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Responses to Information Requests

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Turkey: The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), including areas of operation and targets, methods of recruitment and activities; state response

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. General Information

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK) was established in 1978 aiming to create an independent Kurdish state (Canada 22 Dec. 2010; US 2 Feb. 2012, 11, 40). It began an armed struggle in 1984 (AA 4 May 2012; MRG [2011]; US 2 Feb. 2012, 11). According to a US Congressional Research Service (CRS) report, demands of the separatist group have evolved from complete separatism for Kurds to "greater cultural and political autonomy" (ibid.). Sources note that PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan began negotiations with the Turkish government in 2012 (ibid., 40; Milan 22 Mar. 2012), with separatism being discounted as a resolution (US 2 Feb. 2012, 40). International Crisis Group similarly states that the PKK is looking for a "future of Turkish Kurds within Turkey" (20 Sept. 2011, 2). GlobalSecurity.org, an online information source on defence, space, intelligence, and homeland security (n.d.a), also notes that in 2009, one PKK leader indicated that the PKK is "seeking local autonomy (3 June 2009).

The PKK has been designated a terrorist organization by some states and organizations, including Turkey (Milan 22 Mar. 2012), the European Union (EU) (AA 4 May 2012; Milan 22 Mar. 2012), the US (ibid.; US 2 Feb. 2012, 1; AA 4 May 2012), and Canada (Canada 22 Dec. 2010; Milan 22 Mar. 2012). The PKK is also known as Kongra-Gel and Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) (GlobalSecurity.org n.d.b; Canada 22 Dec. 2010), among other names (ibid.).

According to International Crisis Group, the PKK consists of 3,000 to 5,000 insurgents from northern Iraq and Turkey (20 Sept. 2011, 2). An article published by the Umut Foundation, an Istanbul-based organization promoting peace, conciliation and individual disarmament (n.d.), mentions information provided by a terror expert briefing parliamentary deputies on the PKK, which indicates that in the 2000s, PKK membership approximated 6,000 (14 Feb. 2012). The expert also noted that, in decreasing order, the following provinces are the largest providers of PKK members: Diyarbakir, Mardin, Van and Hakkâri (Umut Foundation 14 Feb. 2012).

The dominant PKK leader is Abdullah Öcalan (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 1; US 2 Feb. 2012, 40) who is in a Turkish prison serving a life sentence; the acting PKK leader is Murat Karayılan (ibid.). According to International Crisis Group, Öcalan's capture has led to a "multiplication of power centres" for the PKK, including among insurgents in the field, in northern Iraq headquarters, Turkish jails, and among Kurds in Europe (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 2).

Since the start of the fighting between the PKK and the Turkish government, there have been reportedly at least 30,000 deaths (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 1; MRG [2011]; US n.d.), with GlobalSecurity.org placing the number of deaths at 40,000 (3 June 2009). Anadolu Agency (AA), a national government news agency, reports that some of the casualties include soldiers, policemen, village guards, teachers, and engineers (AA 4 May 2012).

1.1 Areas of Operation and Targets of the PKK

Sources indicate that the majority of events, such as fighting, concerning the PKK occur in eastern Turkey (IDMC Apr. 2012, 71; Professor 23 May 2012; EU 2012, 24), in Kurdish dominated areas (ibid.; Professor 23 May 2012). BBC reports that the province of Bitlis, in south east Turkey, is a "stronghold" for the PKK (24 Mar. 2012). Sources note that the PKK has bases in northern Iraq (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 1; US 18 Aug. 2011) and "uses safe havens in northern Iraq to coordinate and launch attacks" (ibid. 2 Feb. 2012, 11).

In 23 May 2012 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political science, and the Thomas G. Strong Chair of Middle East Politics at Missouri University, stated that PKK targets include informants, village guards, and local level government officials (Professor 23 May 2012). *US Country Reports on Terrorism 2010* indicates that the main targets of the PKK are Turkish security forces (US 18 Aug. 2011). The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), which is a centre of excellence of the US Department of Homeland Security based at the University of Maryland and maintains a database with information on terrorist incidents around the world (n.d.a), lists the following targets of the PKK during 2010: military; transportation, private citizens and property; utilities; religious figures and institutions; police, government; and businesses (START n.d.b). Public Safety Canada notes that the PKK attacks the Turkish military, diplomats and businesses, both in Turkey as well as in parts of Europe, and has also kidnapped tourists and bombed Turkish resorts (Canada 22 Dec. 2010).

1.2 Recruitment

The political science professor indicated that the PKK has "political cadres" in villages, towns and cities responsible for recruiting people (Professor 23 May 2012). In the professor's opinion, PKK recruitment is not forced, since that might cause the alienation of Kurdish communities from the movement (ibid.). Information on forced recruitment between 2009 and 2012 could not be found among sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Press TV, an English-language Iranian international news network based in Tehran, indicates that, according to a report by the International Terrorism and Transnational Crime Research Center based in Ankara, the Turkish government has been initiating educational programs in the east and southeast of the country through the police and teachers, trying to stop the PKK from succeeding in their recruitment (4 Feb. 2012). Similarly, the *US Country Report on Terrorism 2010* notes that the National Police has an "outreach" program to communities affected by terrorist conflict, which includes attempts to "alter group dynamics and prevent recruitment" (US 18 Aug. 2011). The police also run programs for trainers, psychologists, coaches and religious leaders so they can "undermine radical messages" and stop recruitment (ibid.).

A European Police Office (Europol) report notes that the PKK has a recruiting network throughout Europe (EU 2012, 24). Reuters reports that in February 2010, Italian police arrested 11 people involved in a network recruiting and training Kurds for the PKK, based on an investigation that took place in Italy and France (26 Feb. 2010).

1.3. Recruitment of Children

According to the information provided by the terror expert in the Umut Foundation's article, 43.68 percent of mountain fighters of the PKK are under the age of 18, and with a minimum age of 9 (Umut Foundation 14 Feb. 2012). Press TV indicated in December 2011 that the PKK reportedly kidnapped five children in the province of Hakkari; the children would be trained in camps, learning how to use weapons and explosives (ibid. 6 Dec. 2011). Another media article by *Today's Zaman*, an English-language newspaper based in Istanbul, reports that many volunteer imams put pressure on families to make their children join the PKK and indicates that an incident had occurred at a village in Erzurum, where a volunteer imam was "sent away" for asking a villager to make one of his sons join the PKK (29 Mar. 2012).

Anadolu Agency reports that according to data from the Turkish Police Department's Anti-Terror Desk, the PKK has been "using children," youth under the age of 18, during illegal meetings and demonstrations, including for throwing Molotov cocktails, fireworks, firecrackers and explosives at Turkish security officers (AA 4 May 2012). According to the data, between 1 May 2009 and 22 July 2010, security forces arrested 1,727 children in 799 terror incidents; and, between 23 July 2010 and 16 November 2011, they arrested 2,148 children (ibid.). Bianet, an Istanbul-based news source, reports in a February 2009 article that at least 107 children were arrested by police during protests against the arrest of PKK leader Ocalan (17 Feb. 2009). The article also notes that in 2006 and 2007, the Ministry of Justice had tried more than 1500 children with terrorist charges (bianet 17 Feb. 2009).

Further information on child recruitment could not be found among sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.4 Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK)

International Crisis Group reports that the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Ciwakên Kürdistan, KCK), "an umbrella organisation for all PKK affiliates in Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the diaspora", was formed by the PKK during congresses in northern Iraq between 2005 and 2007 (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 28, 38). According to International Crisis Group, PKK leaders Ocalan and Karayilan hold leadership roles in the KCK (ibid., 28). Sources noted that the PKK created the KCK with

the purpose to serve as a "parallel government" (ibid., 28 note 261; Professor 23 May 2012). Human Rights Watch reports that according to Turkish authorities, the KCK is the PKK's "urban wing" (22 Jan. 2012). Similarly, the political science professor stated that the KCK is the PKK's "urban non-violent" organization (23 May 2012).

Jane's Intelligence Review noted that in December 2009 and early 2010, "hundreds of non-violence Kurdish nationalists were arrested and charged with membership of PKK front organizations" (7 Sept. 2010). According to the professor, there are thousands of KCK members that were imprisoned and are awaiting trial (23 May 2012). Similarly, Human Rights Watch reports that there are thousands of people, including party activists, mayors, lawyers, journalists, human rights defenders, and an academic, that are on trial or in pre-trial detention, accused of being part of the PKK or the KCK (22 Jan. 2012). International Crisis Group also reports that there were more than 3,000 Kurdish activists linked to the KCK placed behind bars since 2009, with the majority arrested for "the peaceful expression of their opinion" (20 Sept. 2011, 9). *Hurriyet Daily News* reports that on 8 May 2012, Turkish police arrested 28 people during operations against the KCK in the provinces of Istanbul, Ankara, Diyarbakir, Eskisehir and Muş (*Hurriyet Daily News* 9 May 2012).

A PhD candidate in the Department of War Studies at King's College in London wrote in a March 2012 article published by the Jamestown Foundation that the ongoing November 2011 "crackdown" by the Turkish government on the KCK also had an effect on the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP), the main Kurdish political party, as several members of the party were arrested for "alleged affiliation" with the KCK (Milan 22 Mar. 2012). Human Rights Watch similarly notes that in 2011 members of the BDP were in detention on terrorism charges for alleged association with the KCK (2012).

2. PKK Attacks

US Country Reports on Terrorism 2010 notes that the PKK's usual tactics include ambushing military patrols in rural areas, using improvised explosive devices (IEDs) along security forces routes, and bombing security and civilian targets in urban areas (US 18 Aug. 2011). The political science professor noted that since 2009, the PKK has been involved in a number of "skirmishes" with security forces, as well as initiated IED attacks, and terrorist bombings (23 May 2012).

Sources report that the PKK increased its attacks in June 2010 (US 18 Aug. 2011; *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7 Sept. 2010; International Crisis Group 1 July 2010). International Crisis Group reports that a minimum of 40 soldiers and militants were killed by the middle of the month (ibid.). *US Country Reports on Terrorism 2010* notes that from May through October 2010 the PKK increased its violent activity, listing three of the attacks:

- June 2010, bombing at a bus stop in Istanbul killed 5 and wounded 13 persons;
- September 2010, attacked a minivan in Hakkari killing 10 civilians;
- November 2010, suicide bomber in Istanbul injured 15 police officers and 17 civilians (US 18 Aug. 2011).

International Crisis Group reports that on 4 May 2011 the PKK attacked the election bus of Turkey's Prime Minister, killing a policeman; this was followed by attacks on military outposts (20 Sept. 2011, 3). The US CRS report notes that after the June 2011 national elections, the clashes between the Turkish forces and the PKK "intensified," with the PKK targeting both civilians and the military (US 2 Feb. 2012, 22). Similarly, Human Rights Watch indicates in their *World Report 2012* that in July 2011 the PKK increased attacks against the police and military (2012). In contrast, Europol reports that although there were several attacks by the PKK in Turkey, the overall number had decreased (EU 2012, 24). Attack tactics included booby-traps and armed attacks against the military, security services and border police (ibid.).

International Crisis Group also notes in a report that the PKK increased its activities in August and September 2011 (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 4). According to International Crisis Group, around 30 security personnel were killed in PKK attacks in August 2011 (ibid. 1 Sept. 2011). Incidents mentioned in the report include the following:

- an attack on a police station in Diyarbakir province, which left several soldiers and police dead;
- two off-duty police officers were killed in Hakkari province;
- seized and executed a Village Guard militia man in Tunceli province;
- fired machine guns during a football game in Tunceli province, killing a policeman and his wife, and injuring eight other spectators;
- an ambush of a military convoy near Hakkari, which left eight soldiers and one militiaman dead (ibid. 20 Sept. 2011, 4).

3. Other Criminal Activities of the PKK

According to Europol, the PKK uses Europe as a "logistical support base for funding, recruitment, training and propaganda" (EU 2012, 24). The main crimes of the PKK in Europe are extortion, money laundering, facilitating illegal immigration, drugs and human trafficking (ibid.).

3.1 Narcotrafficking

In an April 2011 press release, the US Department of the Treasury reports that in May 2008, the Kongra-Gel, "[f]ormerly known as" the PKK, was designated as a "significant foreign narcotics trafficker" (US 20 Apr. 2011). On 20 April 2011, five Kongra-Gel leaders were also added the "Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers" list (ibid.). AA reports that Turkey's EU Minister and Chief Negotiator for EU talks stated that the PKK controls the largest human and illicit drug-trafficking network in Europe (AA 9 Nov. 2011).

According to the US Department of the Treasury, the PKK uses its European network to "produce, transport, and traffic opiates and cannabis," using the proceeds for funding (US 20 Apr. 2011). However, according to the terror expert mentioned by the Umut Foundation, the PKK does not directly deal with drug trafficking, but benefits indirectly through "'sponsorship'" (Umut Foundation 14 Feb. 2012).

3.2 Kidnapping

International Crisis Group reports that on 9 July 2011 the PKK kidnapped two soldiers and one health worker during a roadblock (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 3). The PKK also reportedly kidnapped more than 12 people in August and September 2011 (ibid., 4). The political science professor noted that the PKK had kidnapped ruling-party Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and municipal officials (23 May 2012). *Hurriyet Daily News* reports that on 14 May 2012 the PKK kidnapped the Kulp district chairman of the AKP in Diyarbakir province, and are reportedly still holding another chairman in captivity (*Hurriyet Daily News* 21 May 2012). The same article reports that the PKK also kidnapped a village head along with five guards in the province of Bitlis, claiming that the guards were being "'arrested'" for "crimes" against the PKK (ibid.).

3.3 Oil Pipeline Attacks

Jane's Intelligence Review reported that in 2010, the PKK began targeting oil and natural gas pipelines; all the lines appear to be associated with the Turkish government or the countries supporting the government against the PKK, including Iran and Iraq (*Jane's Intelligence Review* 7 Sept. 2010). Jane's lists six attacks on pipelines between 3 July 2010 and 10 August 2010 (ibid.). Media sources reported two PKK pipeline attacks in 2012, one in April (*Today's Zaman* 5 Apr. 2012; AKNEWS 5 Apr. 2012) and one in May (*Hurriyet Daily News* 5 June 2012).

3.4 Fraud

An article published by *Hurriyet Daily News* in May 2012 claims that members of the PKK played a role in a nationwide fake export ring and a fictitious bank, which managed to extort hundreds of millions of Turkish Liras (TRY) [1 TRY= 0.56 CAD (XE 12 June 2012)] (2 May 2012). Corroboration could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Government Response

The political science professor indicated that, since 2009, the Turkish government has been following a military strategy against the PKK, which includes military and police operations, airstrikes, and mass arrests of "non-violent" KCK members (Professor 23 May 2012). At the end of October 2011, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) reported that the Turkish government is leading a "campaign of arrest and judicial harassment" against the PKK and KCK, which is also affecting "peaceful" Kurdish activists (25 Oct. 2011). According to the US CRS report, Western governments and NGOs have criticized Turkish military strategies against the PKK, saying that they are "overly hard on ethnic Kurds - thousands have been imprisoned for PKK involvement or sympathies and hundreds of thousands have been displaced" (US 2 Feb. 2012, 11). However, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), an organization established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council to monitor internal displacement worldwide, indicated that no internal displacement was reported after the 2011 fighting between the PKK and the Turkish government, as opposed to the approximately one million people who were displaced throughout the 1980s and 1990s (IDMC Apr. 2012, 6, 71). The IDMC indicates that the Turkish armed forces are supported by "'village guard' militias" in their fight against the PKK (ibid.).

Sources indicate that, in reaction to attacks by the PKK, Turkish authorities have bombed PKK bases in northern Iraq in June 2010 (International Crisis Group 1 July 2010) and in August 2011 (ibid. 1 Sept. 2011; Human Rights Watch 2012). According to the US CRS report, because of the increase in PKK attacks after June 2011, the Turkish government has "increased air and artillery attacks on PKK safe havens in Iraq, aided by intelligence-sharing from the United States, and has reportedly involved ground forces across the border" (US 2 Feb. 2012, 22). Similarly, IDMC notes that in 2011 "cross-border operations against Kurdish targets in Iraq intensified" (Apr. 2012, 71).

Press TV reports that the Turkish military has been launching "massive" military operations against the PKK since October 2011 in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq (4 Feb. 2012). Similarly, the BBC notes that in October 2011 the Turkish government began a "major air and land offensive" against the PKK after an ambush resulted in the death of 24 soldiers (BBC 30 Dec. 2011). BBC reports that in the last week of December 2011, the government's airstrike on the Kurdish town of Uludere in Sirnak province resulted in the death of 35 civilians who were reportedly smugglers and not members of the PKK, the military's target (BBC 30 Dec. 2011). On November 2011, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty reported that the Turkish Prime Minister

announced that the US government had agreed to supply Turkey with Predator drones in their fight with the PKK (7 Nov. 2011). The *Huffington Post* similarly reports that in May 2012 the US had agreed to sell Predator drones to Turkey, with the approval of Congress; the US had also deployed four drones into Turkey in 2011 (21 May 2012).

The BBC reports that in March 2012 Turkish forces initiated a "large-scale" operation against the PKK, using helicopter gunships, in the province of Sirnak near Mount Cudi, where clashes resulted in the deaths of six police officers and seven PKK members (22 Mar. 2012). In April 2012, according to Dogan News Agency, Turkish security forces retaliated against the PKK following attacks on military bases in the province of Hakkari (27 Apr. 2012).

4.1 PKK Arrests, Deaths, and Surrenders

Europol reports that in 2011 arrests were made in France, Germany, and Romania of PKK affiliated individuals raising funds for guerrilla operations in Turkey, camps in northern Iraq, and training and propaganda camps in Europe (EU 2012, 24). *Today's Zaman* reports that in March 2012 the Sanliurfa Police Department counterterrorism units arrested seven people, after simultaneous anti-PKK operations, accusing them of spreading pro-PKK propaganda (29 Mar. 2012). Agence France-Presse reports that in April 2012, a suspected former financial manager of the PKK was arrested in Germany (29 April 2012). According to the Anadolu Agency, six PKK terrorists surrendered to security forces in the town of Silopi, in Sirnak in May 2012; they were reportedly to undergo interrogation (AA 14 May 2012).

There are reports on the death of PKK militants following clashes with Turkish authorities, including the following:

- The army killed 7 PKK fighters in Tunceli and 12 near Sirnak, over the Iraq border, during ambushes in early May 2011 (International Crisis Group 20 Sept. 2011, 3).
- On 7 May 2012 gendarme forces killed two PKK members in the province of Siirt (AFP 8 May 2012; AA 8 May 2012).
- On 8 May 2012, five PKK members were killed by security forces in Bitlis province (ibid.; AFP 8 May 2012).
- On 24 May 2012, 15 female PKK members were killed in the southeastern province of Bitlis during clashes with security forces (BBC 24 Mar. 2012).
- Seven PKK rebels and six police officers died in clashes in the province of Sirnak near Mount Cudi in May 2012 (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: An academic writing for KurdishMedia.com did not reply within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts to contact an associate professor at San Francisco State University, an author currently researching the PKK, and the Washington Kurdish Institute were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: American Kurdish Information Network; Amnesty International; Center for Defence Information; Child Rights Information Network; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers; ecoinet; EurasiaNet.org; European Union – Consilium; *Intelligence Quarterly*; International Terrorism and Transnational Crime Research Center; Kurdish Human Rights Project; Middle East Information Center; *The Muslim World*; Small Arms Survey; UN – Children's Fund, Committee on the Rights of the Child, Refworld.

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