



**DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL FACTORS OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE: PKK  
MOVEMENT UNTIL 2005**

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**ВЪТРЕШНИ И МЕЖДУНАРОДНИ ФАКТОРИ ЗА ЕТНИЧЕСКО НАСИЛИЕ:  
ДЕЙНОСТТА НА РАБОТНИЧЕСКАТА ПАРИЯ НА КЮРДИСТАН (ПКК) ДО 2005 г.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper studies the policy of “ethnic violence” imposed by PKK for 20 years, which has become one of the most violent terrorist organizations in the world due to its' terrorist actions in Turkey since 1984. It is observed that the phenomenon of violence experienced in every sphere of life has begun to be a familiar feature of daily life, both to actors who are exposed to it and to those who employ it, including violation of human rights, attacks to national borders, ethnic-religious attacks, domestic power struggles, class contradictions etc. Requiring hundreds of millions of US dollars every year for procurement of weapons and materials, the organization succeeded in obtaining a great many of the weapons of previous BAAS soldiers, exploiting the “process of non-control and anarchy” following the invasion of Iraq. Settled on the Kandil Mountain and its surroundings in Northern Iraq with 5 thousand of its armed members, PKK has become the nominee for the third dominant power of the Kurdish region and now trying to pass its influence over to Syria as well after its planned orderly retreat from Turkey.*

**Keywords:** PKK, Northern Iraq, Syria, terror, Turkey

**Introduction: September 11th and Illusion**

The first fact that the events of September 11th proved was that a common decision against the problem of terrorism was overdue. The influential global and national actors of world politics would either sustain their heedless approach of “*My terrorist is good, and your terrorist is good too, as long as he/she acts in my interests*” with great seriousness, or they would agree with full sincerity to act against the phenomenon of terrorism which can easily target any nation, any time and anywhere. Within this context, the USA has not been able to display the capability to wage the war against terrorism outside of its' areas of national interest. Thus it has made clear, by its' failure, that the world cannot achieve a sufficiently secure and honest operation under the control of a single super power. Also, reducing terrorism only to the narrow pattern of “*Islamic terrorism*” and “*Radical Islam*”, the USA has taken the factor of “*a religion which will in no way negotiate by seeing itself in the place of god once it is let go and gathers enough strength*” out of Pandora's box, by attempting to apply the project of “*moderate Islam*” against radical Islam.

This paper studies the policy of “*ethnic violence*” imposed by PKK for 20 years, which has become one of the most violent terrorist organizations in the world due to its terrorist actions in Turkey since 1984. It is observed that the phenomenon of violence experienced in every sphere of life has begun to be a familiar feature of daily life, both to actors who are exposed to it and to those who employ it, including violation of human rights, attacks to national borders, ethnic-religious attacks, domestic power struggles, class contradictions etc. In fact, the of violence to the continuity of social life lies in its “*success*” in portraying itself as threatening dimension “*a natural member of the household*” by surrounding socio-political and even economic relations with its various derivations. The effects of violence on the modern human life can be summarized briefly as follows:

**The phenomenon of violence and definition of terrorism**

*“An action and phenomenon which occurs under concrete conditions, creating concrete situations for concrete victims; however, which produces effects transcending space and time,*

thus concrete results beyond the 'victim'... Concreteness of the practice of violence is without doubt based on a symbolic meaning which also makes it possible to imagine. With its symbolic action which changes cultural codes and especially reconstructs the idea of legitimacy, violence is such a resource in which reality and history are reconstructed involving all the results it includes that it cannot exist without creating a sharp polarization between 'we' and 'they' from which no one can escape and which makes ambiguity possible. That is why violence catches and surrounds not only victims and those applying it, but also all of us who witness it with our own agenda and interpretation." (<http://fef.kou.edu.tr/siddet/n1.html>)

Defining terrorism which is one of the most basic elements of violence and of the use of uncontrolled power is not a simple task, further complicated by national balances of power and conflicts of interests. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a number of propositions so as to demarcate the characteristics and boundaries of terrorism. Firstly, all definitions begin with the reality that no nation "possesses immunity" against the phenomenon of terrorism. Very generally, the FBI defines the act of terrorism as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, civilian population or any segment thereof in furtherance of political or social objectives" (Moghaddam-Marsella, 2004:15). U.S. State Department defines terrorist acts as any politically motivated, planned act on unarmed targets in order to influence or apply pressure upon a certain target group or party (Reich, 1998:282).

In fact, it is possible to define terrorism both as a crime committed against humanity and a type of political war applying a mild-to-moderate degree of violence against the state, and as a strategy which is applied in considerations of international balance (Sloan, 2000:1-7). Discussing violence as a political war waged against a state, Sloan argues that "it is the systematic attempt to undermine a society with the ultimate goal of causing the collapse of law and order and the loss of confidence in the state" (Sloan:7).

### **Terrorism and Turkey: A Brief History:**

Within this context, it is possible to point out that the struggle of the Turkish state with the phenomenon of terrorism originates before the modern Republic. The 1st Wave of Armenian

incidents which occurred between 1905-1915 occurred not only in Istanbul, the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, but also during World War I in many Anatolian cities including the Armenian population. The 2nd Wave of Incidents targeting the leadership of Union and Development Party, exiled following the World War, together constitute the first comprehensive process of terrorism in Turkish history. During the late Ottoman period, the State again attempted to suppress the unrest caused by the Alevite Kurdish groups by arming some of the Sunni Kurdish groups who were in cooperation with the Empire and organizing them under the name of "Hamidiye Legions" (Verimli, 2006:2). The formation of the "Hamidiye Legions" also provided the inspiration for the system of "village guardianship" which has been applied by the governments of contemporary Turkey that took over the "Southeastern Question" from the Ottoman period.

Turkey is the 16th most populous country in the world and 32nd in terms of geographical size, having the largest territory among European countries. Despite a series of economic crises and also being located in one of the most troubled regions of the world, Turkey is among the 20 largest economies of the world, based on GNP.. Due to its' abundance of natural resources and also being situated at the heart of the world's energy corridors, Turkey has repeatedly found itself the focus of political bargaining during successive geo-political re-alignments. Therefore, states which wish to affect the balance of global power do not wish to have a strong Turkey, either to have it as an ally or to exclude it from the bargaining table (Özdiker, 1998:24-32).

Having had the position of one of the "frontier countries" during the Cold War years, Turkey then fell into the atmosphere of terror created by the leftist and rightist organizations. Starting in late 1960s, having its peak in the 1970s-1980s and reaching the level of "mild violent civil war" in its last five years, the atmosphere of ideological conflict claimed the lives of thousands of young people. During the same period, groups of nationalists had been fighting leftist groups (supported by the USSR and other socialist states) that had been attempting the situation lasted until the Military Coup of 12th September 1980 (Tuşalp; 1998:9-207).

The rationale for terrorism experienced in Turkey in those years had not solely been the mild violent civil war. Besides the terrorist organizations within its borders between the years

1973-1980, the Turkish Republic was exposed to the attacks of a left-oriented Armenian terrorist organization "ASALA" which targeted Turkey's embassies and diplomats abroad. 48 of its diplomats and 217 of its citizens had been killed by ASALA over 11 years, during which time Turkey complained of having to "address deaf ears" in Europe (Verimli: 4).

### **Ideological orientation of Öcalan**

The terrorist element that Turkey is presently fighting against is the organization named PKK. PKK's goal is to found a Kurdish state in the southeastern and eastern Anatolian regions of Turkey. Despite its stated focus on Kurdish secession, it applies mass terrorist-suppressive activities regardless of ethnic origin. The group's foundations were laid at a meeting in 1974 involving Abdullah Öcalan, Kesire Yıldırım Öcalan, Cemil Bayık, Kemal Pir<sup>1</sup> and Haki Karaer who had been conducting their activities under the Ankara Higher Education Association (AYÖD). At its inception, PKK adopted the Marxist terminology and ideology of revolutionary struggle. Having followed a silent organizational direction until the mid-1980s, the organizational administration adopted a policy to concealing itself among the Marxist-Leninist Turkish students of non-ethnic objectives, in order not to stand in the forefront and thus not to weaken its supporters during the process until the Military Coup. Having chosen its name as "KADEK (Kurdistan Labor Party)" at a meeting held in Diyarbakır on 27th November 1978, PKK for a long time tried to hide its separatist aims and cover its practice of struggle with the discourse of revolutionary violence rather than ethnic violence. Having used the Turkish revolutionists suppressed by the Coup of September 12th just as a "cover", Öcalan and other administrators, though sometimes encountering troubles with national security forces, succeeded in keeping their silence and concealing their real objectives until the army reinstated civilian rule. Having selected Diyarbakır Prison) which was at full capacity following the Coup of September 12th) for enrollment of members and an ethnicity-oriented training center, the basic strategy of the organization can be summarized as follows:

*"The organization had launched its activities in such southeastern cities as Diyarbakır,*

*Şanlıurfa and Gaziantep. The reasons for selection of these cities by PKK were that: the migration of the proletariat to Gaziantep because of development of industry in this city, rebellion movements in the past in Diyarbakır, and continuation of the feudal structure in Şanlıurfa. ...Having reached full capacity due to the imprisonments following the Military Coup of 1980, Diyarbakır Prison prepared the ground for enrollment activities to the organization. Member of the Central Committee of PKK Kemal Pir had once stated that 'The heart of the struggle for free Kurdistan pounds in Diyarbakır, and the heart of Diyarbakır pounds in the prison' and this statement was an indicator that prisons of Kurdish majorities were turned into training centers."* (Hepsaydir, 2005: www.netpano.com)

In fact the founder and Secretary General of PKK Abdullah Öcalan was a persona in his younger days that can be regarded nationalist-conservative, even fundamentalist. Attending the Maltepe mosque to pray and participating in conferences of anti-communist writers such as Necip Fazıl Kısakürek whilst a student at Tapu Kadastro High School in Ankara, Öcalan (Perinçek, 1991:18) began to endorse communist ideas after he had graduated from the high school. Öcalan was detained on 31st March 1972 at Ankara University Faculty of Political Science for distributing the "Dawn Statement" which had been published by the Turkish Revolutionist Communist Part under the leadership of Doğu Perinçek who was then a research assistant of Public Law. Öcalan had been "so lucky a student from Urfa that he could easily achieve" the government scholarship (Mumcu,1993: 16-28). Öcalan perceived that Turkish socialism would not survive the coup of September 12th and that the provocative nationalist youth prior to the coup would be as repressed as the Marxist organizations. He recognized an opportunity to apply his ethnicity-oriented original "practice of violence". He also correctly guessed that, after taking over power from the army, the civilian ANAP government would downplay any terrorist actions so as not to worsen the tense political atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

In June 1984, the armed propaganda group of the organization was established. The military attack or guerrilla war, as argued to be the basics

<sup>1</sup>Founders of the organization who were not originally Kurds

<sup>2</sup>Primarily the Prime Minister of the time Turgut Özal and many civilian administrators would repeat the illusion for years that PKK "was consisted of only 3-5 rebels on the mountains".

of the struggle by Öcalan, was launched on 15th August 1984 with the attacks at Eruh and Şemdinli. The basic tactic practiced by PKK even during the initial periods of the armed struggle was the practice of known in Turkish history as the “*Balkan resistance groups*”. This practice is very briefly summarized as “*Kill or get killed; Ask Europe for help; If Europe comes to our aid, ask for independence*”. Having been fighting against the Ottoman Empire under resistance groups, Serb, Greek, Bulgarian and Armenian insurgent groups first would attack the Turkish settlers and attract the reaction of the government; when the government intervened to ensure security, they called in European countries that they perceived to be sympathetic to assist them. (Akşin, 1998:21).

### **Development Conditions of PKK**

The dominant objective of Öcalan and the PKK leadership became to undermine the central government and thus to create a power-vacuum and to gain the right of “*self-determination*” from the UN for the Southeastern and Eastern parts of Anatolia by attracting the attention of the international actors to the region of Kurdish population. However, the sole target of the organization was not limited to Turkey. Stating that the party program indicated the territory of the so-called Kurdistan “state-to-be” had been shared by four imperialist states, Yonah noted that the organization posed an open threat to the unitary structures of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran (Yonah, 2002:167). Trying to show the world that it could administer an independent state, the organization also faced the potentially hostile reaction of local people as well as the official institutions of the government with its violent attacks regardless of ethnicity. However, this bloody policy pursued by the organization for the initial 12 years regardless of targets had been, in the most optimistic sense, “*underestimated*” by Turkey’s Western allies. The Secretary general of Amnesty International Perne Sane called PKK an “*armed opposition organization*” on his visit to Turkey on 16th October 1996 (Hürriyet, 15/10/1996), while PKK was free to organize and open representative offices in Greece, France, Belgium, Greek Administration of Southern Cyprus and many other European countries.

The organization conducted armed attacks and also focused on international political activities. One of the Turkish theoreticians of the separatist Kurdish movement, Ismail Beşikçi, empha-

sized the need to carry out every international action and establish an international dialog in parallel with armed struggle, thus attracting the attention of the organization on the civilian side of the struggle (Beşikçi, 1992:57). Therefore PKK is among the terrorist organizations which may be regarded successful in terms of its internal and external organization. Terrorism experts argue that gathering its' strength because of years of economic crises, poverty, rough policies of governments and high unemployment rate, the organization also used the inequality of opportunity between the western and eastern parts of the country as a tool of propaganda. Journalist M. Ali Birand claims that the repressive policies applied by the security forces during the initial period of the fight against terrorism had distanced the local people from the government (Birand, 1992:119). During that period, the GNP per capita in the GAP (Southeastern Anatolia Project) region barely reached 40% of that of Turkey in general.

Serious steps have been taken to eliminate the resources of terrorism and PKK’s human resources. Having been among the 9 greatest development and transformation projects at its launch, the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) was an integrated development model with a budget of 32 billion US dollars. Terrorist activities increased in their intensity in parallel with the project, which aimed to irrigate an area of 17 billion hectares and to generate electric energy of 27 billion kilowatt-hour, have prevented the completion of the project and posed an obstacle to development of the region. By both killing government officials and workers involved in the projects and simultaneously accusing the government on the international level of intentionally perpetuating the poverty of the Southeast, the PKK can be seen to have adopted the opportunist approach pursued by nearly every terrorist organization.

### **Bloody results of the ethnic violence:**

Since the launch of its bloody attacks on 15th August 1984, the organization has killed around 35,000 people from not only security forces of the government, but also from every age group such as women, children and elderly, and injured tens of thousands of people. Among the most interesting types of PKK's basic actions is the violent attacks on Turkish villages located among the Kurdish ones so as to create a Turk-Kurd clash in the country at large, thus preparing

the ground for a civil war. The attack of 4th July 1993 on Başbağlar village in Kemaliye- Erzin-can, which killed 33 civilians, was among the most well-known examples of this type.

However, the sensitivity of both political right and political left since the Military Cop of September 12th not to “encourage” the tense atmosphere in the country, and their success in keeping under control the fierce young people among their supporters have underestimated the strategy of the PKK leadership.

PKK has pursued a systematic campaign against village headmen, mayors, journalists, teachers and Muslim preachers who are known to be government sympathizers. The organization has killed 21 journalists, 23 mayors, 60 headmen, 27 Muslim preachers and 116 teachers so far (HEPSAYDIR, 2005). The number of terrorist attacks increased constantly between the years 1984-1993, reaching a peak in 1993 with 4,118 casualties. In later years, with the re-focusing by the Turkish Armed Forces towards counter-terrorism activities, the number of attacks was reduced sharply. With the detention of Şemdin Sakık (1998) and Abdullah Öcalan (1999) among the leadership of the organization, the number of attacks declined by 40, 16, 11 and 23 percent compared to the preceding year in the last four years before their detainment.

At this point, it is important to observe the basic dynamics that sustained the survival of terrorist organizations. Terrorism experts argue that these dynamics consist of ideology, domestic-international support, human capital that provides the base for the organization and finance. Arguing that “for their survival, organizations require accommodation, nutrition, clothing, treatment, transportation, capability to prepare materials for media and propaganda, weapons, garments and communications; Organizations which cannot secure their needs through law try to meet these requirements through illegal channels” (Alkan, 2007: www.egm.gov.tr), Alkan notes that besides the well-known sources of finance for terrorist organizations such as ransom, human trafficking, usurpation and burglary, PKK also resorted to human trafficking, weapons and the drugs trade.

#### **Financial Resources of the Organization: human-drug trafficking-protection money**

Organized in many countries and mostly in European countries, PKK needed funds not only for procurement of weapons, but also to finance

living in the camps in Northern Iraq and Lebanon, to develop propaganda activities to ensure economic flexibility of political units close to itself. In order to meet the needs of the families of PKK militants killed during the war with government forces and of the requirements of the “professional terrorists” in the mountain cadre, the organization had to maintain a strong cash flow. PKK's commercial activities under various legal guises in Turkey can be uncovered relatively easily. Although the organization is known to conduct limited legitimate commercial activities under the names of private persons, it is well-known that the PKK is unable to resolve its problem of finance by small and medium sized enterprises in Turkey nor via the commercial enterprises it operates in Europe. PKK leaders in Europe first tried carrying refugees abroad and turned the road from Iraq into Germany, France and the Czech Republic into a corridor of human trafficking.

Another finance resource of the organization consists of the protection money under the name of “tax” collected from the Kurdish businessmen who established their enterprises in Turkey or abroad (ÖZTÜRK, 2000:2). Collecting money through publications, newspapers, concerts, low number of usurpations and burglaries, the biggest finance resource of PKK is indeed drug trafficking. The illegal drug trade is attractive to terrorist organizations because the drugs can be easily produced, carried, consumed and converted to money with a high rate of profit. (Özcan, 2000:674-675). Studying the relation of PKK-drug trafficking, Alkan and Demirel make the following statement:

*“It is well-known that the person in PKK responsible for drug trafficking in Turkey and Northern Iraq is the brother of Abdullah Öcalan, Osman Öcalan. Domestic drug trafficking is conducted through workers, young people, villagers and small businessmen who are not out. The international side of this trafficking is sustained through associations established by PKK abroad and cover firms within these associations, and organizations and persons operating illegal drug trafficking with which it has links .”* (Alkan, 2007) (Demirel, 1996:52-54)

PKK is one of the greatest actors of the economic depression in Turkey today, with its' activities being responsible for an estimated economic loss to the Turkish economy of 25 billion US dollars per annum. Requiring hundreds of millions of US dollars every year for procurement of weapons and materials, the organization

succeeded in obtaining a great many of the weapons of previous BAAS soldiers, exploiting the “*process of non-control and anarchy*” following the invasion of Iraq. Settled on the Kandil Mountain and its surroundings in Northern Iraq with 5 thousand of its armed members, PKK has become the nominee for the third dominant power of the Kurdish region.

### **Iraq Problem – Double Standard of the USA**

Due to the respect he showed to the borders of allies, the stakeholder policy he pursued in decision-making processes, and his intense support of Ankara against PKK, Bill Clinton became one of the most notable American presidents and Turkish-American relations peaked during his period in office. However, during the Bush Presidency, both countries have experienced a drop in confidence following the invasion of Iraq. PKK has been included in the “*lists of terrorist organizations*” of both the USA and the European Union since 2002; Reports by British MI5 suggest that PKK is one of the bloodiest terrorist organizations and is no different from Al-Qaeda. Though Turkey expected international attitudes to reflect this situation, Ankara was disappointed by the selection of Kurdish groups as the USA’s supporters which Turkey does not trust at all.

Arguing that the existence of PKK in Northern Iraq made the Kurds in the region and the USA comfortable, Laçiner points out that all parties of interest in the post-Saddam Iraq agree to keep the regional states away: “*However, the local Kurdish powers perceive Turkey as the only actor which would prevent the possible establishment of a Kurdish State. These powers believe that Turkey would be so busy as long as it fights with PKK that it cannot impede their own aims, and thus support the terrorist organization. Furthermore, the strategic partner of Turkey, the USA also tends to use PKK as a trump to avert Turkey from intervening in the region*” (Laçiner, 2006: [www.turkishweekly.net](http://www.turkishweekly.net)). In order to gain flexibility and sustain terrorist activities, giving an open check to every state and/or power which approaches it, PKK impedes both Turkey and Iran from focusing on Iraq by incurring a public reaction in both countries to the casualties.

### **Conclusion: Turkey’s Test with its History**

The fact that the recently emerging propensity towards anti-American and anti-EU views in Turkey has not only limited to the propaganda of the nationalist side in the country, but also influenced CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, the Republican People's Party) which has for so long implemented the policy of integration with the West, obliges all Western powers to revise their policies towards Turkey. Otherwise, presenting a “*model country*” for the ongoing modernization projects for 3rd World countries, if Turkey is transformed into a model of so-called “*moderate Islam*” in parallel with the wishes of the Bush administration and some EU members, all Western powers and mostly the USA will add a new practice to their history, which may be summarized as “*Creating the enmity with your own hands and then falling into social paranoia because of its existence*” which has been witnessed in Somali, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It must not be forgotten that terrorism has been a natural outcome of years of political instability, political powers substituting each other that do not abstain from weakening central authority for the favor of their own interests and poverty, corruption and unemployment which have become daily routines. Government officials must primarily cease referring to the problem via the narrow concept of the “*Southeastern problem*” but try to develop holistic approaches to integrate all Kurdish citizens all over the country as well as those living in the Southeast. Arguing that violence deepens the polarization and hatred in the society, Laçiner suggests that the individual must be provided a space in which he/she can escape from the social polarization and where he/she can travel among the options and possibilities. (Gürses, 1997:117)

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