> Phillips, “Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Worker’s Party,” 10.

<sup>67</sup> Ergil, “The Kurdish Question in Turkey,” 123.

<sup>68</sup> Kirisci, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 90.

<sup>69</sup> Major Andrew Morgado, “Turkish Culture and its Influence on the Counter-Insurgency Campaign Against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party,” (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2005): 9.

and parts of the Middle East, Kurdish nationalism was a relatively late arrival, only crystallizing around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>70</sup>

These nationalist aspirations were recognized in the Treaty of Sevres, the 1920 agreement between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied powers of World War I. With the end of the war and the defeat of the Germans and their Turkish allies, European powers divided what remained of the Ottoman Empire. Originally, much of the division was drawn along ethnic lines, and the treaty included a provision for Kurdish autonomy, with the dangling possibility of future independence.<sup>71</sup> The divisions of Sevres, however, would prove to be fleeting. A young Ottoman military commander, Mustafa Kemal, now known primarily by his adopted surname, Ataturk, led resistance to the foreign occupation. The next treaty with major European powers and a state on the Anatolian Peninsula was the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, signed by a similar set of European powers and the fledgling Turkish Republic. Unlike Sevres, Lausanne mostly treated Turkey as a united state.<sup>72</sup> It made no provisions for ethnic minorities and no mention of the Kurds.

### The Early Republic and the Early Resistance

From the start of the Republic, Ataturk's government emphasized the importance and supremacy of the new Turkish ethnicity. The newly written Turkish Constitution recognized only Turkish citizens and Turkish speakers within the Republic. Authority was highly centralized, resting with the central government in Ankara, rather than local governments or

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<sup>70</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> The exception to this was the question of northern Iraq and Mosul, which was left up to the League of Nations; these formerly Ottoman provinces would ultimately become part of Iraq.

minority groups. Dissatisfied with this arrangement, the Kurds soon rose up against the new state. The government responded quickly and brutally.

Perhaps the most famous of the early Kurdish revolts was the Sheikh Said rebellion. After capturing and executing Said in 1925, the military killed another estimated fifteen to twenty-five thousand Kurds in an effort to discourage further rebellion.<sup>73</sup> The government then placed the region under authoritarian military rule. A new set of punitive laws were put in place in 1934 in reaction to the region's continued defiance. This period of defiance culminated in 1937-1938 with the Dersim<sup>74</sup> massacres.<sup>75</sup> Official Turkish literature about the massacres is scant; however, the story very much lives on in Kurdish oral history.<sup>76</sup>

In the wake of Dersim, no significant resistance arose, either by violent or political means, until the 1960s. The group advocating for Kurdish rights in the 1960s was very different from those who had conducted militant rebellions against the state in the 1920s and 1930s; now it was the educated elite who took up the banner of Kurdish rights. By this time, many Kurds had migrated to the western regions of Turkey at this time, seeking education, better wages and a higher standard of living in the metropolitan centers of western Turkey. The Turkish government encouraged this migration, hoping that it would foster assimilation and integration; consequently, it provided a number of academic scholarships at universities in Istanbul and Ankara to promising Kurdish students. In the 1960s, large numbers of these migrants started forming cultural and political groups, affiliated with the political left, and dedicated to promoting

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<sup>73</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 86.

<sup>74</sup> Dersim is the Kurdish name for the area now known as Tunceli; the Turkish government changed the local names in the 1930s as part of its efforts to enforce assimilation for the Kurdish population.

<sup>75</sup> Phillips, "Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Workers' Party," 10.

<sup>76</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 87.

Kurdish rights. They demanded language rights, representation in parliament, economic development in the southeast, and limited regional autonomy for the same area.<sup>77</sup>

Unfortunately, the state reacted no better to this form of protest.<sup>78</sup> After a military coup in March 1971, leaders of Kurdish groups were among those arrested, imprisoned, or killed. The 1970s in Turkey were a decade of extreme political groups, with many resorting to violence to make their point; perhaps the most famous of these is the Grey Wolves, a radical nationalist group.<sup>79</sup> The large number of leftist, Marxist parties operating in Turkey in the early 1970s, such as Dev Genc and Dev Yol, attracted many, particularly students. Among those who flocked to join were large numbers of disaffected Kurdish youth, frustrated with a system in which the odds seemed stacked against them.<sup>80</sup>

### The Early PKK

One of the students attracted to these leftist groups, Abdullah Ocalan, studied political science at Ankara University. Ocalan was among many Kurdish Leftists who were frustrated with the disinterest of their peers in addressing Kurdish issues.<sup>81</sup> He and several others formed what became the PKK in the late 1970s; the official date is cited as often November 25, 1979. Like many other organizations of the time, this new party espoused Marxist-Leninist views; however, it accompanied this ideology with fervent Kurdish nationalism.<sup>82</sup> Though some ethnic Turks were initially involved with the founding of the PKK, the organization soon became

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<sup>77</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 50.

<sup>80</sup> Barkey and Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question," 66.

<sup>81</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 23.

exclusively Kurdish.<sup>83</sup> Due to their previous experiences with Leftist groups, the PKK's founding members brought preexisting tactics, organization and ideology to their new party.<sup>84</sup> Ocalan already had a wide network from the seven months he spent in prison following the 1971 coup for his involvement with Dev Genc.<sup>85</sup> Other future members of the PKK had fled Turkey after the 1971 coup, only returning after several years in Germany. While in Europe, many met members of politically violent groups from Black September to Baader-Meinhof, forming connections and learning from these experienced organizations.<sup>86</sup> The PKK was by no means the only organization devoted to Kurdish nationalism founded at this time; however, it would prove to possess unusual longevity.

The PKK began its violent activities with a focus on the Marxist components of their ideology. While decisive evidence is lacking, the party is thought to be responsible for the assassinations of a number of wealthy Kurdish landowners in 1978 and 1979, as well as a few small military operations.<sup>87</sup> During the 1970s, PKK tactics did not stand out; rather, its use and level of violence were consistent with other contemporary groups.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the authoritarian style of leadership that quickly became apparent was consistent with other groups of the time. From the beginning, Ocalan did not appreciate opposition, dominating decision-making within the group.<sup>89</sup> Separating the history of the PKK from the history of Ocalan is almost impossible; his personality, energy and charisma have arguably made the party what it is, and, due to the hierarchical leadership structure, he has dictated much of the organization's goals and strategic

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<sup>83</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 48.

<sup>84</sup> Alger, "Lessons from Contemporary Insurgency," 5.

<sup>85</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 24.

<sup>86</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Kirisci, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 110.

<sup>88</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 50.

<sup>89</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 40.



choices over the years.<sup>90</sup> The merits and morality of Ocalan's involvement can be debated: its extent, however, is undeniable.

The rigid hierarchy of the party is one area in which the PKK has made decisions that are not necessarily rational. Rather than determining the leadership structure through a series of calculated choices or designing it for maximum efficiency and efficacy, most scholars agree that it was likely the result of strong personalities, particularly that of Ocalan, and of norms at the time for similar groups.<sup>91</sup> The devolution of the leadership structure into a strictly authoritarian command hierarchy is a frequent example of the PKK's lack of rationality. This is not incorrect; the leadership structure does not seem to be the result of deliberate decision-making. However, one example of irrational behavior does not prove that everything the group does is similarly irrational.

In September 1980, the military overthrew the government again. This military government imitated its predecessors, arresting and imprisoning large numbers of politically active citizens. Again, many such citizens fled Turkey, migrating to Europe or surrounding countries. Ocalan had already left, fleeing to Syria with several other PKK members in July of 1979. Some argue that the PKK destroyed competing groups advocating similar political agenda before 1980; others simply argue that the majority of these groups were destroyed in the widespread crackdown following the 1980 coup.<sup>92</sup> In either case, the PKK thrived in Syria, collaborating with Palestinian nationalist groups to train fighters, and attracting the patronage of the Syrian government.<sup>93</sup> In July 1981, the PKK held its first Conference in the Beka'a valley of

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<sup>90</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 40.

<sup>91</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 50.

<sup>92</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 132.

<sup>93</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 59.

Lebanon where its training camps were based. By this time, the organization had clearly established its intention to pursue political violence.<sup>94</sup>

It was not until 1984 that the PKK officially began their military struggle against the Turkish government and military. In the intervening years, Ocalan made allies and consolidated control. Former members of the PKK have stated that he either ordered or encouraged the deaths of other potential leaders or dissenting voices within the PKK, leading to the deaths of at least 11 people between 1983 and 1985.<sup>95</sup> Ocalan also began reaching out to Kurdish nationalists in northern Iraq, as well as Marxist groups within Turkey. The PKK's blend of ideologies helped it to make connections with groups with a variety of different ideologies, and gain their sympathy and support.<sup>96</sup> Thanks to a network of shared ideologies and interests, the PKK remained the guests of the Syrian government for many years, basing its training camps in Lebanon's Beka'a Valley for almost two decades.

### Military Struggle

On August 15, 1984, the PKK began a struggle against the Turkish government and military that has lasted for three decades. The first two attacks were not hugely destructive: the attacks, which targeted a military barracks in Eruh and a gendarmerie barracks and officers' club in Semdinli, killed one and injured nine.<sup>97</sup> However, they were only the start of a conflict that would kill tens of thousands over the next few decades; while official statistics are unavailable, the most common estimates hold that between 35,000 and 40,000 individuals have been killed

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<sup>94</sup> Kirisci, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, 127.

<sup>95</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 94.

<sup>96</sup> Alger, "Lessons from Contemporary Insurgency," 5

<sup>97</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "ID198408150004", "ID 198408150003", *Global Terrorism Database*, 2013.

since the August 1984 attacks.<sup>98</sup> At least half of those killed in the conflict have been PKK fighters.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to a loss of life, there have also been significant economic and political costs. The so-called “Kurdish Question” or “Kurdish Conflict” has cost the Turkish government between 2 and 3 percent of GDP during much of the 1990s, requiring up to one-third of the Turkish military’s considerable resources.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the conflict has drawn in countries from Germany to Russia to the United States: it is a recurring topic in discussions regarding Turkey’s bid for European Union membership and proved detrimental to US-Turkey relations during the second Iraq War.<sup>101</sup> Many argue that it has been the most significant issue in Turkish domestic and foreign policy over the last three decades.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the PKK’s relevance today, it took the military some time to realize that it was dealing with a persistent threat rather than a handful of brigands.<sup>103</sup> The Turkish military would not establish a significant presence in the region until 1985, and refused to publicly acknowledge the PKK as a serious adversary for several years after.<sup>104</sup> Early PKK activity was primarily limited to guerilla warfare in Southeastern Turkey.<sup>105</sup> However, it was not long before PKK activity expanded out of the southeast; within the first few years of PKK activity, the PKK was tied to several assassinations in Europe, most concerning exiled or former PKK members or activists.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> A recent issue of *The Economist* even cited a number as low as 27,000. “How to stop the fighting, sometimes,” *The Economist*, (11 September 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 19.

<sup>100</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Middle East Journal*, 60.

<sup>101</sup> Bill Park, “Iraq’s Kurds and Turkey: Challenges for US Policy,” *Parameters* (Autumn 2004): 26.

<sup>102</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 97.

<sup>105</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 28.

<sup>106</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 232.

Upon realizing it was facing a serious adversary, the military took two actions in addition to deploying traditional troops that would deeply impact the events of the next three decades. The first of these was once again placing Southeastern Anatolia under military rule.<sup>107</sup> Another three provinces were designated “neighboring provinces” to the region officially designated The Extraordinary Situation Region/*Olagunustu Hal Bolge Valligi* (OHAL) in 1987. OHAL did not officially end until 2002; since then, many of these provinces have again been placed under “security rule.” Military rule entailed the suspension of the minimal protections that existed under Turkish law. The state’s action against the PKK was hardly the first incident of extrajudicial killings, torture, and unlawful detention. Such behavior has become a key feature of the conflict with the PKK, and such abuse has arguably won the PKK significant sympathy, if not support.<sup>108</sup> Diyarbakir Military prison, completed in 1980 and located in the largest city in the OHAL province, is irreversibly tied to military abuses of power, continuing to affect the way in which Turkey’s Kurdish citizens view their government.<sup>109</sup>

The second key action by the military was the reestablishment of an Ottoman-era system of Village Guards or *Koy Korucular*, civilians armed and paid by the state. This time, the Turkish military explicitly intended the *Koy Korucular* to fight the PKK. In a region with few reliable economic prospects, recruitment was rapid: by the end of 1985, there were 13,000 *Korucular*.<sup>110</sup> The Village Guard system was extremely divisive, playing off of existing tribal structures and clan leaders.<sup>111</sup> Many of these tribal leaders and landowners had kept their status and position by cooperating with the government; therefore both the PKK’s anti-government

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<sup>107</sup> Initially it was only 8 provinces, before Batman and Sirnak were created and incorporated into OHAL in the early 1990s.

<sup>108</sup> Phillips, “Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Workers’ Party,” 13.

<sup>109</sup> “Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency”, 4.

<sup>110</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 98.

<sup>111</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 72.

stance and its Marxist ideology presented imminent threats to established power structures in the region.<sup>112</sup> The presence of opposition empowered by the government ensured that any chance, however small, of limiting the conflict to the PKK and the state had vanished; it was now irreversibly a conflict amongst the Kurdish people.<sup>113</sup> The PKK would claim that the majority of their attacks on civilians throughout the 1980s and 1990s were aimed at civilian collaborators, particularly the Village Guards.<sup>114</sup>

### Waxing Power: The Early 1990s

For the first few years of the 1990s, the PKK solidified its *de facto* governance of much of Turkey's southeast. Within regions under PKK control, the military was on the defensive; many observers describe the military's inability to move about freely after dark.<sup>115</sup> The PKK used targeted attacks on industry, military, and civilians alike to demonstrate the extent of its control; some argue that the PKK generated revenue by demanding that companies working in the area pay taxes in order to operate unmolested in the region.<sup>116</sup> Throughout this period, the PKK controlled significant amounts of territory nominally under Turkish rule, establishing roadblocks, collecting taxes from local inhabitants and overtaking traditional authorities in the region.<sup>117</sup> Such actions had a financial benefit, but also a political one: in 1992, the military was essentially forced to admit to private industry that it could not guarantee their safety while working in the region, thereby admitting its lack of control.<sup>118</sup> In line with theories of guerilla

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<sup>112</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 72.

<sup>113</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 204.

<sup>114</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 115.

<sup>115</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 12.

<sup>116</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 182.

<sup>117</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 29.

<sup>118</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 218.

warfare strategy, the PKK secured and controlled territory for several years in the early 1990s, despite continued pressure from the Turkish military.<sup>119</sup>

To combat the increase of PKK power, the Turkish military increased its policy of relocation. Regional expert Professor Henri Barkey describes the military implementing policies of large-scale evacuations and “razing villages” on a large scale.<sup>120</sup> This scorched earth policy was intended to deprive the PKK of local support and the resources, recruits and concealment that it depended on. While arguably successful, the policy had a large number of negative ramifications for the army; Barkey details the growing refugee population and widespread, often arbitrary, human rights abuses that directly resulted from the policy.<sup>121</sup> The consequent alienation of local populations and the increased vitriol towards the army were only a matter of time. The scale of these evacuations are still contested; while the Turkish government claims that only 300,000 civilians were displaced, various human rights groups argue that the number was at least ten times as much.<sup>122</sup> The policy not only influenced public opinion, but had a dramatic influence on the demographics of Turkey’s Kurdish population.

The early 1990s also included several important shifts in mainstream Turkish politics. Perhaps the two most obvious occurred in 1990 and 1991. In June 1990, a group of Kurdish politicians founded Turkey’s first political party with a primary and vocal focus on Kurdish issues.<sup>123</sup> The party, known as HEP, would only remain open for a few years; yet its mission has been carried out to the present day under parties with a variety of names. The second momentous event was Prime Minister Demirel’s 1991 acknowledgement of Kurds in a public

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<sup>119</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 133.

<sup>121</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question*, 141.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Houston, “Creating a Diaspora Within a Country,” in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, eds. Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, Ian Skoggard (New York: Springer, 2005), 408.

<sup>123</sup> Nicole Watts, “Allies and Enemies: Pro-Kurdish Parties in Turkish Politics, 1990-94,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 No. 4 (Nov 1999): 631.

speech, the first ever such mention by a major Turkish political leader.<sup>124</sup> Under the 1983 constitution, mention of Kurds or speaking Kurdish was punishable by law.<sup>125</sup> In October of the same year, the government softened restrictions on usage of Kurdish languages, lifting the constitutional ban on the use of Kurdish in private life.<sup>126</sup>

Demirel and his president, Turgut Ozal, were the first of many government leaders to begin to address the demands Kurds had been making for decades. In 1993, President Ozal made significant progress towards negotiation and reconciliation with the PKK; allegedly Jalil Talibani, leader of the Iraqi PUK, acted as an interlocutor between Ozal and Ocalan.<sup>127</sup> Unfortunately, only days after Ocalan issued a ceasefire extension likely meant as a concrete positive overture, Ozal had a fatal heart attack; arguably, the inability or unwillingness of his successors to pursue his conciliatory policies represents a significant lost opportunity to end the conflict.<sup>128</sup>

### The Republic Strikes Back

In the mid-1990s, there was a shift in the conflict, as the military gradually began gaining ground through the use of new counterinsurgency tactics and weaponry. Many credit the military's "scorched earth" and relocation policies for weakening the PKK by depriving them of supplies and logistical support.<sup>129</sup> In addition, the political situation in Turkey destabilized with a series of shaky coalition governments, increasing the military's control over events; it would instigate a "Coup by Memorandum" in 1997, pressuring the government into resigning. PKK

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<sup>124</sup> Ergil, "The Kurdish Question in Turkey," 130.

<sup>125</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 85.

<sup>126</sup> "Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency," 11.

<sup>127</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 212.

<sup>128</sup> Barkey and Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question," 69.

<sup>129</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 222.

strategy shifted during the period as well, with an increased reliance on tactics that conform more closely to the definition of “terrorism”: isolated strikes at key targets, marked by disinterest in holding land.<sup>130</sup> Frustrated at the inaction of European governments with regards to Turkey’s human rights abuses, PKK supporters in the diaspora began staging protests and attacking Turkish businesses throughout Western Europe.<sup>131</sup> Within Turkey, attacks also began moving west; the first PKK attacks in Istanbul and Ankara took place until 1988 and the number increased as time went on.<sup>132</sup>

At their 5<sup>th</sup> Congress in January 1995, the PKK also decided to begin using suicide bombing as a tactic.<sup>133</sup> Between 1996 and 1999, twenty-one suicide attacks across Turkey were actively claimed by or conclusively linked to the PKK.<sup>134</sup> Most focused on attacking military and police personnel.<sup>135</sup> The PKK’s use of suicide bombing, and Ocalan’s explicit endorsement of the tactic, is a controversial moment in their history.<sup>136</sup>

By 1988, the PKK’s power had severely declined and its membership had decreased to an estimated 1,500 militants.<sup>137</sup> Then, in October of 1998, Turkey succeeded in pressuring Syria to expel the PKK. Ocalan fled first to Russia and then Italy, before being captured in Kenya on February 16, 1999. The reaction was enormous: throughout Turkey and Western Europe, there was an outbreak of protests, self-immolations, and attacks, particularly on embassies of governments associated with Ocalan’s capture. Despite this burst of activity, most theorists saw Ocalan’s capture as the final blow to a dying organization. Most organizations with highly

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<sup>130</sup> Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” 29.

<sup>131</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 9.

<sup>132</sup> Figure 2, 3: Number of Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>133</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 243.

<sup>134</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 244.

<sup>135</sup> Phillips, “Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Workers’ Party,” 12.

<sup>136</sup> Ocalan later denied ever supporting the tactic. Radu, “The Land of Many Crossroads,” 59.

<sup>137</sup> Radu, “The Land of Many Crossroads,” 47.



centralized, Leninist command structures do not survive the arrest or death of their leader; consequently, analyses predicted that the PKK's days were through and that the Turkish state had been victorious.<sup>138</sup>

However, Ocalan defied expectation, becoming not a forgotten leader, but a symbol of Kurdish oppression and resistance.<sup>139</sup> He continues to control the PKK from his jail cell, issuing statements and orders through his lawyers. Some experts argue that his capture was even a turning point for the recognition of Kurdish identity, drawing international attention to military abuses and the long time denial of the Kurdish identity.<sup>140</sup>

The Turkish government held Ocalan as the sole prisoner on the island of Imrali, where he remains today. His trial began on May 1999 in a courtroom built especially for the occasion.<sup>141</sup> The organization of the trial was extremely contentious, with questions ranging from the appropriate judges, the people in the courtroom, those allowed to testify, and who would take up the risky task of defending him. There were allegations that the government was harassing his defense team; defense lawyers certainly received death threats and one was arrested just before the trial, though the government claimed the charges were unrelated.<sup>142</sup>

The start of the trial brought only more controversy. In his opening statements, Ocalan appeared to refute everything the PKK had fought for, declaring his respect for the Turkish state, apologizing for the bloodshed, and swearing to do everything he could to bring about peace.<sup>143</sup> Anticipating the likely accusations, Ocalan also stated that he had not been tortured or harmed by

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<sup>138</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 62.

<sup>139</sup> "The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," 10.

<sup>140</sup> Lesser, et al., "Countering the New Terrorism," 100.

<sup>141</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 283.

<sup>142</sup> "Ocalan lawyers' fears dismissed," *BBC*, 28 February 1999.

<sup>143</sup> "Ocalan tells court he wants to end bloodshed," *BBC*, 31 May 1999.

the Turkish authorities.<sup>144</sup> His statements shocked everyone; many saw them as utter betrayal of everything he and the PKK has stood for.<sup>145</sup> Though much of the party publicly stood behind Ocalan, the statement deeply impacted the PKK leadership, creating divides and even causing some to leave the party altogether.<sup>146</sup>

As anticipated, the court found Ocalan guilty of treason in June 1999. That same month, the Turkish government sentenced him to death. Soon after the verdict, in August, Ocalan ordered the PKK to cease attacks and withdraw to northern Iraq, implementing a unilateral ceasefire that would officially last until 2004. He also orchestrated the surrender of several groups to the Turkish government; unfortunately, despite requests for an amnesty bargain, the government arrested the majority of those who handed over their weapons.<sup>147</sup> The government and the military also continually refused to negotiate with Ocalan.

After these monumental shifts, the PKK struggled to find its footing, suffering from internal rifts and crises of leadership for some time after Ocalan's arrest.<sup>148</sup> It went through several name changes, branding itself as KADEK and Kongra-GEL, before returning to its original moniker in 2005. The majority of the violence that would occur over the next few years was primarily the result of protestors clashing with police or Turkish forays into Northern Iraq, rather than terrorist attacks.<sup>149</sup> The PKK continued to claim Ocalan as its leader, though Murat Karayilan became the field commander in Northern Iraq, nominal second in command and *de facto* military leader of the organization. In other arenas, Kurdish political parties operated with

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<sup>144</sup> "Ocalan tells court he wants to end bloodshed," *BBC*, 31 May 1999.

<sup>145</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 285.

<sup>146</sup> "PKK backs Ocalan's peace call," *BBC*, 2 June 1999.

<sup>147</sup> "Kurdish symbolic surrender rejected," *BBC*, 2 October 1999.

<sup>148</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 287.

<sup>149</sup> Figure 2, Figure 3: Attacks by Year and Location.

apparent independence in the Turkish political system despite continuing allegations of collaboration with the PKK.

### The Fight to Survive

While the PKK adjusted to its new reality, the Turkish state was undergoing its own shifts. In the 2001 parliamentary elections, the socially conservative and moderately Islamist Justice and Development Party/*Adalet Kalkinma Partisi* (AKP) came to power by a large margin, propelled by an odd coalition of liberals and social conservatives. Among other positions, AKP was aggressively in favor of accession to the European Union. Consequently, it passed a great deal of legal reform in their first years in office to modernize Turkey's legal code to comply with the Copenhagen criteria. This reform included the abolition of the death penalty, and the subsequent commutation of Ocalan's sentence to life imprisonment. Military rule was also lifted in all of the OHAL provinces, though the military's presence remained strong. The AKP also attempted to address the conflict, although it was not until the last few years that it demonstrated willingness to negotiate with the PKK. These developments will be addressed in greater detail later; however, actions such as the Oslo Protocol, the Democratic Opening and continuing negotiations with Ocalan have all been significant examples of AKP reaching out to both the PKK and the broader Kurdish population.

Unfortunately, certain problems persisted. Criticism of Turkey's policy towards the Kurds often led to arrests on charges of supporting separatism and insulting the Turkish state. Kurdish MPs continued to be arrested and detained, as well as civil activists and advocates of the Kurdish cause. AKP continued to refute the possibility of negotiating with the PKK, even as the ceasefire unraveled. Economic and social disparities continued to disproportionately affect

Kurds from other segments of the population, particularly in large cities.<sup>150</sup> Finally, the EU continued to label PKK affiliates as terrorist organizations, which had implications for both supporters and financial assets abroad.

In September 2003, the PKK announced the imminent end of the ceasefire, citing the government's failure to grant Kurds greater political and cultural rights and the military's continued pressure on PKK sanctuaries in northern Iraq.<sup>151</sup> The ceasefire officially ended in June 2004, though violence had been gradually increasing since the September announcement.<sup>152</sup> This time, there were groups claiming to be unaffiliated with the PKK, operating exclusively in the west and focusing on civilian targets, such as the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK). In response, the persecution of Kurdish politicians and human rights activists picked up again; the government put fifty-six mayors of towns in the southeast for aiding and abetting terrorism in September 2006.<sup>153</sup> By 2007, many observers were reporting that the violence had reached levels not seen since the 1990s.<sup>154</sup>

However, though the violence may have increased again, there were now different dynamics at play. Following the US invasion of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the north gradually gained autonomy, bringing the tantalizing hint of a Kurdish state for the first time since the Treaty of Sevres. The AKP continued its apparently democratizing reforms, including the curbing of extrajudicial killings and torture. It ultimately entered a power struggle with the military that culminated in the conviction of hundreds of former officers, significantly curbing the military's influence in politics. Continued accession negotiations with the EU applied pressure to the government to conform to international human rights standards as

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<sup>150</sup> "Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," 30.

<sup>151</sup> "Kurdish rebels abandon truce," *BBC*, 2 September 2003.

<sup>152</sup> Figure 2, Figure 3: Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>153</sup> "Kurdish mayors on trial in Turkey," *BBC*, 27 September 2006.

<sup>154</sup> Phillips, "Disarming, Demobilizing, and Reintegrating the Kurdistan Workers' Party," 18.

well. Finally, the government still held Ocalan, who has continued to advocate for peace. He declared ceasefires throughout the period, including in 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2013. In contradiction with their publicly stated policy, AKP began to negotiate with Ocalan almost immediately after its election.<sup>155</sup> News of the failed “Oslo Process” was leaked in 2009, making the negotiations public knowledge. The current round became public in an interview with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in December 2012.<sup>156</sup>

There are still a host of issues on the table. Recent AKP reforms have been condemned as not going far enough, and Prime Minister Erdogan has vacillated between a willingness to negotiate and the state’s traditional obstinacy. Kurdish politicians and activists continue to find themselves under arrest, particularly after the protests of summer 2013. However, with negotiations ongoing and a persistent ceasefire, AKP still might have the opportunity to end three decades of conflict. An understanding of the PKK’s aims and its willingness to negotiate has never been more important.

### **PKK Organizational Structure**

In order to examine PKK decisions, this paper assumes that the party possesses a centralized decision-making structure capable of communicating its directives and objectives across large distances. Given the lack of information about PKK internal structure, it is impossible to confirm such a structure exists; however, through examining the organization and extrapolating from other, similar organizations, there is ample proof for this assumption.

First, as was briefly mentioned before, Marxist-Leninist organizations like the PKK traditionally have a strong and centralized leadership, organized around authoritarian

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<sup>155</sup> “The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement,” 3.

<sup>156</sup> “Turkey discussing disarmament with Kurdish leader,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 December 2012.

principles.<sup>157</sup> For the PKK, this ideological impact is intensified by the central role of Abdullah Ocalan. As mentioned previously, Ocalan was among the PKK's founders and, in its early years, solidified his control by rooting out dissent. In addition to allegations that he has many of his rivals assassinated, there are also numerous anecdotal examples including his wife, Kesire Yildirim; former PKK commander Halil Kaya; the former coordinator of the Academy in Beka'a; and other popular figures within the PKK. The initial levels of dissent demonstrate that, though Ocalan's strength of personality propelled him to power, it was not enough to keep him there.

Ocalan certainly used violence, intimidation and coercion to consolidate and maintain his position of authority; such violence has earned him a reputation for megalomaniacal brutality.<sup>158</sup> However, prior to his arrest in 1999, Ocalan had not faced a serious threat to his power since 1991.<sup>159</sup> Even after his arrest, the PKK remained largely intact and under his control through PKK field commander, Murat Karayilan. Today, orders relayed from his cell on Imrali still determine the PKK's actions and agenda. Ocalan's continuing prominence and control over the organization demonstrates the changing source and nature of his support: had his power rested only in his ability to punish and intimidate, it would have decreased significantly during his time in prison.

Instead, for those PKK supporters growing up in the 1990s, the PKK and Ocalan have become inextricably linked; he is a figurehead, a symbol, and the party's rightful leader. Both prospective militants and supporters have known nothing but Ocalan's leadership for over two decades and, since the mid-1990s, disloyalty to Ocalan has often been equated with disloyalty to the Kurdish cause. Ocalan's power no longer rested on intimidation, but on love and respect, a

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<sup>157</sup> "Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," 12.

<sup>158</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads: The rise and fall of the PKK," 49.

<sup>159</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 151.

trend that continues today. Consequently, he retains the ability to communicate strategic objectives to the organization and trust that, using his written literature and their own experience, his commanders will be able to derive tactics consistent with centralized directives.

Despite the precedent for centralized leadership and the unique importance of Ocalan, it is undeniable that, due to the nature of its activity, the PKK necessarily operates over an expansive space with limited communication. This entails a certain degree of decentralization in the leadership structure. This logistical constraint means that the PKK must have a critical mass of rational members capable of acting relatively independently. As in any group, there are certainly irrational individuals who have climbed in the party's hierarchy; however, the necessary degree of decentralization suggests that concluding that the PKK is a rational organization does not merely mean only Ocalan, but rather the membership more generally, is rational.

Thus, the combination of Marxist-Leninist authoritarianism, Ocalan's particular position, and the necessarily decentralized elements of PKK hierarchy support the assumption that the PKK has centralized, coherent strategies and tactics and is rational as a whole.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, I hope to use the various tools at my disposal to better understand the actions of the PKK. Whether its members are called freedom fighters or terrorists, I believe they are largely rational actors, whose behavior can be analyzed and explained. This will not be true in every instance; I have already pointed out their hierarchical leadership as the likely result of charismatic personality and norms rather than conscious decision-making. However, I will demonstrate overall trends over the last three decades of conflict, particularly as the PKK has

become an increasingly global actor and, arguably, the most prominent voice of Kurdish nationalism by adapting their strategy and tactics to better operate across different settings.

My analysis will explore multiple facets of the issue, and will encompass three key subject areas: ideology, political tactics, and military tactics. In Chapter Two, I will look at the PKK's ideology, examining its ability to adapt aspects of its ideology to fit changing circumstances and attract public support. The third chapter will delve into the PKK's participation in Kurdish civil society, both directly and indirectly. In this chapter, I will examine the PKK's supporters and networks both in Turkey and in Western Europe. Finally, the third chapter will move on to the PKK's military tactics and the ways in which it has sought to legitimate its use of violence. I will divide this analysis by geographic area, looking at the way these tactics differ in Southeastern Turkey, Western Turkey, and the European Union.

In examining these subject areas and through qualitative and quantitative analysis, I hope to thoroughly explore the ways in which the PKK has strategized and adjusted its tactics to maintain its legitimacy and relevance over the past three decades.



## CHAPTER TWO: IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGY

Having determined that the PKK is a largely rational organization, capable of adapting its strategies and tactics based on circumstance, it is important to look at what exactly this adaptation looks like. One area of strategic change that is particularly relevant is ideology.

The PKK's ideology has undergone a number of shifts since the organization's founding in 1979. These shifts have primarily acted either to justify and legitimize the PKK's actions or to guide them. Such changes came from two primary sources: some were consciously strategic, such as incorporating women's rights or religion to attract certain key groups, while others caused strategic change, such as the PKK's adaption of liberal, democratic ideals in the early-1990s. Understanding the strategies driving and following from ideological change is crucial to understanding the PKK's strategic adaptation.

This chapter examines some of the primary components of the PKK's ideology, and the ways in which they have changed over time. Aside from a nationalist core, much of PKK ideology is relatively flexible. This leads some analysts to accuse the organization of lacking strong convictions.<sup>160</sup> However, close analysis shows that the PKK's flexibility in other areas only demonstrates the primary importance of its nationalist agenda.<sup>161</sup> In order to pursue the primary goal, Kurdish nationalism, the PKK is able and willing to change other parts of their ideology, either as the party itself changes its mind or to deliberately appeal to different groups in society. Michael Radu, who studies the PKK and other terrorist organizations in depth, describes these changes as the result of "astute political instincts and sheer opportunism."<sup>162</sup> The context and tone give his description clear negative connotations. This 'framing' often

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<sup>160</sup> Michael Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads: The Rise and Fall of the PKK," *Orbis* (2001): 43.

<sup>161</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), 103.

<sup>162</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 43.

reflects strategic shifts, and can affect anything from rhetoric and long-term objectives to on-the-ground tactics. Fiona Adamson, whose studies focus on the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, examines this phenomenon in a more neutral light as “strategic framing.”<sup>163</sup> Despite their different views, Adamson and Radu agree on the PKK’s unusual capacity to adapt its stated ideology in response to changing times, places, and political climates.<sup>164</sup>

To more fully understand these changes, one must explore several key areas. These include Marxism and liberalism, key factors in shaping the PKK’s overall agenda; the willingness to engage with the Turkish state, which has significant ramifications in the direction of the conflict; and the role of women and Islam, both of which have been instrumental in attracting groups to the PKK. This chapter will examine each area’s contents, its origin, its strategic implications, and why the transition is significant.

### **The Importance of Ideology**

Ideology at its most basic is the worldview and set of beliefs that underlie the decision-making process of any group.<sup>165</sup> The stated ideology of a group has two primary functions: a guide to appropriate action and a means by which to justify or explain those actions.<sup>166</sup> Both theory and history demonstrate the importance of ideology when exploring the actions of the PKK and other similar groups, and the consistency with which it translates directly to action in areas like recruitment, branding, legitimization, and even military strategy. David E. Apter, a prominent academic in the field, also notes the ability of ideology to promote authority and

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<sup>163</sup> Fiona Adamson, “Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war,” in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* ed. Jeffrey Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 81.

<sup>164</sup> Adamson, “Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war,” 81.

<sup>165</sup> Michael Freeden, “Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?” *Political Studies* (1998): 49.

<sup>166</sup> David E. Apter, “Introduction: Ideology and Discontent,” in *Ideology and Discontent* ed. David Apter (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 16.

solidify community.<sup>167</sup> Both within organizations and in the image they project to the outside world, ideology is an important way of explaining and legitimizing its actions. It also sends important messages regarding the way in which the group perceives itself and wants to be perceived by others. The PKK has certainly used ideology to promote both its collective authority, and Ocalan's individual political position.

The other role of ideology is to guide action and decisions regarding both strategy and tactics. Apter notes the ability of ideology to "link...action and fundamental belief."<sup>168</sup> This often entails that a group's actions must be consistent with its ideology in order for the group to be perceived as legitimate. Consequently, ideology can have a distinct impact on concrete actions taken by a group, and on the strategy and tactics it chooses to endorse. For example, later sections will discuss the ways in which the PKK's adaption of liberal ideology may have contributed to its increased willingness to enter negotiations with the Turkish government.

Ideology has two primary sources; most are some combination of the two. They can arise organically as the result of a situation or similar experiences. Apter refers to these as 'primordial sentiments', or loyalties and beliefs shaped by things like aspects of identity such as ethnicity, race, language, or tribe.<sup>169</sup> Kurdish nationalism, for example, arose out of the oppression and marginalization experienced by many Kurds.<sup>170</sup> According to Apter, nationalism is the ideology that best embodies these primordial or organic sentiments.<sup>171</sup> Like Kurdish nationalism, other forms of nationalism often arise out of shared frustration and experience, rather than deliberate planning.

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<sup>167</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 18.

<sup>168</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 17.

<sup>169</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 22.

<sup>170</sup> Freedman, "Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?" 752.

<sup>171</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 23.

Not all aspects of nationalism have this organic origin. Apter notes the ways in which ideology promotes and legitimizes the authority of an individual.<sup>172</sup> Ideology based on primordial sentiment can also naturally promote authority, particularly within developing and consolidating communities.<sup>173</sup> However, it is not uncommon for individuals seeking such positions to manipulate ideology for political and social gain.<sup>174</sup>

Finally, Apter discusses the ways in which a group's ideology changes over time. He describes this process as maturation, as groups move from the initial ideals of rebellion to more pragmatic and practicality in their ideological tenets. Such maturation is often the consequence of pressure on the organization to deliver as it becomes increasingly prominent; Apter describes the ways in which the "Robin Hood" role nationalist groups adapt early in their existence must eventually give way to some degree of bureaucratic priority system in order for the organization to retain its legitimacy.<sup>175</sup> This shift to pragmatism is visible in the PKK particularly regarding its willingness to compromise and its perception of realistic goals.

This chapter will examine some of the ways in which the PKK's ideology has changed over time, both maturing organically or in a deliberate effort to increase the party's legitimacy and authority within different segments of society, particularly regarding women and religion. Such efforts may involve the wholesale construction of ideology; however, it also may entail framing existing ideologies in ways that make Kurdish nationalism relevant to other issues, as was the case with women's rights. Both sources of ideology has also had unexpected consequences for the strategies the PKK has employed, both in the actions ideology will or will not legitimize, and the priorities it defines.

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<sup>172</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 18.

<sup>173</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 22.

<sup>174</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 23.

<sup>175</sup> Apter, Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 27.

## **Marxism**

Marxism was a central component of PKK ideology from the start, and was instrumental in determining the party's internal structures and initial approach. Though not a calculated choice, the emphasis on Marxism also proved very appealing for the party's target constituency, and legitimized a great deal of the PKK's early violence. However, its primary role has been as a guide, helping to shape the PKK's early actions and organization. Thus, though it was not the result of a strategic choice, the PKK's Marxist ideology had strategic implications.

## Content

The PKK's exact brand of Marxism is a blend, combining elements of Maoism and Leninism to form core party beliefs and structures. Two popular examples are the PKK's leadership structure and its desire to begin its activity in the rural Southeast. Observers often describe the PKK's centralized and authoritarian leadership structure as Leninist, commenting that it was extremely similar to that of many other parties of the Turkish Left.<sup>176</sup> This leadership structure has remained with the party through its present incarnation. The other concrete example is the PKK's initial decision to move its activity to the countryside. Mao emphasizes that revolutionary activity and guerilla warfare are "based on the masses of the people" particularly in the countryside.<sup>177</sup> Therefore, PKK strategy was very much in keeping with the Maoist emphasis on popular rural mobilization.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom*, (Oxford: Praeger, 2011), 3.

<sup>177</sup> Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-18, 1989), 47.

<sup>178</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 3.

Marxist anti-imperialism also influenced the PKK's worldview. Parts of this came from the Turkish Left of the 1970s, which emphasized the need to break away from Western domination and capitalism.<sup>179</sup> However, the defeat of Soviet-backed Iraqi Kurdish groups led the PKK to take this ideology even further, denouncing any reliance on foreign powers.<sup>180</sup> The party also saw this imperialism reflected, not only in Western domination of Turkey, but in Turkey's domination of Northwestern Kurdistan.<sup>181</sup> The PKK was therefore able to draw on the anti-imperialist vocabulary of Marxism in outlining their arguments against the Turkish state and justifying the case for Kurdish liberation.<sup>182</sup> This proved a further justification of the PKK's use of violence, both for potential members of the group, as well as outside audiences.

### Origins

At the time of the PKK's founding, the Political Left was a powerful force in Turkey, and any activist received a thorough education in Marx, Mao and Lenin. Many of the early members of the PKK, a group that included Turks, came from other radical leftist parties such as Dev Genç.<sup>183</sup> Ocalan, for example, spent time in prison following the 1971 coup for participating in protests organized by student-led Leftist organizations.<sup>184</sup> The Left's unwillingness to acknowledge the specific situation of the Kurds caused the PKK's founders to believe that a new group was needed; when these individuals left their original organizations, they brought Marxist-

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<sup>179</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 8.

<sup>180</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 34.

<sup>181</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey," *MERIP Reports* 124 (1984): 10.

<sup>182</sup> Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 123.

<sup>183</sup> van Bruinessen "The Kurds in Turkey" 10

<sup>184</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 24.

Leninist ideals with them.<sup>185</sup> Consequently, the PKK drew not only its membership, but also many of its key attributes from similar groups of the time, including its authoritarian leadership structure.<sup>186</sup> Though unique in Turkey at the time of its founding, the PKK's emphasis on Marxism is not entirely unusual in this; Apter notes that nationalism and socialism often coexist within the ideology of various groups.<sup>187</sup> However, what distinguished the PKK from other groups within Turkey was its fierce and uncompromising focus on Kurdish nationalism.<sup>188</sup>

### Implications

The PKK's shift towards an emphasis on nationalism by no means indicated an immediate split with the rest of the Left. Many of its founders remained active in other Leftist groups until the PKK's official founding in 1979.<sup>189</sup> Even after the PKK became a distinct organization and its membership entirely Kurdish, Marxism was a common ground on which to base alliances.<sup>190</sup> The PKK maintained relationships with Turkish Leftist groups like Dev-Yol for many years thanks to these shared ideological tenets.<sup>191</sup> After fleeing Turkey due to the impending 1980 coup, the PKK leadership also used this common ideology to form alliances with Palestinian and Lebanese groups such as Fatah, which provided training in Lebanon, and Black September.<sup>192</sup>

Though Marxism was not consciously incorporated to legitimize the PKK's violent action, it was extremely appealing to the constituencies the PKK wanted to recruit. For Kurds

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<sup>185</sup> van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey," 10.

<sup>186</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 111.

<sup>187</sup> Apter, "Introduction: Ideology and Discontent," 29.

<sup>188</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 108.

<sup>190</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 55.

<sup>191</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 65.

<sup>192</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 109.

living in rural southeastern Turkey, examples of class-based oppression were plentiful. Wealthy landlords dominated much of Southeastern Anatolia economy, concentrating much of the land and other resources in their own hands.<sup>193</sup> Though in much of Turkey land-ownership has become more democratic over time, today the southeast remains in what some academics call a semi-feudal state.<sup>194</sup> Illustrative of this feudalism is the ratio of landless families to landholders in the southeast, which remains twice as high in Southeastern Turkey as in the rest of the country.<sup>195</sup> As late as 2000, three percent of landowning families continued to control 57.3 percent of land in the Southeast, while the majority of agricultural workers operated in a sharecropping system.<sup>196</sup> Many of these landlords had also made deals with the Turkish government to secure their own holdings and repressed local populations.<sup>197</sup> Consequently, the Marxist-Leninist leanings of the PKK paired well with its nationalist aims.

In addition, traditional tribal leaders dominated national and local politics, including those in opposition to the national government. Most active Kurdish politicians and rebel leaders also came from these landowning families.<sup>198</sup> Ocalan and other PKK leaders are unusual in not coming from prominent positions in the traditional tribal hierarchy.<sup>199</sup> Marxism, therefore, offered the party leadership a source of legitimacy separate from the more traditional hierarchy. Thus, Marxism was extremely useful to the PKK.

Many of the PKK's early attacks in the late 1970s were calculated to support this claim to Marxism. The group assassinated a number of wealthy, oppressive landholders and political

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<sup>193</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 105.

<sup>194</sup> P.J. White, "Economic marginalization of Turkey's Kurds: The failed promise of modernization and reform," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 No. 1 (1998): 141

<sup>195</sup> White, "Economic marginalization of Turkey's Kurds," 141.

<sup>196</sup> White, "Economic marginalization of Turkey's Kurds," 142.

<sup>197</sup> van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey," 10.

<sup>198</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 75.

<sup>199</sup> van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey," 10. This was discussed in more detail in *Chapter One*.



officials, who they referred to as ‘collaborators’.<sup>200</sup> Attacking the wealthy and powerful testified to the PKK’s Marxist convictions, while the close relationship many of the same individuals enjoyed with the Turkish government and military made the targets attractive from a nationalist perspective as well. Attacking such high-profile targets was also an excellent way to generate publicity, establishing the PKK on the radars government, local people, and other groups active in the area.<sup>201</sup> It also legitimized the PKK’s violence with two mutually supporting narratives, one based on Kurdish ethno-nationalist goals, and the other drawing on Marxist antipathy for the wealthy and powerful.

As this chapter briefly discussed earlier, the PKK’s Maoist-Leninist heritage manifests itself in the party’s leadership structure and its activity in rural Turkey. Mao is insistent upon the need for a bold and imaginative leadership, despite logistical arguments for decentralization.<sup>202</sup> In addition, Mao stresses the need for this leader to concern himself foremost with organization, instruction and propaganda rather than military aspects of the struggle.<sup>203</sup> These traits have all remained part of the PKK throughout its existence. Ocalan is certainly a strong leader around whom the party’s hierarchy was centrally organized. In addition, even before his imprisonment, he stayed out of the physical fighting, focusing instead on instruction and appealing to the public.

In addition, Mao emphasizes the importance of mobilizing rural populations, rather than focusing the struggle in urban centers.<sup>204</sup> He offers concrete advice on ways in which to do this, including reliance on local supplies and organization; many such ideas later translated into concrete PKK tactics.<sup>205</sup> Mao’s emphasis on the importance of educating and arousing the

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<sup>200</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 110.

<sup>201</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 105.

<sup>202</sup> Mao Tse-tung in Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, 23.

<sup>203</sup> Mao Tse-tung in Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, 8.

<sup>204</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 3.

<sup>205</sup> Mao Tse-Tung in Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, 51.

people is clearly seen in PKK tactics throughout their fight, and offers a clear example of the concrete implications of broader ideology.

### Significance

Marxism was an initial component of the PKK's ideology that shaped its priorities and guided its actions from the start. It also manifested itself in several concrete aspects of strategy, including the PKK's rural focus, which reflected a Maoist interpretation, and its highly centralized leadership structure. The adoption of Marxist ideology was not the result of strategic calculation, but rather the inevitable influence of the Leftist movements of the 1970s from which the PKK founders emerged. Initially, it was also extremely attractive to key PKK constituencies, helping to legitimize early instances of violence.

However, changing global circumstances meant that by the start of the 1990s, Marxism was no longer as useful, causing the PKK to deemphasize this initially dominant ideology. The early 1990s brought major changes that likely impacted this movement away from Marxism. The first was the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was no longer a strong counterpoint to NATO's emphasis on self-determination and freedom, and therefore much less available ideological and material support available to Marxist groups. These groups also became increasingly unimportant in a post Cold War world.<sup>206</sup> The second key change was the PKK's expansion into the European Union as it became increasingly involved with the EU's Kurdish diaspora. In the West, phrases like democratic governance, human rights, and self-determination dominate conversation. In order to effectively appeal to European politicians and their constituents, the PKK chose to shift its focus. Thus, broader political trends clearly motivated the party's movement away from Marxism.

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<sup>206</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 25.

The PKK's Marxist emphasis decreased throughout the early 1990s, a process that culminated at its 1995 Party Congress. At the Congress, the PKK leadership voted to officially remove the hammer and sickle from its flag.<sup>207</sup> Though the PKK was adamant that this did not signal a wholesale ideological shift, this did signal the end of the organization's publicly avowed Marxism.<sup>208</sup> Though strains of Marxism remain visible in PKK ideology and rhetoric, its primary emphasis has shifted in order to adapt to the changing world order.

### **Liberalism**

The increased need to appeal to Western liberal sensibilities as a result of broader geopolitical trends prompted the PKK's shift to an ideology based on liberal democratic values. However, their continued reliance on authoritarian leadership structures reveals that this change was the result of pragmatic and strategic decision, rather than genuine conviction.

### Content

Since 1995, the PKK has increasingly framed its goals in terms of the rights of self-governance and self-determination. The organization's literature describes itself as "the key to...democratization in Turkey."<sup>209</sup> Murat Karayilan, the PKK's current field commander, stated in a recent interview that only a process involving "reasonable, fair demands that really base on democracy, fair sharing and superiority of law" would solve the issues at hand and calling on all

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<sup>207</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 244.

<sup>208</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 102.

<sup>209</sup> "A profound democratic reform should be initiated by mid-October", PKK Website, <[www.pkkonline.com/en](http://www.pkkonline.com/en)>.

involved parties to “take violence out of the political arena.”<sup>210</sup> This rhetoric is a stark contrast to both the PKK’s persistent public image and its founding ideology.

Economic inequality is still a key issue and has remained a central part of PKK rhetoric. Rather than using a Marxist vocabulary to describe Kurds’ historical marginalization, however, Ocalan frames it as an exclusion from economic relations based on ethnic discrimination.<sup>211</sup> The PKK’s material emphasizes that part of the solution is returning economic sovereignty to Turkey’s Kurdish citizens through appropriate institutions and democratic self-governance.<sup>212</sup> While the material certainly mentions the class differences so central to Marxism, it also ties economic inequality to insufficient women’s rights, a lack of democracy and an overbearing and dictatorial state. The PKK has maintained its focus on the importance of economic inequality that is so central to Marxism, rephrasing it as a precondition for democracy.

### Origins

The PKK’s decision to shift their focus to liberal values and ideals reflected a larger trend throughout Turkey. As mentioned previously, as the Cold War ended and Turkey emerged from the aftermath of its 1980 coup, the emphasis on liberal values and democracy was visible across the spectrums of Turkish politics.<sup>213</sup>

Despite the presence of an obvious rhetorical shift, the PKK has crafted a narrative in which democracy and self-determination were always the cause. In one of the many books he wrote in prison, Ocalan outlines the founding tenets of the PKK using a liberal democratic

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<sup>210</sup> “Karayilan: Our aim is democratic solution to the Kurdish Question”, PKK Website, <[www.pkkonline.com/en](http://www.pkkonline.com/en)>.

<sup>211</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan: Perspectives for a political solution of the Kurdish Question* (Cologne: International Initiative, 2009), 19.

<sup>212</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 32.

<sup>213</sup> Nicole Watts, “Allies and Enemies: Pro-Kurdish Parties in Turkish Politics, 1990-94,” *Ethnopolitics* 52 (2006): 635.

vocabulary, rather than Marxist terms. He states that the founding of the PKK was a response to the Turkish state's repeated denial of the Kurdish population's right to self-determination.<sup>214</sup>

Though these were not the terms that the PKK initially used to discuss their goals and motivation, Ocalan asserts that it is possible to recognize these liberal principles in the PKK founders, though the party did not publicly espouse such ideals until after its 1995 Congress.<sup>215</sup>

Such assertions have played well in international media. However, despite their rhetoric, it seems more likely that the PKK's apparent change of heart was more an effort to legitimize its participation in the political process than the result of genuine convictions. One key indication that this shift in values was a primarily strategic move related to appealing to public opinion comes in the PKK's leadership structure. The party continues to organize itself around the Marxist-Leninist structures of the 1970s. Even Ocalan's writings recognize the significant contradiction between the PKK's democratic ideals and its extremely authoritarian and hierarchic organization.<sup>216</sup> His acknowledgement of this conflict has not prompted internal reform, but it is an attempt to publicly recognize the internal tension between the PKK's liberal rhetoric and its authoritarian internal structures. The group's lack of internal democracy speaks to the strategic nature of their commitment to democracy: they are not so devoted as to reform their own governance structures.

### Implications

This ideological shift did not prompt strategic change; rather, the change was itself the result of a strategy to help the PKK adapt in the post-Cold War world. The new emphasis on democratic values enabled the PKK to more easily reach the ears of policy makers and a more

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<sup>214</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 26.

<sup>215</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 26.

<sup>216</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 28.

global audience. It also provided access to a network of organizations working to promote human rights, rather than fighting the marginalization that increasingly handicaps many Marxist groups.<sup>217</sup> This was particularly true as the PKK increased its presence and activity in Europe, which will be explored further in *Chapter Three*.

The adoption of values like democracy and human rights also had potential implications for the PKK's use of violence. Unlike Maoism or Leninism, liberal values do not emphasize the virtue of violent struggle. In addition, alliances with human rights groups also put pressure on the PKK to limit their use of violence. While the PKK by no means abandoned their violent tactics with the shift to more liberal ideology, it is certainly possible that the party found it increasingly difficult to legitimize the large-scale violence against civilians common throughout the 1980s. This may have impacted the party's increasing willingness to compromise with the government, discussed in the next section.

It is important to recognize that the presence of strategic adaptation and the utility of liberal ideals do not preclude genuine convictions among the PKK or its supporters. Both are possible, particularly in generations of PKK recruits who joined the party in the years after this ideological shift. It is entirely possible that liberalism now acts as a guide for many such individuals or even for parts of the broader party. In addition, it may genuinely legitimize the PKK's increasing turn to participation in more traditional political action.

### Significance

Fiona Adamson, who studies PKK activity among the diaspora in Western Europe, notes in her work that the introduction of liberal values is perhaps the most significant example of the

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<sup>217</sup> Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Politics of Migrants' Transnational Political Practices", *International Migration Review* 37 No. 3 (2003): 774.

PKK intentionally changing the framing of its objectives in order to thrive in a changing context.<sup>218</sup> In the wake of the Cold War, and the destruction of other Leftist groups in Turkey, more allies available in the quest for democracy rather than a Marxist utopia. The persistent lack of democracy within the PKK indicates the strategic nature of the shift: a genuine newfound devotion to democratic ideals would have included moving away from the party's undemocratic leadership structure. Though the PKK's primary ethno-nationalist objectives have not changed, the terms in which it has framed these goals has changed in order to continue to legitimize its actions and ensure that it remains a relevant political actor.

### **Compromise**

Over time, the PKK's willingness to enter talks and compromise with the Turkish state has increased. Some of this is due to the increasing discussion of liberal ideals and importance of democratic processes, as the previous section touches on, and their ability to guide the party's actions. However, some of this change is due to conscious valuation of the political rewards of doing so. While this increased willingness seems to be the result of the desire to maintain the party's legitimacy amidst changing circumstances, it has also influenced both party and individual behavior, allowing the PKK to expand its activities and achievements beyond violent political action.

### Content

Despite their reputation for pursuing solely violent avenues of resource, the PKK has over time demonstrated an increasing willingness to communicate in a more nonviolent manner. Since the early 1990s the PKK has declared repeated ceasefires, reaching out to the Turkish state

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<sup>218</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 81.

for negotiations and peace talks. Ocalan has stated multiple times that, “the revolutionary struggle can turn into an acquisition of humanity only through a qualified negotiation process.”<sup>219</sup> In other words, while the threat of military force remains important, that force is only a first step: it is through negotiation and compromise that a lasting solution will be reached. This demonstrated willingness to pursue nonviolent avenues of conflict resolution has increasingly been part of both PKK rhetoric and action.

### Origins

As observed in the previous chapter, those who study the PKK often see 1999 and Ocalan’s arrest as a watershed moment in many aspects of the group’s history, including the PKK’s stated willingness to negotiate and work towards peace with the Turkish state.<sup>220</sup> However, though the need to maintain legitimacy and relevance was certainly made more urgent by Ocalan’s arrest, particularly on an individual level, the desire and efforts to ensure this legitimacy predated the arrest.

The conciliatory nature of Ocalan’s opening statement at his May 1999 trial took many of his long-time supporters and allies by surprise. Among his many shocking statements was the pledge to “serve [the Turkish Republic] for peace and brotherhood.”<sup>221</sup> Many longtime PKK members felt betrayed by statements as their leader acknowledged of Turkish soldiers killed in the conflict as “honorable martyrs” and stated his desire to pursue, not separatism, but peace,

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<sup>219</sup> Huseyin Hayatsever, “PKK leader Ocalan hands over legacy to umbrella party of leftist-Kurdish alliance,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, 27 October 2013.

<sup>220</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 100.

<sup>221</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, “Ocalan tells court he wants to end bloodshed,” *BBC Monitoring International*, 31 May 1999.



brotherhood, and democracy.<sup>222</sup> These members, as well as many outside analysts, perceive these statements as an abrupt and unheralded shift.

However, careful analysis shows that this was not the case. While his opening statements certainly demonstrated a change in the tone and intensity of Ocalan's stance, it did not come entirely out of nowhere. Instead, it was the culmination of a gradual softening, and arguably maturation, in his position beginning in the early 1990s.<sup>223</sup> It is important to discuss three concrete ways in which observers and journalists have traced this change.

In regards to negotiation and prospect of compromise, the organization has not been monolithic. Ocalan has been a visible driver of change, sometimes publicly acting unilaterally, and its most visible spokesperson. Though the PKK issued a statement during Ocalan's trial stating its desire to work towards a democratic solution, this did not reflect true consensus.<sup>224</sup> PKK suffered from a divided leadership and struggles over the direction of the organization for several years after Ocalan's capture. Many perceived Ocalan's statements as a capitulation to the Turkish government, and his orders for a ceasefire as coming the military they had fought for over a decade.<sup>225</sup> Mehmet Can Yuce, a longtime influential figure, was one of several imprisoned PKK leaders who renounced Ocalan in the wake of his statements.<sup>226</sup> Ocalan's brother temporarily left the PKK to found his own militant group.<sup>227</sup> Others, including Huseyn Topgider, a twenty-two year veteran of the PKK, sought political asylum in Europe.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 283.

<sup>223</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 40.

<sup>224</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation, "PKK backs Ocalan peace call," *BBC Monitoring International*, 31 May 1999.

<sup>225</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 287.

<sup>226</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 288.

<sup>227</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 305.

<sup>228</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 288.

Despite the presence of many critics and significant splits within its leadership, the PKK as an organization ultimately stood behind Ocalan. At its 7<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2000, the party explicitly approved of Ocalan's shift and affirmed his position as its leader despite his imprisonment.<sup>229</sup> There are also other, more concrete indications that the PKK as an organization has ultimately come to see the need for compromise.<sup>230</sup> For example, the PKK has adhered to ceasefire orders since Ocalan's imprisonment, indicating that, though the moderation of the PKK's initial uncompromising stance is often driven by Ocalan, his statements are also congruent with the group's outlook.

### Implications

The PKK's terrorist activity overall has declined significantly from its peak in the late-1990s.<sup>231</sup> The party no longer endorses suicide-bombing tactics, and the proportion of civilian casualties has declined significantly.<sup>232</sup> These developments will be explored in greater detail in *Chapter Four*. One can best examine this shift, however, in three areas: the PKK's demand for independence versus autonomy; its willingness to call and honor a ceasefire; and its willingness to enter into negotiations with the Turkish government.

The shift in the PKK's demands from an independent state to an autonomous region within Turkey is one demonstration of this gradual shift. One persistent misconception about the PKK is that its stated goal is an independent Kurdish state. This was certainly true at the time of the party's founding: throughout the PKK's early years the party saw any attempts to

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<sup>229</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 288.

<sup>230</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 27.

<sup>231</sup> Figures 2, Figure 3: Number of Attacks by Year and Location

<sup>232</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 104. Also see Figure 6: *Change Over Time by Target Type and Location* to see evidence of the decline in the number of attacks on civilian targets.

compromise as betrayal. In 1989, for example, Ocalan condemned Iraqi Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, for his willingness to settle for an autonomous Kurdish state, rather than one that was fully independent.<sup>233</sup> Though there were undoubtedly other factors involved, Talabani's willingness to moderate his demands was the explanation for a cancelled agreement between the PKK and Talabani's group, the PUK.<sup>234</sup>

Today, PKK literature goes out of its way to explicitly refute this assertion, stating explicitly that it “does not derive the creation of a Kurdish nation-state from the right of self-determination.”<sup>235</sup> Ocalan has also specifically pledged that the PKK does not “[seek] new political borders” but rather a solution that works within the existing national boundaries.<sup>236</sup> While such statements certainly increased in frequency and volume after 1999, Marcus and others argue that they were part of the PKK discourse long before Ocalan's arrest. In a 2013 article for *Foreign Policy*, for example, Jake Hess observed that, contrary to popular belief, the PKK has not demanded a separate state since the early 1990s.<sup>237</sup>

The multiple ceasefires called in the last decade in the hopes of negotiating with the Turkish state are another useful indicator. A willingness to momentarily forego violence is arguably both the strongest indicator and ramification of this strategic shift. The PKK declare its first official ceasefire with the Turkish state in the spring of 1993, arguably the period when they reached the height of their military power.<sup>238</sup> Evidence indicates that this gesture was in response to statements made by then-President Ozal that hinted at a willingness to begin talks

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<sup>233</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 123.

<sup>234</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 123.

<sup>235</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 31.

<sup>236</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 31.

<sup>237</sup> Jake Hess, “Turkey's PKK Talks,” *Foreign Policy: The Middle East Channel*, 8 January 2013.

<sup>238</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 26.

with the PKK.<sup>239</sup> Unfortunately, it was also the day before President Ozal suffered a fatal heart attack; though his successor made some gestures towards the PKK, Ozal's death marked the end of any real chance at reconciliation.<sup>240</sup> Interestingly, Ocalan kept the ceasefire in place for over another month. Such decisions can be viewed as evidence that Ocalan's opening statement was not an abrupt about-face, but rather an opportune moment to further a long-time trend of expressed willingness to work towards a negotiated peace. This is certainly how Ocalan chooses to present events, emphasizing his willingness to compromise with Ozal.<sup>241</sup>

Even those who believe that Ocalan's position towards the government began to soften in the early 1990s acknowledge that there was a dramatic shift after his arrest. Ocalan continued to call for peace and brotherhood from his cell on Imrali, calling for ceasefires in 1999, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, and 2013.<sup>242</sup> This was a dramatic shift from the man who proclaimed in 1977 "the highest form of rebellion is armed rebellion."<sup>243</sup> The PKK as a whole largely respected these ceasefires, demonstrating that the shift was not Ocalan's alone.

Even more telling than ceasefires was Ocalan's willingness to participate in negotiations with the government. The first occurrence of this was in 1993 with President Ozal. After Ozal's sudden death, negotiations did not start again until after Ocalan's arrest. Though it has become clear that Ocalan was involved in talks with Turkey's National Intelligence Organization/*Milli Istihbarat Teskilati* (MIT) since his capture, these negotiations did not become public for some time.<sup>244</sup> In 2011, a tape was leaked that revealed ongoing conversations between PKK

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<sup>239</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 211.

<sup>240</sup> Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, "Turkey's Kurdish Question: Critical Turning Points and Missed Opportunities," *Middle East Journal* 51 No. 1 (Winter 1997): 71.

<sup>241</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 31.

<sup>242</sup> Jake Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks".

<sup>243</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 39.

<sup>244</sup> Yilmaz Ensaroglu, "Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Peace Process," *Insight Turkey* 15 No. 2 (2013): 13.

negotiators and the government both at Imrali and in Oslo, Norway.<sup>245</sup> Though rumors of these talks had been circulating prior to the 2011 leak, there was no evidence.<sup>246</sup> It is unclear who provided this evidence; there are many parties who could have gained an advantage from its distribution and nobody claimed responsibility. However, the leak revealed an ongoing shift in the dynamics between the PKK and government interlocutors. Since 2011, both the Turkish government and Ocalan have been open about times when negotiations are ongoing.<sup>247</sup> The public negotiations now occurring since Ocalan's capture demonstrate the implications of this change in ideology.

### Significance

Despite the PKK's words and actions, many still doubt the sincerity of its interest in compromise with the Turkish government. The ceasefire from 1999 to 2003 certainly served as a time for the PKK to reorganize and reemerge as an influential organization. Arguing that was the organization's only intention, however, ignores the failure of the Turkish state to provide opportunities for political engagement. It is impossible to know whether the PKK would have returned to violent tactics anyway; however, it is a compelling counterfactual. Still others argue that the shift is real, but that it is evidence only of Ocalan's opportunism, self-absorption and lust for power.<sup>248</sup> Significant skepticism remains regarding the veracity of the PKK's stated willingness to pursue negotiations and its motivation for demonstrating a less harsh stance.

Whether the PKK's increased efforts to compromise originated with genuine conviction or simply the recognition it would help the party retain its prominent position in the fight for

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<sup>245</sup> "Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, September 2012), 3.

<sup>246</sup> Ensaroglu, "Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Peace Process," 13.

<sup>247</sup> Ensaroglu, "Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Peace Process," 15.

<sup>248</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 48.

Kurdish rights, the party has demonstrated increased distance from its initial absolutist positions regarding the need for independence, the supremacy of violence and the moral failing of compromise. The PKK's public statements and participation in official negotiations and government have both indicated and enacted a visible shift in the party's strategy, particularly since 1999.

### **Women's Rights**

Marxism, Liberalism and compromise have been key parts of the PKK's history and self-image. Other key strategic shifts concern more peripheral areas of the PKK's ideology, such as its view of the rights and role of women. Since the early 1990s, women's rights have increasingly featured in PKK ideology. While this advocacy may be the result of genuine convictions, it has also been intentionally framed to attract women to the PKK, as incorporating women is an extremely effective means of maximizing limited resources. Regardless of the initial motivation, the decision has had significant ramifications both for the PKK and in other aspects of Kurdish society.

### Content

The PKK describes the deplorable situation of women in Kurdish society at some length.<sup>249</sup> Their written material describes women's "lack of freedom, economic inability, lack of education, and health problems" as key elements of the oppression of women and children.<sup>250</sup> Ocalan in particular emphasized the need for the Kurdish movement to liberate women, and the

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<sup>249</sup> Abdullah Ocalan, "Women's State in Kurdish Society," 2014.

<sup>250</sup> Ocalan, "Women's State in Kurdish Society."

importance of women to the broader movement and the PKK specifically.<sup>251</sup> This opened the doors for women to participate not only within civil society, but as fighters and leaders within the PKK.

These texts also tie the plight of women to the broader struggle for Kurdish rights, arguing that this oppression is caused by the lack of political and moral rights in society.<sup>252</sup> While discussing the actions of Kurdish men, such rhetoric also traces the ultimate blame for women's oppression to the Turkish state. The chosen vocabulary also emphasizes the parallel nature of these struggles, referring to marriages in Kurdish society as "old feudal relationships."<sup>253</sup> This reinforces the need for the PKK's fight for Kurdish rights and freedoms, framing it within the context of women's daily suffering. The PKK's framing has been successful. One female BDP member recently described similarities between the mentality of the state and that of men in a news article, discussing how both result in oppression.<sup>254</sup>

### Origins

According to Ocalan, his views on women arose from seeing the way that highly conservative Kurdish culture treated women. He has written a number of texts on the issue including one 200-page interview entitled "Killing the Man" and speaks about his horror at his own sister's arranged marriage.<sup>255</sup> In these, he presents the PKK's focus on the women's rights as the product of his own genuine convictions. Whether or not this is true, the framing used in the party's rhetoric is a clear example of strategic use of an issue to reinforce the primary fight for Kurdish rights.

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<sup>251</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 173.

<sup>252</sup> Ocalan, "Women's State in Kurdish Society."

<sup>253</sup> Ocalan, "Women's State in Kurdish Society."

<sup>254</sup> Jenna Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters," *The Atlantic*, January 2013.

<sup>255</sup> Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters."

There are many reasons to question Ocalan's purported feminism: historically, minority groups have had to draw on their entire population, regardless of gender, in order to maximize a necessarily limited resource pool.<sup>256</sup> The emphasis on women's rights, therefore, may simply be a tactic to maximize the limited size of the pool of potential PKK recruits. Though less common, the PKK's female fighters are hardly unprecedented: other minority groups have also actively incorporated women, including the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (also known as the Tamil Tigers or LTTE) in Sri Lanka and the Irish Republican Army (IRA).<sup>257</sup> Scholars also note that the PKK's vocal feminism began around the time that the PKK expanded into urban areas through protest and publishing and, thereby, began to come into contact with more women.<sup>258</sup> Thus, there is a clear argument for the strategic nature of the PKK's promotion of women's rights. In addition, the strategic use of framing to relate such issues to the Kurdish cause is also indicative of the party strategically using ideology as a recruitment tool.

In addition to the strategic benefits of promoting women's rights, experts also present arguments to belie the PKK's professed concern for the situation of women. One of the most prominent of these arguments is Ocalan's troubled relationship with his ex-wife, Kesire Yildirim.<sup>259</sup> There is, however, a significant difference between Ocalan's wife and women who have joined the PKK over time, namely that many of the latter are utterly devoted to Ocalan. His wife, in contrast, directly threatened his position of power.<sup>260</sup> His split with her was in many ways consistent with his treatment of male members who posed a similar threat. Thus, one cannot extrapolate Ocalan's entire view on women from his relationship with his wife. Others

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<sup>256</sup> Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters."

<sup>257</sup> Miranda Alison, "Women as agents of political violence: gendering security," *Security Dialogue* 35 No. 4 (2004): 448.

<sup>258</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 172.

<sup>259</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 42.

<sup>260</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 42.



raise allegations that Ocalan and other high-level commanders considered themselves exempt from rules banning members from romantic or sexual relationships.<sup>261</sup> Unfortunately, there is no evidence of this.<sup>262</sup> Therefore, there is minimal evidence to draw any conclusions regarding whether his rhetoric is the result of calculation or conviction. Critics therefore argue that the PKK's promotion of women's rights is no thing more than a ploy, taking advantage of women's limited options in a restrictive and highly patriarchal society to persuade them to pursue such a drastic course of action.<sup>263</sup>

Another argument often employed against the PKK's genuine feminism is the statistic that 55 percent of PKK suicide bombers have been female. This draws a great deal of attention, as female suicide bombers are perceived in the West as an aberration, particularly in Turkey's Arab neighbors.<sup>264</sup> Critics therefore argue that the PKK is merely taking advantage of those most vulnerable in society to complete these suicidal missions. This is certainly an argument worth exploring; however, it is insufficient evidence to dismiss the PKK's claims to feminist beliefs. It is difficult to ascertain the motives of suicide bombers, male or female, and to judge who is being manipulated and, if so, how much.

The discussion above demonstrates that while it is possible that the PKK's advocacy for women's rights arose out of genuine convictions, it is equally plausible that its support for women's rights is entirely strategic. In either case, the PKK framed the incorporation of women's rights in such way that helped to maximize the PKK's fighting force.

### Implications

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<sup>261</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 197.

<sup>262</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 197

<sup>263</sup> Zekai Ozcinar and Bayram Kaya, "Women join terrorist PKK for many reasons, mainly seeking freedom," *Today's Zaman*, 29 January 2012.

<sup>264</sup> Mia Bloom, "Female suicide bombers: A global trend," *Daedalus* 136 No. 1 (2007): 94.

Today, an estimated 18 percent of PKK fighters are women.<sup>265</sup> In the early 1990s, at the peak of the PKK's military power, as much as one-third of the PKK's fighting force were women.<sup>266</sup> These women have become a highly visible symbol of the party, and have garnered the party publicity in a number of mainstream Western publications.<sup>267</sup> Women are also not relegated to lower ranks: the PKK boasts all female units, female founding members, and has women sitting on its executive council.<sup>268</sup> This high rate of female participation is certainly linked with the "feminist" values articulated in Ocalan's writings and which the PKK now publicly holds.

It has also had implications beyond on the PKK for women in broader Kurdish society, particularly in the Kurdish political parties. Female PKK members do not come from a specific demographic, instead ranging from women fleeing poverty with the bare minimum of education to those turning away from careers made possible by their university degrees.<sup>269</sup> For all of these women, families cannot refuse to let their daughters join the PKK for fear of appealing disloyal.

This has opened up unprecedented options to women within other areas in highly conservative Kurdish society, particularly in the Kurdish political parties.<sup>270</sup> The Kurdish *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (BDP) also has high rates of female participation, and is the only party in Turkey that requires male and female party co-chairs. This has become particularly prevalent in contrast with *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*'s (AKP) conservative stance on women.<sup>271</sup> Following the 2011 elections, 30.5 percent of BDP parliamentarians were women, the highest of any

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<sup>265</sup> Ozcinar and Kaya, "Women join terrorist PKK for many reasons".

<sup>266</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 173.

<sup>267</sup> See Yildiz, Krajeski, Hall

<sup>268</sup> Richard Hall, "The PKK's Guerilla Girls Will Fight Until They Die," *Vice News*, 2 April 2012.

<sup>269</sup> Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters."

<sup>270</sup> Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters."

<sup>271</sup> Krajeski, "Kurdistan's Female Fighters."

political party and twice the parliamentary averages.<sup>272</sup> In contrast, only 13.8 percent of AKP's parliamentarians at the same time were women.<sup>273</sup> The prominence of women in the BDP demonstrates the ramifications of the PKK's policy towards women in spheres far beyond the Qandil Mountains.

### Significance

Regardless of whether it started as a genuine conviction, women's rights and issues have become an important part of the PKK's ideology. The PKK's promotion of women's rights has caused continued dedication to public female leadership and incorporation of women's rights in public dialogue for Kurdish parties. Women's rights is an example of an area where it is unclear where the PKK's convictions were initially genuine, or simply an attempt to maximize a small resource pool. In either case, the Party consciously framed the issue in a way that explicitly connected the oppression of women and the oppression of the Kurds, in order to make the PKK's fight relevant to women who wanted personal autonomy. The decision to reach out to women has changed, if not attitudes, certainly options available for Kurdish women. While it is important not to overstate this progress, it is still significant. Described as a "movement within the movement", female members of the PKK have certainly gained momentum that will not easily be reversed, regardless of the overall outcome.

### **Islam**

Regarding many of the topics discussed above, it is unclear to what degree changes in rhetoric and ideology were caused by actual changes in belief or opinion, and how much the shifts were

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<sup>272</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "Women 'appear' in Turkey's Parliament," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 17 July 2011.

<sup>273</sup> Cagaptay, "Women 'appear' in Turkey's Parliament."

themselves strategic. In some areas, however, it is relatively obvious that ideological change was entirely for the sake of expediency, rather than genuine conviction. One of these areas is religion, specifically Islam. While none of the PKK's leaders publicly demonstrate religious piety, the party has gradually increased efforts to explicitly attract and include Muslim supporters, largely in response to the increasing presence and importance of Islamist organizations both concerning specifically Kurdish issues and in Turkish politics more broadly. While Islam does not seem to have guided the PKK's actions at all, it helps to legitimize the party's actions and existence to a certain audience.

### Content

There is very little in the PKK's stated ideology that deals directly with religion. Though the party has increasingly taken action to appeal to religious groups in society, the associated ideological content is all but absent. Islam is mentioned as an important component of society; however, the PKK is careful to remind supporters that their national and ethnic identity must always take priority over their religious identity.<sup>274</sup>

### Origins

Congruent with its Marxist outlook, the PKK initially completely dissociated itself with religion. Surprisingly, they did not take a clear anti-religious stance; however, they did not cooperate with religious groups.<sup>275</sup> In fact one of the PKK's most bitter rivalries was with

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<sup>274</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 40.

<sup>275</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 244.

Hizbullah<sup>276</sup>, an Islamist organization that employed similar terrorist tactics to pursue the goal of Kurdish independence.

Perhaps the PKK's neutrality was out of a desire to distinguish itself from Hizbullah. Through much of the early 1990s, Hizbullah was the PKK's most significant rival within Kurdish society.<sup>277</sup> The group espoused an agenda of Islamist Kurdish nationalism.<sup>278</sup> However, many believe that Hizbullah was also supported by the state in an explicit attempt to destroy the PKK.<sup>279</sup>

The decision to avoid discussing Islam may also have been out of pragmatism: though religion is an integral part of the social fabric in the southeast, the Kurds in Turkey are a religiously diverse group, with groups identifying as Sunni, Shi'ite and Alevi.<sup>280</sup> The PKK clearly believe that loyalty based on common ethnicity trumps that springing from religious affiliation.<sup>281</sup> Their decision to refrain from attacking religion may have simply been the result of a desire maximizing their pool of potential resources by continuing to draw constituents of all religions.

By the mid-1990s, it became clear that silence was not sufficient. At their Fifth Congress in January 1995, the PKK issued a statement saying that Islam was "not contrary to the Kurdish nationalist goals."<sup>282</sup> Following the Congress, the PKK also founded the Kurdistan Islamic

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<sup>276</sup> The Hizbullah in Turkey is unaffiliated with the terrorist organization Hezbollah that has long been active in Lebanon.

<sup>277</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 73.

<sup>278</sup> Gareth Jenkins, "Values and Identity: The Resurgence of the Kurdish Hizbullah," *Turkey Analyst* 5 No. 9 (2012).

<sup>279</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 73.

<sup>280</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 67.

<sup>281</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 14.

<sup>282</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 244. Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 95.

Movement (KIH), a group they deliberately backed and arguably controlled.<sup>283</sup> By this time, the PKK no longer needed to distinguish itself in contrast to its religious rivals; Hizbullah effectively collapsed by the mid-1990s.<sup>284</sup>

The growing presence of Islamist parties in government may also have been a factor. Many experts argue both the PKK recognized that Islamic parties also ran against the grain of mainstream Turkish politics, with both opposing the ideals of Kemal Ataturk and thus of secular Turkey.<sup>285</sup> This commonality caused the PKK to perceive that Islamist parties in government might be more open to negotiation than their predecessors. PKK may therefore have hoped to use these Islamic groups to reach out to Islamist parties in the Turkish government.

In the early 2000s, the strength of religious groups became extremely evident again with the rise of the AKP. The AKP was extremely popular in the religiously conservative southeast, on average claiming one-third of the vote in the southeast since its founding.<sup>286</sup> In 2007, for example, when AKP hit the peak of their popularity in the region, they claimed 42 percent of the vote in Diyarbakir, close to the national average of 49.9 percent that carried AKP to victory.<sup>287</sup> While BDP remains the most popular party in the region, AKP is a close second and the only real threat. Even after its popularity fell prior to the 2011 elections, 32 percent of voters voted AKP.<sup>288</sup> In contrast, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP), the main opposition party, claimed 2 percent of the vote.<sup>289</sup> The continuing prominence of the AKP in Turkish politics indicates the

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<sup>283</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 244.

<sup>284</sup> Jenkins, "Values and Identity".

<sup>285</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 78.

<sup>286</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse: The View from Diyarbakir," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, November 2012), 19.

<sup>287</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 19.

<sup>288</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse", 19.

<sup>289</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse", 19.

importance of Islam; however, the AKP has significantly stronger religious credentials than the PKK; appealing only to religious values could backfire.

This conundrum has been the key to understanding the PKK's current position with regards to religion. Their official statements make sure to acknowledge the importance of religious preferences and identity, while carefully balancing it against the reminder that it is the Kurdish cause, not Islam's, which is supreme.<sup>290</sup> This careful balancing attempt seems engineered to balance the importance of constituents' religion with the clear threat posed by the AKP and, at times, Hizbullah.<sup>291</sup>

### Implications

The strategic implications of this attitudinal shift have been extremely minor. For example, the PKK has founded a number of Islamic organizations associated with the party to encourage the active support of more pious groups in Kurdish society.<sup>292</sup> It has also supported the building of mosques in Western Europe as part of the network it has built to link the diaspora.<sup>293</sup> In addition, the PKK has on occasion used religious rhetoric, including attempts to legitimize and justify for its messages and actions.<sup>294</sup> Such efforts have focused on Sunni Islam, but works to build coalitions of affiliated Alevi groups as well.<sup>295</sup> The need for only minor changes is perhaps in part why appealing to religious groups was such an attractive strategy: it was incredibly 'cheap' for the organization, requiring minimal action.

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<sup>290</sup> Ocalan, *War and Peace in Kurdistan*, 40.

<sup>291</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 110.

<sup>292</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 102.

<sup>293</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 70.

<sup>294</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 110.

<sup>295</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 70.

## Significance

There is no indication that this shift in favor of Islam is the result of anything other than political pragmatism. Ocalan is not a conspicuously religious man, nor is any other member of the PKK leadership. Religion has also never been a central part of the PKK's ideology; rather it has always been a clear add-on meant to attract still more supporters and avoid alienating religious constituents. Finally, the emphasis on religion has clearly followed societal trends of the public importance of religion in Turkish culture. Islam is one example of an instance when the ideological shift was itself strategic, rather than genuine, and the result, as opposed to producer, of strategy.

## **Conclusion**

The PKK's ideological shifts have both deeply affected its strategic decisions and been the result of strategic decisions. This is best reflected in the core areas of Marxism, democracy and willingness to compromise with the central government, as well as the more peripheral issues of women's rights and Islam. In certain of these areas, particularly Islam, it is clear that the PKK intentionally changed their ideology in order to increase support for their core ethno-nationalist aims. This was particularly noticeable when it occurred in response to competition from other groups. In other cases, it is unclear whether the ideological shift itself was genuine; however, it clearly guides strategy and actions; this is evident in the increased number of ceasefires between the PKK and the Turkish government in the last decade. These strategic shifts in ideology have changed the ways in which the PKK's fight is framed, particularly in terms of its stated goals and rhetoric, and in which it is conducted. They are also illustrative both of the ways in which the PKK justifies its own actions, as well as the ways in which it seeks to



legitimize them for a broader public. An examination of these ideologies is crucial in understanding both the causes and implications of strategic shifts throughout the course of the PKK's fight.

Ideology provides a compelling example of an area in which the PKK has adapted its strategy in order to operate effectively as circumstances changed. Over time, there has arguably been an increasing tendency to embrace ideologies that are more practical and pragmatic, demonstrative of the organization's ability to learn from past experience. Thus, this chapter provides one example supporting my overall thesis, using the proof of rationality from Chapter One to move into a more detailed discussion of the party's strategic decisions. The next chapter will discuss the way in which the PKK adapts its tactics in traditionally political arenas.

### CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND TACTICS

The previous chapter provided an understanding of the ways in which the PKK's rational decision-making affects its strategy regarding ideology. Ideology shapes a group's identity and priorities: consequently, many of the strategic shifts in the previous chapter are related to securing legitimizing the PKK's actions for a broader audience.

The PKK's tactics in the political arena are further proof of the organization's ability to adapt to changing circumstances and appeal to different audiences. This political activity has occurred both through direct action and through interactions with other political actors. This chapter evaluates these changing tactics within different geographical contexts, in order to account for the changing audience, available resources, and goals as the PKK moves from country to country. This chapter considers first civil society and politics first within all of Turkey and then in Western Europe.

While one can find independent actors driving these efforts, the PKK has often directly used the resources of civil society in pursuit of its ethno-nationalist aims, including political parties, media outlets and civilian involvement. In addition, it has at times used various tactics to influence or, arguably, co-opt various independent actors. The connection between the PKK and legal organizations is often complicated; in frequently seeking to shut down legal parties through unsubstantiated accusations of collaboration with the PKK, the Turkish government makes these connections even more confusing. It is important, therefore, to consider both the PKK's direct efforts and its interactions with other social and political actors in order to more fully understand PKK tactics.

Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, an academic whose work focuses on political activism in diaspora communities, draws a useful distinction between two types of political activity; though

her discussion pertains specifically to diaspora groups, the distinction exists in domestic politics as well. Ostergaard-Nielsen distinguishes between institutional participation, or political action through established institutions and channels, and confrontational participation, challenging existing institutions from the outside through popular protest or alternative media.<sup>296</sup> Another way to define the difference between the two would be to describe institutional participation as working from within the system, whereas confrontational participation seeks to impact the system from the outside. One is not necessarily always more useful than the other; the two attract different types of participants and different types of attention and are useful in different ways.<sup>297</sup> In Turkey, for example, the opportunities for institutional participation by explicitly Kurdish parties are limited, while Europe's more open structures have provided more space for PKK involvement. Used effectively, both types of participation can enable and even strengthen the other, and the PKK has often used such both either together or in parallel. This chapter will consider both types of participation within the two geographic areas.

## Turkey

Within Turkey, there have been multiple efforts to address the Kurdish Question through legal means and without the use of violence.<sup>298</sup> The PKK has consistently been involved directly and indirectly with both institutional and confrontational political action in Turkey. The exact extent of this involvement and the nature of relationships between the PKK and legal organizations and

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<sup>296</sup> Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state: Turks and Kurds in Germany and the Netherlands," *Global Networks* 1 No. 3 (2001): 272.

<sup>297</sup> Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state," 275.

<sup>298</sup> Nicole Watts, "Allies and Enemies: Pro-Kurdish Parties in Turkish Politics, 1990-94," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31 No. 4 (Nov 1999): 631.

parties are difficult to ascertain; however, this existence of this involvement and the influence of the PKK are undeniable.

### Background

Due to restrictive policies and active attempts to shut down dissent, much of the progress made within Turkish civil society and politics regarding Kurdish nationalism and rights has been unsatisfactory. Despite difficulties, there has been a relatively consistent positive trend since the first outspokenly pro-Kurdish politicians emerged in 1987.<sup>299</sup> These politicians were not members of a party with an explicitly Kurdish agenda, but rather affiliated with the Social Democratic People's Party/*Sosyaldemokratik Halkı Partisi* (SHP). Ultimately, however, they realized they needed their own party: outspokenness on the Kurdish issue cost these original MPs their SHP membership.<sup>300</sup> In June 1990, these MPs joined with others to form the first party explicitly addressing the Kurdish issue, the People's Labor Party/*Halkın Emek Partisi* (HEP).<sup>301</sup> The party retained its leftist affiliation; however, its primary focus was on issues related to the Kurdish issues. The party's emergence was a turning point, marking the beginning of the Kurdish issue as an active presence in legal Turkish politics.<sup>302</sup>

Since the founding of the HEP, there has consistently been a single-issue Kurdish party in the Turkish political arena; between 1990 and 2013 there have been seven such parties, including HEP. These parties have been represented in Turkish parliament with regularity and have also held local positions in the Southeast. There are certainly instances and examples of state accommodations over that time; unfortunately, these have been few and far between. The

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<sup>299</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 636.

<sup>300</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 642.

<sup>301</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 631.

<sup>302</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 643.

primary reason why there have been so many Kurdish parties is because Turkey's Constitutional Court banned all but the most recent from the political arena.<sup>303</sup> Nicole Watts, who has studied Kurdish political parties in some depth, describes "continued state resistance to any overt demonstration of Kurdish political identity."<sup>304</sup> Though the court has had various legal justifications for each shutdown; the pattern of discrimination is unmistakable.

In addition to shutting down the parties entirely, the state has also used other tactics to keep Kurdish political parties from functioning effectively. The first of these is a clause in the Constitution mandating that, in order to be represented in Parliament, a party must receive a minimum of 10 percent of the vote nationwide. As a party whose constituency is very localized, a national threshold was impossible for Kurdish parties to meet.<sup>305</sup> Consequently, Kurdish party candidates run as independents or as candidates of an allied party, before reconvening once in parliament.<sup>306</sup> The threshold is one of the most visible indications of prejudice against Kurdish parties.

Another of Turkey's laws that had a great impact on Kurdish politicians is Article Three, paragraph two of the Turkish constitution, which bans the official use of any language other than Turkish.<sup>307</sup> The practical ramification of this policy is that politicians cannot address their constituents in Kurdish without risking government reprisal; this response often includes removing politicians' eligibility to run for office and even arrest and criminal persecution.<sup>308</sup> This has both practical and symbolic implications. Practically, it hampers many Kurds from

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<sup>303</sup> The court banned HEP in 1993, the Democracy Party/*Demokrasi Partisi* (DEP) in 1994, People's Democratic Party/*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi* (HADEP) in 2003, and Democratic Society Party/*Demokratik Toplum Partisi* (DTP) in 2009.

<sup>304</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 632.

<sup>305</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 252.

<sup>306</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 20.

<sup>307</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 10.

<sup>308</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey," *MERIP Reports* 121 (1984): 10.

participating in the political process in areas where Kurmanji or Zaza is the first language of most of the population.<sup>309</sup> Symbolically, it is another clear indication of exclusion. Kurdish politicians often would prefer to address constituents in their native language, both to better share ideas and to express a common identity. The ban on the use of Kurdish languages and the government's often-enthusiastic enforcement is another obstacle to the participation of Kurdish politicians and parties.

Another way in which the Turkish government prevents the efficacy of Kurdish parties is simply by arresting their members. The majority of these arrests were based on falsified charges or charges that lacked sufficient proof; however, that has not stopped Turkish courts from handing down long prison sentences or banning individuals from holding office. For example, Leyla Zana, one of the most famous female Kurdish politicians and a two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, spent over a decade in jail due to allegations of PKK connections. In another instance of clear discrimination, when an independent candidate in Diyarbakir beat an AKP candidate for a parliamentary seat in the 2011 general elections, the courts suddenly decided to uphold an old verdict that disqualified him from the election.<sup>310</sup> The number of Kurdish parliamentarians imprisoned or banned from politics on very minimal proof is another compelling indication of the hurdles that the Turkish state has created for Kurdish parties and politicians.

### Institutional Participation

Due to the PKK's designation as a terrorist organization and the charges leveled against many of its members, its direct participation in institutional politics in Turkey has until recently

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<sup>309</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 1.

<sup>310</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 20.

been difficult if not impossible. Even after Ocalan's arrest provided a potential vehicle for official participation in institutional politics, the abilities of the broader party remained minimal. It is therefore important to examine the ways in which the PKK has interacted with legal Kurdish parties to further its own agenda.

The connections between the PKK and legal political parties are complicated. Initially, the PKK simply condemned all legal political parties. When the single-issue Kurdish political parties first emerged, the PKK rejected them as well, warning civilians and politicians alike to stay away from the democratic process.<sup>311</sup> PKK members were not hesitant to reinforce these warnings with violence.<sup>312</sup> Analysts debate whether the vehemently negative response was about a competition for power or a fundamental distrust of the Turkish political system; the answer is likely somewhere in between. Throughout the early 1990s, the PKK went back and forth between supporting these parties and threatening them.<sup>313</sup>

Any measure of PKK support complicated the identity of these parties, particularly in the eyes of the state. Many in government already viewed these political parties as the "PKK come down from the mountains."<sup>314</sup> Throughout the last two decades, the government frequently accuses the parties of being PKK fronts, and supporting terrorism is a popular charge leveled against Kurdish politicians.<sup>315</sup> Many of these allegations are supported with insufficient or falsified evidence, and are clearly acts of government repression.<sup>316</sup> However, pictures of

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<sup>311</sup> "PKK Official Warns Candidates to Withdraw," *Voice of Independent Kurdistan*, 3 March 1994.

<sup>312</sup> "PKK Official Warns Candidates to Withdraw."

<sup>313</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 160.

<sup>314</sup> Watts, "Allies and Enemies," 645.

<sup>315</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 21.

<sup>316</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 20.

Kurdish MPs embracing PKK fighters, as they did when a number of fighters returned to Turkey in October 2009 under an amnesty deal, provide visible support for such accusations.<sup>317</sup>

Politicians explain such pictures with another complicating factor: due to the significant overlap in the PKK and BDP constituencies, Kurdish political parties need positive relations with the PKK to be successful.<sup>318</sup> Perhaps the earliest example of this is Ocalan's tentative statements in 1991 in support of the new HEP; as a result of his approval, the party found itself with a sudden exponential increase in membership and public support as a direct consequence.<sup>319</sup> Mahmut Kilinic, one of the HEP's founding members, by noting that while their methods and approaches differed greatly, ultimately PKK and HEP goals overlapped, explaining the large number of individuals who sympathized with both.<sup>320</sup>

Thus, even as the Kurdish political parties explicitly deny any connection with the PKK, true independence is impossible. The PKK's ability to affect public opinion necessarily remains a key decision-making factor for these Kurdish parties. Finally, the PKK's ability to impact the key issues on which these parties focus also further intertwines the parties' decision-making. The need for PKK approval complicates the legal issues surrounding Kurdish political parties.

The PKK has also actively reached out to legitimate political parties, as allies and even as the future of the Kurdish struggle. Ocalan has stated that, as the fight for Kurdish rights must now continue in a democratic sphere, it is the BDP who "will take over this historical legacy" in order to turn a "revolutionary struggle...into an acquisition of humanity."<sup>321</sup> While this is certainly a positive sign of the PKK's willingness to leave behind its violent tactics, it also

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<sup>317</sup> Jonathan Head, "Mistrust at the center of Turkey's Kurdish strife," *BBC News*, 19 October 2011.

<sup>318</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 21.

<sup>319</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 161.

<sup>320</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 161.

<sup>321</sup> Huseyin Hayatsever, "PKK leader Ocalan hands over legacy to umbrella party of leftist-Kurdish alliance," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 27 October 2013.



indicates an alignment of PKK and BDP goals, a problematic association. Turkish media has accused the PKK of trying to co-opt the BDP and its predecessors on numerous occasions. The PKK's popular support and the government's frequent accusations contribute to the unclear status of the relationship between legitimate political parties and the PKK. This makes it more difficult to stop the Turkish government from shutting these parties down, and to understand the extent of the PKK's influence over the legitimate Kurdish political parties.

The PKK does have one avenue of access to formal institutional politics: Abdullah Ocalan. Since his arrest and imprisonment in 1999, Ocalan has had the ability to speak publicly and negotiate formally with the government. Obviously, those statements released are subject to some government screening; however, Ocalan's word has been widely respected both by the PKK and by society at large. It is arguably Ocalan's presence that has made possible the series of recent ceasefires and negotiations, as he is able to speak directly with the government and MIT without fear of arrest. In addition, one can speculate that Ocalan might be able to make larger concessions in negotiations both because of his immense popularity and because his time in prison, particularly when facing a death sentence, proves his devotion to the cause. In either case, he is certainly politically influential. Since restrictions were loosened on Ocalan's visitors following the most recent ceasefire, many of Ocalan's visitors have been BDP politicians. Particularly since active PKK fighters and commanders seem to follow his orders, Ocalan's arrest opened up an unorthodox avenue of direct institutional political participation for the PKK.

Though direct institutional participation is largely unavailable, the PKK is nevertheless a participant in Turkey's institutional politics, both because of necessary connections with the Kurdish parties and through their own efforts to reach out to these parties. Thus, though the full

extent of PKK involvement is unknown, it is important to note the points of contact and the ways in which they participate in institutional politics.

### Confrontational Participation

The founding of the first Kurdish political parties and the consequent increase in formal institutional participation coincided with an increase in confrontational public participation from the broader public. While the PKK and its leaders recognized the need for public support by the start of the 1990s, it was seen as an eventual goal rather than an immediate possibility.<sup>322</sup> That changed in the spring of 1990 with what has become known as the *Serhildan* or Uprising. In March, around Newroz, families in the city of Nusaybin took the rare step of claiming the bodies of thirteen PKK members ambushed and killed by Turkish forces.<sup>323</sup> While the PKK had been pushing for families to do this more frequently, few did out of fear of angering the army.<sup>324</sup> When the police tried to prevent funerary processions for these fighters on March 14, 1990, the situation developed into mass protests that including an estimated 5,000 people.<sup>325</sup>

These protests spread to other cities as well: the next day in Cizre, another city in the southeast, an estimated 15,000 people took to the streets.<sup>326</sup> The result was not peaceful demonstration, but violence between civilians and the police, as the police opened fire in several locations.<sup>327</sup> In Nusaybin, security forces killed eight people and injured at least twenty-five.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 147.

<sup>323</sup> “4 Killed, 9 Wounded in Cizre Incidents,” *Ankara Domestic Service*, 20 March 1990.

<sup>324</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 140.

<sup>325</sup> Namik Durukan and Sukru Basaslan, “300 Detained in Nusaybin,” *Milliyet*, 16 March 1990.

<sup>326</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 140.

<sup>327</sup> See multiple media reports for confirmation including “Security Forces Reportedly Kill 25 in Nusaybin,” *Tehran International Service*, and Durukan and Basaslan, “300 Detained in Nusaybin”.

<sup>328</sup> “Security Forces Reportedly Kill 25 in Nusaybin,” *Tehran International Service*, 16 March 1990.

The government officially reported at least 300 arrests.<sup>329</sup> In Cizre, at least five protestors were killed, eighty injured, and another 155 arrested.<sup>330</sup> Nusaybin and Cizre were only two of many examples of this kind of protest, as evidenced by the government's decision to impose martial law on the region in April and to step up the forcible migration of Kurdish citizens shortly following the Newroz protests.<sup>331</sup>

These protests, the first of their kind in decades, took the Turkish government by surprise. However they were not alone; the PKK was shocked to see this amount of urban support.<sup>332</sup> The *Serhildan* was only the first indication of increasing Kurdish activism nominally independent of the PKK that took place during the early 1990s.<sup>333</sup> The PKK responded quickly to their newly discovered public support; at their second conference in May 1990, the leadership determined that the organization was now ready to begin shifting its attention and its reach from rural areas into city centers with the intention of raising a general uprising.<sup>334</sup> Following the 1990 protests, Newroz celebrations became, and remain, a time of public protest among Turkey's Kurdish citizens.

Though the PKK certainly appreciated the value of the public support shown during the *Serhildan*, the extent to which it engineered either the initial protests or subsequent demonstrations is unclear. PKK commanders active at the time report mixed signals from Ocalan, and, despite rhetoric from the Second Conference, there is no sign that it tried to

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<sup>329</sup> Durukan and Basaslan, "300 Detained in Nusaybin."

<sup>330</sup> "Chronology of Kurds in Turkey," Minorities at Risk Database, last updated 16 July 2010, [www.cidcm.umd.edu](http://www.cidcm.umd.edu).

<sup>331</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 142.

<sup>332</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 140.

<sup>333</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 175

<sup>334</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), 110.

engineer a Kurdish *intifada*.<sup>335</sup> Some of the aforementioned commanders suggest that this was due to the PKK's Syrian hosts who had no desire to give their own Kurdish population any ideas about the possibility of revolt.<sup>336</sup> Others state that it was Ocalan's ego that prevented the *Serhildan* from having comparable influence, complaining that he feared that such sudden rapid growth would dilute his influence within the new popular movement.<sup>337</sup>

Government attempts to suppress public protests were hugely unsuccessful. Public protests have continued since the *Serhildan*; International Crisis Group (ICG) reports from two decades later detail numerous instances of similar protests in Diyarbakir and other cities.<sup>338</sup> Despite the passage of time, the government response changed little. Methods of protest have also adjusted in the face of police brutality. In October 2012, for example, shops, schools, and bus services in Diyarbakir all shut down during a one-day strike.<sup>339</sup> Such strikes are a way to demonstrate dissent without risking the consequences of taking to the streets. Public protest, in contrast, can mean arrest and prison time under the broad provisions of the Turkish Penal Code, or the police brutality many protestors reported in the summer of 2013.<sup>340</sup> Hunger strikes are also a common form of protest, particularly among those imprisoned in Turkish prison. As with the *Serhildan*, it is often extremely to determine whether the PKK is involved in the organization of such protests.

The other key area of Kurdish confrontational participation in Turkish politics is the media. Until 1991, publication in Kurdish languages was illegal within Turkey; however, many

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<sup>335</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 180.

<sup>336</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 180.

<sup>337</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 180.

<sup>338</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 2.

<sup>339</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse," 17.

<sup>340</sup> For more information about the Kurdish involvement in the Gezi Park protests, as well as police brutality, see Amnesty International's report, "Gezi Park Protests: Brutal Denial of the Right to Peaceful Assembly in Turkey. For more information on Turkey's Penal Code and Anti-Terror Law, see ICG reports.

organizations and journals continued to publish in secret.<sup>341</sup> The same was true for the use of Kurmanji or Zaza on television and radio. Even after softening restrictions in 1991 and partially lifting them under AKP, the government has often continued to object strongly to the content of Kurdish journals, which almost invariably contradicts official narratives regarding the conflict. Due to active efforts by the Turkish government to shut down such organizations, Europe was the hub for the majority of PKK media production. Reports of Turkish military abuses, for example, rarely occurred in Turkish publications; however, the PKK was able to not only discuss these abuses, but also show proof in the form of photographs and video.<sup>342</sup> Satellite television has also been an effective means of communication; whether or not the PKK controls the popular Kurdish-language stations, its members and spokespersons frequently appear on the channels. Such stations are popular with constituencies from Village Guards employed by the Turkish government to members of rival Iraqi-Kurdish groups, PUK and KDP, despite its PKK connections.<sup>343</sup> It is important to recognize the importance within Turkey of providing and distributing a narrative contradicting the stories told in Turkish media, over which the government exercised a great deal of control, or mainstream publishing, which largely neglected issues of specifically Kurdish interest.<sup>344</sup>

The Turkish government ultimately realized the importance of television, actively pressuring European countries to shut down MED-TV, the earliest of the Kurdish satellite television stations.<sup>345</sup> The government eventually relaxed restrictions on broadcasting in Kurdish

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<sup>341</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting national and ethnic identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 No. 1 (1998), 49.

<sup>342</sup> David Romano, "Modern Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands: The Case of the Kurds," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 35 No. 1 (March 2002), 138.

<sup>343</sup> Romano, "Communications Technology in the Hands of Ethnic Nationalists," 128.

<sup>344</sup> van Bruinessen, "Shifting national and ethnic identities," 41.

<sup>345</sup> Romano, "Communications Technology in the Hands of Ethnic Nationalists," 143. They succeeded several times; MED-TV was shut down in 1999 by the British; its successor Medya-TV was shut down in

languages with in Turkey in 2009, launching a government-sponsored Kurdish language channel, TRT.<sup>346</sup> Despite this, MED-TV and its successor stations ROJ-TV and Medya-TV, which have also been produced in Europe and linked to the PKK, continue to dominate Kurdish language television.

A great deal of this confrontational political participation seems to have developed outside of PKK control, though it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion. While the PKK occasionally organized street celebrations for Newroz, there is little evidence that they planned the large and occasionally violent demonstrations that have often emerged.<sup>347</sup> This confrontational participation, therefore, is not only an example of civic activism towards many of the PKK's goals, but also of a case in which the level of PKK involvement and innovation are contested and ambiguous. This true of media; however, despite ambiguity regarding control over the stations, the PKK has used them as a means of communication. For most large-scale public protest in favor of PKK goals the situation remains much more ambiguous; while the organization's goals and ideology are clearly present, the extent to which the PKK has engineered their presence is unclear.

### Conclusion

Although official political participation is difficult due to the party's illegality, the PKK has consistently been involved in both confrontational and institutional politics. While the extent of this involvement is at times difficult to ascertain, the PKK has dominated nonviolent political

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2004 by another European government. ROJ-TV, which began broadcasting in 2004, is the channel's current iteration.

<sup>346</sup> "Turkey's Kurdish Impasse: The View from Diyarbakir," 11.

<sup>347</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 180.

activism in Turkey throughout its existence. In addition, the type, intensity and means of this involvement has shifted over time.

## **Europe**

In order to sustain their fight within Turkey, the PKK has required significant support from abroad. In fact, the PKK's political activism in Europe is sometimes referred to as a "second front" in its fight, speaking to the equal importance of this component of the PKK's strategy.<sup>348</sup> The party's deliberate cultivation of support among the European diaspora demonstrates its awareness of this importance from early in the conflict and its ability to adapt in different geopolitical settings in order to remain relevant.

## Background

The Kurdish population in Western Europe is made up of a combination of economic and political immigrants. Many were Gastarbeiter<sup>349</sup> who emigrated from Turkey under the permissive laws in the sixties and seventies seeking jobs. Others sought political asylum, particularly after Turkey's 1980 coup.<sup>350</sup> To this day, many of the Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in Western Europe are not citizens of the countries in which they live, but rather remain Turkish citizens. Many of those who have become politically active as members of the Kurdish diaspora did not start out that way: instead, their activism is the result of deliberate efforts to cultivate Kurdish identity among Turkish immigrants in Western Europe.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Alynna J. Lyon and Emek M. Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 No. 6 (2001): 928.

<sup>349</sup> German for "Guest Worker": a term applied to Kurds and Turks who arrived in the EU throughout the 1960s and 1970s under labor agreements between Turkey and Germany.

<sup>350</sup> Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state," 266.

<sup>351</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 933.

It is important to note that the politically active groups discussed here are only a subset of the population. Estimates vary and clear membership numbers are difficult to attain. One 1999 estimate put PKK membership, that is to say active support rather than sympathy, at 11,000, or more than one in five Kurds in Germany at the time.<sup>352</sup> Other estimates from approximately the same period put passive support as high as 90 percent.<sup>353</sup> Regardless of the specifics, the number is certainly significant, but by no means does it constitute the entire population.

Many scholars have used the Kurdish population in Western Europe as a case study for the effects of a diaspora on civil conflict. Perhaps the most impressive of these scholars are Fiona Adamson, who looks at transnational networks, political mobilization, and violence; Alynna Lyon and Emek Ucarer, who focus specifically on the PKK in Germany; and Eva Ostergaard-Nielsen, whose research concerns transnational political practices. All of these researchers have used the Kurdish diaspora to shed light on some of the larger issues related to diaspora populations, while simultaneously providing insight into the actions of the PKK and other actors in the diaspora. Other often-studied diaspora groups include the Irish-American and Jewish-American communities, both of which had a significant impact on the conflicts in Ireland and Israel respectively.

Empirical research on these and other diaspora groups has found that their impact is not always positive. Researchers at the World Bank have concluded that there is correlation between an involved diaspora and the recurrence or perpetuation of civil conflict.<sup>354</sup> Part of this is about

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<sup>352</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 934.

<sup>353</sup> Fiona Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 80.

<sup>354</sup> Paul Collier, "Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and their Implications for Policy," in *Leashing the Dogs of War*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, et al. (USIP Press Books: 2007), 213.



the political stance of diasporas, which is often more radical than that of domestic groups.<sup>355</sup>

Adamson attributes this more radical stance to the lack of accountability in the diaspora; they are largely unaffected by the consequences of perpetuating conflict.<sup>356</sup> Other scholars have speculated that it is diasporas' ability to contribute resources that tends to exacerbate and renew conflict.<sup>357</sup> Ultimately, though there seems to be no single causal factor, civil conflicts that engage a diaspora are often at risk of prolonged conflict.

This risk is offset heavily by the advantages a diaspora can provide to insurgent groups. The greatest utility of a diaspora in a given civil conflict is often linked with its access to the same resources that arguably prolong conflict.<sup>358</sup> The PKK is no exception, relying heavily on the Western European diaspora for funding and recruits. While some of this monetary support comes from illegal activity, allegedly including drug trafficking, smuggling, and extortion, academics who have studied the PKK in depth, including Eccarius-Kelly, have concluded that the PKK does not have the capacity to raise its capital solely through illegal means, particularly those heavily reliant on intimidation and fear.<sup>359</sup> Therefore, a significant portion of financial contributions from Europe, if not the majority, must come from voluntary donations.<sup>360</sup>

This section will discuss the ways in which the PKK mobilized the Kurdish community in the European Union to support their fight through a variety of mechanisms. It will then

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<sup>355</sup> Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 48.

<sup>356</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 65.

<sup>357</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (2004): 588.

<sup>358</sup> Fiona Adamson and Madeleine Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of 'State' and 'National Identity': Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing," *Journal of International Relations* 13 No. 4 (2007): 491.

<sup>359</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 29.

<sup>360</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 29.

explore the implications of this mobilization and how it differs from the way in which the PKK and its supporters act in Turkey, given the different goals and political context.

While within Turkey, the legal status of the PKK is strictly defined, in the various countries of the European Union, it is a bit more contested. The various Kurdish organizations through which the PKK in Western Europe are mostly legal: until its dissolution in 2000, the official European arm of the PKK, National Liberation Front of Kurdistan/ *Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan* (ERNK),<sup>361</sup> remained legal throughout much of its area of operations. Germany, the country in which the largest portion of the Kurdish diaspora resides, did not ban the organization until 1993 when it responded to a specific series of attacks. Even then, officials were willing to relax the group's designation as a terrorist organization and reclassify it as a criminal organization in 1998, based on the decrease in violence.<sup>362</sup> The Netherlands, which has a smaller but nonetheless politically active Kurdish minority, allowed the organization to remain legal throughout the peak of violence in the 1990s.<sup>363</sup> Turkey has lobbied for years for the entire European Union to classify the PKK as a terrorist organization and crack down on its activities; however its efforts have been largely unsuccessful. Instead, the PKK's legal status has been more dependent on its activities and the level of violence it brings within European countries. While making the organization illegal does not greatly hamper the PKK's ability to operate, it does handicap its institutional political capabilities and therefore its relevance in a context in which violence is largely ineffective.

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<sup>361</sup> To avoid confusion and the excessive proliferation of acronyms, I will refer to all groups definitively linked with the PKK as simply the PKK, rather than the many official names of various organizations.

<sup>362</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 942.

<sup>363</sup> Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state," 276.

While there are certainly other significant actors in Kurdish diaspora politics in Western Europe, the PKK was able to create a political monopoly from early on.<sup>364</sup> However, it is important to note that some of the same complications associated with linking groups to the PKK in Turkey also exist in Europe, albeit to a lesser degree. While some of the organizations this chapter discusses are truly independent organizations, others are attempts by the PKK to maintain a legal base in a particular country when the group is made illegal under another name.; however, it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other.

The PKK itself attempted to not only get around legal barriers, but to rebrand itself on numerous occasions over the past decade. For example, the group changed its name to The People's Congress of Kurdistan/Kongra-Gel in the early 2000s in an attempt to evade its historical reputation, and legal designation, as a terrorist organization. These attempts have been largely unsuccessful; governments simply designate the newly named group as illegal as well. Ultimately, the party resigned itself to the moniker PKK for the foreseeable future. However, the PKK's attempts to rebrand area gain indicative of its understanding of the importance of public opinion and the different nature of politics in Europe, rather than Turkey.

### The Cultivation of Kurdish Identity

The sense of common Kurdish identity was not something that early migrants initially brought with them.<sup>365</sup> Their motivations, as discussed briefly above, were economic, rather than political. Kurdish nationalism and common Kurdish identity were exported to Western Europe from Turkey. Some of the chief carriers of this ideology were political refugees who fled to Europe after Turkey's 1980 coup.<sup>366</sup> Prior political refugees, including those who came to

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<sup>364</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 80.

<sup>365</sup> Adamson and Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of 'State' and 'National Identity,'" 505.

<sup>366</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 109.

Europe after the 1971 coup, identified first as Leftists, Marxists, or Maoists.<sup>367</sup> In 1980, however, some of those who fled to Europe were PKK members, or at the very least, were familiar with the rising importance of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey.<sup>368</sup> These activists worked to intentionally create collective Kurdish consciousness in the sizeable migrant populations in Western Europe, often explicitly with the agenda of creating PKK supporters.

Their work was made easier by the fact that most Kurdish immigrants to Western Europe were members of a doubly marginalized population. In Turkey, their Kurdish identity meant their social and political exclusion, in addition to the economic hardship they often shared with ethnically Turkish migrants. Once in Europe, they became a marginalized group yet again due to both cultural disparities with the native population and the effective limbo of their own identity: though the Gastarbeiter could become residents of Western Europe, the process was complicated and, consequently, they often remained Turkish citizens.<sup>369</sup> In addition, Kurdish population in Western Europe faced consistent discrimination, even decades after their arrival; for generations born and raised in Europe, this dislocation has been particularly painful.<sup>370</sup>

For new arrivals or individuals who felt out of place in their new country of residence, gathering points based on cultural identity were understandably attractive. Beginning in the early 1980s, a network of nominally autonomous Kurdish organizations, cultural clubs, athletic organizations, and publications began to arise throughout Western Europe.<sup>371</sup> It is unclear whether the PKK coopted or created this Kurdish cultural network; however, it quickly became clear that many of these organizations were affiliated with the PKK or ERNK.<sup>372</sup> The PKK also

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<sup>367</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 110.

<sup>368</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 931.

<sup>369</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 48.

<sup>370</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 167.

<sup>371</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 931.

<sup>372</sup> Adamson, "Globalisation, Transnational Political Mobilisation and Networks of Violence," 40.

spread their message through media, using cassette tapes and video in the 1980s before moving into satellite TV and eventually the Internet.<sup>373</sup> The PKK effectively used the public space available in Europe's liberal democracies to create a network that supported its target population and cultivated a sense of Kurdish identity.

To bring people through the doors of these organizations, the PKK actively used visible signifiers of common identity. For example, a number of groups linked with the PKK regularly organized large Newroz celebrations.<sup>374</sup> These celebrations were not inherently politically; however, they were part of this broader effort to cultivate and appeal to the common identity of immigrants in the Kurdish diaspora. The PKK's effective use of visible elements of common Kurdish identity enabled them to reach out to large segments of the population and further increase the presence of the distinct Kurdish identity.

Language was another such tool. The PKK actively promoted the use of Kurdish languages, particularly Kurmanji, through its use in literature and media.<sup>375</sup> Particularly given restrictions on the use of the language in Turkey, this was an incredibly effective tool; it has also had lasting implications for Kurmanji.<sup>376</sup> The literary corpus in Kurdish languages was not particularly sizeable when the PKK arrived in Europe in 1981, nor was it a widely used language outside parts of the Southeast; however, the number of Kurmanji speakers and publications increased perceptibly throughout the 1990s.<sup>377</sup> Kurdish nationalist groups, many of which were affiliated with the PKK, were the driving force behind many of these publications, which proved

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<sup>373</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Transnational aspects of the Kurdish Question," (Florence: Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, 2000), 6.

<sup>374</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 933.

<sup>375</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 78.

<sup>376</sup> Adamson and Demetriou, "Remapping the Boundaries of 'State' and 'National Identity,'" 510.

<sup>377</sup> Van Bruinessen, "Shifting Ethnic and National Identities," 49.

instrumental in spreading the language.<sup>378</sup> These publications did not only include material relating to the conflict; rather, the corpus has come to include grammars, dictionaries, books on Kurdish history and culture, and novels, in addition to journalism.<sup>379</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, a scholar of the Kurdish diaspora, stated in the 1990s that, due to these changes, “Kurdish has been enriched and sufficiently developed to serve as a vehicle for modern political and literary discourse.”<sup>380</sup> With both the increased use of Kurmanji and the increased number of ways in which it could be used, came the spread of a common culture and identity.<sup>381</sup> Kurdish nationalist groups, many of which were likely linked with the PKK, contributed greatly to this linguistic revival and the consequent spread of common Kurdish identity.

Television was also played key roles in the growing Kurdish national consciousness across Europe. Scholar David Romano argues MED-TV, the first major satellite station, may be the single most important promoter of Kurdish common identity in the twenty-first century.<sup>382</sup> Beginning in 1995, MED-TV broadcast a wide variety of programming, including news, political debates, cultural programming, and children’s programs primarily in Kurmanji, Zaza, and Turkish.<sup>383</sup> Though illegal in Turkey, as the only station with Kurdish language programs until 2009, MED-TV and its successors quickly became popular stations.<sup>384</sup>

For many of those who came to these into contact with the PKK, either through discussion or written publications, it had an inherently appealing ideology. The PKK’s Marxist tenets in particular were highly attractive to many Kurds for whom the enemy was not only Turkish

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<sup>378</sup> Romano, “Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands,” 136.

<sup>379</sup> Romano, “Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands,” 138.

<sup>380</sup> Van Bruinessen, “Shifting Ethnic and National Identities,” 47.

<sup>381</sup> Van Bruinessen, “Shifting Ethnic and National Identities,” 44.

<sup>382</sup> Romano, “Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands,” 140.

<sup>383</sup> A. Hassanpour, “Satellite footprints as national borders: MED-TV and the extraterritoriality of state sovereignty,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 No. 1 (1998), 57.

<sup>384</sup> Romano, “Communications Technology in Ethnic Nationalist Hands,” 140.

nationalism, but also the broader Western system that they perceived as economically and politically exploitative.<sup>385</sup> The PKK increased their organization's appeal further through the use of strategic framing, which Adamson defines as a method of interpreting events that creates meaning, organizes people, and supports a particular narrative.<sup>386</sup> The PKK linked the marginalization and discrimination faced by Kurds in Western Europe with that faced by Kurds in Turkey. Rather than insisting that Kurds acclimate to and integrate with surrounding populations, the PKK associated Kurdish identity with resistance.<sup>387</sup> The ability to draw similarities between the experiences of Turkey's Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora, in addition to drawing on connections with events in Turkey, enabled the PKK to create a significant constituency amongst the Western European Kurdish Diaspora.

The PKK was not the only Kurdish organization active in Western Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the violence linked with the PKK in Europe is connected with 'turf wars', conflict with other similar groups.<sup>388</sup> Ultimately, however the PKK did become the dominant organization in Europe. The precise causal mechanisms are unclear: certainly mobilization, the distribution of information, and strategic framing were key, in addition to the credibility the PKK was gaining through military activity in Turkey. By the mid-1980s, it had distinguished itself by proving that it was a group willing to resist by whatever means necessary and able to do so successfully.<sup>389</sup> Though not as visible in Europe, that reputation traveled, impacting the perceptions of Europe's Kurdish diaspora. Cultivating a group identity was less difficult than it might have otherwise been since the PKK was dealing with a population that felt increasingly

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<sup>385</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 79.

<sup>386</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 69.

<sup>387</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 80.

<sup>388</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 232.

<sup>389</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 81.

marginalized. Through an extensive social and communications network, the PKK was able to strategically frame common grievances and recruit supporters.

It is important to note again that this by no means refers to the entire European Kurdish diaspora, but rather to the segment that identifies with and supports the PKK. Though they are a significant minority, they are still small in number compared to the vast number of Kurds in Europe who have either neutral or strongly negative perceptions of the PKK.

The PKK's strategy in Europe was initially twofold, incorporating both political violence and political activity.<sup>390</sup> Ultimately, the PKK used both institutional and confrontational political participation to mobilize resources, recruit fighters, and lobby within the European political system.

### Institutional Participation

Europe's democratic governance structures gave the PKK access that it rarely had in Turkey. More than using the open system to run its own candidates, the PKK took advantage of access to politicians and free speech laws to lobby individuals, disseminate information, and build public awareness about the situation in Turkey.<sup>391</sup> Perhaps most importantly, as the PKK and its influence continued to grow, Europe provided opportunities for the PKK to have the direct voice, as well as a chorus of sympathetic advocates, that was so difficult in Turkey.

One important source of support was the alliances that the PKK was able to foster with other non-governmental groups, based on shared interests.<sup>392</sup> Perhaps the best example of this is the involvement of Kurdish groups and human rights groups. It is unclear how many of these groups have PKK ties and what the extent of these ties are; however, given the scope of PKK

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<sup>390</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 75.

<sup>391</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 934.

<sup>392</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 84.



activity and involvement in Europe, it seems sensible to consider that at least one of the groups involved has such connections. The concerns voiced by the PKK in this area are also not unfounded: given the extent of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Turkish government in the Southeast, it makes a great deal of sense to tie the two issues together. Over time, human rights have become one of the most critical and best-publicized issues in the Kurdish Conflict. Much of the most informative publications are from organizations like the International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, and the Minorities at Risk Group. In addition, there are a number of distinctly Kurdish human rights organizations, the largest of which is the Kurdish Human Rights Project in England.<sup>393</sup>

This was particularly helpful when dealing with the European Union as a whole. While Turkey is not a part of the European Union, it has long been working with the EU in hopes of eventually becoming a member. Human rights are not an uncommon stumbling block for Turkey in its quest for membership; however, when the EU assessed Turkey's eligibility for membership in the 1990s, it became one of the key issues under discussion.<sup>394</sup> The PKK and other Kurdish groups worked extensively with human rights organizations, publicizing Turkey's human rights violations in the Southeast to the European public in order to increase awareness. When Turkey's EU Accession talks commenced in 2005, human rights remained a key agenda item.<sup>395</sup> Though multiple human rights groups were involved in ensuring this area received EU attention, the Kurds were one of the key constituencies, working to lobby committee members, raise public awareness and lobby legislators.<sup>396</sup> Turkey's EU aspirations provided the PKK and

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<sup>393</sup> For more information, the organization's website is <http://www.KHRP.org>. Note that I am not accusing the KHRP of affiliation with the PKK; however its platform is demonstrative of common tactics used to publicize the Kurdish Question that have also been employed by groups affiliated with the PKK.

<sup>394</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 84.

<sup>395</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 84.

<sup>396</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 84.

other advocates for Kurdish rights with yet another point of leverage to use against both the diaspora's host countries and against Turkey.

Most Kurdish cultural organizations in Europe claim complete autonomy; however, many have close ties with the PKK, even if the exact nature and extent of those ties is unclear.<sup>397</sup> That is not to say all Kurdish organizations have links to the PKK; many organizations are in fact independent and even have difficult relationships with the PKK.<sup>398</sup> However, the PKK has been able to use many such groups to organize the Kurdish diaspora in order to connect with European politicians and non-governmental organizations. They were thus able to promote the Kurdish cause through a variety of means in institutional settings.

#### Confrontational Participation

Perhaps the most visible instances of PKK political activism in Europe are confrontational participation, specifically public protests. The PKK has historically been able to rally hundreds if not thousands of supporters in many of Western Europe's major cities. Perhaps the most visible example of this occurred in 1999: following Ocalan's arrest, protestors took to the streets in major cities from London to Athens. Though the geographic sprawl was remarkable, such protests were not a new phenomenon: protests in support of the PKK drew thousands of participants in Western Europe as early as 1990.<sup>399</sup> Even the size of the 1999 protests was not unprecedented: following Germany's ban on the PKK in 1993, 500,000 supporters demonstrated in Bonn.<sup>400</sup> Protests often occur on major dates or holidays, such as Newroz or the anniversary of the PKK's founding.

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<sup>397</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 931.

<sup>398</sup> Ostergaard-Nielsen, "Transnational political practices and the receiving state," 268.

<sup>399</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 936.

<sup>400</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 940.

Another common means of confrontational participation that often accompanies protests is hunger strikes. The vast majority of those who participate in pro-PKK hunger strikes do not die; however, the risk of physical harm or death is a persuasive means of demonstrating the importance of the Kurdish cause.<sup>401</sup> Hunger strikes have been used in Turkish prisons as well; however, their most public and widespread civilian use was certainly in Europe.<sup>402</sup> For example, in the early 1990s, 700 individuals launched a hunger strike in Brussels to protest the Turkish government's policies of forced migration.<sup>403</sup> Such hunger strikes are another nonviolent yet very public way of participating in confrontational political action.

The production and publication of various materials either by the PKK or by other Kurdish organizations is another key way of participating in confrontational political action. Such publications provide an alternative narrative regarding the conflict and, when smuggled into Turkey, break the government monopoly on information. Many of these publications were journals, books or newspapers. The use of radio and, later, the rise of the internet have also been effective ways for the PKK and other Kurdish nationalists to spread information. Perhaps the most visible example of the PKK's use of media, however, is regarding television.

There is a great deal of disagreement regarding the relationships MED-TV, Medya-TV and ROJ-TV have had with the PKK. While the channels state their independence, the Turkish government maintains that the three stations have all been PKK mouthpieces, though it has had difficulty providing sufficient evidence for European legal bodies.<sup>404</sup> The government has nevertheless been successful in pressuring European governments many times, as MED-TV and its successors have been shut down several times by their host countries for various other

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<sup>401</sup> Michael Biggs, "Dying Without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963-2002," in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, ed. Diego Gambetta, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

<sup>402</sup> Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 25.

<sup>403</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing Ethnic Conflict," 936.

<sup>404</sup> Romano, "Communications Technology in the Hands of Ethnic Nationalists," 143.

charges.<sup>405</sup> In either case, satellite television was an effective way for the PKK to subvert the authority of the Turkish government. Not only was broadcasting in Kurmanji or Zaza illegal until 2009, but these channels provided the Kurdish population in Turkey and in Europe unprecedented access to information about the conflict. Whether or not it controlled the stations, the PKK is able to air its views and opinions through these channels, as PKK leaders regularly appear on or send messages to the stations.<sup>406</sup> Views in opposition to the PKK also air with apparent freedom on these channels.<sup>407</sup>

Public protest and the use of media have been the two main vehicles through which the PKK has participated in confrontational political activity in Europe. This not only impacted European governments, but also spread to Turkey and the Middle East through the use of communications technology. As is the case in Turkey, it is difficult to ascertain the depth and nature of PKK involvement in this activity; however, it is clearly a dominant player. Clearly, there is a significant constituency whose actions either directly or indirectly support the PKK's ethno-nationalist agenda.

### Conclusion

The PKK has actively fostered the creation of a Kurdish identity among the European diaspora, using this shared identity and intelligent use of media to build a necessary support base. There currently exists a large network of nominally independent Kurdish organizations across Western Europe; while the exact nature of the relationships they have with the PKK is unclear, many do have such ties. The PKK has used this network and the popular support gained

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<sup>405</sup> Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds*, 184.

<sup>406</sup> Van Bruinessen, "Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Problem," 15.

<sup>407</sup> Van Bruinessen, "Shifting Ethnic and National Consciousness," 48.

through its military activity in Turkey to become involved with European politics, in hopes of promoting their cause.

### **Conclusion**

The PKK has used both institutional and confrontational political activism, engaging in civil society and traditional politics to further their goals. This is particularly true in Europe where, as *Chapter Four* will discuss, violence proved largely ineffective. The PKK's intentional efforts to develop a sense of Kurdish identity and draw in migrants demonstrates their understanding of the importance of civil society and that the involvement of civilians was far from accidental in most cases.

This chapter also provided some insight into other available options and the often-complicated nature of their relationships with the PKK. It is important to consider how all Kurdish groups have faced the challenge posed by Turkey's often authoritarian restrictions on speech related to the Kurdish Question and by the PKK's frequent designation as an illegal organization. Here, too, Europe and its more open and democratic society play a key role, as the majority of spokespersons both for the PKK and for other Kurdish groups are located in Europe beyond the reach of the Turkish authorities.

This chapter demonstrates the PKK's ability to adapt their tactics regarding more traditionally political actions in order to ensure their continued legitimacy in changing contexts. The next chapter will consider the PKK's tactics in the realm of its best known action: violence.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TACTICS OF VIOLENCE

The previous chapters discussed the ways in which PKK strategy both impacts and is impacted by ideological change, and how the PKK operates in more traditional political spheres. However, the PKK is not usually known for its conventional political activity: to many, it is purely a terrorist<sup>408</sup> organization. As discussed in previous chapters, the PKK have often felt that violence was the only way to advance the cause of Kurdish nationalism. However, it was also aware that its employment of violence has a dramatic effect on its public image, particularly in areas subject to that violence. Consequently, the PKK does not simply perpetrate random acts of violence: rather, the PKK's violence has often been another form of political activity. Thus, it is important to analyze those tactical changes regarding the ways in which the PKK plans and executes attacks, particularly those that have popularly been labeled as terrorist attacks.

The PKK uses political violence to further its military and political objectives. Though aspects of the party's objectives vary across different geographic and temporal contexts, these tactics incorporate the aim of legitimizing violence. Specific tactics can involve variation in the choice of target, the scale of the attack, the location and, if necessary, limiting the use of violent attacks altogether. This chapter will examine tactical adjustments, particularly strategic framing, the use and reduction of violence, the causes of these changes, and their implications. Furthermore, it will divide this analysis according to geography. Due to changes in its goals and audience, the PKK employs visibly different tactics in different locations. Specifically, this chapter focuses on three regions: Southeastern Turkey, Western Turkey, and Western Europe.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> For more information about the problematic nature of the term "terrorism", see the section "Terminology" in *Chapter One*.

<sup>409</sup> Western Europe does not include the European portions of Turkey, but rather refers only European Union members, particularly Germany, France, England, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Each geographic subsection will to examine first the PKK's perception of the importance of the audience and need for violence over time; how it actively sought to legitimate necessary violence for each audience; and the tactics it uses to do so.

### **Data**

The data used in this chapter comes from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), compiled by the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses for Terrorism (START). This data set includes 1,535 attacks between 1984 and 2012 from the GTD database. For data collection, the GTD defined terrorism as “The intentional threat or actual use of violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation.” The dataset, therefore, does not include a great deal of the violence that took place in southeastern Turkey, as those instances may not fit this definition or insufficient information may be available. To supplement, and fill explicit gaps in, the GTD data, this analysis also includes 161 attacks pulled from various media sources; these attacks are omitted unless explicitly stated.<sup>410</sup> The dependent variable in this analysis will be casualties,<sup>411</sup> and the primary independent variables will be target type, whether the target is symbolic, and the location of the target.<sup>412</sup> The unit of analysis is a single attack.

This thesis drew conclusions from the GTD data with caution. Specific information regarding the Kurdish conflict is difficult to attain, particularly quantitative data. Journalists were regularly prevented from entering areas where the conflict was ongoing. As mentioned

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<sup>410</sup> Media sources include the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC); *The New York Times*, Al-Jazeera, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Hurriyet Daily News*, an English-language Turkish newspaper. Instances in which these attacks are included in analysis include the label “All Attacks.”

<sup>411</sup> For the purposes of this paper, “casualties” indicates the number of killed and wounded.

<sup>412</sup> Other coded variables include year; perpetrator; type of attack; and whether the attack occurred before 1999.

above, accounts published in the Turkish media were all subject to government scrutiny. There also are multiple issues regarding attribution of individual attacks. Unfortunately, incomplete and potentially unreliable data is an obstacle in using quantitative analysis to look at terrorists and their actions. It also limits the depth of analysis possible using this data; nuanced conclusions are difficult when working with a dataset that possesses so many holes.<sup>413</sup> While shortcomings in the dataset should certainly be kept in mind, the GTD data presents the best opportunity available for a quantitative understanding of the conflict.

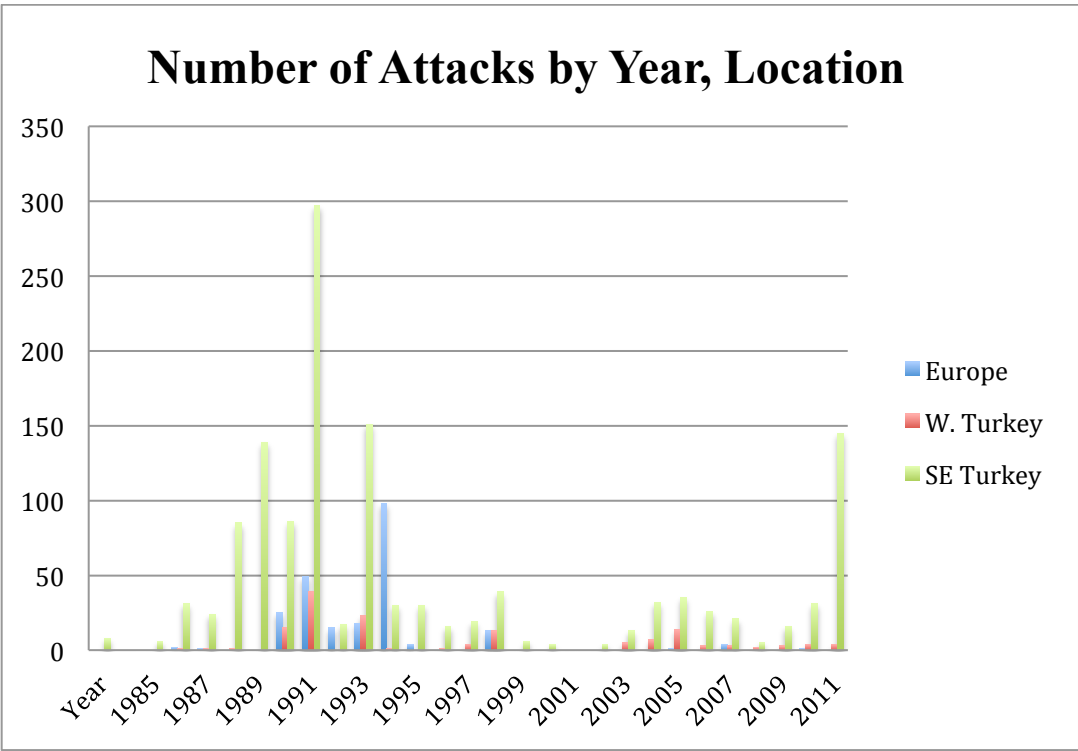


Figure 2: Variation in the number of attacks by year and location

<sup>413</sup> The GTD, for example, excludes the entire year of 1993, and lacks information regarding the majority of guerilla or insurgent activity.



## Overall Trends

Casualties due to PKK attacks span a large range, from zero to 167 dead or injured in a single attack. However the graph is heavily skewed; approximately one-third of attacks have no casualties, and 87 percent of attacks have fewer than ten casualties.<sup>414</sup> The single largest category of attacks is attacks against the military in southeastern Turkey, which includes 664 attacks or 38 percent of attacks in the dataset.<sup>415</sup> The largest concentration of symbolic targets is located in Europe, where the fewest overall attacks take place; this indicates a high emphasis on political, rather than military, objectives.<sup>416</sup> Finally, a graph of attacks over time reveals visible patterns regarding their frequency: for example, there are a significantly higher number of attacks concentrated in the early 1990s.<sup>417</sup> This chapter will explore many of these features in more depth later on.

Certain trends support tactical shifts across the board. Some of these are best visible in rhetoric; for example, the decision to first train suicide bombers in 1996 and Ocalan's subsequent repudiation of the tactic. Others appear only upon quantitative analysis. The most significant shifts occur in the frequency, target type and location of terrorist activity.

The number of terrorist attacks overall goes down over the period. For example, 1,249 attacks, 75 percent of attacks in the dataset, occur in or before 1999.<sup>418</sup> From 1994 until 1999, this meant an average of seventy-seven attacks each year.<sup>419</sup> Between 2000 and 2011, prior to the spike in 2012, there were only an average of twenty attacks annually; even including that

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<sup>414</sup> Figure 7: Frequency of Casualties per Attack.

<sup>415</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Location.

<sup>416</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>417</sup> Figure 2, Figure 3: Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>418</sup> Figure 10: Average Number of Attacks Per Year. For information about the choice of 1999, please see *Chapter One*.

<sup>419</sup> Figure 10: Average Number of Attacks Per Year

spike, the annual average .is still significantly lower than pre-2000 numbers.<sup>420</sup> The number of attacks on civilians also goes down: prior to 1999, 37 percent of attacks targeted civilians, while after 1999 that percentage was only 20 percent.<sup>421</sup> In contrast, the number of attacks on military targets increased to 46 percent from 38 percent after 1999.<sup>422</sup> There is therefore a significant shift in the targets of PKK attacks. PKK-perpetrated violence that occurred outside of the definition of terrorism is overwhelmingly focused in the southeast and the military; therefore, the exclusion of those attacks does not pose a significant problem for these statistics. These overall trends are only one piece of the picture; when broken down on a regional level, these statistics become even more interesting.

### **Southeast Turkey**

Southeast Turkey is the epicenter of the PKK's fight, with the highest concentration of its supporters and also the most violence. Due to the high frequency of violence in this region, the PKK has focused primarily on constructing and supporting a narrative legitimizing its use of violence and on moving away from targeting civilians.

### Importance

Southeastern Turkey is historically home to the majority of Turkey's Kurds and, throughout the PKK's existence, has been the location in which the bulk of PKK guerilla and terrorist violence occurs.<sup>423</sup> Consequently, it is an essential area for the PKK to have supporters for recruitment, supplies and public support. The party's primary tactics for doing so have been

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<sup>420</sup> Figure 10: Average Number of Attacks Per Year

<sup>421</sup> Figure 6: Change Over Time in Number of Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>422</sup> Figure 6: Change Over Time in Number of Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>423</sup> Figure 8: Civilian and Military Casualties by Location

the construction and support of a narrative that legitimizes the use of violence, and an intentional shift away from targeting civilians.

From the beginning, the PKK wanted to take this fight to the people and the countryside. Since the suppression of a large-scale revolt in the 1950s, pro-Kurdish activism had been the domain of elites, focused primarily in urban areas. However, these activists had lost a great deal of credibility in the intervening years; despite their agitation and the high political price they often paid, they seemed incapable of making progress or effecting change.<sup>424</sup> The PKK was the first Kurdish group in quite some time to take its ideas back to the rural southeast and try to rally public support from the general population.

The PKK's Maoist influences are extremely visible here; in *On Guerilla Warfare* Mao is adamant about the importance of the people and guerillas' dependence upon them. For this reason, the first fundamental step that Mao outlines for prospective guerillas is "arousing and organizing the people."<sup>425</sup> The PKK's noted adherence to Mao in other areas supports the idea that organizing and maintaining public support would have been a high priority for them.

In addition to ideological motivations, public support satisfies two logistical necessities: recruits and supplies. Mao is clear on this topic, stating, "The fountainhead of guerilla operations is in the masses of the people."<sup>426</sup> From the start, the PKK planned to draw much of their manpower from the southeast. The need for recruits was exacerbated by the rate at which the PKK lost troops. Scholars often cite the statistic that over 40,000 people have died since the start of the PKK's fight.<sup>427</sup> This figure, while as close to the truth as possible, omits a key piece

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<sup>424</sup> Aliza Marcus, *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 129.

<sup>425</sup> Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, (Washington, DC: Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-18, 1989), 42.

<sup>426</sup> Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, 73.

<sup>427</sup> Jake Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks," *Foreign Policy: The Middle East Channel*, 8 January 2013.

of information: PKK fighters make up at least half of those casualties.<sup>428</sup> This is likely due to military technology, which gives the state advantages such as airplanes and helicopters that the PKK simply does not have access to.<sup>429</sup> In detailed reports of PKK clashes with the Turkish military, the PKK consistently loses more fighters than they kill. This made attracting new recruits a constant priority from the beginning of the PKK's fight.

In addition, like any group, the PKK needed supplies. With highly mobile units separated over a wide geographical area and, initially, avoiding large urban areas, the logical source of these supplies was local residents. Without large established bases, fighters needed small amounts of supplies on a relatively regular basis, requiring consistent and widespread cooperation. Again, Mao provides advice to the prospective revolutionary, directing that guerrillas "must depend for the substance upon what the locality can afford."<sup>430</sup> Without food, clothing and weapons, the PKK would never have been able to carry out its fight.

The PKK were largely successful in gaining sufficient public support to keep recruits coming in and keep supplying their soldiers. This however, raises a conundrum: many scholars have observed that though casualties negatively impacted public opinion in Western Turkey, the PKK found that violence had a much smaller impact on public opinion and support in the Southeast.<sup>431</sup> Public sympathy and the acceptance of violence are particularly striking in this region, where the majority of civilian casualties have been inflicted.<sup>432</sup> This dataset only particularly reveals the extent of this concentration, as it does not include the guerilla warfare which occurred entirely in the southeast. That there is any public sympathy for the PKK is therefore surprising; its extent is still more shocking.

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<sup>428</sup> "The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," (Brussels: International Crisis Group, September 2012), 12.

<sup>429</sup> Michael Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads: The Rise and Fall of the PKK," *Orbis* (2001): 57.

<sup>430</sup> Griffith, *Mao Tse-tung on Guerilla Warfare*, 51.

<sup>431</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.

<sup>432</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Location.

### Management and Framing

The PKK actively worked to create and maintain this public support from the very beginning. This included perpetuating the idea that the PKK fought for a just cause and that, in pursuit of this cause, civilian casualties were a regrettable but necessary consequence.<sup>433</sup> Some scholars have also suggested that this legitimacy is easier to perceive in a society where violence is historically prevalent in honor killings and other elements of tribal politics.<sup>434</sup> This context, so different from that in Europe or western Turkey, arguably makes legitimizing violence against civilians much easier for the PKK.

From the beginning, the PKK's best tactic for legitimizing its use of violence was the narrative in which the PKK only killed those who collaborate with or receive material support from the state; in this narrative, civilians killed in PKK attacks were not innocent victims, but traitors.<sup>435</sup> This narrative serves to both intimidate those who would collaborate with the state, and legitimizes the PKK's use of violence. To support this framing, the PKK has, on multiple occasions, staged large-scale attacks on the homes of members of the *koy korucu* or Village Guards, Kurdish militias employed by the Turkish state.<sup>436</sup> It has also explicitly cited some of the most severe attacks against civilians as operations against traitors. After a particularly horrifying attack in which thirty civilians were killed, including sixteen children, PKK fighters told a nearby town that such violence was the consequence of working with the Turkish state. "If you don't want us to repeat the Pinarcik massacre," they allegedly warned, "don't betray."<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), 104.

<sup>434</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 14.

<sup>435</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 104.

<sup>436</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 104.

<sup>437</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.

If violence against civilians was not, in fact, indiscriminate, but rather targeted the PKK's enemies, Kurds who turned against their own people, it became more acceptable. The PKK actively encouraged the belief that this was the case, both by targeting its raids against such individuals to some extent and through its rhetoric.

The PKK also supported this rhetoric with action. In clear contrast to the violence in Pinarçik, a warning for those who collaborated with the government, when the PKK raided villages that had not accepted state aid events unfolded very differently. For example, one week after Pinarçik, the inhabitants of three Mardin province villages found themselves gathered into the town squares, at the mercy of PKK fighters.<sup>438</sup> Because these villages were not allied with the state, there was little or no violence; instead, villagers were subjected to speeches and pamphlets regarding the PKK's aims and the legitimacy of its fight.<sup>439</sup> There were no PKK-inflicted casualties in these villages.<sup>440</sup> The PKK clearly established a contrast in the treatment meted out to those who did and did not "collaborate", reinforcing its rhetoric of targeting traitors by demonstrating the outcome for those who remained loyal.

The PKK's public support is also based, not only on the PKK's actions, but on what the alternatives are, both specifically within the Kurdish population and in Turkey more broadly. The Turkish government has, for a long time, systematically shut down any Kurdish presence in legitimate politics, increasing the sense among many Kurds that nothing short of violence would be effective.<sup>441</sup> In Aliza Marcus' interviews with former PKK members, there is the repeated sentiment that violence was the only option. In one fighter's words, "To get rid of [Turkish rule]

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<sup>438</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.

<sup>439</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.

<sup>440</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.

<sup>441</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 167.

you couldn't use democracy. We thought the only way to win was through struggle.”<sup>442</sup> To all appearances, this was a widely held sentiment among the Kurdish population, not only in Turkey, but in the surrounding countries as well.

In addition to a lack of other, less violent Kurdish groups, the PKK was also contrasted with Turkish military and Special Forces active in the region. These fighters were, to all appearances, just as bad as, if not worse than, the PKK. The military's adoption of a “scorched earth” policy led to the widespread expulsion of villagers from their homes. The difficulty in identifying insurgents among the local population led to numerous instances of the army taking its revenge against the civilian population.<sup>443</sup> In addition, there were widespread arrests of anyone suspected of assisting the PKK, with no legal process or transparency. These often-arbitrary detainments were accompanied by appalling prison conditions and incredible human rights violations.<sup>444</sup> The heavy hand of the military caused<sup>444</sup> many individuals to become increasingly willing to overlook or accept the violent consequences of the PKK's fight.<sup>445</sup> Such abuses also lessened the extent to which the PKK had to work to legitimize its use of violence against the Turkish government or military.

Aside from physical abuses, there were other ways in which the government alienated the Kurdish population. Throughout the conflict, the government has, to varying degrees, controlled the media, printing stories in the newspaper that are discriminatory, misleading or even entirely fabricated.<sup>446</sup> Consequently, when newspapers print reports of PKK casualties, many Kurds are inclined to believe that the paper is either inflating the numbers or blaming the PKK for crimes

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<sup>442</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 29.

<sup>443</sup> For more information regarding these events, see accounts of Lice, Dersim massacres.

<sup>444</sup> For more information about human rights' violations, see Amnesty International and International Crisis Group reports, particularly regarding Diyarbakir Prison.

<sup>445</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 100.

<sup>446</sup> Dilara Sezgin and Melissa Wall, “Constructing the Kurds in the Turkish Press: A case study of Hurriyet newspaper,” *Media Culture Society* 27 (2005): 795.

committed by the military.<sup>447</sup> As one Kurdish citizen remarked, “The state lied so often, when they said something true I didn’t believe them.”<sup>448</sup> The government’s attempts to smear the PKK’s reputation backfired, in that many Kurds began to disbelieve official reports of PKK violence, even when they were true.

While the actions of the Turkish government and military certainly assisted in making the PKK’s actions more publicly acceptable, the next section will discuss ways in which the PKK also actively sought to manage this perception and legitimize its use violence against civilians, through the narrative about who it was killing and by persistently appealing to public opinion.

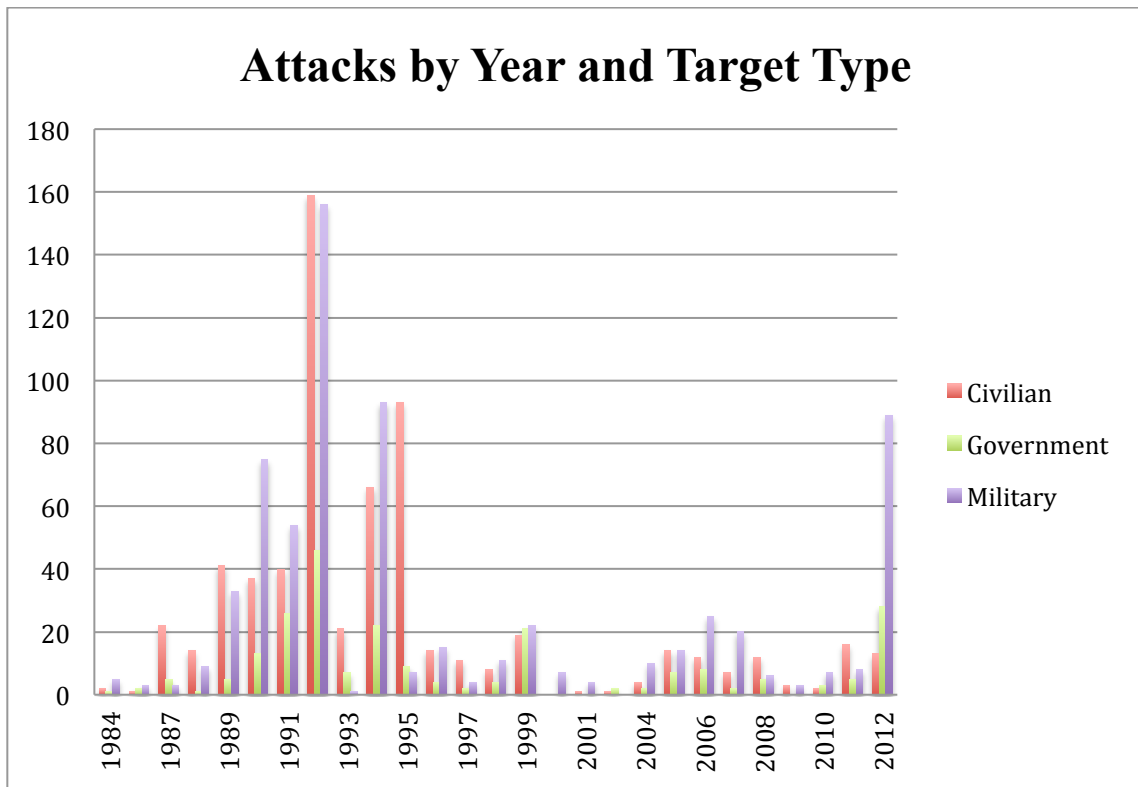


Figure 4: Number of Attacks by Year and Target Type (Graph)

<sup>447</sup> Davis, et al., *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 104.

<sup>448</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 116.



## Tactics

Despite its overall success, the narrative of killing only traitors gradually ceased to resonate with populations in the southeast in the same way. The PKK adapted to this by decreasing the relative scale of attacks on civilians and shifting its focus on military targets.<sup>449</sup> There is a noticeable decline in the kinds of large-scale attacks on whole villages over time and a decrease in the percentage of attacks targeting civilians.<sup>450</sup> The amount of violence overall also decreases; the number of attacks after 1999 is a fraction of the number of attacks in the years before.<sup>451</sup> It was significant when, in 2012, observers commented the violence might be reaching mid-1990s levels again.<sup>452</sup> Even during this period, however, a significantly lower number of attacks were aimed at civilians, rather than at the military.<sup>453</sup>

Some commentators suggest that the PKK's public support is due entirely to intimidation and extortion, rather than genuine public sentiment.<sup>454</sup> While it is certainly true that such intimidation and extortion did occur, at times on a large scale, there are two issues with this assertion. The first is that the PKK has visibly backpedaled away from tactics that provoked public disapproval; for example, its brief attempt to implement forcible conscription in 1996.<sup>455</sup> The second is the scale of the PKK's support, even outside the areas in which the group is active. While such threats were undoubtedly a factor, they explain the provision of supplies or some willingness to overlook offense. However, the amount and intensity of public support the organization has is impossible to secure with threats alone. The number of people who support

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<sup>449</sup> Figure 6: Change Over Time in Number of Attacks by Target Type and Location

<sup>450</sup> START, *Global Terrorism Database* [Kurdistan Worker's Party 1984-2012], 2013. Also see Figure 6: Change Over Time in Number of Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>451</sup> Figure 2, 3: Number of Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>452</sup> "Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," 32.

<sup>453</sup> Figure 6: Change Over Time in Number of Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>454</sup> Radu, "The Land of Many Crossroads," 58.

<sup>455</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 117.

the PKK's goals, sometimes while disapproving of its tactics, exceeds what seems plausible to maintain through violent means.

### Conclusion

The PKK has successfully maintained, if not increased, levels of public support in the Southeast throughout the conflict. Though some scholars speak to explain this by citing the levels of violence intrinsic to Kurdish society, this is insufficient; the actions of the PKK far exceed violence that might be considered socially acceptable.<sup>456</sup> Instead, this support is largely due to the PKK's careful management and framing of its violence in order to secure its legitimacy.

One area in which the success of these tactics is particularly visible is that of recruitment: one of the reasons the conflict has continued for so long is the PKK's ability to replace astronomical losses. More than half of total casualties in the conflict since 1984 have been PKK fighters.<sup>457</sup> In 1992, for example, the PKK suffered huge losses; however, it took in more fighters than they lost, meaning that the overall number of active fighters was actually highest at the end of the year.<sup>458</sup> In 2009, the chief of the Turkish General Staff observed that the PKK "pipeline of recruits...has continued almost unabated" despite multiple efforts to stem the flow, and that this was one of the chief reasons that, after twenty-five years, the Turkish military was little closer to solving the so-called "Kurdish Problem."<sup>459</sup>

The PKK's public support in the southeast is also apparent through public protest and frequently quoted public sentiment. The PKK is the dominant Kurdish political group in

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<sup>456</sup> Davis, et al, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency*, 103.

<sup>457</sup> Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *The Militant Kurds: A Dual Strategy for Freedom*, (Oxford: Praeger, 2011), 19.

<sup>458</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 170.

<sup>459</sup> Henri J. Barkey, "Turkey's New Engagement in Iraq: Embracing Iraqi Kurdistan," *United States Institute for Peace Special Report 237* (May 2010): 11.

Turkey.<sup>460</sup> Even if many Kurds do not agree with the group's tactics, they often recognize its achievements and support its cause, and the group has remained a formidable institution with a considerable amount of support both in Turkey and its surrounding countries.<sup>461</sup> It is difficult to ascertain the precise implications of PKK tactical shifts; however, its ability to maintain public support throughout a conflict that has had an immense toll of the region is indicative of its ability to use tactical shifts, and provide a compelling legitimization for its violence.

### **West Turkey**

As Turkey's political and economic hub, Western Turkey has a large number of soft targets with high symbolic value and the presence of a high concentration of both domestic and international media. These factors make it a key location for political violence. However, Western Turkey is also home to a less sympathetic audience consisting predominantly of ethnic Turks. While the PKK has uses political violence in Western Turkey, it has implemented tactics to intentionally limit casualties and carefully manage public attribution in order to minimize the negative ramifications on public opinion.

### Importance

Western Turkey was always an attractive location to terrorist organizations within the country, and the PKK is no exception. Unlike the southeast which has been under martial rule throughout much of its history and contains a prodigious military presence, western Turkey, and particularly its big cities, have a low military presence and, usually, much more social freedom. Turkey's political and economic power is disproportionately concentrated in its western regions,

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<sup>460</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 229.

<sup>461</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 47.

with Istanbul alone holding approximately 20 percent of Turkey's population and contributes 27 percent of its GDP.<sup>462</sup> It is a center of production and economic growth, and contains both the largest city, Istanbul, and the capital, Ankara, where many political decisions are made. Western Turkey is also home to an active tourism industry, which means a larger presence of foreigners, foreign capital, and foreign attention.

Western Istanbul's financial, political and economic significance create a large number of high-value soft targets. Combined with the high presence of foreigners and diplomatic centers, events in the west are much more extensively reported in the international press. This is particularly true given the relative frequency of violence; the situation in the southeast has at times been so bad that individual attacks are rarely reported. These factors combine to create a setting in which the PKK has a much wider audience in the west of Turkey, particularly in the cities, than it did in the southeast, and therefore a greater opportunity to communicating both its cause and its capability on an international stage.

These opportunities were initially limited for a significant period of time, as the PKK chose to concentrate its resources in the Southeast. Western Turkey, much more urbanized and hardly mountainous, is no place to launch a guerilla war. In addition, the Kurdish population in this region was historically small; now, migration has shifted the balance so that half of Turkey's Kurds now live in the western region.<sup>463</sup> Some of these migrants were victims of the army's relocation policies, while others moved to escape the violence and economic inequality. Almost all of those who left moved to urban areas, and many of them moved west.<sup>464</sup> Numbers are difficult to attain, due to Turkish census laws and the unofficial nature of many of these

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<sup>462</sup> "10 Traits of Globally Fluent Metro Areas: Istanbul," *Global Cities Initiative*, The Brookings Institute and JP Morgan Chase, 2012.

<sup>463</sup> Christopher Houston, "Creating a Diaspora Within a Country: Kurds in Turkey," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, eds. Carol R. Ember, Melvin Ember, Ian Skoggard (New York: Springer, 2005), 408.

<sup>464</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 222.

migrants' lifestyles. Regardless of the exact numbers, however, there has clearly been a major shift, particularly in the last twenty-five years, leading many to point to the existence of a diaspora within Turkey.<sup>465</sup> Like many diaspora groups, Kurds in western Turkey suffer from high unemployment rates, economic inequality and frequent social marginalization.<sup>466</sup> Like most diasporas, it is also more vulnerable to political radicalization.<sup>467</sup>

### Management and Framing

Even once opportunities to operate in Western Turkey became available, attached to this greater opportunity was also a greater risk. To the vast majority of ethnic Turks, the PKK's fight is entirely illegitimate. If in the southeast it stood some chance of being characterized as freedom fighters, in the west the organization is firmly classified as a terrorist entity. Here, even more than in the southeast, high civilian casualty rates quickly become detrimental to the public perception of a group's legitimacy.<sup>468</sup> In addition, in the West, there is no guerilla fighting, few military targets and few instances in which potential victims can fight back; in addition, due to conscription and mandatory service in the national military, even the deaths of soldiers in the southeast are more likely to be seen as the deaths of innocents; therefore, even those attacks can negatively impact the party's reputation. Therefore, though the west is full of more easily accessible and highly public targets, it also presents a set of challenges that are largely absent in the Southeast. The negative predisposition in public opinion is only too obvious: for example, until recently, the Turkish press regularly referred to Ocalan as *bebek katili* or baby-killer.

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<sup>465</sup> Houston, "Creating a Diaspora Within a Country," 403.

<sup>466</sup> Houston, "Creating a Diaspora Within a Country," 408.

<sup>467</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 190.

<sup>468</sup> L.M. McCartan, et al., "The Logic of Terrorist Target Choice: An Examination of Chechen Rebel Bombings from 1997-2003," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008): 63.

Despite these significant challenges to providing a legitimate frame for violence in Western Turkey, the PKK managed public perception in a number of ways. One of these involves issues of attribution. On numerous occasions, the PKK has taken responsibility for its actions by calling the media or making public statements to that effect. However, perhaps even more telling, are the cases where it explicitly denies culpability, as it did for a large-scale attack in 2008.

On July 27, 2008, two bombs in an Istanbul shopping district killed 17 and injured approximately 154 people.<sup>469</sup> No organization officially claimed responsibility, and newspaper accounts make it clear that the identity and affiliation of the perpetrator were unknown. The attack is an anomaly in the dataset, the only attack on civilians in Western Turkey associated with the PKK with this number of casualties by a wide margin.<sup>470</sup>

Holding someone responsible for the attack quickly proved problematic. Turkish police blamed the PKK, and arrested several individuals, issuing a statement saying that these men were PKK members and they were responsible for the bombings. They offered no evidence to support these claims.<sup>471</sup>

To counter the police's claims, an official PKK spokesperson appeared on television to deny PKK involvement and express his deepest sympathies for victims of the attack.<sup>472</sup> Clearly, even if the PKK did perpetrate the attack, it recognized that certain lines had been crossed. The response of the PKK leadership demonstrate its awareness that attacks on this scale do them

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<sup>469</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "ID 200807270020", *Global Terrorism Database*, 2013.

<sup>470</sup> Figure 7: Frequency of Casualties per Attack; Figure 11: Maximum Casualties by Perpetrator, Location.

<sup>471</sup> F. Fassihi, "Turkey Blames Kurdish Rebels for Istanbul Bombing," *The Wall Street Journal Online*, 28 July 2008.

<sup>472</sup> Fassihi, "Turkey Blames Kurdish Rebels for Istanbul Bombing," 28 July 2008.

more harm than good, turning public opinion against them and reinforcing its identity as a terrorist organization rather than a political player.

There are multiple potential explanations for the attack and its perpetrators. Due to the decentralized nature of illegal organizations like the PKK, there are two questions to answer: the first being whether the attackers believed that the attack was in the name of the PKK; and the second being whether the PKK leadership knew about the attack. It is entirely possible that the attack was intentionally perpetrated by the PKK, and the spokesman was simply lying. If the PKK was responsible, with the full knowledge of the leadership, there is also the question of intended scale: the number of casualties could have been an accident; explosives and amateurs should not mix for a reason. It is also possible that the police were lying and that the PKK was not involved; there were several other terrorist organizations active in Istanbul at the time, including various al-Qaeda affiliates.<sup>473</sup> Of course, it is also possible that the PKK intentionally planned an attack that it hoped would injure upwards of one hundred people and affect many hundreds more. However, regardless of the origin of the attack, the party's response reveals its political awareness and its ability to adapt to maintain public opinion.

The group responsible for the July 27 attack remains unknown. However, the attack and its aftermath reveal the PKK's awareness of the implications of large casualties, therefore supporting the idea that other attacks included intentional efforts to minimize those casualties. In other words, the July 27 attack supports the idea that the goal of PKK bombings in the west is not maximum death and destruction, but rather is an act of political speech, meant to publicize the PKK's cause and demonstrate its capabilities.

#### Tactics

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<sup>473</sup> Arguably, TAK is another group operating with some degree of independence in Western Turkey.

PKK attacks in western Turkey are very different from those in the southeast in a number of ways. Both the amount and intensity of attacks is significantly lower in the west, providing support for the argument that the PKK is intentionally limiting casualties.<sup>474</sup>

Perhaps the most obvious change in PKK tactics is that the predominant form of violence in western Turkey is what is often referred to as terrorism: attacks by a few individuals against soft, civilian targets, often using some kind of explosive.<sup>475</sup> There are also discernable patterns in the PKK's tactics that point to deliberate decisions focused on maintaining as much public support as possible while grabbing media attention and delivering credible threats to the Turkish state, most discernably in their choice of targets and the number and timing of attacks.

Western Turkey has the lowest concentration of civilian targets of any of the three regions; however, attacks on civilians are the majority of attacks within western Turkey.<sup>476</sup> On average, these attacks had 5.53 casualties, fewer than occurred in the southeast.<sup>477</sup> In addition, Western Turkey had the second highest concentration of symbolic targets after Europe.<sup>478</sup> These statistics support the assertion that violence in the West of Turkey is more calculated and political, particularly when it comes to minimizing casualties.

This relatively low number of casualties becomes even more interesting in context. Istanbul is among the densest cities in the world, with an average population density of 2,666 inhabitants per square kilometer.<sup>479</sup> In Beyoglu, a central municipality on the European side that includes main areas such as Taksim Square, it is as high as 27,368 inhabitants per square

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<sup>474</sup> Figure 8: Casualties and Attacks by Type and Location.

<sup>475</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>476</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>477</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Location. When this number is limited to confirmed PKK attacks, the mean drops goes down to 2.28 casualties per attack.

<sup>478</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>479</sup> "News Release: The Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2012," Turkish Statistical Institutes, published 28 January 2013, <http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/>. Numbers from 2012.



kilometer.<sup>480</sup> Including foot traffic and temporary residents, areas like Beyoglu can have as many as 700,000 people per square kilometer at any given time.<sup>481</sup> This means that even attacks with a small physical footprint can quickly affect a large number of people, and provides a more informative context for the low casualty numbers in PKK attacks.

In contrast with the southeast, PKK attacks in the west are more frequently aimed at civilian targets, rather than military.<sup>482</sup> In addition, more attacks in the west are on what are referred to as “symbolic targets.”<sup>483</sup> The number of casualties in attacks on symbolic targets that the PKK claims is lower on average than in attacks on other types of target.<sup>484</sup> This makes sense: symbolic attacks explicitly lack strategic value and are often chosen to send a message. Inflicting a large civilian toll risks overshadowing the attack’s intended message with stories of gruesome civilian casualties. It also risks negatively impacting audience perceptions without strategic payoff. Finally, it is important to note the lower number of PKK-perpetrated suicide bombing attacks in western Turkey.<sup>485</sup>

The ways in which these considerations affected tactical decision-making is best viewed in examples, including the April 1994 attack on the Grand Bazaar or Kapalicarsi, the 1999 bombing of an Istanbul park, and the 2008 bombings in Istanbul. These attacks are particularly informative in contrast with a series of al-Qaeda bombings in Istanbul in 2003.

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<sup>480</sup> “Beyoglu (District),” City Population, last modified 2014, <http://www.citypopulation.de/>. Numbers from 2013.

<sup>481</sup> Mark Hennig, “Sustainable Urban Mobility: The Example of Istanbul,” *Case Studies in Sustainable Urban Transport* No 3 (2011): 18.

<sup>482</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>483</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>484</sup> Figure 12: Mean Casualties by Perpetrator and Location.

<sup>485</sup> START, *Global Terrorism Database* [Kurdish Workers’ Party 1984-2013].

On April 2, 1994, a bomb next to Istanbul's Grand Bazaar killed 2 individuals and injured 8.<sup>486</sup> The Grand Bazaar is an enclosed, and crowded space, where a larger attack could have been potentially devastating. Security protocols are also not particularly stringent; there is, for example, no bag check at any of the multiple entrances. Combined with the number of strangers coming and going in the vicinity and its status as a major tourist attraction, it is certainly a soft target, perhaps even softer than most. The bomb was placed in one of the few open spaces inside the bazaar, with wide roads leading directly to the outside of the bazaar.<sup>487</sup> The location of the bomb may have been accidental; however, its placement in the center of the bazaar makes that less likely. The PKK later claimed responsibility for the attack; it was the first time the organization had killed a foreign tourist.<sup>488</sup>

On July 4, 1999, an unknown individual left a homemade shrapnel bomb in a garbage bin near a park in Istanbul.<sup>489</sup> Upon detonation, the bomb killed one individual and injured 25 others.<sup>490</sup> Police suspected the PKK, but the organization's leadership did not comment on the bomb.<sup>491</sup> In either case, the bomb was hardly set in a high traffic area, nor was the decision to place the bomb in a park likely accidental; finding parks in Istanbul is a bit difficult, as only 1.5 percent of the city's land is dedicated public parks.<sup>492</sup> These factors support the argument that this bombing was likely not planned with the intention of maximizing casualties.

In both of these attacks, the PKK had a low number of casualties, particularly when considering the population density in the public, highly trafficked areas in or near the bombs.

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<sup>486</sup> START, "ID 199404020016", *Global Terrorism Database*.

<sup>487</sup> Figure 13: Map of Kapalicarsi

<sup>488</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Patterns of Global Terrorism 1994," *U.S. Department of State Publication 10239* (2014).

<sup>489</sup> START, "ID 1999047040001", *Global Terrorism Database*.

<sup>490</sup> START, "ID 199907040001", *Global Terrorism Database*.

<sup>491</sup> START, "ID 1999047040001", *Global Terrorism Database*.

<sup>492</sup> Alexander Christie-Miller, "In Turkey, echoes of US-style clashes over glitzy redevelopment," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2013.

While placed in very public locations, the attacks were organized so as to maximize visibility while limiting, if not minimizing, casualties. Thus, the attacks functioned more as a statement or threat than an effort to destroy, conforming to definitions of political violence used with the intent of coercion and supporting the hypothesis that the PKK deliberately used tactics intended to maximize the political impact of their attacks while minimizing the negative effects on its reputation.

Analysis of these attacks is interesting in its own right; however, it is still more informative when compared with attacks by other groups. On November 20, 2003, explosive-laden trucks were detonated near HSBC headquarters and the British consulate in Beyoglu, Istanbul. Al-Qaida soon claimed responsibility for the attack, which killed 26 people and injured over 400 individuals.<sup>493</sup> Among those killed in the attack was the British Consul-General for Istanbul.<sup>494</sup> This attack, proudly claimed by al-Qaeda, had an impact larger than any of the PKK's attacks in western Turkey, acknowledged or otherwise. Obviously, al-Qaeda is a trained and sophisticated organization with a proven desire and capability to inflict massive casualties. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the reason the PKK has not inflicted casualties on this scale is because it is incapable of doing so. Based on Istanbul's population density and the example of other possible large-scale attacks in the city, it seems more likely that the PKK has chosen to limit casualties in their attacks, particularly in attacks on symbolic targets.

### Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK)

As mentioned previously, the number of groups actively using political violence in Western Turkey complicates issues of attribution. For some of these groups, not only their

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<sup>493</sup> Esra Aygin and James C. Helicke, "Truck bombs hit British consulate and London-based bank, killing 25, wounding hundreds," *Associated Press*, 20 November 2003.

<sup>494</sup> Aygin and Helicke, "Truck bombs hit British consulate and London-based bank," 20 November 2003.

internal dynamics but their connection with and allegiance to the PKK are unclear. This is most significant in the case of the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), founded in the early 2000s. TAK has perpetrated a number of attacks throughout the last decade, and is active only in western cities. The group was created at a moment when the PKK was rife with internal divisions after Ocalan's capture and subsequent statements. It does not claim formal affiliation with the PKK, and the PKK has explicitly denied any connection with the group.<sup>495</sup> Turkish authorities have repeated on numerous occasions that TAK is simply a rebranded group of the PKK; however, insufficient evidence exists regarding the affiliation or lack thereof between the two.<sup>496</sup> Aside from the PKK, TAK is the most active Kurdish terrorist organization in western Turkey, making it necessary to discuss it here.<sup>497</sup>

In comparison with the PKK, TAK perpetrates more violent attacks, often choosing times inconvenient for ongoing talks between the PKK and the Turkish government. The average number of casualties in its attacks is 9.81, significantly higher than that of confirmed PKK attacks.<sup>498</sup> TAK targets are strictly soft, with many attacks focusing on destinations frequented by tourists, including hotels and touristic attractions.<sup>499</sup> It also often publicly claim its attacks rather than leaving ambiguity. This is best illustrated with the example of the TAK's first major attack in 2004.

On August 9, 2004, explosives detonated in two Istanbul hotels. The twin attacks, which occurred at two in the morning, killed two people and injured seven.<sup>500</sup> Additionally, severe

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<sup>495</sup> "The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement" 11.

<sup>496</sup> "The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement," 11.

<sup>497</sup> For clarity, this section refers to PKK and TAK as separate organizations; however, this decision regarding terminology is not meant to express an academic conclusion.

<sup>498</sup> Figure 12: Mean Casualties by Perpetrator and Location.

<sup>499</sup> Figure 14: Attacks by Perpetrator and Target Type.

<sup>500</sup> Dexter Filkins, "Bombs Kill 2 in Istanbul; Kurdish Rebels Suspected," *The New York Times*, 11 August 2004.

structural damage was caused to one of the hotels.<sup>501</sup> TAK called a German-based media outlet to claim responsibility for the attacks shortly after the blasts.<sup>502</sup> At the time, TAK was an unknown group; this was its first public attack. While an al-Qaida affiliate later claimed involvement in the attack as well, TAK remained the prime suspect for the attack.<sup>503</sup>

These attacks fit with many of the aforementioned trends to which most TAK attacks adhere. They were clearly calculated to attract media attention, particularly from foreign countries, and to hurt Turkey's lucrative tourist industry.<sup>504</sup> In addition, though significantly higher than the number of casualties in confirmed PKK attacks, the number of casualties in TAK attacks pales in comparison to the 2008 Al-Qaeda attack. As with the PKK, it would be a mistake to assume that this is because the group lacks the capability; rather, there is a reason why the group is deciding to limit the scale of its attacks. Unfortunately, there is very little information available on the TAK, leaving its intentions opaque.

PKK explicit distancing from TAK could be due to a number of reasons, from setting up a good cop-bad cop situation with the Turkish government, providing contrast to its apparent reason and moderation, or simply as a rebranded but intentional offshoot of the group. However, it is equally likely that TAK is a group of individuals angered by Ocalan's conciliatory attitude following his capture who decided to break off from the PKK and continue to rely solely on violence. In either case, the PKK's decision to distance itself from TAK makes it necessary to also consider TAK attacks separately, rather than including them in the larger group of PKK

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<sup>501</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, "ID 200408090001", "ID 200408090002", "ID 200408090003", *Global Terrorism Database*, 2013.

<sup>502</sup> Filkins. "Bombs Kill 2 in Istanbul."

<sup>503</sup> Associated Press, "Blasts Rock 2 Istanbul hotels, gas plant," *NBC News*, 10 August 2004.

<sup>504</sup> Equally indicative of this are a series of attacks later that year in Cesme, a town near Istanbul with minimal political significance, but which draws a large number of tourists each year, and a 2005 bus bombing in Kusadasi, a city with a similar profile.

attacks. Whether the separation is for public perception and political advantage or a genuine lack of connection, TAK attacks belong in their own category.

### Conclusion

PKK attacks in western Turkey are more political than those in the southeast. They are significantly fewer in number, disproportionately affect symbolic targets, rather than strategic targets, and have lower casualties overall. An examination of the population statistics in Istanbul and comparison with attacks by other groups demonstrates that the number of casualties in PKK attacks is relatively low; a detailed examination of these attacks demonstrates the possibility that the PKK is intentionally minimizing casualties. Additionally, in potential PKK attacks where there are a high number of casualties, the PKK often explicitly disclaims involvement and condemns the attack. Due to what is necessary to maintain public support and due to the character of the location, the PKK's activity in western Turkey is significantly different than that in the southeastern portion of the country, adjusted for logistical but also clearly political reasons.

### **Europe**

The PKK's use of political violence in Europe was always less frequent than in Turkey; however, even this initial limitation proved insufficient to prevent a highly negative turn in public opinion. Europe is consequently an instance of the PKK's ability to recognize the inefficacy of violent tactics in certain contexts and adjust its goals and actions accordingly.

### Importance

The Kurdish diaspora in Europe was an important source of resources for the PKK. The scale of financial contributions flowing to Turkey from Europe is unclear; however, various estimates have indicated that it was a significant amount of financial capital.<sup>505</sup> Also unclear was the source of this money; experts debate the extent to which this money came from voluntary contributions as opposed to extortion and even the drug trade.<sup>506</sup> The PKK and its various affiliated organizations also made money through the sale of publications, whether video cassettes or written materials.<sup>507</sup> In addition, the PKK took recruits from the diaspora in Germany and the Netherlands to come fight in Turkey. Ensuring this base of support has been crucial to the PKK.

As *Chapter Three* discussed, European political systems allowed the PKK greater access to formal politics. The open democratic structures of many EU countries allowed PKK sympathizers and supporters to lobby politicians, particularly throughout Turkey's many attempts to join the European Union, to put pressure on Turkey. The PKK could also access media outlets, as well as creating their own, to get around the Turkish state's monopoly on news. In addition, the PKK valued its relationships with European politicians. Though the European diaspora was not located in Turkey, it was still a crucial constituency for the PKK.

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<sup>505</sup> Alynna Lyon and Emek Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 No. 6 (2001): 935.

<sup>506</sup> Fiona Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," in *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* ed. Jeffrey Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 83.

<sup>507</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 935.

## Management and Framing

From the beginning, the PKK's strategy in Europe was the second portion of a dual strategy, in which the PKK employed violence against the state within Turkey and pursued more political activities in Europe.<sup>508</sup> Some authors see the violence as the logical evolution of a cause that gained little traction through purely political channels; others see it as the result of a desire for revenge.<sup>509</sup> The sporadic attacks on Turkish businesses and, more frequently, Turkish government throughout the period could support either argument.<sup>510</sup> It is important to note that even if these attacks were motivated by anger, casualties were rare. The exception to this is of course the assassination of former PKK members and conflict with rival groups; however, while such internal violence is concerning and important, it is not the focus of this thesis.

The PKK certainly pulled no punches in terms of the rhetoric aimed at Turkey's European allies. Perhaps the most famous example of this was in 1996 when Ocalan's threatened Germany with the idea that "Every Kurd can become a suicide bomber."<sup>511</sup> Fortunately this rhetoric was only that; there were no acknowledged PKK suicide bombings in Europe.<sup>512</sup> However, it certainly colored the European view of the PKK and contributed to its negative reputation, one that seems disproportionate with the amount of PKK-perpetrated violence in the region.

If PKK activity in western Turkey is visibly different, the nature of attacks in Europe is an even starker contrast to the southeast. The average casualties and the number of violent

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<sup>508</sup> Adamson, "Mechanisms of diaspora mobilization and the transnationalization of civil war," 75.

<sup>509</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 231.

<sup>510</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 937.

<sup>511</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 941.

<sup>512</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and the Responses to Terrorism (START), *Global Terrorism Database [Kurdistan Workers' Party 1984-2012]*, 2013.



attacks attributed to the PKK are exponentially lower.<sup>513</sup> In addition, the coordination in attacks is visibly higher, synced across multiple countries. Despite the lower amount of political violence, the PKK's European activity is an extremely illustrative instance of its ability to recognize the inefficacy of violent tactics and adjust its priorities and actions accordingly.

### Tactics

Overall, in Europe, the GTD data set includes 232 attacks. The majority of these attacks occur between 1987 and 1995.<sup>514</sup> The mean number of casualties in a given attack was 0.15, an indication that the majority of the attacks inflicted no casualties.<sup>515</sup> Many of these attacks targeted civilians; in fact, despite having the fewest attacks overall, the second greatest concentration of attacks on civilians occurred in Europe.<sup>516</sup> The vast majority of attacks in Europe struck symbolic targets; Europe also had the highest number of attacks on symbolic targets out of any region.<sup>517</sup> There was only a single attack on a military target in Europe; it involved no casualties.<sup>518</sup>

A series of attacks in June 1993 are a good example of the type of attacks perpetrated by the PKK in Europe and the evident level of planning and coordination. On June 24, Kurdish activists likely affiliated with the PKK attacked Turkish businesses and consulates in twelve cities throughout Western Europe.<sup>519</sup> June 24 was hardly an isolated incident; similarly coordinated attacks with minimal casualties also occurred on other dates including on November

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<sup>513</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Region.

<sup>514</sup> Figure 2, Figure 3: Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>515</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Location.

<sup>516</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>517</sup> Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location.

<sup>518</sup> Figure 8: Attacks and Casualties by Target Type and Location.

<sup>519</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 233.

28, 1994; February 25, 1995; and on March 29, 1995.<sup>520</sup> Such attacks caused very limited human casualties; however, they did inflict property damage and sent a strong message.

The PKK soon realized, however, that such attacks prompted a strong and unwelcome backlash against the PKK. Newspapers described the attacks on June 24 as a “terrorist rampage” and called for Europe to give Turkey stronger military support to strike back at the organization.<sup>521</sup> There were direct consequences as well: in November 1993, Germany and France banned the PKK and thirty-five affiliated organizations.<sup>522</sup> While the bans did little to prevent the groups from operating, it drastically limited its political options, preventing it from officially interacting with European politicians and from lobbying for Kurdish rights.<sup>523</sup> It was quickly clear that such violence came at an immense cost to the PKK’s political legitimacy and activity.

The evident drawbacks to such violence eventually caused the PKK to reconsider its use of violence in Europe. After 1995, levels of violence in Europe dropped significantly, evidence of a clear shift in policies.<sup>524</sup> The PKK’s continuation of large-scale, albeit heavily altered, activity in Europe demonstrates that this was clearly the result of a tactical decision, rather than simple distraction.

Ocalan ultimately moved to arguing, not for violence, but for non-violent political dialogue with Europe, expressing his desire “gain legitimacy as the spokesperson for all Kurds.”<sup>525</sup> Conferences regarding the Kurdish Issue began to occur more frequently, particularly

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<sup>520</sup> National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “ID 199411280001-5”, “ID 199502250025-30”, “ID 199503290007-29”, *Global Terrorism Database*, 2013.

<sup>521</sup> “Strike at the Sources,” *The Wall Street Journal, Europe*, 28 June 1993.

<sup>522</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 233.

<sup>523</sup> Marcus, *Blood and Belief*, 234.

<sup>524</sup> Figure 2, Figure 3: Attacks by Year and Location.

<sup>525</sup> Lyon and Ucarer, “Mobilizing ethnic conflict,” 941.

with the creation of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (KPE).<sup>526</sup> This body, located in Europe and with a membership consisting of activists and intellectuals, as well as former members of Turkish parliament, is among those that advocated a political solution to the ongoing Kurdish oppression in Turkey and its neighboring countries.<sup>527</sup> The KPE and other groups included representatives from multiple countries and organizations; at least nominally, neither the PKK nor Ocalan held a privileged role, though the party remained heavily involved.<sup>528</sup>

Though there were multiple large-scale pro-PKK demonstrations throughout Europe in the late 1990s, particularly after Ocalan's arrest, such demonstrations were usually without major incident or violence.<sup>529</sup> One arguable exception to this lack of violence was the use of self-immolation by a significant number of PKK supporters, particularly during 1999. For an example of scale, over the course of the single day, seven Kurds self-immolated in Western Europe as part of protests following Ocalan's arrest.<sup>530</sup> The use of self-immolation in Europe is particularly interesting, as civilians in Turkey never adopted the tactic; it was only ever used in prisons.<sup>531</sup> Michael Biggs, an academic who studies self-immolation as a form of political violence, argues that, unlike terrorist activity, self-immolation is not a weapon of war, but rather an act of protest.<sup>532</sup> He further describes how self-immolation achieves the same shock value as an act of outwardly focused violence, but without the accompanying damage to public opinion, as self-immolation does not involve innocent victims.<sup>533</sup> Consequently, rather than the coercive

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<sup>526</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 34.

<sup>527</sup> Barkey and Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*, 36.

<sup>528</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Transnational Aspects of the Kurdish Question," Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at European University Institute, Florence, 17.

<sup>529</sup> Ucarer and Lyon, "Mobilizing ethnic conflict," 936.

<sup>530</sup> Michael Biggs, "Dying Without Killing: Self-Immolations, 1963-2002," in *Making Sense of Suicide Missions*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73,

<sup>531</sup> Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 73.

<sup>532</sup> Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 2.

<sup>533</sup> Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 45.

intent of a terrorist attack, self-immolation is intended to provoke public attention and sympathy. PKK supporters' use of self-immolation in Europe following the cessation in political violence is another interesting testament to the way in which the PKK adapted its tactics based on the public response to violence. While the intense need for political expression remained the same, the means of that expression changed drastically after 1996.

The PKK's use of terrorism in Europe changed over time; it ultimately abandoned the tactic altogether. Hunger strikes and public protest also became a more widespread means of directing popular attention in Europe to the plight of the Kurds.<sup>534</sup> The use of self-immolation also makes an interesting statement about the changed objectives in European political activity. These alternative methods of political activity are more indicative of the type of PKK activism and advocacy most visible in Europe, particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Conclusion

The PKK was unable to legitimize its use of violence in Europe and, consequently, chose to strictly limit it instead. For the PKK, Europe was always more of a place for political, rather than military, action; over time, it became an almost exclusively political arena. The coordinated attacks with wide geographic reach and minimal casualties provide evidence for a highly coordinated organization that implemented its attacks extremely deliberately, thus supporting the assertion that this minimization of casualties was intentional. Terrorism ultimately gave way to nonviolent protest and political action in Europe, as *Chapter Three* discussed.

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<sup>534</sup> Biggs, "Dying Without Killing," 8.

## **Conclusion**

Though the PKK felt it had to use violence to reach its objectives, it was also aware of the negative impact violence could have on public opinion. Therefore, the PKK's use of violence was carefully planned in order to achieve various political goals. One of these goals was minimizing damage to public opinion through the legitimization of the PKK's use of violence. This often also involved minimizing certain types of violence or violence overall. To best understand this, one must consider the PKK's use of violence as an inherently political activity. Due to the different audiences and different goals present in various places, it made sense to divide this analysis by geographical location in order to better understand the tactics present in each. Comparing the PKK's attacks across time and geographic regions made it easier to understand the way tactics changed and adapted to fit various contexts.

This chapter contains a demonstration of another area in which the PKK have evolved their tactics for political action in order to ensure their continued legitimacy and cultivate public support. Such a demonstration supports the overall thesis regarding the PKK's ability to learn and adapt in changing contexts.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The previous four chapters have demonstrated the ways in which the PKK is a rational organization that learns from its mistakes, changing its strategy and tactics to adapt to new circumstances. It does so to maintain the party's legitimacy and relevance in the discussions around Kurdish nationalism. Such discussions have become increasingly prominent within Turkey largely because of the PKK's actions; while there have certainly been independent actors involved, the PKK has dominated politics regarding the Kurdish question in Turkey over the last three decades. In conclusion, this chapter will lay out the empirical conclusions of the preceding chapters, before discussing their implications the near future.

### **Empirical Conclusions**

*Chapter One* begins by asking whether it is even appropriate to analyze the decisions of a terrorist organization such as the PKK, particularly when society often perceives terrorism and political violence more broadly as inherently irrational. Increasingly, however, scholars have demonstrated that, terrorists may actually be rational, political actors. In order to be considered rational, organizations or individuals must meet the three criteria of the strategic model. Furthermore, an assessment of an organization's ideology and history can determine whether it is acting as a political actor, or with different motivations. The international community is often hesitant to consider terrorists as rational, as it challenges existing norms of behavior, as well as the current status quo and power hierarchy. However, in order to understand terrorists, and therefore effectively address terrorism, one must examine their beliefs, priorities and decisions.

Most of the Western world classifies the PKK as a terrorist organization. Even in academic work, its members are often portrayed as bloodthirsty, brutal killers, with little or no

attention paid to their motivations. In fact, the PKK fulfills the criteria of the strategic model, and has demonstrated its identity as a political actor throughout its existence. Kurdish history shows that, in Turkey, the PKK saw little alternative to violence: all other methods of political activity were crushed by the state and the military. The brutality of the Turkish military in the region also increased the appeal of violence, as the penalties for nonviolent political action and guerilla warfare were often the same. Tracing the party's history to the present day, one sees clear patterns and moments of change, as well as ample evidence of political activity.

Chapter Two explores the ways in which the PKK's ideology has not remained static, but rather has evolved throughout the party's existence. This chapter examines five areas of ideology and the ways in which changes affected or were the result of strategic decisions. This is important, as the primary functions of ideology are to legitimize and guide action as well as justifying the use of violence both within the group and to external audiences. Consequently, ideology is an important component in setting priorities and determining appropriate action. The PKK's strategic adjustments to its ideology demonstrate its awareness of various constituencies, its foremost devotion to the Kurdish ethno-nationalist cause, and, most importantly, its ability to learn over time and adapt their ideology in order to attract supporters and maintain its legitimacy.

Chapter Three examines the tactics the PKK employs to pursue its goals through more conventional political action. Its status in many countries as a terrorist organization complicates these efforts, as does the Turkish government's frequent attempts to shut down any expression of Kurdish identity in the Turkish political arena; however, both in Europe and in Turkey, the PKK has continued to remain active in politics either directly or through its interactions with other groups. These forms of political activity fall into the two categories of institutional and confrontational participation.

Within Turkey, the PKK has mostly lacked direct access to institutional politics. Interactions between the PKK and legal Kurdish parties are complicated, and unclear. While the parties claim independence, many Turks accuse them of being PKK fronts. In addition, even if the party is organizationally independent of the PKK, the PKK's popularity among many Kurdish voters means that the PKK remains influential. Ocalan's endorsement of an early Kurdish party, for example, increased its popularity significantly. Ocalan's arrest provided a unique opportunity for the PKK to have an interlocutor inside the institution in order to act directly in the political arena. The PKK is also active outside the system, supporting public protest and the distribution of media produced in Turkey and in Europe. This allows it to spread information and awareness, breaking the government's monopoly on information and demonstrating its level of support. Again, the relationships between the PKK and various individuals and organizations organizing this activity are opaque and uncertain. While the extent and exact nature of the party's involvement in Turkey's institutional and confrontational political systems is unclear, the fact of its involvement is unmistakable.

In Europe, open and democratic systems make it easier for the PKK to have more formal institutional participation. This occurs primarily under organizations with alternate names, and consists of forging alliances with NGOs, lobbying parliament and building awareness and agreement among citizens. Here, too, the PKK is active outside the system, as it is the site of most of the PKK's media production and the location of many public protests over the period. The inefficacy of violence in Europe, as seen in Chapter Four, makes this all the more pressing, as political activity is the means by which the PKK must get out its message.

Finally, Chapter Four looks at the political violence that has earned the PKK its reputation for brutality. Violence is the most controversial means by which the PKK attains



political goals, even when it is the only way the PKK believes it can achieve its goals. Evidence shows that the violence overall is not the desired end, but rather a means by which the PKK seeks to achieve political goals. A careful analysis of terrorist attacks demonstrates tactical adjustments in order to maintain the party's legitimacy. When necessary, these tactics seek to limit the use of violence. Tactics also include shifting target types so that attacks are not directed at civilians but rather at the military, or avoiding people altogether.

Dividing PKK terrorist attacks by region, one can examine trends that demonstrate the ways in which the PKK has changed and constrained its use of violence in order to ensure that the violence does not overshadow political goals. Such patterns are inconsistent with the popular perception that the PKK acts only for revenge or glory; while these motives may be present on an individual level, broader trends demonstrate that for the PKK, violence is a tool, not a goal.

In the Southeast of Turkey, there is not only a decrease in terrorism over time, but a clear decline in attacks on civilians. While the PKK initially constructed a narrative in which they only attacked collaborators and those working with the state, ultimately they reduced violence against civilians across the board.

In Western Turkey, the decrease in attacks is even more marked. Overall, violence here is employed in a much more careful manner, with a higher focus on symbolic targets and lower casualty rates. In addition, there is a clear effort to limit the number of casualties incurred in a given attack. This becomes particularly apparent when comparing PKK attacks with those perpetrated by other terrorist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda.

Finally, in Europe, the PKK initially limited violence. This is clear from the highly coordinated attacks across multiple cities and countries, carefully planned and executed, which cause no casualties. However, after even these attacks sparked censure from European

governments and threatened to hamper the PKK's more conventional political activity, the party ceased its use of violence altogether. Europe provides one of the strongest examples of an instance in which the PKK clearly adjusted its tactics to adapt to a negative response in order to protect their public image.

All of these areas provide examples of ways in which the PKK has adjusted its tactics and strategy in order to remain relevant in discussions surrounding the Kurdish issue; retain its reputation as a legitimate political actor; and ensure continued public support. The party adapts to changing circumstances in a variety of areas, demonstrating its rationality, its ability to learn, and its desire to be seen as a legitimate political actor.

### **Policy Implications**

Since March 2013, the PKK has maintained a ceasefire with the Turkish government. Discussions between the PKK, BDP and the government are ongoing. Proposals have come to the table that would have been unthinkable a decade ago; this is undoubtedly in part due to Prime Minister Erdogan's ability to take unpopular stances without a serious threat to his popularity, as he lacks a strong political challenger. In addition, as liberals have fled the AKP coalition, the Kurdish party has made an excellent ally. Issues on the table include the 10 percent national threshold for elections and the restoration of Kurdish names to towns and provinces in the Southeast. The government has also taken positive steps in their decision to allow Kurdish languages to be spoken on radio and television, in addition to beginning to offer optional classes in Kurdish languages. Finally, BDP deputies have been permitted to meet with Ocalan on Imrali for the first time since his arrest; several meetings have now taken place, beginning on January

2013.<sup>535</sup> Neither these steps nor negotiations with Ocalan have provoked the strong public outcry that many expected; in fact, the cries for negotiation have been significantly louder.<sup>536</sup>

In return, Karayilan has promised to withdraw PKK troops back into Northern Iraq and to continue to respect the ceasefire. After the spike in violence in 2012, this is a significant improvement. While disarmament is a high priority, given its history it is difficult for the PKK to trust the Turkish state. This is particularly true given the Turkish military's frequent disregard for ceasefires. However, Karayilan has publicly expressed a willingness to disarm and Ocalan has publicly acknowledged engaging with the government in disarmament talks.<sup>537</sup> Though difficult, solving the issues surrounding disarmament are not impossible; peace negotiations with other extra-governmental organizations have encountered similar challenges.

It is possible that Ocalan's willingness to engage with the Turkish government is entirely due to his own desire to emerge triumphant from Imrali; the comparison with Nelson Mandela is not uncommon among outside observers or from Ocalan himself. Whether the motivation for a negotiated peace rests on Ocalan's ego or a genuine desire for reconciliation is irrelevant: the PKK, as well as thousands of Kurdish citizens, have demonstrated that they will follow him. Perhaps the most dramatic example was a hunger strike in the fall of 2013. Hundreds of prisoners in Turkey's prisons stated that their resolve to fast until the government removed restrictions on Kurdish language in the public sphere and improved Ocalan's living conditions.<sup>538</sup> After sixty-eight days, Ocalan ended the hunger strike with an announcement through his brother. The Turkish government's easy access to an interlocutor with this kind of power and

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<sup>535</sup> Jake Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks," *Foreign Policy: The Middle East Channel*, 8 January 2013.

<sup>536</sup> Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks".

<sup>537</sup> Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks".

<sup>538</sup> Hess, "Turkey's PKK Talks".

influence makes the logistics of negotiations relatively straightforward and could help to facilitate discussion.

The PKK has clearly demonstrated a willingness to negotiate with the Turkish government and has released a comprehensive document detailing its aims. AKP's response, while an improvement over its predecessors, has still proven disappointing. Given that three decades of pursuing a military solution, often with brutal and inhumane tactics, have consistently failed, perhaps it is time for AKP to take the PKK up on its offer, not temporarily, but in pursuit of a lasting peace.

In addition to its importance regarding Turkish domestic politics, and even regional dynamics, the PKK is representative of multiple groups around the world who have turned to violence, not out of an inherent desire to destroy, but because they felt it was the option promising the best chance of success. Many of these groups have demonstrated their willingness to come to the table and participate in negotiations and conventional politics, like the PKK has done in Turkey. Understanding these groups as rational, political actors is essential in ending such conflicts, particularly as the futility of military solutions is proven time and time again.

Whether or not the global community wants to accept it, the PKK and many other extra-national groups have expressed a desire to be at the table, with the stated intention of seeking involvement in legal, democratic politics. It would be foolish to take this entirely at face value; the PKK has proven that it is foolish to dismiss its capabilities either as a political actor or as a security threat. However, it is also important to acknowledge that the PKK has been sending consistent signs throughout much of its existence that it is willing to turn to negotiation and compromise, rather than violence. The PKK is undoubtedly not the only group for whom this is the case; groups such as the IRA, FARC, ETA, ANC have demonstrated that they, too, might be

interested in participating in nonviolent political systems. The individual case of the PKK demonstrates the importance of dealing with such groups as political actors, rather than bloodthirsty outlaws. This will not be the case for all groups; one of the lingering questions is how to ascertain groups' willingness to negotiate and participate in political systems, especially when things do not go their way. However, it is only through the close examination of individual cases like that of the PKK that the international community might begin to discover the answer.

Perhaps the most provocative question in existing literature on the PKK is that of how it has maintained its popularity despite the huge amounts of violence it has either directly inflicted or unleashed upon Turkey's citizens. This paper demonstrates that part of the answer is that it is not by accident; rather it is the result of deliberate planning, careful adaptation, and learning from past mistakes. The PKK leadership cannot be simplified to a bloodthirsty group out for revenge. Instead, the reality is much more complex, and must include an understanding of the PKK's identity as a savvy and competent political actor, making decisions regarding strategy and tactics that will ensure the enduring legitimacy and relevance of the party.

APPENDIX I: FIGURES

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Europe</b> | <b>West Turkey</b> | <b>Southeast Turkey</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| <b>1984</b> | 0             | 0                  | 8                       | 8            |
| <b>1985</b> | 0             | 0                  | 0                       | 0            |
| <b>1986</b> | 0             | 0                  | 6                       | 6            |
| <b>1987</b> | 2             | 1                  | 31                      | 34           |
| <b>1988</b> | 1             | 1                  | 24                      | 26           |
| <b>1989</b> | 0             | 1                  | 85                      | 86           |
| <b>1990</b> | 0             | 0                  | 139                     | 139          |
| <b>1991</b> | 25            | 15                 | 86                      | 126          |
| <b>1992</b> | 49            | 39                 | 297                     | 385          |
| <b>1993</b> | 15            | 0                  | 17                      | 32           |
| <b>1994</b> | 18            | 23                 | 151                     | 192          |
| <b>1995</b> | 98            | 1                  | 30                      | 129          |
| <b>1996</b> | 4             | 0                  | 30                      | 34           |
| <b>1997</b> | 0             | 1                  | 16                      | 17           |
| <b>1998</b> | 0             | 4                  | 19                      | 23           |
| <b>1999</b> | 13            | 13                 | 39                      | 65           |
| <b>2000</b> | 0             | 0                  | 6                       | 6            |
| <b>2001</b> | 0             | 0                  | 4                       | 4            |
| <b>2002</b> | 0             | 0                  | 0                       | 0            |
| <b>2003</b> | 0             | 0                  | 4                       | 4            |
| <b>2004</b> | 0             | 5                  | 13                      | 18           |
| <b>2005</b> | 0             | 7                  | 32                      | 39           |
| <b>2006</b> | 1             | 14                 | 35                      | 50           |
| <b>2007</b> | 0             | 3                  | 26                      | 29           |
| <b>2008</b> | 4             | 3                  | 21                      | 28           |
| <b>2009</b> | 0             | 2                  | 5                       | 7            |
| <b>2010</b> | 0             | 3                  | 16                      | 19           |
| <b>2011</b> | 1             | 4                  | 31                      | 36           |
| <b>2012</b> | 0             | 4                  | 145                     | 149          |

*Figure 3: Number of Attacks by Year and Location (Table)*

| <b>Year</b>  | <b>Civilian</b> | <b>Government</b> | <b>Military</b> |
|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| <b>1984</b>  | 2               | 1                 | 5               |
| <b>1986</b>  | 1               | 2                 | 3               |
| <b>1987</b>  | 22              | 5                 | 3               |
| <b>1988</b>  | 14              | 1                 | 9               |
| <b>1989</b>  | 41              | 5                 | 33              |
| <b>1990</b>  | 37              | 13                | 75              |
| <b>1991</b>  | 40              | 26                | 54              |
| <b>1992</b>  | 159             | 46                | 156             |
| <b>1993*</b> | 21              | 7                 | 1               |
| <b>1994</b>  | 66              | 22                | 93              |
| <b>1995</b>  | 93              | 9                 | 7               |
| <b>1996</b>  | 14              | 4                 | 15              |
| <b>1997</b>  | 11              | 2                 | 4               |
| <b>1998</b>  | 8               | 4                 | 11              |
| <b>1999</b>  | 19              | 21                | 22              |
| <b>2000</b>  | 0               | 0                 | 7               |
| <b>2001</b>  | 1               | 0                 | 4               |
| <b>2003</b>  | 1               | 2                 | 0               |
| <b>2004</b>  | 4               | 2                 | 10              |
| <b>2005</b>  | 14              | 7                 | 14              |
| <b>2006</b>  | 12              | 8                 | 25              |
| <b>2007</b>  | 7               | 2                 | 20              |
| <b>2008</b>  | 12              | 5                 | 6               |
| <b>2009</b>  | 3               | 0                 | 3               |
| <b>2010</b>  | 2               | 3                 | 7               |
| <b>2011</b>  | 16              | 5                 | 8               |
| <b>2012</b>  | 13              | 28                | 89              |
| <b>Total</b> | 547             | 230               | 684             |

*Figure 5: Number of Attacks by Year and Target Type (Table). Due to the absence of the year in the dataset, 1993 does not include attacks from the GTD dataset.*

|                    | <b>Total Attacks</b> | <b>Attacks Pre-1999 (%)</b> | <b>Attacks Post-1999 (%)</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Civilian</b>    | 552                  | 37.00                       | 20.00                        |
| Southeast Turkey   | 312                  | 27.00                       | 14.00                        |
| West Turkey        | 103                  | 76.00                       | 62.00                        |
| Europe             | 131                  | 71.00                       | 5.00                         |
|                    |                      |                             |                              |
| <b>Military</b>    | 691                  | 38.00                       | 46.00                        |
| Southeast Turkey   | 664                  | 48.00                       | 55.00                        |
| West Turkey        | 18                   | 13.00                       | 12.00                        |
| Europe             | 1                    | 0.00                        | 0.00                         |
|                    |                      |                             |                              |
| <b>All Targets</b> | 1729                 | 100.00                      | 100.00                       |
| Southeast Turkey   | 1325                 | 75.00                       | 81.00                        |
| West Turkey        | 148                  | 7.00                        | 13.00                        |
| Europe             | 232                  | 17.00                       | 4.00                         |

Figure 6: Change over time regarding percentage of attacks on a specific target in a particular location.

| <b>Casualties</b>                                | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Cumulative (%)</b> |
|--|------------------|-----------------------|
| 0  | 559              | 32.96                 |
| 1 - 2  | 382              | 55.48                 |
| 3 - 5  | 315              | 74.06                 |
| 6 - 10   | 224              | 87.26                 |
| 11 - 50  | 204              | 99.29                 |
| 51 - 85  | 10               | 99.88                 |
| 86 - 167   | 2                | 100                   |
| <i>Numbers for all perpetrators, all regions</i> |                  |                       |

Figure 7: Frequency and Cumulative Percentage of Casualties per Attack



|   | <b>Mean Casualties</b> | <b>Number of Attacks</b> |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Civilian*</b>  | 4.85                   | 552                      |
| Southeast Turkey  | 6.24                   | 396                      |
| West Turkey***  | 2.28, 5.53             | 73, 103                  |
| Europe  | 0.15                   | 131                      |
|   |                        |                          |
| <b>Military</b>   | 6.38                   | 691                      |
| Southeast Turkey  | 6.41                   | 664                      |
| West Turkey***  | 6.0, 6.38              | 10, 18                   |
| Europe  | 0                      | 1                        |
|   |                        |                          |
| <b>All Targets</b>  | 4.79                   | 1729                     |
| Southeast Turkey  | 6.17                   | 1325                     |
| West Turkey***  | 2.28, 6.17             | 83, 148                  |
| Europe  | 0.15                   | 232                      |
| <p><i>* These numbers include civilians deemed “collaborators”.</i></p> <p><i>*** The first number is the average number of casualties for confirmed PKK attacks. The second is the average casualties for all possible PKK attacks, including TAK attacks.</i></p> |                        |                          |

Figure 8: Civilian and military attacks and casualties by location

|   | <b>Europe</b> | <b>West Turkey</b> | <b>Southeast Turkey</b> | <b>Other</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Civilian</b>   | 131           | 103                | 312                     | 6            | 552          |
| <b>Collaborator</b>   | 0             | 1                  | 85                      | 1            | 87           |
| <b>Government</b>   | 76            | 20                 | 132                     | 3            | 232          |
| <b>Military</b>   | 1             | 18                 | 664                     | 4            | 691          |
| <b>Infrastructure</b>   | 0             | 1                  | 105                     | 1            | 108          |
| <b>Media</b>  | 13            | 0                  | 7                       | 0            | 20           |
| <b>Symbolic</b>   | 222           | 148                | 98                      | 4            | 446          |
| <b>Other</b>  | 11            | 1                  | 20                      | 3            | 35           |
| <p><i>** Some locations unknown; therefore, totals may not add up</i></p> |               |                    |                         |              |              |

Figure 9: Attacks by Target Type and Location

| <b>Year</b>   | <b>Average Attacks Per Year</b> |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1984-1999   | 26.67                           |
| 1990-1992   | 216.67                          |
| 1994-1999   | 76.67                           |
| 2000-2011   | 20                              |
| 2012  | 149                             |
| <i>This analysis excluded 1993, as it is not included in the GTD. Averages include all perpetrators, all regions.</i> |                                 |

*Figure 10: Average Number of Attacks Per Year*

|   | <b>Southeast Turkey</b> | <b>West Turkey</b> | <b>Europe</b> |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| <b>PKK: Confirmed</b>   | 125                     | 31                 | 6             |
| <b>PKK: Possible</b>  | 125                     | 167                | 6             |
| <b>TAK</b>  | n/a                     | 32                 | n/a           |
| <i>Maximum casualties inflicted in a single attack. PKK: Possible includes TAK attacks.</i> |                         |                    |               |

*Figure 11: Maximum Casualties in a Single Attack by Perpetrator, Location*

|  | <b>Europe</b> | <b>West Turkey</b> | <b>Southeast Turkey</b> | <b>Symbolic Targets</b> |
|--|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>PKK: confirmed</b>  | 0.18          | 2.28               | 5.39                    | 1.1                     |
| <b>PKK: possible*</b>  | 0.15          | 5.53               | 5.38                    | 10.56                   |
| <b>TAK</b>   | n/a           | 9.81               | n/a                     | 6.1                     |
| <i>* This includes TAK casualties, as TAK may or may not be under the control of the PKK</i> |               |                    |                         |                         |

*Figure 12: Mean Casualties by Perpetrator and Location*

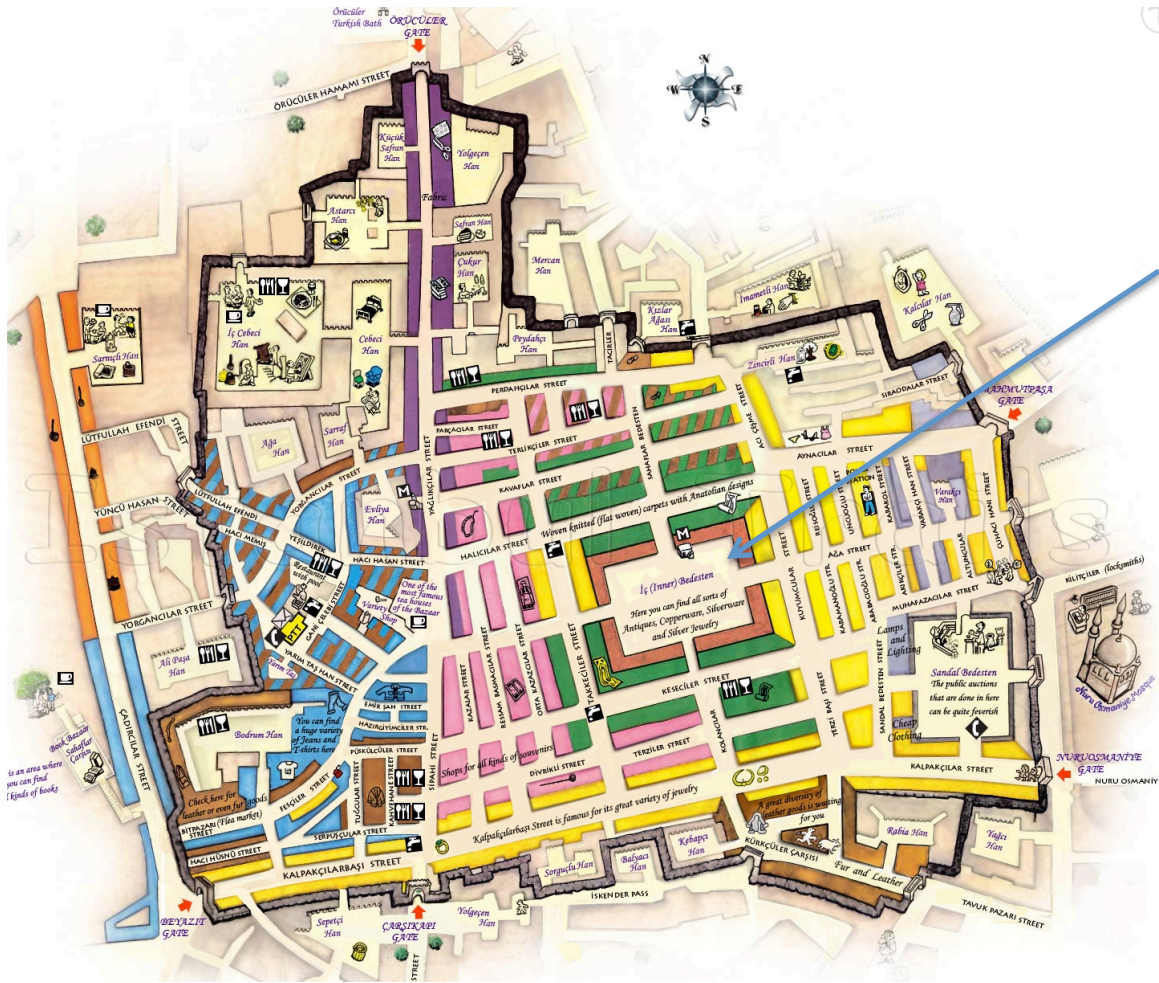


Figure 13: Map of the Grand Bazaar. The Arrow indicates the approximate location of the bomb (reports only provided the street name).<sup>539</sup>

|                       | Civilian | Civilian Collaborator | Government | Military |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------------------|------------|----------|
| <b>PKK: confirmed</b> | 458      | 72                    | 148        | 598      |
| <b>PKK: possible</b>  | 80       | 15                    | 72         | 87       |
| <b>TAK</b>            | 9        | 0                     | 7          | 4        |

*PKK: Possible includes only those attacks which may or may not have been PKK, and includes no TAK attacks*

Figure 14: Number of Attacks by Target Type and Perpetrator

<sup>539</sup> “Grand Bazaar: Istanbul <[http://www.grandbazaaristanbul.org/Grand\\_Bazaar\\_Map.html](http://www.grandbazaaristanbul.org/Grand_Bazaar_Map.html)>. Date not provided.

## APPENDIX II: KEY FIGURES

*Note: Below, I am following the most standard practice for acronyms. Some organizations are most commonly referred to with their English-language acronym, while others use Turkish, Kurmanji, Arabic, etc. In this appendix, I am endeavoring to use correct spelling where appropriate; throughout the remainder of the document, these names have been Anglicized.*

### Groups and Political Parties

**AKP** *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/Justice and Development Party (sometimes called JDP)

Established in 2001, AKP currently holds the majority of seats in the Turkish legislature, having received significant proportions of the national vote in all elections since its founding.

**BDP** *Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*/Peace and Democracy Party.

Founded in 2008, the BDP is the current iteration of a mainstream single-issue, pro-Kurdish party.

**CHP** *Cumhuriyet Halk Partesi*/Republican People's Party

CHP is the party of secular Kemalism in Turkey, and is currently the main opposition party for AKP. Historically, it has had close relations with the army and has been inflexible regarding the PKK. It often refers to itself as the party of Atatürk.

**Hizbullah**/*Hizbullahı/Hizbullahî Kurdi*/Turkish Hizbullah

Unrelated to Lebanese Hizbullah, this Islamist and Kurdish nationalist group was primarily active in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There have long been rumors that in the early 1990s, the Turkish government financed the group in order to combat the PKK.

**Köy Korucular** Village Guards

Begun in the 1980s, these civilian militias were armed and paid by the Turkish government as a way to combat the PKK. They often play on tribal politics and have proven extremely divisive.

**MİT** *Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*/National Intelligence Organization

Turkey's National Intelligence Organization

**PKK** Kurdistan Workers' Party/Partiye Karkêren Kurdistan

Founded in 1979, the PKK has become the dominant representative of Turkey's Kurdish population. Since 1984, the party has used violence to fight for its ethno-nationalist aims; consequently, it is still classified as a terrorist organization by the EU and the US. The PKK is also referred to as referred to as the People's Defense Force/*Hêzên Parastina Gel* (HPG); Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan (KADEK); the People's Congress of Kurdistan (Kongra-Gel). The National Liberation Front of Kurdistan/*Eniya Rizgariya Netewa Kurdistan* (ERNK) was the party's longtime political arm in Europe.

**SHP** *Sosyaldemokratik Halkçı Parti*/Social Democrat Populist Party

This Leftist party included many of the initial outspoken Kurdish MPs, before leaving due to its unwillingness to adequately address the Kurdish issue.

**TAK** *Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*/Kurdistan Freedom Hawks

This off-shoot of the PKK has been active since the early 2000s, committing acts of political violence in Western Turkey. The extent of its current relations with the PKK is unknown.

### Timeline of Kurdish Political Parties in Turkey

*All of these parties with the exception of DEHAP and DTH were shut down by the Turkish courts for various reasons.*

**HEP** *Halkın Emek Partisi*/People's Labor Party: 1990-1993

**DEP** *Demokrasi Partisi*/Democracy Party: 1993-1994

**HADEP** *Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*/People's Democracy Party: 1994-2003

**DTH** *Demokratik Toplum Halkın*/Democratic Society Movement: 2000-2005.

**DEHAP** *Demokratik Halk Partisi*/Democratic People's Party: 1997-2005

**DTP** *Demokratik Toplum Partisi*/Democratic Society Party: 2005-2009

This party was formed with a merger by its predecessors, DTH and DEHAP.

**BDP** *Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi*/Peace and Democracy Party: 2008 to present

### Individuals

#### **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk**

An officer in the Ottoman army during WWI, Atatürk resigned soon after the end of the war to lead resistance to European occupiers. The founder of modern Turkey, basically created Turkish nationalism and the fiercely secularist ideology of Kemalism. Atatürk was the first president of Turkey, a position he held until his death in 1938.

#### **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan**

Erdoğan has held the office of Prime Minister since 2003. He was one of the co-founders of AKP along with Abdullah Gül, and remains the party head. Known for his social conservatism and often-authoritarian leadership style, Erdoğan remains extremely popular in Turkey. He has done more than any of his predecessors to resolve Turkey's conflict with the PKK.

#### **Murat Karayılan**

PKK's current field commander and *de facto* leader, Karayılan has been a member of PKK since its founding in 1979.

#### **Abdullah Öcalan**

Known as Apo, or 'uncle', to his followers, Öcalan is the founder and leader of the PKK. He has been the sole prisoner on Imralı Island since his arrest in 1999.

#### **Turgut Özal**

Özal served as Turkey's Prime Minister (1983-1989) and President (1989-1993). One of the first mainstream Turkish politicians to be open about his Kurdish heritage, he was also the first President to agree to negotiations with PKK. He died suddenly of a heart attack during his presidency.

### Kurdish Parties Outside of Turkey

**KCK** Group of Communities in Kurdistan/ *Koma Civakên Kurdistan*

Founded by PKK, KCK is an umbrella organization technically encompassing Kurdish groups in surrounding countries. KCK retains Öcalan as its honorary leader, and its *de facto* leadership has historically included many prominent PKK members.

**KDP** *Partiya Demokrat Kurdistan*/Kurdistan Democratic Party

This Iraqi Kurdish party is led by Massoud Barzani, the current president of Iraqi Kurdistan/Kurdish Regional Government (KRG).

**KPE** Kurdish Parliament in Exile

Located in Europe, this group contains many prominent Kurdish intellectuals and politicians. It is nominally independent of the PKK.

**PJAK** *Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*/Party of Free Life of Kurdistan

PJAK is the primary Kurdish organization pursuing political violence in Iran.

**PUK** Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

The rival party to KDP within Iraqi Kurdistan, PUK is run by Jalal Talabani.

**PYD** *Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat*/Democratic Union Party

PYD is the primary Kurdish organization pursuing political violence in Syria.

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