# WHEN STRATEGY COLLAPSES

## THE PKK'S URBAN TERRORIST CAMPAIGN

Murat Yeşiltaş, Necdet Özçelik

SETA



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# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| AK Party | : Justice and Development Party |
| ANFO | : Ammonium Nitrate and Fuel Oil |
| ATGM | : Anti-Tank Guided Missile |
| BDP | : Democratic Regions Party |
| CHP | : Republican People's Party |
| DAESH | : Islamic State of Iraq and Sham |
| DISK | : Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey |
| DKP | : Revolutionary Communist Party |
| FSA | : Free Syrian Army |
| GSM | : Global System for Mobile Communications |
| HBDH | : People's United Revolutionary Movement |
| HDP | : People's Democratic Party |
| HPG | : Public Defense Forces |
| IED | : Improvised Explosive Device |
| KADEK | : Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan |
| KCK | : Kurdistan Communities Union |
| KESK | : Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions |
| KKK | : Kurdistan Democratic Confederalism |
| KONGRA-GEL | : People's Congress |
| MANPADS | : Man-Portable Air-Defense Systems |
| MHP | : Nationalist Movement Party |
| MKP | : Maoist Communist Party of Turkey |
| MLKP | : Marxist-Leninist Communist Party |

NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OES : Operation Euphrates Shield

PA : Public Affairs

PK : Plemyot Kalanikova

PKK : Kurdistan Workers' Party

PSYOPs : Psychological Operations

PYD : Democratic Union Party

RPG : Rocket-Propelled Grenade

SETA : Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research

STM : Defense Technology Engineering Company

SVBIED : Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device

SVD : Snayperskaya Vintovka Dragunova

SVEST : Suicide Vest

TAK : Kurdistan Freedom Falcons

THKP-C/MLSPB : People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit

TKEP-L : Communist Labor Party of Turkey-Leninist

TKP/ML : Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist–Leninist

TNT : Trinitrotoluene

TOW : Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wireless-Guided

UAV : Unmanned Air vehicle

U.S. : United States

VBIED : Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device

YDG-H : Youth Movement of Patriotic Revolution

YPG : People's Defense Units

YPS : Civil Protection Units

# FOREWORD

Terrorism has become a global phenomenon over the past two decades. There exists a wide range of transnational terrorist groups that target nation-states and aim to deter national security structures. Unfortunately, Turkey is one of those nation-states that has had its fair share of the terrorism phenomenon. Today, one can name three major terrorist organizations, the PKK, DAESH and the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ), that continuously try to destabilize the Turkish state and instill fear among Turkish citizens. DAESH, which produces so-called religious claims; FETÖ, which appears to be a pro-dialogue and moderate group; and the outlawed PKK, which often manipulates secular and ethnic humanist values for its advantage pose critical security challenges that no other democracy has yet encountered. Among these terrorist organizations, the PKK is perhaps the most abrasive since it has long occupied the public and military discourses on terrorism in the country. Furthermore, the terrorist group views itself as a regional player, pursues a pan-Kurdish agenda and a derailed reconciliation policy on the Syrian civil war. However, thanks to the profound feeling of social unity inspired by the July 15 triumph of democracy, it is important to note that the fight against terrorism has made significant progress in Turkey.

It is no secret that the ongoing violent turmoil in the Middle East has encouraged and inspired many terrorist groups towards implementing fatal action plans. The PKK was among those who saw an opportunity in revising its conventional terrorism strategy. This book is a timely and articulate evaluation of the PKK's failed urban terrorist campaign. It contains a wealth of information and intriguing analyses regarding the terrorist group's changing organizational structure and urban warfare tactics in the post-Arab Spring period. Besides being a much-needed publication that eloquently assesses urban counterterrorism strategies, it constitutes a very informative and intriguing

source for those who are involved in other areas of terrorism studies. Although this work focuses on the PKK's technical and ideological modus operandi between 2015 and 2016, it contains much that will be of interest to those who are eager to gain an in-depth knowledge of the terrorist group's activities, its changing dynamics, and long-term goals in Turkey and Syria.

What makes this work exceptionally unique is that it embodies the technical expertise of a former TAF member, who has a vast first-hand irregular warfare experience in the Middle East, and the overarching perspective of an academic, whose work has been much cited and celebrated internationally by many in the security domain. The authors, Murat Yeşiltaş and Necdet Özçelik, are distinguished and prominent experts on the PKK discourse in Turkey. The content of their work is divided into five chapters, each providing essential and thought-provoking analyses and assessments regarding the TAF's urban PKK confrontation. The authors, most candidly and compellingly, explain the context and causes of the PKK's urban failure. The final chapter, especially, contains quite valuable remarks as it yields significant lessons learned from the TAF- PKK confrontation in eastern Turkey.

It is unavoidably evident that Turkey's fight against terrorism is a long journey that requires meticulous planning and unyielding commitment. As this work delicately elaborates on the TAF's counterterrorism efforts, we must acknowledge and appreciate the national progress made in the fight against terrorism under the Erdoğan administration. I would like to thank the eminent authors as well as the contributors and editors who made this much-anticipated and eye-opening publication possible. I am confident that their work will make valuable contributions to the understanding of the PKK's terrorist campaign and its truthful publicization worldwide.

Prof. Burhanettin Duran
*SETA General Coordinator*

# INTRODUCTION

Turkey's latest cross-border military operations in Syria, against DAESH (also known as ISIS) and the PKK/YPG, demonstrate the country's reaction against the changing nature of violent non-state actors' terrorist campaigns. Compared to other world states, unfortunately, Turkey faces a wide range of terrorism dimensions. This variety of terrorist dimensions keeps Turkey busy explaining its righteous causes, such as seeking stability on domestic and regional grounds. The multiplicity in terrorist threats is the first dimension that should be taken into consideration when analyzing Turkey's fight against terrorism. Turkey has been fighting against the PKK/PYD, the DHKP/C and other radical terrorist groups for many years. The second dimension is the diversity in the organizational characteristics of terrorist organizations. The different ideologies, organizational structures and modus operandi of the terrorist groups have diversified the threat range targeting Turkey. The newly emerging security environment, especially due to the post-Syrian civil war period, is another dimension that extends from rural to urban areas, and stretches from national territory to extraterritorial security environments – and it is crucial in examining Turkey's counter-terrorism strategy. Another dimension is the complex relations between different terrorist organizations, and the relationship between terrorist organizations and their external supporters. In the PKK case, direct and indirect sponsorship of foreign states in terms of providing safe haven, political support, military equipment and fundraising opportunities constitute the critical components of sustaining its violent tactics against Turkey. The new partnership trend between terrorist organizations became an alarming case in Turkey's post-2015 political climate when the PKK was forming its new vio-

lent strategy and terror tactics. The last dimension regards Turkey's self-capacity and the international cooperation against terrorism.

Turkey's fight against the PKK has a long history and projects the multidimensional arguments mentioned above. Neither Turkey's reactive approach to PKK violence nor the PKK's protracted rural terror strategy has been able to let either side claim a complete victory in the last four decades. The hope for a diplomatic and peaceful solution to PKK terrorism was also seen to fade amidst the PKK's political exploitation and the government's de-securitized approach during the attempted solution process between 2012 and 2015.[1] The PKK's resumption of armed violence in 2015 raised the bar for Turkey and led the country to fight against terrorism with more decisive and effective means, and in cooperation with all relevant actors. Examining the PKK's resumption of violence with its newly adopted and differentiated strategy serves to better understand the depth of Turkey's current counter-terrorism efforts. The armed program (modus operandi) is one of the three important authenticating approaches of identifying a violent non-state organization.[2] The other characteristics evolve around two dimensions: ideology and organizational structure. Despite the fact that violent non-state actors voluntarily publicize their ideology, their armed strategies and organizational structures remain concealed due to the secrecy of their violent actions. However, a close glimpse of the PKK's armed tactics reveals its short-term objectives. The combination of its objectives helps us understand the operational trend, and then more importantly, the master strategy of a particular terrorist organization. Therefore, understanding the armed strategy of

[1] Ali Balcı and Tuncay Kardaş, "Inter-Societal Security Trilemma in Turkey: Understanding the Failure of the 2009 Kurdish Opening", *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2016.

[2] Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, *Non-State Armed Groups in the Middle East: Ideology, Geopolitics and Strategy*, Palgrave McMillan, 2017.

the multilateral, complex and diverse nature of a violent non-state armed group helps reveal its strength and weakness.[3]

This book aims to explain the modus operandi of the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the U.S., and to demonstrate how the PKK relies on the manipulation of the physical and psychological impacts of its urban attacks, whose aim is to expand its diverse area of operations.

The PKK, as a pragmatic terrorist group, is capable of adapting itself to different security environments to pursue its ideological and long-term objectives. Its armed strategy shapes the domestic security environment in Turkey and has been reshaped by the developments in the regional security and political atmosphere in the post-Arab Spring era in the Middle East. The PKK has adopted the "Protracted People's War Strategy" to achieve its strategic goals through several stages.[4] If the PKK's armed program were to be divided into phases along its history, the first stage is seen between 1984 and 1990 and is influenced by the Iraq-Iran War, the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and the Turkish political and institutional transformation following the coup d'état in 1980. This was the perfect course for the PKK to start its armed campaign to be recognized domestically, regionally and internationally. Contrary to the Maoist *strategic defense* aspect, the PKK acted proactively to develop its armed capacity for a large-scale armed campaign. The Gulf War in 1991 and its aftermath provided the PKK with many opportunities to develop its organizational growth. Even though the PKK aimed to initiate its *strategic balance* and then move to the *strategic offense* stage, Turkish counter-terrorism activities suppressed the PKK's back-and-forth armed surge during this period. The regional developments such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 paved the

[3] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Columbia University Press, 2008.

[4] Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK (Kürdistan İçşi Partisi): Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi*, ASAM Yayınları, 1999.

way for the PKK to adopt a new character through the formation of the PYD in 2003 and the establishment of the KCK in 2005.[5] The PKK's "democratic confederalism" rhetoric under the KCK organization is the driving force behind the resumption of the violence in Turkey in 2015.[6]

The PKK's strategy of urban warfare started in the third quarter of 2015, and lasted until mid-2016. It brought in the practice of a locally arranged theater of operations, which were carried out, in the initial attempts of the surge, in Silvan, Sur, Nusaybin, Cizre, Yüksekova, and Şırnak. Attempting to isolate certain zones in eastern Turkey, the PKK projected to consolidate its resources in these zones in order to build up military capabilities and gain people's support to spread the surge over other areas. The PKK's challenge in different zones also aimed to force the government to disperse security forces in multiple areas of operations and prevent them from unifying their efforts and operational initiatives. This aim would culminate in a large scale people's war by the PKK and its adjacent elements. The PKK prepared for urban warfare based on a defensive tactic: suburbs were selected where people's grievances could easily be manipulated in order to support the PKK's cause. Moreover, the locally recruited youngsters were used for digging trenches and building barricades across streets to challenge the state authority by physically isolating urban zones.

This book focuses on the PKK's urban surge strategy by particularly underlining the causes, processes and consequences in relation to the changing nature of PKK terrorism in post-2015 Turkish politics. The first chapter examines the PKK's urban strategy within the scope of the PKK's changing terrorism perception by focusing on the domestic and regional political and security contexts.

[5] "KCK Örgütlenme Modeli ve Amacı", Analiz, *Stratejik Düşünce Enstitüsü*, July 2011.

[6] "Dördüncü stratejik mücadele dönemi-4 Devrimci Halk Savaşı'nın hedefleri", *Serxwebun*, January 2017.

The second chapter describes and categorizes the PKK's violent tactics and its target selection methods within the framework of the urban conflict between 2015 and 2016. The correlations of the attacks and the target and security environments are explained in the third chapter, which suggests how the PKK's strategy can be categorized during implementation. The causes of the PKK's strategy are explained in the fourth chapter by focusing mainly on the vital parameters of the PKK's capacity-handling skills. The fourth chapter also discusses the main factors that shape the failure of the PKK's urban tactics. The fifth chapter suggests how to study the nature of the PKK and the lessons at tactical, operational and strategic levels for Turkey in the fight against the PKK.

The 817 attacks conducted by the PKK between July 20, 2015 and December 31, 2016 were analyzed to bring an empirical perspective to this study. Information about the attacks was obtained from open sources such as the media, official statements and other local sources. The information was grouped according to the attack type, target selection and the security environment; each had different variables and required a correlation to better understand the logic of the violence patterns. Thus, each variable was coded in order to be evaluated through computer software. The Terrorism Analysis Platform (TAP) developed by SETA and STM contributed greatly to the study by outlining the interrelations between the attack categories and the geolocations of terrorist attacks. In the second chapter, the methodology of the study is explained; the study is presented in the third chapter. The book does not contain casualty analyses.

CHAPTER 1

# **MAKING SENSE OF THE PKK'S URBAN TERRORISM:** DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

In order to make sense of the PKK's urban terrorism and its changing nature, it is necessary to look at how the domestic, regional and international dynamics in the post-Arab Spring era has shaped the PKK's overall terrorism strategy against Turkey. The post-2011 regional security environment determined by the Syrian crisis transformed the PKK's strategy towards Turkey.[7] The conflict environment carved out by DAESH's expansionism in Syria has brought an explicit change in the character of the nationalist Kurdish politics on a regional scale and helped to constitute a new "public enemy" among Kurds. This also yielded a fracture of the PKK's strategy towards Turkey. The first sign of this development was Abdullah Öcalan's statement during an interview with his lawyers in prison on İmralı Island, which was published in February 2011. In this statement, drawing on the incidents in Tahrir Square in Egypt, Öcalan said, "If the solution is not realized [in Turkey], Diyarbakır could be ten times Tahrir Square… If Diyarbakır desires so, it could make that happen easily." This led to the claim that Öcalan emphasized 'action.'[8]

Within the framework of the new period's strategy, the PKK felt the need to establish a strategic organization that would be political in nature and based on "urban force" and, at the same

[7] Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş, "Global Politics of Image: The Making of Kurdish Geopolitics, The ISIS and 'The Secular West' in the Middle East", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, December 2017; Galip Dalay, "Kurdish Politics amid the Fight against the ISIS- Can a Common Cause Surmount Old Rivalries?", *Al Jazeera Center for Studies*, 7 February 2016; Cengiz Gunes and Robert Lowe, "The Impact of the Syrian War on Kurdish Politics across the Middle East", July 2015, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150723SyriaKurdsGunesLowe.pdf.

[8] Abdullah Öcalan, "Önümüzdeki günlerde açıklama yapacağım", *Rojbaş*, February 20, 2011, https://rojbas.wordpress.com/category/abdullah-ocalan/page/3/.

time, would also be capable of using violence by remobilizing its militant structure. As a matter of fact, the KCK (Koma Ciwaken Kürdistan – Kurdistan Communities Union) that was formed by the PKK in 2005, aimed at serving such a purpose.[9] It stands out that, in this period, both Öcalan and the KCK made statements declaring that "in case a 'democratic constitutional solution' could not be provided, a 'new defensive war' or a 'revolutionary people's war,'[10] by name based on insurrection and rebellion will step in."[11] Hence, the fourth strategic period was deemed unlikely to be a period of peace.[12]

The PKK's new aforementioned strategic reading was firmly transformed by the deepening of the Syrian crisis and the strength gained by DAESH in northern Syria. The PKK, in this period,

[9] Initially, the KCK was perceived as the PKK's 'urban structure' in public. However, later, this structure proved to be an attempt to set an organizational model, which was "aimed at a structuring like a state" beyond the mentioned definition. Through the KCK model, the PKK did not dismiss armed struggle as an instrument and aimed to hold sway in local administrations. As a result, the opinion was formed among the public that with the KCK structure the PKK aimed at generating growing and phased mass mobilizations through its urban-based organizations within the scope of the former's fundamental strategy. In this way, the PKK would ensure the sharpening of social segregation and radicalization.

[10] Thomas A. Marks & Paul B. Rich "Back to the Future – People's War in the 21st Century", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, (2017) 28:3, 409-425.

[11] The most comprehensive definition of the 'revolutionary people's war' was provided by Duran Kalkan. In fact, Kalkan claimed in one of his writings before the June 12 general elections, specifically in May 2011, titled "Why Revolutionary People War" that although three strategic phases had been overcome in the PKK's struggle, the Kurdish people could not become free and this very fact had an impact on the main characteristic of the "Fourth Strategic Phase." According to Kalkan, the current situation, which posed a threat to Kurdish existence made a new defensive resistance/ state of war (the 'revolutionary people's war') mandatory based on "preserving the existence and gaining the freedom" of the Kurdish people. See Kalkan, Duran, (2011), "Neden Devrimci Halk Savaşı", http://guncelyorum-canadil.blogspot.com/2011/05/neden-devrimci-halk-savas.html, retrieved October 28, 2011.

[12] In fact, notwithstanding the PKK's unilateral inaction decision, which was declared in August 2010 and extended at certain intervals, certain attacks such as the Taksim attack on October 31, 2010 and the Kastamonu attack on May 4, 2011 followed a course gearing towards the general elections of June 12, 2011.

became a main component of the U.S. strategy of degrading and defeating DAESH, especially in Syria.[13] This process paved the way for the consolidation of the PYD and the YPG's (Syrian offshoots of the PKK) military and political power in northern Syria and changed the former priorities of the PKK toward Turkey.[14] In this period, the PKK made an assessment that the new security landscape and power vacuum especially in northern Syria were prepared for a "revolutionary people's war" against Turkey.

The change in the local and regional priorities also led to a number of consequences not only for the PKK but also for Turkey and its immediate neighbors. The PKK's new strategy,[15] based on the Soviet-type single party ideology,[16] dissolved the "opening process" and made the sustainability of political will in Turkey impossible in the eyes of the AK Party government. The PKK and PYD, which attempted to forge an ethnic-based homogenous geopolitical corridor, contributed to the emergence of a significant autonomy by seizing territorial control over time.[17] The PKK used the aforementioned autonomy and the U.S. support to consolidate its own armed and political power on a regional scale, and redefined its geopolitical ambitions on a regional ground particularly by focusing on northern Syria.

[13] Murat Yeşiltaş, "Harita ve Gerçeklik Arasında Kürdistani Coğrafi Tahayyülün Yükselişi", *Ortadoğu Analiz*, July-August, Volume 7, Number 89, 2016, http://www.orsam.org.tr/files/OA/69/11muratyesiltas.pdf.

[14] Vahap Coşkun, "Çıkışı Zor Bir Çatışma", *Al Jazeera Türk*, December 26, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/cikisi-zor-bir-catisma.

[15] Murat Yeşiltaş, "PKK'nın Jeopolitik Hırsları", *Star Açık Görüş*, January 30, 2016, http://haber.star.com.tr/acikgorus/pkknin-jeopolitik-hirslari/haber-1085839.

[16] Şener Aktürk, "The PKK and PYD's Kurdish Soviet Experiment in Syria and Turkey", *Daily Sabah*, January 27, 2016, http://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2016/01/27/the-pkk-and-pyds-kurdish-soviet-experiment-in-syria-and-turkey.

[17] Fahrettin Altun, "Self-Governance: The PKK's New Weapon", *Daily Sabah*, January 1, 2016, http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/fahrettin-altun/2016/01/01/self-governance-the-pkks-new-weapon.

Kobane protests on October 6-8, 2014 and the subsequent developments, as well as the PKK-DAESH conflict provided an opportunity to further engage the Kurdish public with the PKK's conflict strategy. This proved the PKK's willingness to retain armed conflict in Turkey as a significant alternative whilst the solution process was continuingin parallel.[18] The "Kobane incidents," on the other hand, unearthed the vulnerable nature of the negotiation process, exposed the weakened backdrop and revealed the new dimensions of terrorism shaped by the PKK's ethnic radicalization.[19] Calling out a strategy that drew people directly into violence, this radicalization aimed at making "urban warfare" a part of daily life by arming the youth in the southern region of Turkey to this purpose. More importantly, the PKK's new radicalization strategy intended to increase a pan-Kurdish nationalism by encouraging violence and to institutionalize it via local political institutions, and thus, to use it in order to undermine the sovereignty of the state. This was considered part of the PKK's autonomy strategy, which was activated by its former urban warfare.

The PKK's strategy of ethnic radicalization started to gain momentum in 2014. The PKK criticized the government for "taking slow steps towards the peace process" and claimed that the latter was utilizing the process as "a tool of stalling for the upcoming elections," whilst the former was holding its threat of using weapons and violence constantly in reserve. The AK Party government, on the other hand, accused the HDP (Halkların Demokrasi Partisi) and the PKK of "provoking the process by

[18] Abdullah Öcalan, *Demokratik Kurtuluş ve Özgür Yaşamı İnşa* (İmralı Notları),Waşenen Mezopotamya, 2015.

[19] International Crisis Group, "Türkiye ve PKK: Barış Sürecini Kurtarmak", Avrupa Raporu No 234, November 6, 2014, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/europe/turkey-cyprus/turkey/Turkish%20translations/234-turkey-and-the-pkk-saving-the-peace-process-turkish.

promoting violence."[20] After the Kobane incidents, the delicate balance between public order and the solution process was duly appreciated, which compelled the government to take different counter-terrorism measures, and to introduce legislative regulation regarding domestic security that became a law.[21] However, this move misfired and accelerated the activation of the PKK's new "conflict strategy," which had been reshaped by the Syrian crisis.[22] The PKK attempted to make violence a part of daily life for the people living in certain southeastern Anatolian cities by digging trenches, building barricades, and activating an armed violence through the youth whilst the solution process and ceasefire were in force. At the same time, this strategy played as one that intended to fully marginalize the political domain in the region by activating a mobilization of violence, which aimed at undermining state sovereignty through the claims of "self-rule" and "self-defense."[23] In this way, it became clear in June 2015 that the peace process was thoroughly weakened.[24]

A sharp rupture in the solution process came after June 7, 2015. After the June 7 general election results were announced,

[20] "Erdoğan: Çözüm Süreci Buzdolabında", *Sabah*, August 11, 2015, http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/08/11/erdogan-cozum-sureci-buzdolabinda#.

"Murat Karayılan'dan HDP yorumu!", *Milliyet,* July 14, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/murat-karayilan-dan-carpici-hdp-gundem-2087518/.

[21] "İç Güvenlik Paketi Mecliste Kabul Edildi", *Milliyet*, March 27, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ic-guvenlik-paketi-mecliste-kabul-edildi-ankara-yerelhaber-696260/.

"İç Güvenlik Paketi Genel Kurul'da kabul edildi", *Haberturk,* March 27, 2015, http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1058616-ic-guvenlik-paketi-yasalasti.

[22] Bradley M. *Joe Parkinson,* "America's Marxist Allies against ISIS", Wall *Street Journal*, retrieved February 5, 2016, from http://www.wsj.com/articles/americas-marxist-allies-against-isis-1437747949.

[23] Fahrettin Altun, "Self-Governance: The PKK's New Weapon", *Daily Sabah*, January 1, 2016, http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/fahrettin-altun/2016/01/01/self-governance-the-pkks-new-weapon.

[24] Burhanettin Duran, "Çözüm Süreci Ne zaman Koptu?", *Enine Boyuna*, TRT 1, September 14, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iQLymxCJ_I.

the top echelon of the PKK declared the beginning of a new process. Especially the KCK's Co-chair Bese Hozat criticized the HDP directly after the elections and said, "Democracy elements could not adequately take advantage of the positive outcomes of the elections." According to Hozat,

> In the current phase, all conditions have become ripe for the formation of a Free Kurdistan and the construction of a Democratic Republic of Turkey. If the democracy elements enhance the struggle for democracy via ascendant moves, our people and Turkish society develop the revolutionary people's war, Apo, the leader, is freed and Turkey attains true peace and democracy. The current strife stance poses a great danger.[25]

Such an attitude was exemplary of the kind of change in the PKK's new strategy towards Turkey.[26] In fact, what Hozat meant by "strife stance" was a conviction that the political process alone would not be enough - it would need to be supported by a "military strategy." Hence, whilst the PKK was suggesting, on the one hand, the remobilization of the "political power" attained by the HDP on a military and bellicose level, the PKK, on the other hand, also intended to transfer its rising military power in Syria to Turkey.[27] The PKK's goal was shifting Turkey's focus "inwards" by carrying the war of attrition into cities, as well as filling the power vacuum in Syria in the name of fighting against DAESH via the military assistance of the Obama administration. In this regard, the goal was to integrate the areas of opportunity created by the regional transformation into the north-south axis and to maintain the mo-

[25] Bese Hozat, "Yeni süreç, devrimci halk savaşı sürecidir.", *Özgür Gündem*, July 15, 2015, http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/yazi/133642/yeni-surec-devrimci-halk-savasi-surecidir.

[26] Oral Çalışlar, "Bese Hozat, Halk Savaşı ve İran", *Radikal*, August 1, 2015, http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/oral-calislar/bese-hozat-halk-savasi-ve-iran-1407419/.

[27] Nebi Miş, "PKK Çözüm sürecini Baltaladı", *TRT Türk*, July 29, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr26U_1gyrw; Nevzat Çiçek, "10 Maddede PKK'nın değişen stratejisi", *TimeTürk*, March 18, 2016, http://www.timeturk.com/10-maddede-pkk-nin-yeni-stratejisi/yazar-136622.

bilization of weapons, ammunitions, people and resources on the Iraq-Syria axis.[28]

The activation of such a strategy was realized when two police officers were killed by the PKK in Şanlıurfa's town of Ceylanpınar near the Syrian border.[29] This occurred two days after DAESH killed 33 people in the town of Suruç in a suicide attack on July 20, 2015.[30] The HPG, an armed wing of the PKK, framed the assassination of the police officers as a "retaliation against the bomb attack in Suruç." This ended the ongoing solution process in practice, and turned the HDP into a tool of the PKK by cornering the former into a radical political domain and inducing an increase in radical practices, which normalized the PKK-sanctioned use of extremist violence by destabilizing the political climate in the region. In the meantime, the HDP played a facilitating role in the greater activation of such a discourse.[31]

With the soaring tension between Russia and Turkey, following the former's intervention in Syria and the latter's downing of a Russian military jet, the PKK took advantage of the situation in order to start a new bellicose process in Turkey. In this process, the PKK initially delegated the use of extremist violence to the YDG-H (later changed to YPS), which consisted of militant youth radicalized within the context of urban warfare in the PKK's newly developed strategy, kept its own militants (the HPG) in the background and assigned a small portion of the HPG as local leaders for the

[28] Nihat Ali Özcan, "PKK'nın askeri hazırlıkları üzerine", *Milliyet*, September 11, 2015, http://m.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nihat-ali-ozcan/pkk-nin-askeri-hazirliklari-uzerine----2115741/.

[29] "Şanlıurfa'da iki polis şehit", *CNN Türk*, July 22, 2015, http://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/sanliurfada-2-polis-sehit.

[30] "Suruç'ta Korkunç Patlama", *Milliyet*, July 20, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/suruc-ta-patlama-gundem-2090029/.

[31] Nebi Miş, "HDP Kürtlere Ölüm vaadi", *Sabah Perspektif*, December 19, 2015, http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/perspektif/nebimi%C5%9F/2015/12/19/hdpnin-kurtlere-olum-vaadi.

management of the YDG-H. As a result, this new process changed to a great extent the dynamics of conflict between Turkey and the PKK when compared with the previous conflict and brought a change to the nature and character of terrorism in general.

The PKK's new strategy had five profound goals:

1. Making a new *fait accompli* by expanding its sphere of influence from limited rural and mountainous areas to cities, shifting it from a strategy of hit-run-raid to one of "neighborhood/field control," and making its security forces appear pacified.

2. Carrying the conflict into society's daily life by forming paramilitary armed elements such as the YDG-H and consolidating its armed power at a maximum level especially in the areas where distribution of votes is more homogenous in favor of the HDP.

3. Limiting the state by challenging one of its most fundamental functions, namely the monopoly over the legitimate use of force, thus turning itself into the only "legitimate authority" in some regions and cities of the country. This aimed at eventually transforming the PKK into a "legitimate actor" in a larger region.

4. Generating victimhood by carrying the conflict into society, and through this method, transforming the idea of "popular resistance" into a point of attraction for society.

5. Consolidating a PKK-oriented sovereignty practice by ensuring the formation of state-like (semi-state) structures, such as the KCK, through courts, ID checks, entrenching and the normalization of such practices in society. In this way, the PKK intended to create a "social control" mechanism in which it is the principal power.

This chapter seeks to understand the context-specific dynamics of PKK terrorism and its urban strategy between 2015 and 2016. The aim is to explore the new dynamics of PKK terrorism by considering the following interrelated transformations: spatial, structural, and tactical.

## THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE CONFLICT SPACE

Throughout the conflict period and terror attacks since July 22, 2015 a number of changes were observed both in the character of the PKK's terrorist attacks and the conflict environment. When the conflict erupted again, in 2015, the geopolitical environment of the urban warfare and rebellion strategy were quite different. First of all, the PKK had secured an increase in its civilian and military capacities by organizing itself politically and militarily - due to the implementation of government's security measures and policies during the solution process. Secondly, it had gained an urban warfare experience in Syria, thanks to the increased number of militants between 2011 and 2015. Thirdly, it had seen an increase in its armed capacity to an extent that some of the young militants who formed the backbone of the urban warfare had participated in the Syrian civil war.

Despite the fact that the PKK is known as a terrorist organization, which was born and expanded in rural areas in terms of its attack cycle,[32] it had attempted to carry armed conflict into city centers in the past, but could not maintain those initiatives.[33] The reasons behind the PKK's failure in its urban warfare and rebellion attempts before 2015 (especially in 1992) include the lack of a sufficient number of militants (the militancy character for the most part was rooted in the rural population); the Turkish security forces' mobilization of available military resources to take initiative against the PKK; and, most importantly, the changing nature of the global and regional priorities.[34]

[32] Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK: Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi*, Asam Yayınları, 1999.

[33] Nihat Ali Özcan, "'Şehir savaşlarının' ağır sonuçları ve PKK'nın çıkış stratejisi", *Milliyet*, June 3, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nihat-ali-ozcan/-sehir-savaslarinin--agir-sonuclari-ve-pkk-nin-cikis-stratejisi-2256224/.

[34] Nihat Ali Özcan, "Yeni başlayanlar için 'ayaklanma' dersleri – 2", *Milliyet*, August 1, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/nihat-ali-ozcan/yeni-baslayanlar-icin--ayaklanma--dersleri---2-2098343/.

Within the context of the new strategy, which was built upon the PKK's "rural based urban apparatus" the PKK, on the one hand, carried out its attacks against the security forces in city centers, and intended to position itself as the new "security actor" via its armed elements in the eyes of local people in neighborhoods; while, on the other hand, it attempted to pose an armed challenge against the state authority in large cities.[35] In fact, within the context of organizational structure that constitutes the PKK's military doctrine, the PKK, the HPG and the YDG-H formed the parts of the "self-defense" elements: the PKK as the *party*, the HPG as the *army* and the YDG-H as the *street force*.

In this period, the PKK read all the developments based on a "prolonged political military strategy" aimed at independence.[36] Such a strategy aims at "arousing the people under the cover of guerrilla character." Therefore, the first goal in the new strategy, which formed the backbone of the urban warfare, was "insurgency." To this end, it endeavored to ripen four target groups.

The first target group was the people living in the region. In this context, the PKK tried to gather people to be organized, form an armed militia group, and surge. The second target group was the AK Party government, because it needed to be convinced that the PKK was strong enough to conduct urban warfare and spread turmoil. Therefore, while wearing the government down in the eyes of the public, the PKK would impose the desired policy change. In order to enhance political homogenization among the Kurds, the PKK targeted local communities who would be displaced due to the conflict. The final target was selected as the international community.[37]

[35] Duran Kalkan, "Neden Devrimci Halk Savaşı", 2011, http://guncelyorum-canadil.blogspot.com/2011/05/neden-devrimci-halk-savas.html.

[36] Nihat Ali Özcan, "Öksüz 'mutabakat' nereye?" *Milliyet*, July 31, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/oksuz-mutabakat-nereye-/siyaset/ydetay/2095143/default.htm.

[37] Nihat Ali Özcan, "Yeni Başlayanlar için 'ayaklanma' dersleri -1", *Milliyet,* August 4, 2005, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yeni-baslayanlar-icin-ayaklanma-/siyaset/ydetay/2096801/default.htm.

Using the methods of irregular warfare tactics, this conflict strategy[38] began to be implemented by the PKK in Turkey in the second half of 2015. All parts of the city were accepted as a conflict environment and a constantly mobile, armed structure was preferred. In the classical political-military Maoist approach,[39] the inferior combatant force in a low-intensity conflict carries the armed struggle from rural areas to cities to create an impact in the latter through the armed struggle against the superior enemy in the rural areas. Mao's "protracted war strategy"[40] was implemented in the 1980s and 1990s by the PKK on the axis of the strategic defense-strategic balance-strategic offense basis. However, this strategy could not go beyond the defense aspect due to the security dynamics of the period, and the attacks were limited to the gendarmerie stations mostly in rural areas.[41]

Understanding the popular assembly emphasis in the KCK contract, adopted at the PKK's congress in 2005, may contribute to the comprehension of why the PKK was in search of combining combating tactics in rural areas and urban centers. The PKK, before the armed struggle in city centers, made a long-term effort in order for residents in cities to accept such a war in their hometowns.[42] In the KCK contract, it is expressed that by addressing a democratic nation instead of a nationalist-statist nation for the Kurds, a new philosophy of life for the Kurds under the name of "Kurdistan

[38] Stephen Graham (ed), *Cities, War, and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

[39] FMFRP 12-18, *U.S. Marine Corps Mao Tse-Tung on Guerilla Warfare*, http://www.irregularwarrior.com/files/Mao_Tsetung_Guerrilla_Warfare.pdf. The most important feature of Mao's strategy is that it is not exclusively based on armed force. Regarding the strategy's tactical tools, the organizational model is structured in the form of 'Party', 'Army' and 'Front.' Likewise, the PKK is structured in this manner. Especially the 'Front' and its activities are important.

[40] Thomas A Marks and Paul B Rish, "Back to the Future – People's War in the 21st Century", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Volume 28, 2017 - Issue 3, pp. 409-425.

[41] Ümit Özdağ, *Türkiye'de Düşük Yoğunluklu Çatışma ve PKK*, Üç Ok Press, 2005, p. 67.

[42] SETA interview, Diyarbakır, January 23, 2015.

Democratic Confederalism" is created on the basis of equality and freedom.[43] In the first section of the same contract, the KCK is defined as a democracy-building system. Ethnic, sectarian, cultural laborers, women and youth groups in society called for the establishment of the KCK's interpretation of democracy. These missions were conducted through youth clubs, established with the support of the PKK, associations, women and youth branches of the political parties close to the PKK, while municipal employees, teachers and administrators in private and public schools also contributed to this process.[44]

In the process of raising public awareness, the PKK attempted to gain effectiveness in the rural areas between the years 2005 and 2008. The period between the years 2009 and 2011, remained under the shadow of the PKK's threats of ending the unilateral ceasefire, even though it retained a relative distance from terrorism due to the Democratic Opening (Demokratik Açılım).[45] This last period was described by the PKK as a process framed by 'democratic autonomy' based on the purpose of "securing its existence and ensuring its freedom." It was based on the claim that against all the odds, they could not achieve a political solution for the Kurdish problem and that they could not reach a strategic success on the basis of the political solution of the Kurdish problem - despite having achieved certain tactical gains. The KCK was initially perceived by the public as the PKK's 'urban branch.' However, later on, it was seen that beyond this definition, there was an effort to create a much more advanced model of "a state system structure."[46] The PKK, with the KCK model, did not abandon

[43] Preface of KCK (*Kome Komalen Ciwan*) Contract, May 17, 2005.

[44] SETA interview, Diyarbakır, September 21, 2015.

[45] AK Parti, *Demokratik Açılım Süreci*, retrieved February 10, 2016, from http://www.akparti.org.tr/upload/documents/acilim220110.pdf.

[46] SETA interview, September 22, 2015.

the armed struggle as a tool, and at the same time, aimed to have a say in local governments. As a result, public opinion held that with the KCK structure, the PKK's main purpose was to establish a gradually growing and progressive mass movement through urban-centered organizations under the framework of the organization's main strategy. Accordingly, the PKK would ensure that social segregation and radicalization became even more acute.[47] It is noteworthy that both Öcalan and the KCK explained that if a 'democratic constitutional solution' cannot be achieved, a new 'defensive war' based on insurgency and rebellion will be activated under the name of the 'revolutionary people's war.'

The PKK tried to increase its effectiveness with attacks on the military units in the rural areas of Beytüşşebap, Çukurca, Şemdinli and Yüksekova and the Iraqi borderline between the years 2011 and 2012. To create a sense of 'state violence' among the public, the PKK often used people as human shields in rural areas while restraining the security forces from carrying out operations in urban centers by putting the public in harm's way.[48] However, in late 2012, the PKK suffered from serious defeats in rural areas. Accepting the terms of preliminary talks in the ongoing reconciliation process, the PKK obscured its military defeat.[49] At the onset of 2013, it appears that

[47] Democratic confederalism is constantly mentioned in the KCK contract. While the KCK defines itself as a kind of 'confederation,' in a statement published on December 25, 2009, Ocalan asserted that "it is wrong to claim that the KCK envisaged and supported confederalism" and added that "the state system would remain the same in the KCK system and would not interfere with the state." However, in the second article of the KCK contract, this formation is defined as follows: "Koma Civakên Kurdistan is a democratic, socialist-confederal system. Democracy is based on gender freedom and ecological life. The KCK is a non-governmental, horizontal and pyramid style-structured, democratic, political and social organization."

[48] "Canlı kalkan olmak için Şemdinli'ye gittiler", *Sabah*, August 7, 2012, http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/08/07/canli-kalkan-olmak-icin-semdinliye-gittiler.

[49] Atilla Sandıklı, *PKK/KCK için 2012 Final Yılı Değil Hüsran Oldu*, BİLGESAM interview, November 13, 2012, http://www.bilgesam.org/incele/247/-pkk-teror-orgutu-icin-2012-final-yili-degil-husran-yili-oldu/#.VrmWfNuLTIU.

the PKK established the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H) - later named the Civil Defense Units (YPS) - as a new element for urban warfare.[50] Shortly after the establishment of the YDG-H, Abdullah Öcalan indicated the commencement of a new war strategy in his prison interview with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) delegation by stating that "Neither house arrest, nor amnesty. These are not needed. We will all be free. If I succeed, neither the KCK prisoners will remain in custody, nor anyone else. Otherwise, there will be a people's war with 50,000 people. Everyone should know that we will not live like we used to, nor will we fight like we used to."[51]

This type of conflict contains all elements of "irregular warfare."[52] Irregular warfare is defined as a form of struggle based on violence that is applied by the state and non-state armed actors with different aims in order to influence the people or with the aim of legitimation.[53] By this definition, it is evident that the irregular warfare is population-centric in terms of the target audience. The post-2015 strategy of the PKK is basically built on this dynamic. In the conflicts that emerge within the scope of irregular warfare, the "guerrilla warfare" tactics are generally adopted by other countries, as well.[54] The guerrilla warfare techniques adopted by every armed movement with the aim of gaining influence and legitimacy are referred to as "military or paramilitary operations carried out by irreg-

[50] "YDG-H Analizi", *Jiyan*, retrieved February 9, 2016 from https://jiyan.us/2015/01/22/kurdistan-devrimcileri-ydg-h-kisa-bir-ydg-h-analizi/.

[51] Abdullah Öcalan, *Demokratik Kurtuluş ve Özgür Yaşamı İnşa* (İmralı Notları),Waşenen Mezopotamya, 2015, p. 26.

[52] FM 3-05.130, *US Army Special Operations Forces Unconventional Warfare*, September 2008, pp.1-5.

[53] JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* January 31, 2011, p. 189.

[54] For example, the Montonero Uprising in Argentina (1969-79), the Shining Path in Peru in (1962-ongoing), and the Red Brigades in Italy (1962-1982).

ular local forces."[55] In the book *Fighting in the Streets*, the handbook of urban warfare, guerrilla warfare is described as a tactic of "the natural struggle against a strong enemy."[56] On the other hand, it is possible to define guerrilla warfare as "a form of war in which the strategically weak side carries out tactical attacks on certain forms, time and places."[57]

Examining the main elements of the PKK's terrorist strategy in 2015, it can be said that the first element is to gain the support of the people in conflict zones. To that end, the public has been regarded as a supporting element considering the needs of the PKK such as food, shelter, arms, ammunition, medical support, and the provision of new militants. In addition, local people are particularly important in terms of providing intelligence, especially where conflicts are intensely experienced. In this context, the PKK's "urban guerrilla" strategy, which was originally performed independently in separate city centers, was founded on correlating conflicts in other city centers, and was transformed into a unified movement through increasing resistance or insurrection. With coordinated attacks, the PKK aimed to weaken state control in this period, aiming at spreading this conflict over a wider area and making it into a full-scale war featuring a regular force.

The five stages of guerrilla warfare conceptualized in the 1970s by Brian Michael Jenkins, known for his work on security and terrorism studies, are listed as follows: propaganda of violence; organizational growth; guerrilla aggression; mobilization

[55] JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, January 31, 2011, p. 158.

[56] Urbano, *Fighting in the Streets, A Manual of Urban Guerilla Warfare,* J. Flores Publication, 1991, p. 9.

[57] Samuel P. Huntington, "Introduction" in Franklin M. Osanka, (Ed.), *Modern Guerrilla Warfare: Fighting Communist Guerrilla Movements*, The Free Press, 1941-1961, 1962, New York, p. xvi.

of the masses; and local uprising.[58] It was seen that between the years 1984 and1992, the PKK completed the first three stages and tried to pass to the fourth phase, the stage of mass mobilization. The brochure titled *Ayaklanma Taktikleri Üzerine Tezler ve Görevlerimiz* (Theses and Duties on Insurgency Tactics), which was published in 1992 by Abdullah Öcalan and was accepted as an insurrection manifesto, illustrates that the organization mobilized the masses in Nusaybin, Cizre, Silopi and Şırnak in an attempt to rebel. In those years, through the countermeasures taken by the Turkish security forces, the PKK did not achieve its goal of mobilizing the masses and insurgency. The PKK could not shift from the strategic defense phase to the strategic balance phase referred to in Mao's protracted war concept and, as a result, initiated a dialogue with Turkey by declaring a unilateral ceasefire on March 20, 1993.[59] It is possible to say that the capacity shortages are the primary reason behind the failure of the materialized strategy in the aforementioned period.

The PKK initiated the terrorist campaign in 1984 by using the "rural guerrilla" tactics in the rural triangle of Siirt-Hakkari-Van, in which the political and economic conditions were relatively weak. The PKK also affirmed that, within thirty years, its rural attacks have impacted the people; but the attacks were not sufficient in the main battlefield to gain the full support of the people in the cities.[60] In 2015, to merge the rural attacks with urban guerrilla tactics, the PKK differentiated its concept of action. Through this strategic shift, the PKK desired to turn its one-way influence on the people into a two-way relationship with public support. The PKK tried to

[58] Jenkins Brian M., "*Five Stages of Urban Guerrilla Warfare: A Challenge of The 1970s*", RAND Corporation, July 1971, https://www.rand.org/pubs/papers/P4670.html.

[59] Türkmen Töreli, *PKK Terör Örgütü (Tarihsel ve Siyasi Gelişim Bakımından İncelenmesi (1978-1998)*, Süleyman Demirel University, 2002, p. 129.

[60] Urban Warfare Based on Rural Guerrilla Warfare, Article 10.

activate urban warfare in the Nusaybin-Cizre-Sur area, which is a vulnerable and geostrategically significant region due to the spill-over effects of the Syrian crisis. Domestic political developments and foreign security-centered developments also triggered the PKK into taking action in favor of this new strategy.

Urban warfare is a new phenomenon for the public opinion in Turkey, local communities, government agencies and security forces. It is also a new concept for the PKK and its local base. While conducting urban warfare against DAESH in Syria through the PYD-YPG on the basis of the concept of offensive action, the PKK applied its experience in Turkey against the security forces by utilizing the concept of defensive action.

There are two main reasons for this strategic shift from the rural areas to the urban centers. The first is the compulsory change of the PKK's war strategy. The transformation in the capacity of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) and the changing character of the Turkish counter-terrorism strategy drove the PKK to conduct urban warfare - supposedly, to be more effective. The technological superiority and sophisticated military systems of the TAF pushed the PKK to organize itself in the cities which became the new centers of action. The second reason is the rapid transformation experienced in the "external security environment." In northern Syria, the establishment of an organic relationship between the PKK and the PYD on a military-political level and the change in partnership relations on a regional scale were assumed to provide an opportunity to fight against Turkey. In other words, the PKK aimed to create a military and political balance against Turkey by spreading the process, which is defined as the "Kurdish struggle" or resistance by the PKK, to a larger geographic area. Therefore, the PKK would change the character of the conflict by deepening the conflict environment in Turkey, and it would create a new domain of sovereign/autonomy for itself.

Especially, the terrorist attack in Dağlıca on September 6, 2015, was considered one of the most important indicators of the concept of "urban warfare based on rural guerrilla warfare." This war doctrine, which means to carry out a "balanced war" in the countryside and city centers was discussed in the article titled "The Fourth Strategic Struggle Period - Goals of the Revolutionary People's War," published in the PKK's *Serxwebun* magazine.[61] In the article published in April 2015, it is stated that the KCK's new program is a comprehensive approach to economic, social, legal, political, diplomatic, cultural, and military affairs. The plan to create "new action units" that will act jointly in both rural and urban areas is set forth.[62] Therefore, it was assumed that the main battlefield would be cities, while the PKK and other elements affiliated with it would expand their territorial dominance with "popular uprisings" to be launched in the districts of Cizre, Yüksekova, Silvan, and Varto. Moreover, it would be possible to weaken the state control of cities, streets and society.[63] The tactic adopted for this aim was the establishment of "liberated zones" by creating areas in the cities where trenches and barricades could block the access of the security forces. At the same time, with this tactic, the civilians would be attracted to the clash, and thus, the impression would be created that the security forces were "clashing with the people" and an insecure environment suitable for the "revolutionary people's war" would emerge.

[61] "PKK'nın Yeni Stratejisi: 'Şehir Gerillacılığı'", *Timeturk*, September 8, 2015, http://www.timeturk.com/pkk-nin-yeni-stratejisi-sehir-gerillaciligi/haber-55610.

[62] "PKK'nın Yeni Stratejisi: 'Şehir Gerillacılığı'", *Timeturk*, September 8, 2015, http://www.timeturk.com/pkk-nin-yeni-stratejisi-sehir-gerillaciligi/haber-55610.

[63] "PKK'nın Yeni Stratejisi: 'Şehir Gerillacılığı'", *Timeturk*, September 8, 2015, http://www.timeturk.com/pkk-nin-yeni-stratejisi-sehir-gerillaciligi/haber-55610.

## THE CHANGING NATURE OF THE TERRORIST PROFILE: THE YDG-H AND THE PKK'S STRATEGY OF AUTONOMY AND VIOLENT RADICALIZATION

Another dynamic in the changing character of PKK terrorism is the recruitment of armed youth, which is a new strategy that takes place in city centers. The most prominent feature of these recruited young people aged between 15 and 25, who come together under the Revolutionary Patriotic Youth Movement (YDG-H), is that they have all witnessed the urban warfare scenes in Iraq and Syria; moreover, they are being radicalized rapidly to promote terror and terrorism on behalf of the PKK, and in the name of "self-defense."[64] Despite the fact that the PKK administrators often claim not to regard this entity as an organic part of the group, the direct involvement of the PKK terrorists in urban warfare, especially in the cities of Diyarbakır, Mardin, Nusaybin and Şırnak in November and December 2015, and the general situation in these cities demonstrates that the youth structure in question acts as an organic part of the PKK.[65] Therefore, it can be said that such a structure has served as an inevitable part of the PKK's tactical reflection of its strategic change.[66]

The changing character of PKK terrorism in this period is that the "young militants" became one of the main elements of the urban conflict. That situation also brought a change in terms of the nature of the conflict. The PKK's "armed youth movement," the YDG-H, is a new phenomenon that emerged in cities and functions as part of the PKK's expansion strategy towards urban areas. The armed tactic of the HPG, which constitutes the PKK's

[64] Michael Tanchum, "New Kurds on the Block The Rise of Turkey's Militant Youth", *Foreign Affairs*, 23 September 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-09-23/new-kurds-block.

[65] "Kobani'de Şehir Savaşı Eğitimi", *Yeni Şafak*, December 16, 2015, http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/kobanide-sehir-savasi-egitimi-2361825.

[66] Vahap Coşkun, "Hendek ve Siyaset (I)", *Serbestiyet*, September 14, 2015, http://serbestiyet.com/Yazarlar/hendek-ve-siyaset-1-168575.

main armed wing, is defined as "hit-and-run in the cities" while the strategy emerging in the YDG-H is defined as "showing permanent presence in cities." This strategy has brought about a change in the profile of the terrorists as well as an opportunity for the PKK to materialize a new "autonomy" strategy.

The goal of the PKK's autonomous strategy is to stigmatize state sovereignty and security practices as controversial by ensuring that there is a field of conflict in which the masses can engage in the conflict process. This change is also a part of the PKK's "population-centric struggle" strategy: autonomy is not only limited to the creation of contested areas of conflict. By controlling the streets, the YDG-H was also used to render the government's routine sovereignty functions (barricading, digging trenches, providing public services and ID checks) as controversial.

The PKK launched a new initiative in 2004 under the name of Self-Defense Units as a sub-branch of the HPG. In 2005, along with the transition to the Democratic Structure of the KKK and the process of the KCK Contract, the Self-Defense Organization began to gain structural importance. With the KCK structure resembling Murray Buckhin's philosophy of social ecology,[67] while the HPG organization is referred to as the primary armed force in the countryside; the Self-Defense Forces are seen as the "secondary army" within the public. Between 2005 and 2006, the Self-Defense Units increased their attacks on civilians, which mostly consisted of bomb attacks in the metropolitan and touristic areas of the country by the group members who were generally trained in the north of Iraq.[68]

[67] Sinan Tavukçu, "Murray Bookchın'in "Toplumsal Ekoloji" Felsefesi ve KCK'nın İdeolojik Kodları", *Stratejik Düşünce Derneği*, November 17, 2011, http://www.sde.org.tr/tr/authordetail/murray-bookchinin-toplumsal-ekoloji-felsefesi-ve-kcknin-ideolojik-kodlari/995, February 10, 2016.

[68] July 16, 2005: A bomb attack was carried out in Aydin's Kuşadası province; five people, including British and Irish tourists, were killed and 13 others were injured. August 28, 2006: 10 British tourists and 11 Turkish citizens were injured in an explosion in three different locations in Muğla's Marmaris province, one in a minibus and two in waste containers. September 13, 2006: 11 people were killed, including a baby, and 17 others were injured after a bomb was detonated near the Koşuyolu Park, a recreational area in Diyarbakir.

The administrator cadres of the regionally organized Self-Defense Units were chosen among the experienced militants whose organizational commitments rely on many years. The militants chosen to conduct attacks were picked from among urban militia known as patriotic people, since the militants from rural environments would feel uncomfortable in the daily routines of the city and metropolitan life. After a month of bomb-making training and expreince, the militants would enter Turkey and conduct their attacks individually when they were ordered to do so in organized groups. These militants, because of inherent secrecy, acted independently and in cooperation with similar groups (compartmentation); they received instructions only from the regional Self-Defense Administration and reported to them - the responsible militants at the HPG Main Headquarters. Although the Self-Defense Units are specifically Turkey-focused, the group felt the need to establish a similar structure in Syria after 2008. Their activities, however, in Syria remained limited to militant recruitment and configuration efforts. The group exploited the conflict in Syria based on its experience over many years, and tried to have a say in eastern Turkey by benefitting from the achievements of the PYD/YPG.[69]

After the implementation of the self-government forces which began their attacks between 2005 and 2006, after 2013, the attacks in the city centers were continued by the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H). The YDG-H was founded in the beginning of 2013, and its actual activities started in Cizre in June 2013.[70] The foundations of the establishment of the YDG-H and the organization of its units in cities started at the time of the "PKK's Fourth Strategic Struggle Period" in 2012. This was also the

[69] Can Acun ve Bünyamin Keskin, *PKK'nın Kuzey Suriye Örgütlenmesi: PYD ve YPG*, SETA, February 2016, http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20160224112810_pkknin-kuzey-suriye-orgutlenmesi-pyd-ypg-pdf.pdf.

[70] "Çözüm sürecinin maskelileri: YDG-H", *Al Jazeera Türk*, January 19, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cozum-surecinin-maskelileri-ydg-h

year when the group launched the "Revolutionary People's War." In the new struggle period, the organization besides "rural guerrillas" aimed to develop "urban guerrillas."

The PKK, which complained about the "struggle" being carried out only in the mountains and the countryside, frequently, emphasized the need to organize young people. In this context, they worked on the homogenization of the Kurdish political space in the region in favor of the PKK as well as the hegemonization of the nationalist Kurdish political discourse by ensuring a new paramilitary structure[71] in the cities. The aim of this policy was to deepen the process of armed conflict in order to establish a kind of "semi-sovereignty" in the name of "self-management" and "self-defense" in the streets and neighborhoods through the YDG-H in October, November and December 2015. Thus, the strategic objectives that were set out previously and the tactics to be used to achieve these objectives were introduced in the second half of 2015.

The main goal of the YDG-H, affiliated with the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan ideologically, was defined as to "provide order against drugs, prostitution, assimilation and espionage" in the regions that they inhabited. According to the YDG-H ideology, rather than the organic relationship with the HPG, the armed wing of the PKK, the ties with the KCK are more significant along with the doctrines of regionalism, social order, and state antagonism.[72] In this context, it is possible to say that the YDG-H was actuated by the KCK neighborhood assemblies and the DBP's (Democratic Regional Party) local governance units.[73]

[71] Murat Yeşiltaş et al., "PKK Terörünün Değişen Karakteri ve Terörle Mücadele", *in 2015'te Türkiye*, SETA Publications, December 2015, http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20160107162718_2015te-turkiye.pdf

[72] "PKK 'resmi ve açık' ateşkes ilan etti", *BBC Türkçe*, 23 March 2013, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2013/03/130323_pkk_ateskes_ilan_etti, February 10, 2016.

[73] The press announcement of Sirnak Governorship dated January 7, 2016, http://www.sirnak.gov.tr/basin-duyurusu-07012016.

The primary mission of the YDG-H was to make the PKK's presence continuously felt by the public during the peace process initiated at the end of 2012. This role gradually turned into one of provider of public order in order to fix the PKK's drug-related image. The YDG-H subsequently tried to become an alternative to the state's law enforcement authorities. The YDG-H, along with militants from the mountain cadre embedded in it, assumed the role of the urban component of the "rural-based urban guerrilla strategy," which is an element of the PKK's "Revolutionary People's War" concept. As a result, the YDG-H transformed into the Civil Defense Units (YPS) over time.[74] The YDG-H, through the help of the neighborhood councils of the KCK, carried out illegal sanctions in the streets of Diyarbakır's Sur and Bağlar districts in the name of providing public order against drug dealers, prostitution ringleaders, and thieves. In 2013, it succeeded in making a positive impact in the eyes of the public. By sending some of the well-known drug traffickers, thieves and prostitution ringleaders to the public courts under the judicial structure of the KCK, the YDG-H strengthened the functioning of these courts, which were already in operation.

Towards the end of 2013, some of the YDG-H members began to exploit the "social sympathy" and "oppression power" norms at their disposal and organized themselves as the new drug dealers. While finding a ground among the public, the YDG-H began to challenge state authority by conducting identity checks in order to expand territorial dominance. The war in Syria, which intensified in 2014 around the Kurdish area, began to be exploited by the PKK through the YDG-H by manipulating the local public opinion in certain eastern and southern provinces of Turkey, where conflicts between DAESH and the PYD-YPG sensitized the population. In 2014, HPG militants began to join the YDG-H, the emergence of

[74] "YDG-H İsmi Yıprandı, Yola YPS ile Devam!" http://www.haksozhaber.net/ydg-h-ismi-yiprandi-yola-yps-ile-devam-69910h.htm, February 11, 2016.

which the PKK insisted was spontaneous, and the YDG-H members between the ages of 15 and 25 years started to take a leading role in social events with the help of embedded militants.[75]

In the context of ongoing conflicts, the PKK observed that in settlements where young people are driven to disobedience by ideological motivations such as hatred, imitation, persuasion, leadership, action, suspicion and the need of a sense of belonging, they turn into PKK militants, but that they lack the ability to fight like experienced HPG militants. The PKK initiated its urban warfare strategy with the YDG-H, but continued the war with its alleged "sister structure," the YPS, which consisted of experienced militants, and could easily utilize the people's support - instead of the patriotic youth concept.

## Radicalization

The PKK's preference for the use of arms in cities through the YDG-H is a strategy developed to obtain a semi-ruling sovereignty based on ethnic identity. This is one of the main reasons behind the PKK's radicalization efforts in city centers since the sustainability of such a goal can only be realized by the means of military territorial control, rather than mainstream political mechanisms.

The YDG-H has emerged as a radical, ideological and armed youth formation that has been tasked with the duty of carrying out public order exercises in urban centers within the framework of the PKK/KCK ideology, and making the population feel the influence of the KCK according to the people's war strategy regarding individuals, society and the population. The message that the PKK was trying to convey through the YDG-H was to create a national and international perception that "the state is fighting against its own people" by spreading the conflict from previously targeted neigh-

[75] SETA interview, Diyarbakir, January 22-25, 2016.

borhoods, streets and districts to the majority of people residing in the wider impact zones. The YDG-H became radicalized by the doctrine of violence, which was developed on the basis of ethnic and political arguments to disrupt the political order. In this sense, the YDG-H should be seen as a useful tool to demonstrate the PKK's ethnic radicalization process and dynamics.

Violent radicalization is defined as carrying out or actively supporting an act of violence aimed at bringing permanent changes to society that will threaten the existing order and generate conflict. A radical YDG-H member can be described as an individual desiring political and social change as the last resort; this fundamentalist desire exists from the structural and ideological periphery of the social and political environment in which s/he lives. The basic narrative that laid the groundwork for radicalization in the militant Pan-Kurdism is "Liberation of the Kurd and Kurdistan." The goal of such an upper narrative is the ultimate destruction of the state authority. At the same time, this narrative also emphasizes the necessity of resorting to violent action by means of military methods against authoritarianism in the name of "establishing justice and Kurdish law." YDG-H members have developed an oppositional reflex against the state, and public and social discipline through the systematic dissolution propaganda provided by decades-long conflict and internalized the belief that the state does not have control of its territory.

The main mechanism that drives the radicalization of YDG-H members is social networking. This mechanism evolves over time through processes such as intra-group interactions, friendships, and indoctrinations. In this context, the radicalization of a YDG-H individual depends on his or her identity, social preferences, and the development of perceptions through informal and horizontal networks, or, in general, by means of preexisting persons and ideologies. Here radicalization is largely subordinated by a formal or top-down

organization, as well as through the use of kinship ties or existing relations between loose or temporary local group of friends. These networks are the places where the political arena merges with the individual field: neighborhood councils, educational associations, courses, bookstores, etc. These formal and semi-formal networks that grow in the fields not only reinforce collective ethnic identity but also combine political and violent activism with individual preferences and establish a distinctive opposition sub-identity and open spaces for mutual solidarity and alternative lifestyles.

With Abdullah Öcalan's quotation above, the eastern and southeastern regions as well as the Kurdish youths in metropolises such as Mersin, Istanbul and Izmir have been targeted by incorporating both institutional and informal practices into their radicalization process in order to reach the size of 50,000 people.[76] In addition, the ongoing armed conflicts in the Syrian civil war and DAESH's battles have been presented in the form of the "DAESH-Kurdish War," which facilitated the rapid radicalization of these young people. This propaganda should be seen as the triggering dynamics of the PKK radicalization. The PYD/YPG/PKK-DAESH equation has caused an important geopolitical change in the action universe of the PKK and the group has begun to legitimize the mobilization of armed youth and other militants by enacting a trans-border violence. Such a situation has also accelerated the process of the PKK-based ethnic identity construction. The street demonstrations and armed actions that took place on October 6-8, 2014 are also important, in which young people gathered around such an ideology and disobedience and proved their potential for militarization.

For disobedience, a person must have the courage to embrace loneliness, misconception, and crime. The local militias and recruiters are able to conduct socio-psychoanalysis on target individ-

[76] SETA interview, Diyarbakır, January 23, 2015.

uals in order to access their potential; and radicalization techniques are introduced on young people aged 15-20 whose personalities are not yet matured. Individuals are first isolated and the beliefs that they do not belong to the state, the public order, the schools and the social systems are inculcated in them; then they are misguided by small or big promises; and lastly they are ideologically indoctrinated to create a potential for taking action. The act of disobedience, which is carried out by a call or a marginal person or group, is transformed into an act of courage that generates the effect of emotion and desire for imitation in the people who are developing the potential to act disruptively. Later the threshold to take action is quickly overcome, and the person performs the disobedient act.

Another dynamic that triggers radicalization is the organizational survival of the PKK. The PKK needs to constantly recruit militants to survive at the organizational level. The armed youth structure is acting as a motivation driver for such radicalization. While this serves to keep the PKK's ethnic mobilization rhetoric alive, it also serves to reinforce homogeneity in ethnic identity and to transform it into a security body that protects ethnic identities against the so-called "state violence." Because the increasing democratic representation of ethnic identities weakens the group's control over the ethnic community, it also makes the armed organization policy unnecessary. For this reason, it is only possible for the group to survive with its armed structure, if it maintains the hegemonic control over ethnic identity.

### The Changing Nature of Tactics

The changes in the PKK's attack characteristics were observed on the intensity, prevalence, and violence levels. First, the frequency of the attacks was quite high and publicly apparent; the weekly attack average was reported as 13.16 in 2015 and 8.75 in 2016. The frequency of the attacks varied from one period to another and from

one location to another during the surge. Secondly, another change was in the prevalence of the attacks. The PKK intended to carry out attacks both in rural and urban environments. Stretching over a wide geography at the beginning of the surge, the PKK aimed at bridging the conflict zones. Yet, attacks had to be restrained in certain urban and rural areas over time. The third change was seen in the outcomes of violence, which were interrelated with the correlation of attack and target type, and the attack location.

The intensity and the prevalence of the attacks sharply increased at the beginning of the surge, but the casualties and damages were limited. When the PKK faced a quagmire in sustaining the attack frequency and prevalence domain in the vast urban and rural areas, it had to employ a more sophisticated attack type that resulted in mass casualties and damages. The basic change in attack character was related with indiscriminate attack locations, which led the PKK to change its target selections. This is assumed to have occurred for two major reasons: diverting the attention of the security forces to other locations, and conducting attacks at unexpected times and locations. This strategy resulted in a high number of civilian casualties, creating limited coercion and intimidation but an enormous hatred against the PKK across society. Inevitably, the shift in tactics did not benefit in bridging the conflict zones. The use of large quantities of explosive materials obtained from the PYD and improvised commercial materials were also important factors that influenced the changing character of the tactics. The use of HPG terrorists (rural PKK terrorists) in urban centers for the sake of replacing the YDG-H militants in eastern cities, and the use of TAK as an instrument to justify the killings of civilians in western cities increased the impact of the violence.

Brian A. Jackson and David R. Frelinger frame the analytic approach of studying the success or failure of terrorist tactics based on characteristics such as capabilities and resources, requirements

of the terrorist activity or plan, the attacks' relevance, and the reliability of security countermeasures.[77] These parameters are the definite determinants that lead the modus operandi of a terror organization to success or failure. Yet, in order to understand the real cause of success or failure, it is better to seek the compabilities or discrepancies between the level of attack intensity and the preference of the attack type.

In the PKK's failure, there seem considerable discrepancies between the attack characters and the level of intensity, prevalence and violence. The frequency of a certain type of armed attacks was restrained in certain locations. This was directly related to the PKK's capacity problem. The PKK's attack intensity showed certain patterns that aimed to operate on sets of environmental circumstances. The PKK relied on the inexperienced YDG-H militants to carry out the attacks in the city suburbs. This was simply because the PKK lacked the well-indoctrinated, perfectly trained and effectively organized human resources. Local and spontaneously carried YDG-H attacks, other than provoking the Turkish security forces, had no impact on weakening the latter, while the intensity of the attacks in certain cities did not serve the PKK's broader armed strategy for cooperation between rural and urban attacks. Moreover, localization had no positive impact on bridging similar terror activities in other cities. The attack intensity in restrained areas led the security forces to concentrate on curbing the original motivations of the terror activities. The attack intensity was also observed in line with certain time intervals. This led the security forces to understand the attack patterns and to predict future attack attempts. The PKK's attack tactics had no relevance to the security forces' countermeasures in general, and the PKK faced a serious setback militarily.

[77] Brian A. Jackson and David R. Frelinger, *Understanding Why Terrorist Operations Succeed or Fail*, RAND Corporation, 2009, pp. 5-7 https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2009/RAND_OP257.pdf.

## CONCLUSION

The post-2015 urban strategy of the PKK manifested itself in the domestic and regional transformation of the security landscape. The PKK reformulated its overall strategy after the intensification of the Syrian civil war in order to consolidate its influence not only in Turkey but also in northern Syria. Meanwhile the emergence of DAESH constituted the "Other," especially in northern Syria, and helped to reconsolidate the PKK's perception of conflict. The power vacuum generated after the removal of the Syrian regime and the U.S. anti-DAESH strategy facilitated the PKK's urban strategy. The main component of the urban warfare strategy is the changing nature of the conflict structure. Within the context of the new strategy, the PKK reconfigured its terror tactics and carried its attacks against security forces in city centers. According to the new strategy, the PKK intended to position itself as the new "security actor" in the eyes of local people through its armed elements in neighborhoods, whilst, on the other hand, attempting to pose an armed challenge to the state authority in large cities.

Another component of the PKK's urban warfare strategy is the radical transformation of its terrorist profile whereby the YDG-H became the main paramilitary force in sustaining the PKK's influence over the local population. The last dimension of the changing nature of the PKK's urban strategy is the tactics used by the PKK in the conflict. In this period, the PKK started the attacks both in rural and urban environments. Stretching across a wide geography at the beginning of the surge, the PKK aimed to bridge the conflict zones. The next chapter will focus on the violent tactics of the PKK during the surge.

CHAPTER 2

# THE VIOLENT TACTICS OF THE PKK

This chapter aims to categorize the PKK's tactical approaches to the decisions and dynamics of attack types and target selections. The PKK looked for reciprocal links between the attack and target variables in order to serve its surge strategy better. The target variables are defined as the attack methods and correspond to twelve different types in this study. The target variables are presented in thirteen typologies: twelve main typologies and one combination of two other typologies. The security environment was also taken into consideration when the relations between the attack and target types were studied. The security environment was broken into urban (U) and rural (R) variables for the calculation of the correlations.

As Isaac Cronin Carlos Marighella's *Minimanual* put forth, the PKK's surge tactics complied with the characteristics of urban violent tactics: the PKK employed an aggressive technique renouncing the defensive roles, adapting hit and run tactics while preserving all available force, and aiming to develop a large scale urban warfare in order to wear out, demoralize and distract the government forces.[78] The PKK's surge strategy operated on certain violent tactics for a successful execution from July 22, 2015 until December 31, 2016. Categorically, the violent tactics included armed attacks, bombings, assassinations, road blockades and arson attacks, and kidnappings. Among these five categories, armed attacks and bombings were elaborated in terms of the methodology, which depended on the target selection, the weapons, location, time, available force, and the desired objective. Therefore, the armed attacks included am-

[78] Isaac Cronin, *Confronting Fear, A History of Terrorism*, Thunder's Mouth Press, New York, 2002.

bush, raid, harassing fire, indirect fire and anti-tank guided missiles ATGM attacks while the bombings were broken down into IED, VBIED, SVBIED, and SVEST attacks.

## VIOLENT TACTICS

### Assassinations

Assassination is described by the U.S. publication of antiterrorism as a deliberate action intended to kill specific, usually prominent, individuals such as political leaders, notable citizens, collaborators, or particularly effective government officials.[79] Terrorist attempts are used to murder prominent persons, symbolic government figures, and ordinary local figures opposed conceptually to the terrorist ideology. After achieving the provocation objective with the first round of assassinations, the second wave of assassinations by the PKK took place between January 1 and February 25, 2016 when the PKK tried to break operational deadlocks due to the unexpected setbacks in the cities of Silvan, Silopi, Cizre, Nusaybin, and Sur. During this period, the PKK tried to regain the tactical advantage by intimidating the security personnel in Şırnak and Yüksekova/Hakkari. The PKK's target selection, assassination numbers on weekly basis and the sustainment frequency show a stable trend during this period; the PKK assassinated security personnel almost once every two weeks. The end of this period overlaps with the PKK's SVBIED attacks in Ankara on February 17 and March 13, 2016, and the PKK's major losses in Nusaybin/Mardin. The third wave was between March 28 and July 6 during the course of 2016, which marked the PKK's total defeat in urban areas. The PKK was defeated in urban fights in Sur, Nusaybin, Cizre, Yüksekova, and moved its armed campaign back to mountainous areas where it is already experienced in fighting. During this period, the PKK seemed

[79] Joint Publication 3-07.2 Antiterrorism, U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, November 2010, p. II-10.

to carry the assassination attacks in an irregular matter by diversifying the targets and losing the frequency of sustainability. The PKK started to target the local village guards (now named "security guards") together with security personnel. The assassinations of the security personnel were carried out on an individual level as revenge for the losses of urban fights. On the other hand, the assassination tactics at the PKK's organizational level were employed for punishing the village guards for their support of the security forces. In this period, the assassination tactics are assessed as spontaneous rather than well-organized but when the PKK's organizational initiative is taken into consideration, it can be said that the PKK intended to coerce the locals rather than intimidate them through assassination tactics. The assassinations in Nusaybin/Mardin of the village guards support the objective of coercion: the attack against a police officer in Adana and a civilian in Siverek/Şanlıurfa support the idea of hatred that drives the irregularity of PKK assassinations.[80] The last wave was between August 8 and October 10, 2016 when the PKK assassinated political figures and local village guards. The PKK targeted mostly the ruling AK Party local figures to discourage them from taking political actions locally – for example, the assassination of the AK Party district leader in Dicle, Diyarbakır.[81] Meanwhile, the PKK also aimed at coercing the local people by selectively targeting AK Party members. The assassinations of the village guards also served coercive objectives, namely to force the village guards to leave the guard system or to prevent the new appointees from joining the system. However, this period seemed to end because of the effective security operations against the PKK.

[80] "Adana'da bir polis silahlı saldırıda yaralandı", *Hürriyet*, May 20, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/adanada-sivil-polis-silahli-saldirida-yaralandi-40106527.

[81] "AK Parti Dicle İlçe Başkanı Deryan Akdert'e suikast", *Habertürk*, October 11,2016, http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1308494-ak-parti-dicle-ilce-baskani-deryan-akdert-olduruldu

The PKK carefully selected its targets and executed the attacks frequently based on its intelligence supremacy. The PKK analyzed the soft targets which shared many typical characteristics: they were security personnel who lived in the same civilian communities with the auxiliary members of the PKK and acted routinely in their daily life. The terrorists knew the exact time and locations when the targets were unguarded and vulnerable; they killed or wounded the targets as they were heading to work, home, to the hospital, or for shopping, etc. A few were even assassinated in their homes. The assassination team was composed of 3 to 5 PKK members: one was the perpetrator (radical YDG-H member), one or two observers to report the movement of the target (either disguised YDG-H or auxiliary members), one or two people to cover and help the perpetrator evade the scene (mostly the auxiliary members). The team communicated with cell phones mostly to disguise their movements. The attacker was armed with a pistol with maximum two magazines; the observers did not carry weapons to compromise the attacks; the cover elements who helped the perpetrator escape, (if they were YDG-H members) were equipped with small arms to slow down the security intervention while escaping from the scene.

### Armed Attacks

The PKK perpetrated the first armed attack in its history in the form of simultaneous raids in the downtown areas of small districts - Eruh in Siirt and Şemdinli in Hakkari - in 1984. Since then, armed attacks have dominated the PKK's modus operandi. However, contrary to its first armed challenge, the PKK's armed attacks became more rural as the theater of operation shifted to mountainous areas. The PKK's early weapons included AK-47 assault rifles, PK machine guns, SVD Dragunov sniper rifles and RPG rocket launchers which were all conducive to mobility, and conducting raids and ambushes in mountainous terrain. The ambiguous secu-

rity environments shaped by the Iraqi invasion in 1991 provided the PKK with mortars in different calibers ranging from 60 to 120 mm and 12,7 to 14,5 mm DShK anti-aircraft weapons. The recalibration in weapons also allowed the PKK to adjust its armed attacks during the 1990s and until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, the PKK remained immobile until carrying out major attacks against the Turkish border security bases along the mountainous Iraqi border in 2007 and 2008. Unlike, the huge volume of raids and ambushes with a large number of rural terrorists within the Turkish territory in the 1990s, until 2012, the rural attacks took on the characteristics of raids and harassing fires with relatively smaller PKK tactical elements. The effectiveness of the rural armed attacks helped the PKK achieve its strategic objective of fighting the people's war on a large scale. Raids and ambushes have similar characters in formation. Both types focus on the division of force in line with different tasks and responsibilities. However, raids target stationary targets, while ambushes engage with mobile targets. Classically, a raid or an ambush force is divided into three functional elements: security, fire, and assault. The size of a raid or ambush force is bound to the target, weather and terrain conditions as well as the force available. The target size, formation, capabilities and reaction of the reinforcement are the most important determinants of the force generation. In rural areas, the PKK suffered huge losses due to the reaction of the Turkish security forces, and even when the PKK took the attack initiative, the small size of its attack force did not bring about the desirable impacts in the period 2011-2012.

An *ambush* is described as a surprise attack characterized by the violent execution and speed of action.[82] The PKK relied on ambush tactics when the ground conflict was imminent. The combination of IED and ambush served the PKK in the rural areas. Mil-

[82] *Joint Publication 3-07.2 Antiterrorism*, U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, November 2010, p. II-11.

itary convoys, demining security units on the main roads and the operation forces in the mountainous regions became the targets of organized ambushes. The terrorists organized in accordance to the formation of the ambush and they barely used assault elements to send in the kill zone - instead their use of multiple IEDs played the driving role in causing a high number of casualties. The maximum number of terrorists is estimated to have reached between 20 and 25 in terms of the ambush tactics. In the urban conflict areas, the PKK elements became much smaller numbering roughly between 5 and 12. The size of the tactical security units was the leading factor for the PKK's tactical organization. The use of rocket-propelled grenades, IEDs and the high caliber sniper rifles also helped the PKK's ambush tactic. The PKK chose a hasty ambush with small elements when the tactical security elements emerged in an unexpected time and location; most of the urban ambushes in conflict zones were conducted to prevent the advance of security forces, not to cause a high number of security casualties, as was the case in Sur/Diyarbakır on January 19, 2016.[83]

*A raid* is described as an operation to temporarily seize an area in order to secure information, confuse an adversary, capture personnel or equipment, or to destroy a capability culminating with a planned withdrawal.[84] The PKK terrorists employ raids as their secondary armed attack tactic, and their targets range from rural military bases to urban police stations. While the PKK carries raids against the selected targets, terrorists hope both to demonstrate the government's inability of securing its critical facilities and also support the insurgency attempt. At the operational level, the raids are carried out to neutralize the security forces in the theater of

[83] "Sur'da kanaslı pusu: 3 polis yaralı", *Hürriyet*, January 19,2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/surda-kanasli-pusu-3-polis-yarali-40042453.

[84] *Joint Publication 1-02, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, US Department of Defense, 2010.

operations and gain operational dominance. At the tactical level, the PKK terrorists carry raids to kill, disorganize and intimidate the security personnel as well as to acquire arms, ammunitions and military equipment. In the rural areas, the PKK terrorists organize in groups of 15-25 terrorists to target a specific location of the perimeter security elements at high grounds securing the main base camp or facility. The PKK terrorists conduct raids both at night and during the day to optimize the shock effects on the security forces. Raids start with suppressive gunfire on the desired position, which is within the range of small arms until the assault element consisting of 4-7 terrorists retreat to a reasonable distance so that grenades can be thrown at the security personnel. At this time, the fire support element shifts its gunfire to different positions to let the assault element advance further in the security positions. After the desired objectives are met, a coordinated withdrawal takes place. This is a leading tactic that results in the highest number of security casualties in rural areas.

In urban centers, the PKK terrorists infiltrate roadside checkpoints, nearby a gendarmerie or police building by a vehicle (car, minibus or small trucks) with 4-7 terrorists. Without having a fire support and security element, terrorists prefer to storm in the facilities with assault rifles and hand grenades. Depending upon the level of security resistance, terrorists either continue to attack or withdraw via a standby vehicle nearby. Terrorists try to raid the security facilities at the most vulnerable moment, bearing in mind the optimum time to conduct the attack. Therefore, shift change times, mealtimes and visitor breaks are among the most preferred times. In the urban conflicts, the PKK terrorists carry out the raids soon after the security forces capture new positions in the suburbs. In urban conflicts, terrorists enjoy the advantage of defensive positions in complex areas before carrying out the raids in the form of counter-attacks; the positions of snipers and RPGs help to advance

the assault element through the street and tunnel infrastructures. Some of the buildings in the urban fights are left abandoned intentionally by the terrorists in order to be used to surround the security forces in organized raids.

*A mortar attack* is an indirect means comprising a firing system that launches projectiles with varying diameters. It normally has no direct sight of the target; an eye (forward observer) is needed to direct fire to the target. Therefore, a well-trained mortar crew is needed for an accurate hit. This system is used by the PKK when attacking security facilities with Russian-made 82 mm and 122 mm mortars from a distance of 1,000-3,500 meters in the mountainous regions. The impact radius of the projectile varies up to 50 meters. The PKK enjoyed the use of mortars from the PKK's rural strongholds in Turkish territory against the stationary security facilities; from the tactical PKK positions in mountainous Iraqi territory against the Turkish border security bases; and from the PKK/PYD positions in Syria against the Turkish border security posts. The PKK's use of 81 mm and 120 mm mortar tools, made in the U.S., increased after the U.S. mortar delivery to the PKK/PYD elements in Syria.[85] The PKK also uses the 60 mm mortar in its small unit tactics when engaging with the Turkish operation units in mountain operations.

A *harassing fire* is a small arms fire or a long range mid-caliber anti-aircraft gunfire, which is employed to disturb the routine of the Turkish security forces, to curtail their movement, threaten with random losses, and lower morale. The PKK utilizes almost every possible weapon type in this category, not only for achieving the objectives mentioned above, but also for testing the reaction of the security forces for a future raid. The PKK employs the following tools when conducting harassing fires: 12,7 and 14,5 mm

[85] "PYD/YPG'den Türkiye'ye havanlı saldırı", *Türkiye Gazetesi*, October 20, 2016, http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/411440.aspx.

DShK anti-aircraft weapons; 7,62 mm SVD Dragunov; 12,7 mm Zagros (the improved version of the Barrett M82A1); and 12,7 PKM machine guns. A harassing fire against a gendarmerie base in Diyarbakır was carried out amid the PKK's recovery efforts from the urban setback of April 30, 2016.[86]

The *Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM)* is a sophisticated attack means against armored vehicles due to its laser guiding systems; lasers, television cameras and wired systems. The PKK elements prefer man-portable wired guiding ATGMs because of their small compact parts, which allow carrying and operating the vehicle easily. The PKK's use of ATGMs was seen when the YPG elements in Syria began enjoying the U.S. delivery of such systems in 2015. Although the U.S. provided the PKK/PYD elements in Syria with TOWs, Javelins, and Russian-originated Fagots, the PKK mostly used these Fagots against the Turkish security forces in Turkish territory. The U.S. delivery of Fagots to the PKK/PYD were procured with the help of Ukraine's apathy helping the U.S. Army Special Forces' strategy of "no U.S. sign left behind" in the area of covert operations. Even though they are not considered guided anti-tank missiles, the U.S.-distributed AT-4s were also used by the PKK in Turkish territory.[87] The use of sophisticated ATGM weapons and other U.S.-delivered small arms by the PKK raised the question of the U.S. affiliation with the PKK and its offshoot groups, which has jeopardized the conventional partnership between Turkey and the U.S. Similar to the ATGM case, the PKK has also enjoyed the use of sophisticated man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS). It is again a Russian-made sophisticated infrared homing system of a surface-to-air missile, which was used by the PKK against Turkish

[86] "Diyarbakır'da Jandarma karakoluna PKK'dan taciz ateşi", *DHA*, April 30, 2016, http://arsiv.dha.com.tr/diyarbakirda-jandarma-karakoluna-pkkdan-taciz-atesi_1213068.html.

[87] "Nusaybin'de antitank (AT-4) ele geçirildi", *Sabah*, June 1, 2016, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/06/01/nusaybinde-antitank-at-4-roketi-ele-gecirildi?paging=6.

rotary-wing aircrafts in Turkish territory. The 9K38 Igla is the most effective MANPADS that the PKK obtained from the U.S. Army Special Forces via the PYD elements in Syria. On May 13, 2016, PKK terrorists shot down a Turkish AH-1 gunship helicopter firing the same MANPADS.[88]

### Arson

An *arson attack* is a low risk attack type that can be perpetrated with limited technical knowledge and resources.[89] It is mostly carried out against public facilities and buildings in order to spread fear among the desired group of people. The PKK also focuses on intimidating and coercing the desired target group in the area of activity where the arson attacks are carried out. The PKK has three distinguished patterns of utilizing arson: (i) the usual arson tactic of setting public buildings on fire: the PKK set fire to school buildings, mosques and libraries in the urban centers of the Van, Diyarbakır and Şırnak provinces during its surge with the help of poorly organized and criminal-minded YDG-H members; (ii) setting parked vehicles on fire in metropolitan cities in the western part of Turkey through the employment of similar YDG-H members or the PKK's auxiliary and underground members; and (iii) setting civilian vehicles on fire, an act committed in relation to road blockade activities, with the help of HPG terrorists in the rural areas of eastern cities. The third pattern was the most common use of arson and required tactical organization similar to ambush attacks on the main roads between major cities in eastern Turkey. It was the primary means of spreading fear among civilians and commercial entities to prevent them from traveling freely in east-

[88] "Genelkurmay: Helikopteri teröristler düşürmüş olabilir", *BBC Türkçe*, May 19, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160519_hakkari_helikopter_genelkurmay_aciklamasi.

[89] *Joint Publication 3-07.2 Antiterrorism*, U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, November 2010, p. II-10.

ern Turkey. One of the typical road blockade and arson attacks was reported in Bitlis on August 15, 2015.[90]

### Bomb Attacks

The *Improvised Explosive Device* (IED) is a weapon that the PKK adopted as a tactic in the mid-1990s. The primitive use of IEDs was mostly victim-initiated and gradually replaced the use of relatively more expensive Italian and former Soviet landmines. As the technical developments allowed the triggering mechanism to be more sophisticated, the PKK enjoyed the use of IEDs in more tactical-oriented operations to kill, destroy, incapacitate, harass, deny mobility or distract the Turkish security forces. IEDs are assumed to cause most of the Turkish casualties. The PKK employed large numbers of IEDs to cause the desired impact on the selected targets. Based on the target selections, the IED attacks varied in offensive and defensive objectives. In terms of an offensive term, the IED attacks were carried out in the form of roadside implantations. The PKK employed this attack type against the military motor convoys in order to destroy the security forces with maximum casualties. The sophisticated and remotely controlled initiation equipment played an important role in mass destruction.

The tactical employment of the IEDs by the PKK was seen both in the rural and urban security environments. Since the countering techniques have varied, the PKK utilized the IED attacks along with other supporting types of attacks. The roadside IEDs were among the deadliest means of attacks in the PKK's urban surge. Military convoys, police patrol vehicles, and military and police shuttle buses were the primary targets of IED attacks. IEDs were also effectively planted in walls, under stairs, and alongside different triggering mechanisms in urban complexes. The IED-

[90] "Bitlis'te PKK Yol Kesip Araç Yaktı", *Milliyet*, August 14, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/bitlis-te-pkk-yol-kesip-arac-yakti-bitlis-yerelhaber-926066/.

dense environments in urban areas were buildings within the area of urban conflict and the avenues of possible approach for the security forces along the streets and in the tunnels towards PKK positions. The roadside IED attack in Siirt on August 19, 2015 was one of the deadliest IED attacks during the PKK surge.[91]

The use of vehicle bombs in terror attacks has grown to be an effective method due to the availability of improvised explosive materials in the market, and the variety of options to deliver explosives to a selected target. The PKK first adopted the use of car bombs in Turkey in 2012, and since 2015 has developed its capacity fostered by the foreign support in Syria and Iraq. Generally conducted as a single attack, a car bomb is the deadliest attack and preferred by the PKK for several reasons: the desire to cause mass destruction of security workers and civilians; to impose fear on civilians and intimidation on security forces; to disband the security coordination between local people and security forces; and to dominate the international media coverage. The statement of VBIED literally means "man-made explosive laden on a vehicle" and is conceptualized as the *Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device* (VBIED).[92]

The escalation of VBIEDs (either suicide or remotely controlled) can be understood by the PKK's operational setback in the surge in the theater of terror in eastern Turkey due to the dominant operations of the Turkish security forces. Frequent use of car bombs by the PKK illustrated that its surge efforts had no ground in the projected zones and it lost significant ground. However, the PKK's capacity of carrying out such attacks required more intelligence and operational police capacity from the theater of operation in eastern Turkey.

[91] "Siirt'te askeri araca bombalı tuzak: 8 asker şehit oldu", *CNN Türk*, August 19, 2015, https://www.cnnturk.com/video/turkiye/siirtte-askeri-araca-bombali-tuzak-8-asker-sehit-oldu.

[92] "US Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms", *Joint Publication 1-02*, January 31, 2011, p. 391.

Vehicle bomb attacks may be regarded as an upgraded version of IED attacks on roadsides. Although the use of VBIEDs by terrorist organizations appears to be an alternative attack method against the technological and tactical improvements in the detection and detonation methods of road bombs, IED attacks are indispensable for terrorist groups.[93] There is a series of modifications that have played a critical role in the evolution of IEDs into VBIEDs. The explosive used in VBIEDs hits a determined target in a way similar to an anti-tank missile. In roadside IED attacks, however, the target hits the explosive. Another important difference between the two is that the weight of an IED is limited to 50-250 kg in order to be able to hide the device in the ground, walls or in road culverts. On the other hand, tons of explosives, depending on the vehicle's capacity and its distance to the delivery point, are used in VBIED attacks. Furthermore, an IED attack targets a single moving vehicle, but a VBIED attack aims at both mobile targets such as crowds and convoys, and fixed targets such as buildings and checkpoints. Consequently, VBIED attacks result in a higher volume of casualties. The suicide version of the VBIED attacks (SVBIED) that the PKK employed resulted in more casualties and had a limiting nature in attack selection due to the difficulty of designating volunteer suicide attackers. The PKK had no potential of turning SVBIEDs into a method to use in real time in combination with another type of attack against the operation forces, as DAESH did in Syria and Iraq.

*SVEST attacks* (Suicide vest) have been rarely carried out by the PKK. Yet, to gain leverage, the PKK conducted its SVEST attacks in the same pattern as DAESH did. Since the first experience in 1996 in downtown Tunceli, the PKK forced inactive female terrorists to carry out suicide attacks. However, the implementation of SVEST attacks never occurred in the tactical conflict zone; rather,

[93] Necdet Özçelik, *PKK and Car Bomb Attacks*, Analysis No: 24, SETA, December 2016 https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2016/12/PKK-Car-Bomb-Attacks.pdf.

it was used in the areas where civilians and security personnel mingled in city centers. It was TAK that carried out the suicide attack in Bursa, which targeted civilians on April 27, 2016.[94]

### Kidnapping

Kidnapping is the taking away of a person by force, threat, or deceit, with an intent to detain that person against his/her will. As an organized terror activity, kidnapping is used for political purposes, rather than by economic motivation. The PKK's practice of kidnapping targeted security personnel (military, police and local village guards), government officials, local political figures and civilian individuals who are affiliated with government agencies. The objective of the kidnapping is to instill fear among security, political and local figures, and to create a sense of intimidation. Until the fourth period of its surge, the PKK on occasion executed the kidnapped persons; soon after the setback in urban centers, the PKK's execution of local individuals increased considerably. The PKK used the kidnapped security personnel and state officials as a propaganda instrument and bargaining chip. Not only the security personnel, but also local civilians were kidnapped by the PKK.[95]

## TARGET SELECTION

C.J.M. Darek categorizes the targets in terms of the purpose of attacks and lists them as follows: symbolic, functional, logistical, and expressive.[96] Complying with Darek's categorization, the PKK selected its targets for one or more reasons during its surge. Therefore, the spectrum of the PKK's target selection included a variety of targets ranging from ordinary civilians to organized combat units

[94] "Bursa'daki intihar saldırısını TAK üstlendi", *BBC Türkçe*, May 1, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160501_bursa_saldiri_tak

[95] "PKK'lı teröristler Jirki aşiretinden 2 kişiyi kaçırdı", *Milliyet*, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/pkk-li-teroristler-jirki-gundem-2294286/

[96] C.J.M. Darek, *Terrorist's Target Selection*, Palgrave Macmillan,1998

during the surge. It was not only the mobile targets, but also the stationary facilities, which were among the attack targets. Target selection emanated from conjectural military, political and psychological needs. The PKK aimed to engage all possible targets in order to achieve its objectives of provocation, coercion, intimidation, and insurgency support. Therefore, its target selection did not have a specific focus and varied from one period to another because of the tactical expectations.

The *tactical/operational military units* are the combat and non-combat military units which are operative in rural and urban areas. The law enforcement gendarmerie patrols, demining units, counter-terrorism units, regular army units, and tactical and operational military convoys are among the combat units. The PKK attack against a military demining unit in Hakkari province on July 10, 2016 was a typical PKK attack.[97] Logistics convoys and personnel shuttle vehicles constitute the subcategories of the non-combat units. A unit's size also ranges from element level to company strength.

The *tactical/operational military facilities* are stationary military combat installations and non-combat buildings. The category of combat installations consists of the temporal operation and border security bases, while the gendarmerie posts, gendarmerie checkpoints, military recruitment buildings and military housings are counted among the non-combat facilities. The military recruitment facility in Kızıltepe/Mardin was among the PKK's target selections in 2016.[98]

The *tactical and operational combat police units* are the special police operation units that mainly engage with counter-terrorism and SWAT operations as well as the police reaction units. The

[97] "Hakkari'de Askeri Konvoya Saldırı: 5 Şehit", *NTV*, July 10, 2016, https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/hakkaride-askeri-konvoya-saldiri-5sehit,8inSW0etPkWdvkNkAgIatQ.

[98] "Askerlik Şubesine Bomba Yüklü Araçla Saldırı", *Hürriyet*, April 2, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/askerlik-subesine-bomba-yuklu-aracla-saldiri-mardin-haberleri-40079753.

non-combat police units are the riot police units, traffic police patrols, law enforcement patrols, and police personnel shuttle vehicles. The units' sizes vary from two-officer patrols to 40-60 officer units who are responsible for policing urban areas and protecting them from terrorist and criminal activities. The attack in Diyarbakır on October 30, 2016 was an example of such a target.[99]

The stationary police installations include non-combat law enforcement buildings such as local police stations, district and provincial police HQs, police checkpoints, police social facilities, and police housings. In eastern Turkey, police facilities are mostly located in the city centers; some facilities are located at the main entrances of cities. Facilities are easily accessible and mostly have old infrastructure with weak construction elements that are vulnerable to explosions and rocket-propelled grenades. The police HQs building in Çınar/Diyarbakır was an example of the PKK's target selection for intimidating the police officers and instilling fear among their family members.[100]

The *tactical/operational village guard units* (now named "security guards") are responsible for the security of villages and they also join the military operations, when planned in their area of responsibility. It was the team level security guard units attached to the gendarmerie forces that were active in the military operations, which took place against the PKK. The PKK also aimed to target the ties between the security guards and government by intimidating and attacking the security guards during the surge. The village guards traveling in a minibus in Eruh/Siirt were targeted by the PKK on August 28, 2016.[101]

[99] "Diyarbakır'da hain saldırı: 3 polis yaralı", *Miliyet*, October 30, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/diyarbakir-da-hain-saldiri-2-gundem-2336149/.

[100] "Diyarbakır'da bombalı saldırı: 6 ölü, onlarca yaralı", *BBC Türkçe*, January 14, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/01/160114_diyarbakir_saldiri.

[101] "PKK köy korucularına saldırdı: 5 yaralı", *Hürriyet*, August 28, 2016, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/pkk-koy-korucularina-saldirdi-5-yarali-40210034.

Official and public *government facilities* such as administrative buildings, municipality buildings, hospitals, schools, libraries and mosques are the government facilities attacked by the PKK. As experienced in the library attack that took place in Şırnak on December 25, 2015, the PKK attacked these facilities not only to cause lethal casualties, but also for non-lethal damages to the infrastructure that would interfere with public services.[102] Railroads, energy pipelines, power lines, and TV/radio transmitting stations, and public construction sites are considered as government facilities which serve the public. The PKK's target selection in its surge focused on this type of attacks as seen in Nusaybin/Mardin on August 6, 2015.[103]

Military, police and security guards constituted the *security personnel* who were among the PKK's target selection when they were off duty and going about their daily life. Despite the fact that they were off duty, they became soft targets for the PKK because of accessibility and lack of protection when commuting between work and home, shopping or visiting healthcare centers. The PKK's assassination activities targeted security personnel in different urban locations in eastern Turkey, but mostly in the Silvan district of Diyarbakır.[104] *Government employees* consist of a wide range of personnel such as the officials and local staff at governor offices, village headmen, school teachers, customs officials, healthcare professionals and all other state officials who work for governor offices. Their official roles were manipulated by the PKK members to justify the attacks against them, as in the cases of Bitlis and Van.[105]

[102] "Şırnak'ta can pazarı: PKK kütüphaneyi yaktı", *NTV*, December 25, 2015, https://www.ntv.com.tr/galeri/turkiye/sirnakta-can-pazari-pkk-kutuphaneyi-yakti,01oUjT0Pw021pofcDVlJyg.

[103] "PKK Mardin'de trafo ve yüksek gerilim hattına saldırı", *NTV*, August 6, 2016, https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/pkk-mardinde-trafo-ve-yuksek-gerilim-hattina-saldiri,tpAshpBY6kGxdvhNRAJsLA.

[104] "2 uzman çavuşa otoparkta saldırı", *Milliyet*, October 1, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2-uzman-cavusa-otoparkta-saldiri-gundem-2125547/.

[105] "Terör Örgütü PKK, Muhtarları Da Hedef Alıyor", *Milliyet*, November 10, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/teror-orgutu-pkk-muhtarlari-da-hedef-van-yerelhaber-1639290/.

C*ivilian individuals* can be understood as private contractors for procurement, logistics and constructions, private enterprise staff and business owners. Civilians are the most vulnerable target type. The PKK overtly attacks contractors and commercial company workers, blaming them for being affiliated with government institutions. However, the PKK claims an indirect engagement with civilians and considers civilian casualties as collateral damage. Yet, the TAK, its urban branch in western Turkish cities, was responsible for attacking civilians as in the case of the Ankara bombing.[106]

The PKK has also attacked certain critical private commercial infrastructures and their activities have aimed to intimidate and coerce the business world from opposing the PKK's desired theater of activity in eastern Turkey. Private entities that are associated with public services like communications, road and dam constructions, and power delivery mechanisms were exposed to PKK attacks in eastern Turkey.[107] Commercial transportation vehicles were also among this target typology.

*Political figures* mostly cover the local political party officials and representatives who are against the PKK ideology. The PKK is known for its intention of interfering in the political landscape in eastern Turkey in order to coerce the public political will. The assassination of the HÜ-DA PAR (Free Cause Party) leader in Diyarbakır on May 17, 2014 was the latest PKK attack against a political figure from the ruling party.[108] However, local political figures of the ruling AK Party became the primary targets for the PKK soon after the June 7, 2015 election, and its surge strategy tried to prob-

[106] "Ankara-Kızılay'da bombalı saldırı: En az 34 ölü", *BBC*, March 13, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/03/160313_ankara_patlama.

[107] "Bingöl'de baraj inşaatına saldırı", *Milliyet*, August 27, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/bingol-de-baraj-insaatina-saldiri-gundem-2108260/.

[108] "Terör Örgütü Siyasetçileri Hedef Alıyor", *Anadolu Agency*, July 2, 2017, http://aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/teror-orgutu-pkk-siyasetcileri-hedef-aliyor/852598.

lematize the role of the AK Party representation in the local public space. The analysis of the PKK attacks suggested that there was a correlation between certain attack types, target types and security environments. A code table was developed to demonstrate a statistical study in order to understand the attack patterns of the PKK's surge strategy (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. CODING OF THE PKK ATTACKS, TARGETS, AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT.

| Attack Code | Attack Name | Target Code | Target Code | Security Environment Code | Security Environment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Assassination | T1 | Tactical/Operational Military Unit | U | Urban |
| A2 | Ambush | T2 | Tactical/Operational Military Facility | R | Rural |
| A3 | Raid | T3 | Tactical/Operational Police Unit | | |
| A4 | Indirect Fire (Mortar) | T3C | Joint/Tactical Police and Military Units | | |
| A5 | ATGM and MANPAD | T4 | Tactical/Operational Police Facility | | |
| A6 | Harassing Fire | T5 | Tactical/Operational Village Guards Units | | |
| A7 | Arson | T6 | Government Facilities | | |
| A8 | IED | T7 | Government Entities | | |
| A9 | VBIED | T8 | Security Personnel | | |
| A10 | SVBIED | T9 | Government Employees | | |
| A11 | SVEST | T10 | Civilians | | |
| A12 | Kidnapping | T11 | Private Entities | | |
| | | T12 | Political Figures | | |

## CONCLUSION

Violent PKK tactics formed certain patterns during its surge. The analysis of the PKK cases demonstrated that there were three major components in an attack: the attack type, the target typology, and the security environment. Those three components were crucial in determining the attack's effectiveness. However, the combination of these three components also required an optimization with temporal and conjectural developments to maximize the tactical achievement.

The next chapter will focus on the PKK's strategic pattern formation - if any - when executing the surge strategy. Yet, before studying the strategic patterns, an analytic formula for the correlations is needed to study the tactical aspirations of the PKK in regards to the instrumental approach. Therefore, a combination method was developed through the creation of a code chain of the attack and target types as well as the security environment. "A3T3U" is a sample five-character code that combines the attack type in the first two characters (A3), the target type in the third and fourth characters (T3) and the security environment in the fifth character (U). Further arguments are made in the next chapter on the basis of the attack correlations, time intervals and conjectural developments that have shaped the PKK's surge strategy.

CHAPTER 3

# THE FIVE STAGES OF THE PKK'S TERRORIST CAMPAIGN

The Syrian Civil War and its security-centric dynamics influenced the regional Kurdish politics, which sparked a more nationalist aspiration for the PKK. In their study, Andrew Self and Jared Ferris present how this aspiration turned into solidarity among the PKK-affiliated terrorists.[109] The conflict environment shaped by the offensive expansionism of DAESH facilitated the creation of a "shared enemy" among the Kurdish groups in Iraq and Syria, and turned the PKK-affiliated groups into non-state actors to counter DAESH. While this course enabled the PYD, which is the sister organization of the PKK, to consolidate its political and military power, it also led the PKK to find a geopolitical front in Syria and reconsider its priorities in Turkey and in the region. The PKK aimed to take advantage of this given opportunity to transform itself into a mass-popular movement, and projected four operational objectives in this transformation period:

1. Mobilizing ethnic radicalization: the PKK's aspiration with this objective was to reinforce the armed cadres in the urban centers with radicalized paramilitary Kurdish youth groups so that the conflict would be publicized in the local community as a form of ethnic conflict.

2. Transforming the PKK into a popular movement: the PKK desired to rid itself of its terrorist reputation and attribute its cause to the people under its projected controlled zones so that a widespread "popular resistance" could be realized in an expanded geography.

[109] Andrew Self and Jared Ferris, *Dead Men Tell No Lies*, Defense Against Terrorism Review, NATO CEO-DAT, Vol. 8, 2016, Ankara.

3. Establishing control zones: the PKK aimed to expand its violent influence, limited to distant rural areas, into the suburbs of the urban districts in eastern Turkey, so that it could create a de facto security environment where the security forces could be passivated through achieving territorial dominance.

4. Practicing administrative authority in model zones: the PKK aimed to consolidate the authority tools (in a form of governmental sovereignty) by running illicit local courthouses and law enforcement practices, so that its rules could be adopted by the local public.

The PKK's "strategy of a people's war" relied on the role of radicalized urban youth. The militants of the YDG-H became the representatives of violence under the command of the HPG terrorists in the city centers, while armed violence became a routine in daily life in the local communities that involved the local youth in such a strategy. Thus, unlike the traditional aspects of the confrontation between Turkish security forces and the armed PKK elements, the subjective means of the violence became the local youth. The involvement of the youth was utilized by the PKK to facilitate placing its use of violence in the middle of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The PKK's desire to allocate an ethnic dimension to its program has been on its agenda for a long time, and the youth was the most useful apparatus to evolve the armed program on an ethnic axis with large scale urban atrocities. This attempt by the PKK was a well-designed project to change its terrorist character.

The PKK's efforts to transform its terrorist strategy into a people's war was based on introducing violence to local people with the instrument of local youth, so that the violence could be characterized by locals who could attract large-scale social support to legitimize the PKK. The strategy illustrated that the only way to success was enjoying the efficiency of mobilized mass support within the

urban space. So, the PKK's perspective in justifying its armed struggle relied on its strategy of "urban war based on the rural leverage" which was originated in 2012. Without making the rural strategy obsolete, the PKK aimed to develop urban violence with different characters to penetrate public spheres. The urban terrorist violence was assumed to be a threshold before moving to the popular disobedience phase. The PKK was expected to bridge the rural and urban tactics and seize control of the cities with civil disobedience and popular uprising.[110] Indeed, the entire strategy was based on promoting a civil unrest among the different spheres of society that do not have any sympathy for PKK ideology. The PKK knew that once the widespread civil unrest was emplaced, the Turkish government would have a difficult time overcoming the conflict.

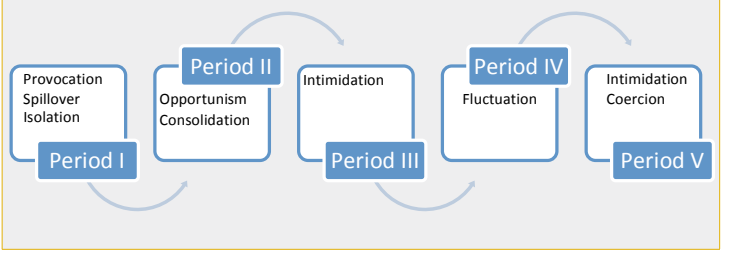
The PKK concentrated on a hybrid form of armed activity combined with terrorist and insurgency tactics for nineteen months between July 20, 2015 and December 31, 2016. The armed strategy presented new tactical aspirations for the PKK during its shift in the areas of operation which covered both rural and urban centers. Therefore, the tactical strengths and the armed capacity deficiencies of the PKK in urban centers could be interpreted as a risky attempt to drive an impactful mass insurgency. Risking its armed survivability, the PKK pragmatically initiated its surge in 2015.

The PKK is understood to have several phases during its surge in 2015 and 2016. Even though the PKK pursued a systematic insurrection, it is hard to claim that the surge moved through the planned phases. Each stage seemed to begin with a conjectural development that sparked an operational development in the PKK and almost all stages ended with a gradual devolution. Operational evolution and devolution brought up two facts about the PKK's success evaluation: the devolution of operational capacity never

[110] Atilla Sandıklı, "PKK Terör Örgütünün 2013 Yılı Stratejisi: 'Kıra Dayalı Şehir Savaşı'", *Bilgesam*, December 19, 2012.

ended with the PKK's full-scale defeat and the PKK always found a way to survive – yet it never achieved its ultimate goal of a full-scale people's war. This obviously introduces the PKK's capability to ignite, escalate and change the forms of violence without popular support. Although the staging strategy of the PKK's insurrection has no suggestion of its desired concept of operations, it presents the PKK's ability to quickly adapt to swiftly changing security environments. Each and every stage was conceptualized on the basis of military objectives, which had an influence on inducing psychological and political objectives. Staging and/or phasing are the breakdowns of a master strategy; both are required as parts of a deliberate military plan. The first two periods contain the characteristics of the PKK-initiated operation concept; however, the last three periods display the characteristics of a course of action taken in unexpected situations. Therefore, the last two periods should not be taken as planned phasing or staging of the PKK's strategy, but as an adaptive PKK maneuver in response to the new security environment. It was observed that the PKK acted in order to manipulate the security environment into causing a violence spillover from one province to another - this occurred so as to achieve its operational objective, which is a full-scale people's war. The list of the five chronological periods, in which the PKK's certain tactical activities were practiced and which dominated the course of violence are as follows:

FIGURE 2. PERIODS OF THE PKK'S TERRORIST CAMPAING



## PERIOD I: THE PROVOCATION, SPILLOVER, AND ISOLATION PERIOD (JULY 20, 2015 TO OCTOBER 10, 2015)

The PKK seemed to manage its first period from July 20 to October 10, 2015 and had several objectives: (i) provoking the government and security forces through assassinations, (ii) spreading the violence to a large-scale area by mobilizing the underground and auxiliary elements in different provinces, (iii) isolating the area of operations (the projected insurgency area) by intimidating and coercing the civilians and private entities, and (iv) showing off force in rural areas to divert the state security efforts from urban centers.

The tense political atmosphere in Turkey after the June 7 elections in 2015 prompted the PKK to take an active role to deepen the state's security gap, prior to its surge. The failure to form a coalition government and the course to a future snap election were the facilitating developments for the PKK to bring the violence back on the Turkish public agenda. Contrary to the domestic dynamics in Turkey, the major factors that the PKK would manipulate were in Syria, not too far from the Turkish borders; DAESH's advancement in northern Syria, the U.S. policy shift from supporting moderate Syrian opposition groups to the PYD, and the rising Russian military presence in Syria were motivational factors that led the PKK to put its "people's war" strategy into practice in Turkey.

On the other hand, the de-securitized environment in eastern Turkey during the solution process caused Turkish security forces to withdraw from the theater of operations in the rural areas and remain in their barracks. Undoubtedly, this situation helped the PKK to save time to organize, equip, and train for the tasks of confronting the Turkish security forces in a more advantageous manner. Taking advantage of the free movement in rural areas, the PKK was able to mobilize its tactical elements in mountainous ar-

eas and dominated the public space in distant villages and towns. The PKK influence then spilled over to the suburbs of major cities and motivated the youth to take action against the state forces. The widespread mass motivation paved the way for the PKK to start its urban armed strategy in order to evolve the violence into a popular mass standoff that it had been trying to create for decades.

Methodologically, an armed urban strategy starts in multiple urban centers and spills over into other distant centers as the violence grows. Then, it turns into a united movement with military, political, social and geographic links along with other local movements. Coordinated actions have stronger impacts in weakening government forces. Gradually developing zone efforts are assumed to have the character of a whole-scale regular army. The transformation of an irregular force into a regular army requires a full-scale offense against the government forces, in which the local civilian population takes part through participating in various civil disobedience activities, such as illegal demonstrations, general strikes, and boycotts to weaken the government authority. The final step is total rebellion aimed at pushing the government forces out of the claimed territory. The strategy, indeed, serves for institutionalizing the desired control as Stathis N. Kalyvas argues in his study.[111] The PKK also followed the same method for spreading and organizing the coordinated acts of its armed strategy in urbanized areas.

After a long term of ideological, organizational and operational affiliation with the PYD, the PKK presumed that the DAESH suicide attack in Suruç on July 20 was to rationalize its projected violent strategy.[112] Unlike the steady period before July 22, it was the PKK that dominated the security environment in eastern Tur-

[111] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press: New York, 2006.

[112] "AKP Saldırıları ve Yeni Kürt Direniş-Duran Kalkan", *ANF*, July 23, 2015 https://firatnews.com/kurdistan/akp-saldirilari-ve-yeni-kurt-direnisi-duran-kalkan-51155.

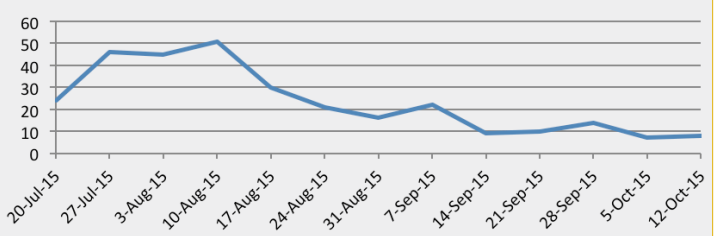
key through various terror attacks. In addition to the high volume of the attacks that surprised the Turkish security forces, it was the diversity of the attack types, the target selections and the locations that complicated the reaction capacity of the security forces. Blaming the lack of intelligence and operational capacity, the Turkish security forces mostly depended on the *meeting engagement* in principle with the PKK in the early weeks of the PKK surge. The Turkish security forces were able to balance the increased number of the PKK attacks with their reactive operations in the third and fourth weeks of the first period, and were not able to take initiative until mid-September, 2015.

The attacks followed a decreasing trend in terms of frequency starting from the fifth week of the PKK surge. The number of the attacks in the first four-week period was enough to coerce and intimidate civilians, and to provoke security forces to take action in both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, the PKK managed to generate public hatred for the security forces by using its locally available YDG-H elements to confront the mobilized security forces in front of the public.[113] Following the sharp decrease of the attacks in late August, the PKK tended to decrease its attacks gradually by testing the local, domestic and international public opinion before deciding to end activity. The PKK achieved several objectives in the first period: (i) provoked the government and the security forces, (ii) isolated the area of activism from the outside world, and (iii) acquired the suburban initiatives and consolidated the gains in the projected control zones in order to inspire supporters in other suburbs. The PKK also took advantage of this period to test the capacity of the YDG-H and the reactions from the local, domestic and international audiences over its urban surge, while the PKK's Syrian branch, the PYD, continued

[113] "Çözüm sürecinin maskelileri: YDG-H", *Al Jazeera Türk*, January 19, 2015, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/cozum-surecinin-maskelileri-ydg-h.

to fight against DAESH in northern Syria. In the late terms of this period, the PKK stopped its attacks and looked for an opportunity to leave behind its more insurgent image by declaring by declaring a decision to go inactive. It was the DAESH Train Station attack that took place on October 10 in Ankara, which motivated the PKK to take such a decision. By coming to the decision of going inactive, the PKK aimed to save time in order to transfer its experienced rural terrorists to the urban areas in order to employ more sophisticated offensive and defensive tactics in the strongholds of city centers for the following planned period. Following the declaration of the decision, it was also the perfect time for the PKK to manipulate public opinion to delegitimize the government operations.

FIGURE 3. PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD I.




When analyzing the PKK's armed tactics during the first period, 10 dominant types of attacks that disrupted the security environment can be observed. The first five dominant attacks were arson attacks (mostly associated with road blockades in rural areas); use of roadside IEDs; raids against security installations; harassing fires against the security installations; and assassinations. It is obvious that assassinations were utilized to spark violence against the security forces despite the fact that road blockades and arson tactics stood out sharply in the same period.

FIGURE 4. BREAKDOWN OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD I.

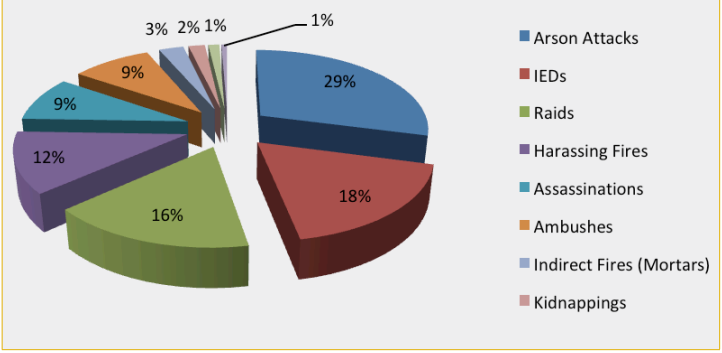
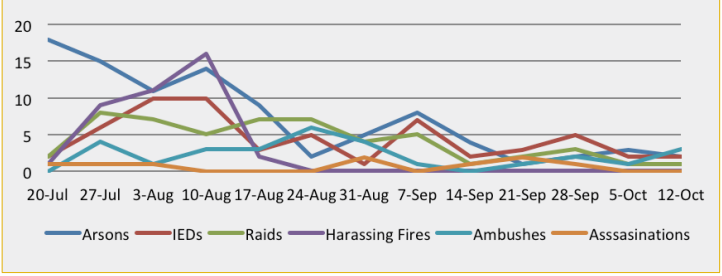



FIGURE 5. PKK ATTACK TREND IN PERIOD I.




The practice of arson attacks was the leading attack type, which served as an instrument to shape the PKK tactics in this period. The implementation of the arson tactic gradually decreased as the PKK's violent activity increased in the area of operation and other tactics replaced it. By late September, the highest point of the early stage in this period, arson attacks had faded away altogether. This type of tactic was easy to conduct with a small number of terrorists both in urban and rural areas. The gathering of the HPG terrorists in rural areas to carry out arson attacks was conducted on the basis of a traditional ambush and raid organization which is composed of security, fire and support, and assault elements. The main difference between ambush and raid was the

assault element that had to wait in the "kill zone," which can be defined as the blockade point of the running traffic. The arson tactic on the main roads targeted ordinary civilian and commercial company vehicles as a supplementary means for the road blockade actions. The checkpoints of this type of attack also defined the border of the PKK's area of operation which was the projected area of insurgency that was supposed to be isolated from civilian movement (either commercial or private). The objective of the PKK in isolating the areas of operation had two major aspects: the show of force and the claim to territorial dominance in order to weaken the government image. This type of attack was an effective method to intimidate and coerce civilian entities. The second category of arson attacks targeted stable rural facilities such as construction and quarry sites within the PKK's projected area of operation. The rural PKK elements also targeted unguarded rural power stations, GSM base stations, and TV and radio transmitting facilities by setting them on fire. In urban centers, YDG-H members carried arson attacks against civilian vehicles, GSM base stations, power substations and public schools in poorly organized attempts. The target selection of the arson tactic, either in rural or urban areas, focused on low risk, highly fragile soft targets due to easy access to the target area, passive security systems in the target sites, and the visual impact on the local public.[114]

The use of IEDs was seen in operation theaters in urban and rural areas targeting military and police vehicles.[115] The composition of the ammonium nitrate and fuel oil (ANFO) was used as the main explosive charge in IEDs. Commercially available propane

[114] "Bitlis'te Pkk Yol Kesip Araç Yaktı", *Milliyet*, August 14, 2015, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/bitlis-te-pkk-yol-kesip-arac-yakti-bitlis-yerelhaber-926066/.

[115] "Iğdır'da polis servis aracına bombalı saldırıda şehitler var", *habertürk*, September 8, 2015, http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1125855-igdirda-polis-servis-aracina-bombali-saldirida-sehitler-var.

cylinders and mortar shells were also found in IEDs compounds. The IEDs, used together with a small amount of boosters such as 450-1,000 gr of TNT or plastic explosives, were triggered by wired or remote control methods. Roadside IEDs of 50-1,000 kg were planted in barricades, walls, under bridges and on roads to target the police patrol vehicles in city centers and military convoys on rural roads. Civilians were also targeted by the IED attacks. Even though the IED attacks were second in number during the first period of the PKK surge, they created the deadliest impact. This attack type was not only used against the security forces, but also against civilians to discourage them from traveling. The IED attacks reached a peak during the first four weeks; meanwhile, the PKK never renounced them due to their tactical merits (low risk/high impact) as the surge continued.

Traditionally, the PKK is a rural-based terrorist organization in terms of modus operandi and the types of harassing fire and raid tactics used against the rural military installations such as gendarmerie posts, military border outposts and operational bases, which have been the most important attack types since the PKK started its armed violence in 1984. Similar to its past implementations, the PKK also carried out harassing fire attacks to test the reaction of the rural security forces and as an instrument to study the feasibility of a future raid in the first period. The harassing fire attacks were carried out mostly with the use of small arms or direct fire methods like heavy machine guns or anti-aircraft weapons. The mortar shelling method was used by the PKK to disturb the rural security forces in a harassing way, as well. As an operational instrument for the continuous harassment or long-term reconnaissance, the PKK carried raids against the vulnerable security facilities. Historically, the PKK employed the raid method mostly at nights. Normally, nighttime raids provide concealment for the PKK elements to infiltrate the

target area and to stalk the facilities. But, during its surge, PKK elements carried out raids in daytime. This is not only related to the PKK's combat readiness or experience in raids - it is also a result of the lack of operational supremacy of the Turkish security forces since 2013.

The PKK's fifth choice of attack – yet not the least important - was assassinations. The PKK's aspiration in assassinating security personnel, prominent local figures or symbolic individuals was observed to cause provocation, coercion and intimidation. The first PKK attack under the scope of this study is the assassination of two off-duty police officers in Ceylanpınar/Şanlıurfa on July 20, 2015. However, the PKK conducted the assassination as a tactical move to support other kinds of attacks or alternate operational deadlocks. The PKK continued its first period of assassinations until October 1, 2015; after the first attack on July 20, the assassinations aimed to intimidate security personnel, and civilians with the hope of interfering in their off-duty lives. Assassinations in this period increased in numbers and spread to different locations. However, the primary target of assassinations was security personnel. The number of the attacks that took place in the first three weeks was limited to one on a weekly basis, but it followed a stable sustainment course three weeks in a row, including the week of the first attack. The assassination numbers tended to increase at the end of the period, but the frequency of the assassination sustainability was observed to decrease. The reason for the increase in the assassination numbers was closely related to the rising impact of the violence caused by the PKK's other types of attacks. The impact of any type of attack during the early stages of the PKK's armed surge is assessed as a trigger for any other type of attack. The decreasing frequency in the sustainability of assassinations is suggested to have been caused by the increased variation of the PKK attacks. When violence was established in

the security environment, the PKK shifted its assassination objective from provocation to intimidation with the intention of using this as leverage for other types of attacks. The assassination tactic was also seen as an instrument to sustain the psychology of violence and to convince people that the PKK maintained operational supremacy. The PKK carried out assassinations in urban areas rather than rural areas to spread fear among the public; Silvan/Diyarbakır and downtown Şırnak, where the PKK started its urban surge, were important locations for both publicizing the assassination impact and intimidating the security personnel. The first period of assassinations seemed to end with the PKK's unilateral ceasefire statement followed by DAESH's twin suicide attacks that took place in front of the Ankara Train Station, but the real cause is believed to be different: the Turkish forces had gained the operational advantage over the PKK by that time. It was not only the assassinations but all the other attack types that had been suppressed to a certain extent. In the first period, the tactic of assassination, indeed, achieved its goal which was for the Turkish security forces to respond to the PKK's armed challenge after almost three years of stability, during the course of the solution process.

The PKK employed a variety of armed tactics ranging from arson to VBIED during the first period of its surge. The attack types suggested that the center of gravity evolved around arson, raid and IED attacks as the primary means in this period. Assassination, harassing fire and ambush methods shaped the primary periphery of the PKK attacks. The secondary periphery was composed of indirect fire, kidnaping and VBIED attacks. The attacks in the secondary periphery were related to a certain extent with the PKK tactics learned in Syria, and hinted towards the fact that the PKK's armed strategy could be transformed into a hybrid form.

FIGURE 6. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD I.

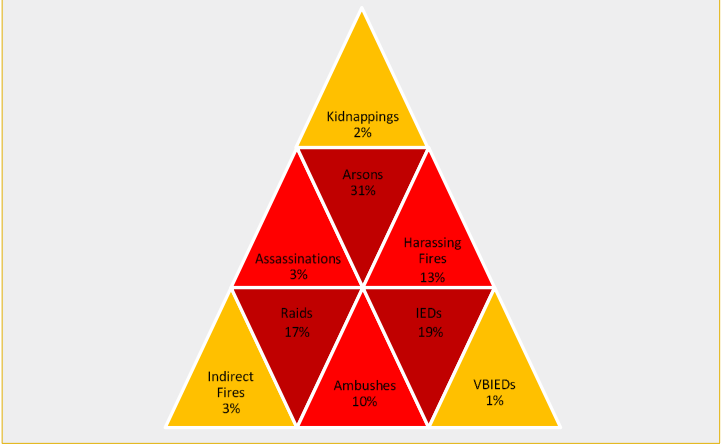
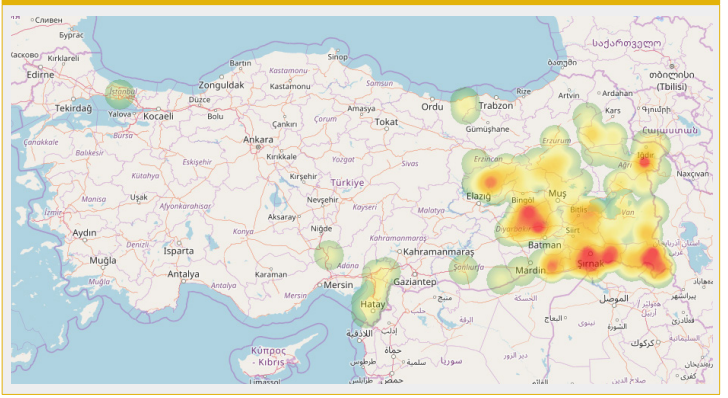


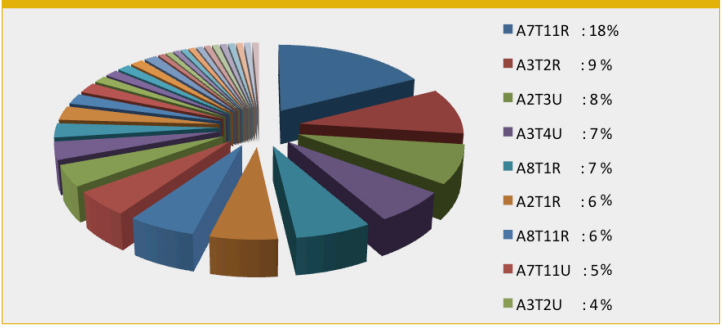

FIGURE 7. MAPPING THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD I.




The correlation between the attacks, targets and locations, illustrates how the PKK unified certain attack types to transform its attack preferences into a hybrid character. The PKK attacks are characterized on the basis of target selection and location. In line with the diversity of the attack type, the PKK's target selection included tactical/operational military units; tactical/operational military facilities; tactical/operational police units; tactical/operational police facilities; tactical/operational village guard units;

government facilities; government entities; security personnel; government employees; civilians; private entities; and political figures. The locations of the attacks were categorized as urban or rural. To better understand the correlation between the variables, the attacks, the targets and the locations were codified and the name combination of these codes represents the correlation. The correlation between the attacks, targets and locations revealed that the PKK employed 32 different variations. The most important correlations are A7T11R (arson attack against private entities in rural area); A3T2R (raid against military entities in rural area); A2T3U (ambush against tactical police units in urban center); A3T4U (raid against police facilities in urban center); and A8T1R (IED attack against tactical military units in rural area).

FIGURE 8. BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATION IN PERIOD I.




The study of the correlation between the attack type, target and location suggests the dynamics and objectives of the PKK's modus operandi. The correlation chart suggests the following facts about the PKK's intentions in the first period:

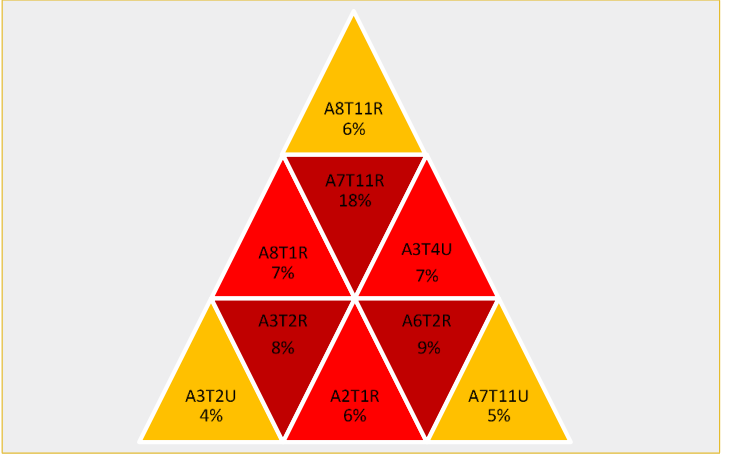
– The center of gravity of the correlations reveals that the PKK had an objective of isolating the area of activity from the broader region with A7T11R and A3T2R attacks in the rural areas,

and mobilizing the security environment in the urban centers with A2T3U attacks.

– The high number of the correlations point to the fact that the PKK tried all types of attacks against almost all types of targets to escalate the violence.

– The urban and rural implementations of the attacks establish that the PKK could carry out certain type of attacks in both rural and urban areas of operation, but that the sustainment in both of the security environments would not be considered rational. The decreasing momentum of certain attacks - as is shown in the trend graphic of the attacks - also proves this inference.

FIGURE 9. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD I.




During the first period of the PKK's armed surge, Turkey was under the influence of various regional and domestic developments that affected the Turkish security environment. At the regional level, Russia's direct military involvement in the Syrian civil war on September 30, 2015 brought a different dimension to Turkey's

fight against the PKK. Domestically, Turkey's decision to go to a snap election, and the election campaign itself, was a chance for the PKK to manipulate the unstable political environment to merge its objectives by gaining people's support. The most important development was the twin suicide attacks committed by DAESH at the Ankara Train Station that ended the first period of the PKK's armed surge in 2015. Following the attack by DAESH, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire on October 11, 2015 under certain conditions that the PKK intended to exploit.[116] The PKK's ceasefire decision had multiple aspects on an operational level; Firstly, the PKK was able to use the YDG-H elements to import violence in the eastern suburbs - the YDG-H had completed its mission in this regard. The inefficiency of the YDG-H in armed conflict and the uncontrolled YDG-H criminal activities against locals were enough to harm the PKK's politicized violent reputation. Secondly, the PKK's prominent leader Murat Karayılan, in an interview with ANF news, pointed out that the PKK terrorists should stop their road blockades and arson activities on the intercity roads in rural areas, but keep their positions in the area of activity. Thirdly, even if there was no clear statement on the termination of the PKK's unilateral ceasefire, it was clear that the PKK would use this initiative soon after the results of the snap election on November 1, 2015 became known. The election results, indeed, would not have any significance for the PKK's resumption of armed violence; the PKK is known to claim that the "Kurdish Issue" and the solution to this problem can only be achieved by armed means, a perspective with which the non-PKK circles in the HDP, the Kurdish population and the Turkish public disagree. As a non-political entity, the PKK would be pragmatic in using the snap election results to resume

[116] Deniz Kendal "Karayılan: Ankara şehitlerinin vasiyeti gereği eylemsizlik kararını uygulayacağız", *ANF News*, October 12, 2015. https://firatnews.com/kurdistan/karayilan-ankara-sehitlerinin-vasiyeti-geregi-eylemsizlik-kararini-uygulayacagiz-56172

the violence. So, what was the intention of the PKK in calling for a unilateral ceasefire? The answer, in simple terms, was to get rid of the inefficiency and irregularity of the YDG-H actions in urban areas, to reorganize the rural PKK terrorist elements for the projected urban fight in city centers, and to gain time to transform into an urban organization while manipulating DAESH attacks to distract the local, domestic and international attention from its own violent stance. Therefore, the causes mentioned above - and more - paved the way for the PKK to move onto the next period, which is the time of opportunism and consolidation.

## PERIOD II: OPPORTUNISM AND CONSOLIDATION (OCTOBER 11, 2015 TO DECEMBER 7, 2015)

The DAESH bombing on October 10, 2015 served the PKK in terms of employing a steady and relatively calm pattern of approach in the Turkish security environment up to when the Turkish security forces started a large scale urban operation on December 7, 2015. The PKK's armed policy seemed to revolve around domestic and regional developments in order to give its surge a more mature character in this period. This was the period for the PKK to transfer its experienced rural HPG terrorists to the urban conflict zones in order to reorganize the YDG-H elements, to take over the key YDG-H roles and alternate foreign support. The objective of the PKK during the second period of the surge was to prepare for a large-scale urban fight under the cover of unilateral ceasefire, by taking advantage of the conjectural developments. The Turkish snap elections, the Russian jet crisis, and the indecisiveness of the U.S. in the fight against DAESH were the leading conjectural developments, which enabled the PKK to optimize this period in terms of opportunities to consolidate its conflict dynamics in urban centers. The PKK also sought to consolidate the public support of Turkish liberals and marginal leftists under the umbrella of

the HDP in order to better serve its projected large-scale popular war. Therefore, extensive grounds for a naïve understanding of the PKK presence in the Turkish political, social and security spaces would be offered and rationalized, giving the PKK an upper hand to execute its widespread violence. The PKK, indeed, adopted a new strategy of urban warfare risking the limited popular support in its strongholds, namely the southeastern cities of Turkey. The PKK's objective of conducting a people's war was decided during the course of the KCK formation in the 2000s. From an organizational perspective, the PKK established three different functional elements in its long-term sustainment: the control (leadership) element, the armed element, and mass organizations.

The first conjectural development in Period II which benefitted the PKK was the DAESH twin suicide attacks against a leftist public gathering in front of the Ankara Train Station.[117] The bombing was carried out to disrupt the cooperative actions of left-wing organizations such as political parties like the HDP; certain unions like the KESK, the DISK, and Egitim-Sen; certain civil public organizations like the Pir Sultan Abdal Association, Halk Evleri, Alevi and Bektasi Associations, and so on. Soon after the DAESH Ankara Train Station bombing, the PKK declared a conditional unilateral call to halt its attacks. Declaring a unilateral and conditional ceasefire, the PKK aimed to recover its public image within the leftist public space in Turkey; to reinforce its international image as an organization that fights against DAESH; and to pave the way for the HDP to strengthen its position in the Turkish Parliament after the snap parliamentary election on November 1. On the other hand, the conditional perspective of the ceasefire also suggested that the PKK left the door open to resume the attacks when necessary. Above all, from a tactical perspective, the PKK was believed to be

[117] "Ankara Explosions Leave Almost 100 Dead – Officials", *BBC*, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34495161 October 2, 2017.

saving time and preparing for a more violent period using the desired positive image of the unilateral ceasefire. Almost 25 days after the declaration of its ceasefire on October 11, the PKK announced that it terminated its unilateral ceasefire on November 1, blaming the government for not stopping military operations against it and called the Kurds in eastern Turkey to take to the streets in an uprising - the PKK attacks increased after this announcement.

The characteristics of the PKK attacks differentiated after the declaration of ceasefire on October 11. The PKK terrorists involved local people in the urban confrontation and fight. They mobilized the people so that they could prevent security forces from identifying terrorists among them. Urban terror activities were carried out in the triangle between Sur of Diyarbakır, Cizre of Şirnak and Nusaybin of Mardin. Strategically, these three locations were not chosen by the PKK randomly. Firstly, all three had a considerable population on which the PKK ideology is built and had a potential to spread the possible urban violence into the surrounding towns and cities. Secondly, Sur is an extensive urban area and can harbor more terrorist operatives to keep more security forces busy, while Nusaybin and Cizre play a key role in providing concealment for the PKK fighters coming in and out of Syria. Thirdly, Cizre and Nusaybin had access to the PYD strip from Syria to the Sinjar region in Iraq. The nature and characteristics of these cities perfectly complied with David Kilcullen's concept of transformation, transformation of a rural armed violence into an urban character. Kilcullen defines four transformational paradigms in his book: population, urbanization, litoralization and connectivity. he PKK had the population support to some extent in these cities: the core groups within the supportive population were of rural origin who moved from distant rural centers in Diyarbakır, Mardin and Şırnak during the 1990s and they already had affiliation with the PKK's rural operatives since the beginning of the PKK's armed violence. Owing to

the lack of urban planning, the PKK supporters were able to build up those cities in terms of basic housing needs following the mass migration from rural areas. The uncontrolled urban construction paved the way to local grievance and caused chaotic movements to emerge, which the PKK would exploit at some point in the future.

The architectural structure of the cities also contributed to the organization of irregular offensive and defensive tactics against the security forces. The connection between those cities and other similar towns was very easy to access through the well-established auxiliary and underground network of the PKK in the region, which allowed the flourishing of violent discourse and the exchange of operational experience as well as the logistical support among the towns. The most controversial issue of the PKK's transformational efforts in those towns was the litoralization argument because none of these towns had access to a sea. However, it was the accessibility to the outside world for foreign support – not access to the sea - that enabled the PKK to take on a violent urban character. Nusaybin and Cizre were perfect hubs for the PKK to access the sophisticated weapons and ammunitions, experienced manpower and interaction with the U.S. and Russian militaries in the neighboring Syrian towns of Qamishli and Hasakah. When Kilcullen's litoralization is replaced by the accessibility paradigm in the PKK case, it is suggested that the PKK's choice of urban violence in Sur, Nusaybin and Cizre is a perfect match with the concept of transformation.

The November 1 election was an important conjectural development for the PKK's violent urban strategy. Even though it is known that the PKK and the HDP support each other, the PKK had no intention of renouncing its violent argument and leaving the Kurdish issue to be solved with a political initiative. Destabilizing the security environment in eastern Turkey soon after the June 7 election, the PKK also dominated the Kurdish political convergence with the Turkish democratic system, and caused the HDP

to lose 26.25% of the parliamentary seats in the November 1 snap election. Cemil Bayık, the co-chair of the KCK, claimed that the HDP was able to remain in the Turkish Parliament after November 1 election because of the PKK's standoff against the state. Cemil Bayık also noted that the HDP lost a considerable number of votes in eastern provinces such as Van and Bitlis.[118] The chart below displays a comparison of the June 7 and November 1 elections for the four major political parties in Turkey.[119]

FIGURE 10. COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF TURKISH PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF JUNE 7 AND NOVEMBER 1 IN 2015

| | June 7 Elections | | November 1 Elections | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Vote Share | Rep. Seats | Vote Share | Rep. Seats |
| AK Party | 40.80% | 258 | 49.50% | 317 |
| CHP | 25.00% | 132 | 25.32% | 134 |
| HDP | 13.10% | 80 | 10.76% | 59 |
| MHP | 16.40% | 80 | 11.90% | 40 |

The PKK announced that it terminated its unilateral ceasefire on November 5 and blamed the government for not stopping military operations against it; it called the local Kurds to take to the street in an uprising. The attacks against the security forces increased after this announcement. The PKK seemed to resume its attacks amid the discussions of a possible Turkish ground intervention in the projected security zone between Azez and Jarabulus in Syrian territory four days after the elections. Exploiting the so-called ceasefire, the PKK reinforced the YDG-H terrorists by deploying active PKK terrorists in downtown areas to take initiatives and di-

[118] Mahmut Hamsici, "Bayık: Artık tek taraflı ateşkes olmayacak", *BBC Türkçe*, November 30,2016,http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/11/151130_bayik_mulakat_1.

[119] Official Results of the November 1 Election, http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/content/conn/YSKUCM/path/Contribution%20Folders/SecmenIslemleri/Secimler/2015MVES/96-D.pdf.

rect other YDG-H terrorists. The PKK escalated its attacks against security forces to intimidate Turkey with further civil disobedience in Silvan, Nusaybin and Sur, and to force Turkey to adapt to the new political atmosphere, which, which emerged from the situation in Syria. The PKK suffered big defeats in Silvan, Cizre, Varto, Lice, Yüksekova and Nusaybin in the course of its urban fight before the snap elections on November 1. The PKK leaned on its new fighting strategy based on the urban guerilla tactics supported by rural elements. This new strategy was intended to mobilize the whole region and drive civil disobedience; furthermore, the aforementioned cities would be the core centers for the call of autonomy.

As the urban conflict between the PKK and the Turkish security forces escalated, the downing of the Russian warplane over Turkish airspace marked the beginning of a new era for the Turkish-Russian relations on November 24 and it also served the PKK in establishing a stronger convergent connection with Russia through the PYD in Syria. Meanwhile, the PKK upheavals in Turkish territory evolved toward a more urbanized character. Twenty-five days of unilateral ceasefire and the election agenda in Turkish politics helped the PKK to complete its tactical preparation in eastern cities; the Russian jet crisis brought an opportunity for the PKK to increase the attacks and created the hope of making Turkey more vulnerable. The ups and downs in the PKK attack trends also demonstrate the way the PKK synchronized its attack strategy with the domestic developments to seek popular support and certain legitimacy via an anti-DAESH discourse, the ceasefire announcement and the claim of the HDP survival in the Turkish Parliament. On the other hand, the PKK justified its decision to intensify the attacks by its strategic advantage in regional developments against Turkey such as the U.S. reluctance to support the Turkish stance in Syria, and the tension between Turkey and Russia. It could be argued that the PKK's attack strategy in this period evolved on two

axes: the consolidation efforts for certain legitimacy and the opportunism approach based on the Turkish vulnerability. This strategy continued until the week of December 7 before the Turkish security forces reacted with decisive counter-operations.

FIGURE 11. THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD II.

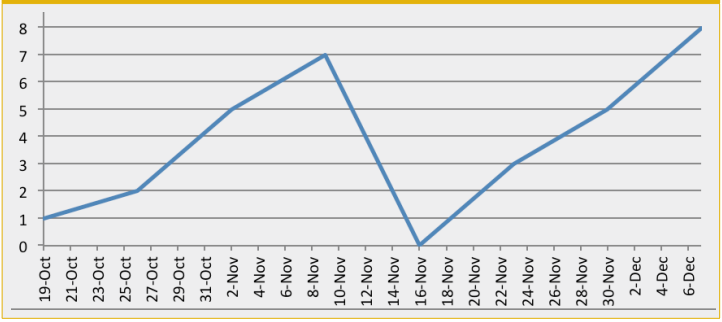



FIGURE 12. PKK ATTACKS TREND IN PERIOD II.

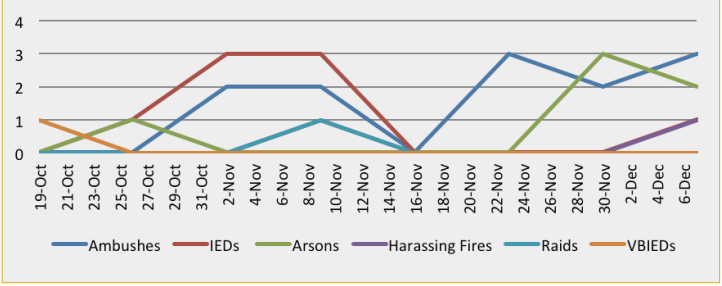
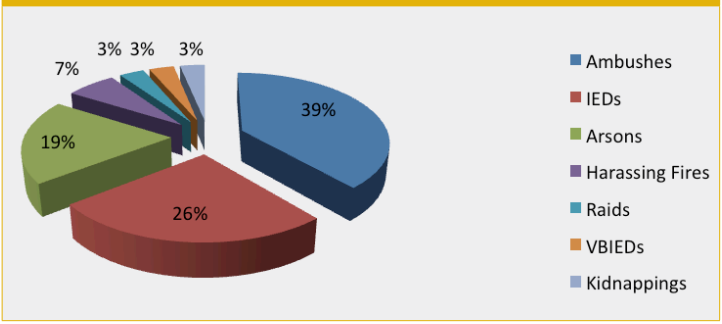



FIGURE 13. BREAKDOWN OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD II.



The attack characters in this period were much more urbanized, but the attack range was very narrow; the 7 attack types above were the prominent tactical instruments for the PKK terrorists. Ambush became the most prevalent; however, roadside IED attacks in city centers also became more sophisticated. On the other hand, arson tactics continued to target civilian vehicles with the hope of coercing the public.

FIGURE 14. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD II.

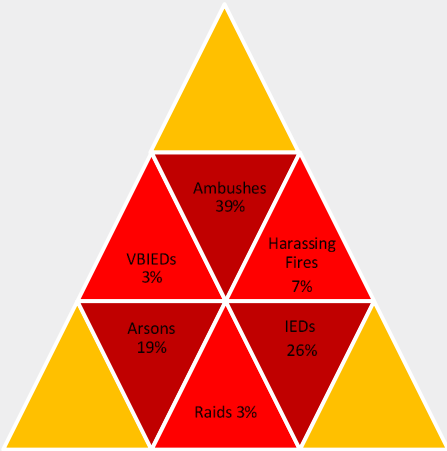
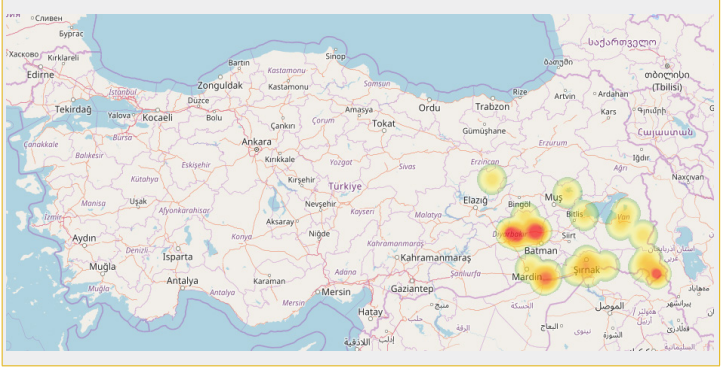
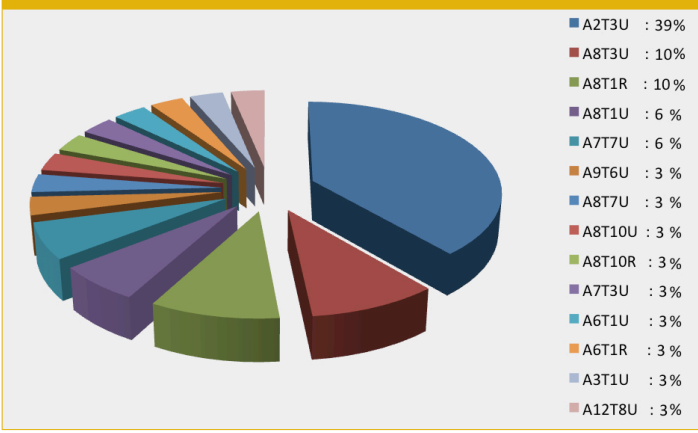



FIGURE 15. MAPPING THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD II.



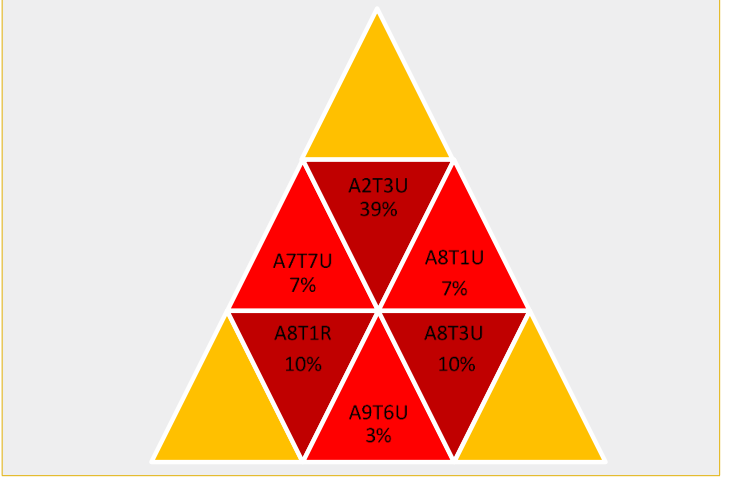
The target selection in this period focused more on urban security entities than rural security elements; the attacks against police patrols, police stations and facilities suggested that the PKK used the consolidation and opportunism stage as a warm-up period in order to switch to a large scale urban standoff. The attacks against the police also served the objective of associating the police with the AK Party institutional personality so that the public opinion in opposition circles could be satisfied by the PKK's pursuit of legitimacy.

FIGURE 16. BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATION IN PERIOD II.




Contrary to the first period, the correlation between the attack types, targets and security environment had smaller variations. Fourteen different variations dominated the attack nature and pointed out the PKK's urbanization strategy. It was also asserted by the PKK that some of the attacks were carried out by the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) and the YDG-H on their own accounts in this period. It is believed that the PKK tried to shed its bad reputation of devastating urban attacks by attributing these attacks to multiple pro-PKK groups. On the other hand, the PKK also gained more public support by putting the spotlight on these violent organizations, which were acting in line with the PKK's armed violent strategy.

FIGURE 17. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD II.




The most applied correlation was A2T3U (ambush against tactical police units in urban area); A8T3U (IED attack against tactical police units in urban area); A8T1R (IED attack against tactical military units in rural area); A8T1U (IED attack against tactical military units in urban area); A7T7U (arson attack on state investments in urban area); and A9T6U (car bomb attack on state facilities in urban area).

## PERIOD III: SUSTAINMENT OF THE INTIMIDATION PERIOD (DECEMBER 8, 2015 TO MARCH 28, 2016)

It was the period between December 8, 2015 and March 28, 2016 when the PKK faced suppressive security operations. The PKK focused on survival in this period, directing intensive attacks against a wide range of targets including civilians and combat security units in order to compensate for its tactical losses in Period II. The PKK's need for a tactical shift was completely against its pursuit of

legitimacy or popular support as evidenced in its coercive efforts against civil society. This was also the most clear example of the PKK's tactical quagmire. The PKK aimed to broaden the area of activities within the urban centers by pushing its urban terrorists to escalate violence in the latter. The PKK terrorists embedded locals in the operation fields in order to prevent security forces from identifying terrorists among the crowds. The urban terror activities were carried out in the triangle between Sur of Diyarbakır, Cizre of Şırnak and Nusaybin of Mardin. Strategically, these three locations were not chosen by the PKK randomly. Firstly, all three have a considerable population backing the PKK and have a potential to spread the urban violence into the surrounding towns and cities. Secondly, Sur is an extensive urban area that can harbor many terror operatives in order to keep more security forces busy while Nusaybin and Cizre play a key role in providing a cover for the PKK operatives coming from Syria; Cizre and Nusaybin could constitute a hub in the eastern Kurdish strip in Syria and in the Sinjar region of Iraq. These considerations complied with the accessibility (foreign support) parameter of the PKK's urbanization transformation, as well.

The activity of a separatist terrorist organization is broken into five stages in the course of its life: (I) violent propaganda, (II) organizational growth, (III) guerilla-type offensive, (IV) mobilization of the masses, and (V) urban uprising.[120] The PKK, ideologically a Marxist/Leninist terrorist organization, started its attacks in 1984. It matured its organizational structure and completed its growth by 1991. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War, the PKK changed its ideology to a separatist platform to gain the Kurdish support. During the 1990s, the PKK faced big losses whenever it

[120] Brian Michael Jenkins, *Five Stages of the Urban Warfare: Challenge of 1970s*, RAND Corporation, July 1971, pp 4-14

increased the attacks against government institutions and civilians. Despite the major defeats against the Turkish military, the PKK was able to create an sense of open-ended war among the local supporters in certain provinces such as Şırnak, Hakkari, Diyarbakır and Mardin. This has been interpreted many times as a full-scale mass mobilization against the Turkish government by the PKK. The PKK has tried to manipulate political and social atmospheres to drive young people into the streets to confront security forces. The PKK's ultimate goal was to carry out an urban uprising, which is the final stage of its organizational purpose. In this period, the PKK over-calculated the support of the local people and tried to initiate a broader urban uprising in Sur, Cizre, Nusaybin, Silopi and Dargeçit. As a result, it had to take the local people hostages in those cities so as to use them as human shields against security forces. It also targeted local transportation and communication infrastructures, power lines, educational and cultural facilities as well as healthcare facilities in order to gain the public support. YDG-G members became the most appropriate apparatus for spreading the violence. Most of the YDG-H terrorists organized in a non-hierarchical way; for the most part, there was no vertical relation between the groups, but all groups were directed and commanded by a few experienced PKK terrorists. However, there was a functional specialization among the groups: intelligence, assassination, bombing, sniping, propaganda, arson, and robbery. Typically, each group was composed of three to ten people. Groups were tightly compartmented from each other before the huge security offensive was initiated by the security forces; yet, the compartments were abolished due to the need for a collective defense against the security forces.

The YDG-H terrorist groups were lightly armed with small arms, automatic weapons, and explosives. Their main weapons were AK-47 assault rifles, SVD Dragunov sniper rifles, Russian-made hand grenades, Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs), and Impro-

vised Explosive Devices (IEDs) made of ammonium nitrate and propane cylinders. The most deadly YDG-H tactic was the use of IEDs. The IED tactics included, but were not limited to:

– roadside bombs buried in dirt and trenches
– car bombs
– booby-traps – commonly triggered by trembler devices and photocells
– nail bombs – used as anti-personnel devices
– suicide bombs
– Molotov cocktails

These devices were detonated mostly via remote control. Since the security forces used jammers to intercept the signals, terrorists shifted the triggering method to wire activation. Time delay and clock mechanisms were not commonly used by the YDG-H or the PKK. YDG-H terrorists were recruited from millennials in the suburbs of Kurdish-populated towns and cities, in eastern Turkey. They were sent to northern Syria to be trained and to gain urban fight experience in the fight against ISIS before returning to Turkey. Group armament was also provided via the northern Syrian Kurds (politically the PYD; militarily the YPG) who in turn, at the time, were armed by the U.S. and Russia. Groups were funded through drug dealing, smuggling and human trafficking. The PKK and YDG-H terrorists taxed local businesspeople using intimidation tactics. Forcible donations, *kumbara* and *zarf* (piggybank and envelope), were other methods of funding. Admittedly, the funds from the HDP municipalities contributed significantly to their finances.

The PKK's urban atrocity turned into a humanitarian chaos for the locals in urban centers. Thousands of people had to flee from their homes, neighborhoods, towns and cities due to the in-

tense conflicts experienced there. School buildings were set on fire and students were alienated from education. Businesses could not operate which caused unemployment to rise. People who had no choice but to remain in the impoverished neighborhoods of cities like Cizre, Silopi, Nusaybin, Dargeçit and Sur became hostages of the PKK. These local, impoverished and uneducated people did not choose to harbor or support the PKK violence, indeed it was the PKK's choice to include them in their urban violence. They were forced by the PKK's outlawed underground and auxiliary elements to send their beloved sons and daughters to the ranks of the PKK's fighting elements - as the PKK recruited fighters, they lost their children. They were also forced to donate their low level incomes - as the PKK gained financial means, they lost their earnings. They were even forced to boycott education, true politics, and business - as the PKK claimed a public ground, they lost everything. Finally, they were forced to host terrorists in their own homes - as the PKK brought conflict to their neighborhoods, they lost their homes.

Strategically, the PKK brought violence to the suburbs of the Kurdish-populated cities to surge a people's movement. Yet, this turned into a strategic mistake, which caused a loss in inhabitant civil support, as the choice of violence was sustained in urban areas. Locals were aware that their civil rights had been usurped by the PKK's militant discourse. This gave a chance to the government to reveal the distinction between the PKK and the Kurdish issue.

Turkish security forces initiated open-ended urban operations against the PKK and its urban affiliation, the YDG-H, starting on December 15. The scope of the operations seemed to be limited to five problematic urban centers, where the streets were dug in trenches, local people were intimidated, state buildings, schools and even mosques were set on fire by the PKK terrorists. Operations in Cizre, Silopi, Sur, Nusaybin, and Dargeçit started in the wake of a series of curfews. It is known that the PKK used these

towns as its strongholds to challenge the state authority: schools were used to recruit fighters, associations were used to conduct PKK propaganda, and auxiliary houses were used as hideouts and to store weapons, ammunition and explosives. The operations marked a new challenge to eliminate the PKK suppression of the local people. The urban operations of the security forces aimed both at evacuating the civilians and crushing the PKK terrorists in these urban areas. Within a few weeks after the operations started, the PKK lost around 250 urban terrorists and was no longer able to keep civilians hostage. People called the security forces to help them evacuate buildings and helped them voluntarily in locating the PKK terrorist positions. Then the PKK started to shoot at civilians during evacuations in the conflict areas - the same civilians that the PKK wanted to drive into the streets to fight a urban war against the government. However, these civilians opposed the PKK presence in their houses, streets and districts, and protested against the terrorists.

The PKK intended to defend urban areas with significant tactical advantages over the security forces owing to its knowledge of the terrain. Fighting with the PKK in urban areas was categorized in three dimensions: street-level battle, roof-top battle (sniper battle), and battle in underground structures. Security forces made an enormous progress in suppressing street battles and counter-snipers. In Cizre, which was a key city for the PKK to hub the infiltration in and out of Syria, the security forces secured most of the streets, and the PKK had to name this defeat as a tactical retreat, while the district of Yafes, in southern Cizre, came under the complete control of the security forces.[121] The PKK terrorists in Silopi sought a way to escape from the city; in a single instance, 82 of them were captured while trying to escape among the civilians who

[121] "Yafes Mahallesi temizlendi", *Habertürk*, January 8, 2017, http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1177994-yafes-mahallesi-temizlendi.

were being evacuated in Silopi.[122] Thirty-three auxiliary members were also captured in one week. However, the momentum of the operations was affected by an unknown substructure in urban areas (mostly in Sur). Disadvantages for the urban operations of the security forces included the possibility of significant damages to structures, the reduced effectiveness of weapons due to their limited use, the reduced firing range of weapons because of the complexity and the close proximity of the buildings, and the limited exposure of terrorists which limited accurate target acquisition and the possibility of rapid execution. These restrictions forced the security forces into close combat with terrorists. The combat in urban areas isolated and separated operation forces into small units. Thanks to the security forces' cautions with firepower to insure minimum collateral damage, they played a well-balanced role between enforcing the curfews and providing essential life support to the civilians in built-up areas. The security forces' attitude toward civilians was a key factor in defeating the PKK not only in urban combat, but also on the social front.

The duration of an urban operation was subject to the urban structure, the PKK's resistance capacity, the security forces' ability, and the density of the civilian population in the theater of operation. After bulldozing the barricades and trenches in Silopi and Cizre, the security forces encountered a smaller resistance in those cities, and were able to emplace public order. Unlike in Silopi and Cizre, they faced a very rigid resistance in Sur beyond the barricades and trenches in the form of a conflict under the ground which was hard to control in a short time. The underground structure of Sur was basically composed of secret passages and tunnels, and it made it very hard for the security forces to establish control of the grounds.

[122] "Silopi'de 82 Terörist Kaçarken Yakalandı", *Milliyet*, January 9, 2017, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/silopi-de-82-terorist-kacarken-yakalandi-ankara-yerelhaber-1154862/.

Because the PKK terrorists were contained in the area of operation under the ground in Sur, their resistance and defensive capacity lost its effectiveness; once they confronted the security forces their position was easily detected and eliminated. As they had lost the supply route on the ground, it was also hard for the terrorists to be supplied with ammunitions, food, and medical equipment. Moreover, they were not able to be replaced with new terrorists who could take over the fight. Medical evacuation was impossible for the terrorists and they had to provide wounded terrorists with medical care under primitive conditions - the terrorist death toll, thus, became a problem of burial. When the negative circumstances piled up, the morale and motivation to carry on the urban resistance were badly affected. The terrorists leaned on the underground structure to keep their sustainability in the conflict, but more positions were captured by the security forces in day-to-day operations. Turkish security forces were equipped with very modern weapon and surveillance systems. The elite military and police special operation units were well-trained and rotated in the fights. Human intelligence was well-prepared to target the terrorists accurately and supported the technical intelligence such as aerial surveillance and taping. The sniping superiority and night vision features were also supportive in obtaining tactical superiority.

The PKK adopted a set of vehicle-borne improvised explosives (VBIED) attacks in this period while facing huge defeats in one-on-one urban fights with the Turkish security forces. Despite the fact that the perpetrator of the Ankara SVBIED attack on February 17 was reported to be a member of the PKK/PYD in Syria, the TAK claimed the responsibility because of the concerns over jeopardizing the PKK/PYD's ambiguous and fabricated legitimate reputation in Syria. The PKK displayed a trend of diversifying its organizational names to create an illusion that many different organizations were against the Turkish government in regard to the Kurdish issue. Yet,

the TAK, YDG-H, YPS and YPG are all PKK originated and act in favor of the PKK. On the other hand, Duran Kalkan's declaration that the PKK had an agreement with other radical leftist terrorists groups in Turkey to cooperate in attacks further supported the PKK's strategy of organizational diversity.[123] The names of the eight mentioned organizations in his statement were the Marxist Leninist Communist Party (MLKP); the Turkey Communist Party/Marxist Leninist Movement (TKP/ML); the Revolutionist Communist Party (DKP); the Maoist Communist Party (MKP); the Turkey Communist Labor Party-Leninist (TKEP-L); the Turkey Revolutionary Communists Union (TIKB); the Turkey People Liberation Party Front/Marxist Leninist Armed Propaganda Unit (THKP-C/MLSPB); and the Revolutionary Headquarters Organization. All these organizations were small, radical leftist terrorist organizations that operated mostly in major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir and some had an operational ground in the provinces of Tunceli and Erzincan that could be an infiltration hub for the PKK's Black Sea opening. The PKK's affiliation with these terrorist groups was presumed to increase car bomb attacks, suicide attacks and sensational bombings and sabotages against government facilities, civilian entities, and economic targets in major cities. The PKK was expected to mobilize these terrorist organizations to attack western city centers as its proxy instruments by motivating them with money, weapons and organizational know-how.

Duran Kalkan's call was so conflicting since he claimed that the PKK would start large-scale terror attacks throughout Turkey to lead an uprising attempt. This was presented at the last as the PKK's last chance to claim such a collective intimidation with the cumulative devastation caused by its urban standoff; and he urged the young people to join urban factions of the PKK. On the other hand, he also

[123] Tolga Şardan, "Duran Kalkan'ın yeni görevi HBDH", *Milliyet*, April 3, 2016, http://www.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/tolga-sardan/duran-kalkan-in-yeni-gorevi-hbdh-2220754/.

admitted the PKK's defeat in Cizre, Silopi, and Sur. The PKK was expected to carry out both urban and rural attacks while retreating to the mountainous areas where it claimed the operation supremacy.

The U.S., at that time, considered Turkey's stance towards the PKK/PYD in a skeptical manner, which caused a formidable split between the two countries. This led to strain in the Turkey-NATO relations in the case of a military intervention in Syria. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) declared a "Federation of Northern Syria" that united three areas, majorly populated by Kurds, into one entity. The plan would involve "areas of democratic self-administration" under a federal banner. The PYD also emphasized that it would declare independence if a federative agreement was not reached in Syria. The announcement was denounced by the Syrian government, the opposition, Turkey and the United States.

FIGURE 18. THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD III.

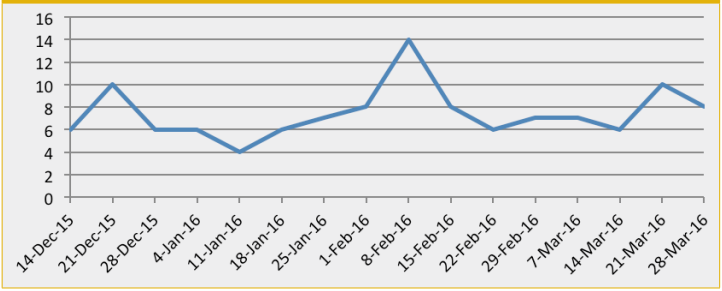



FIGURE 19. THE PKK ATTACK TREND IN PERIOD III.

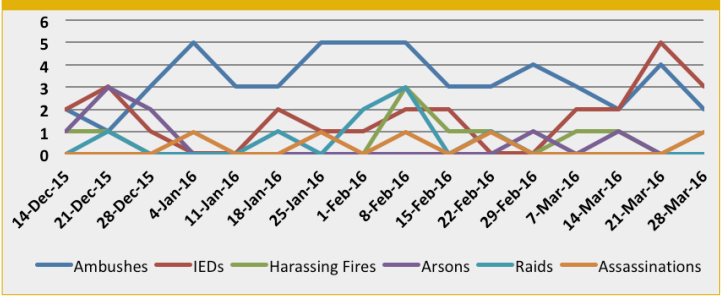


FIGURE 20. BREAKDOWN OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD III.

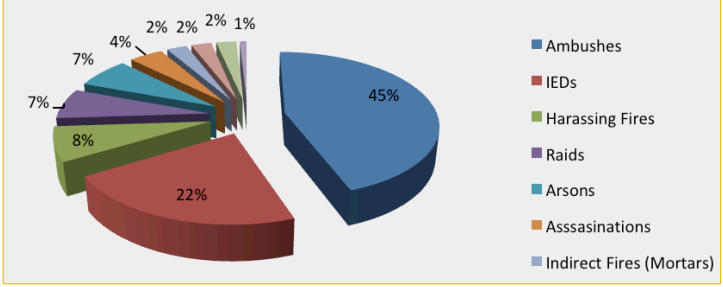
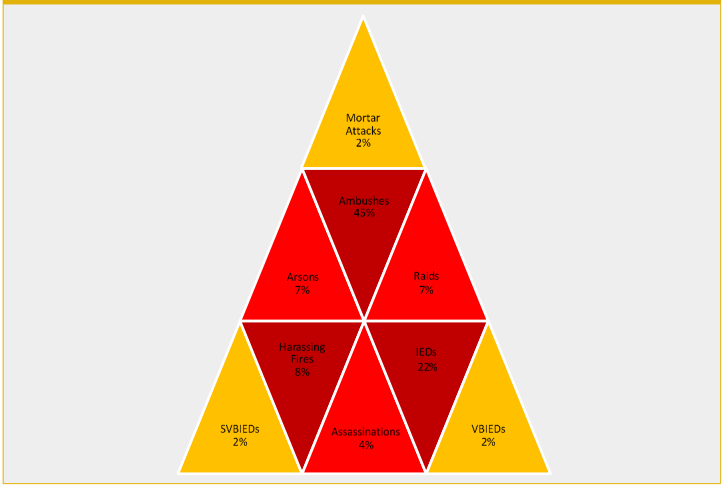



FIGURE 21. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD III.




The attacks in the beginning of Period III had an urban character; as the tactical setback occurred, the PKK put an effort in shifting its operational capacity to rural areas due to survival concerns. Because the PKK lost the operational initiative of its designed and planned urban surge strategy in this course, the stating argument lost its importance and its staging turned into an obligatory adaptation in terms of environmental dynamics. Ten types of attacks dominated the PKK's tactical aspiration in this period; first, they were characterized by an urban character, and in time this evolved

into a rural nature. Ambush continued to hold a prevalent position and became effective in the urban street fight. However, IED attacks were also as effective as ambushes against the operation forces. Harassing fires in rural security facilities and operations started to be carried out during the PKK's pursuit in escaping to rural areas after the first week of February. Arson and assassination attacks followed harassing fires, as in the first period, in order to intimidate and coerce civilians, political figures, and security personnel. However, VBIED and SVBIED attacks gained popularity in this period and took the first place in causing casualties.

FIGURE 22. MAPPING THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD III.

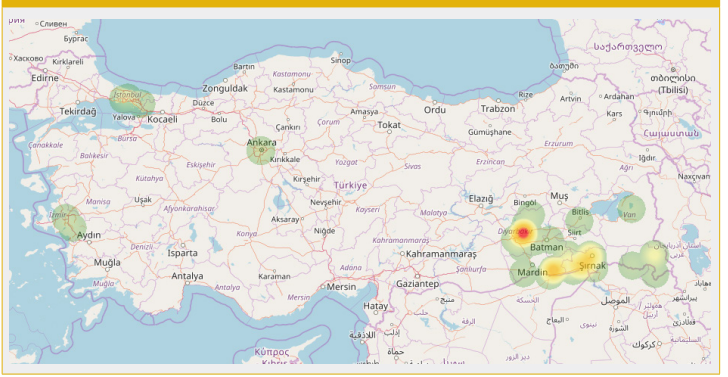
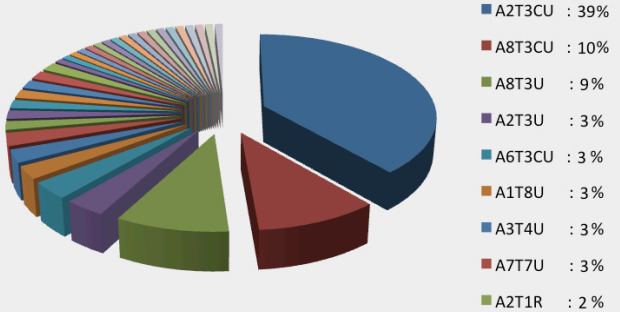


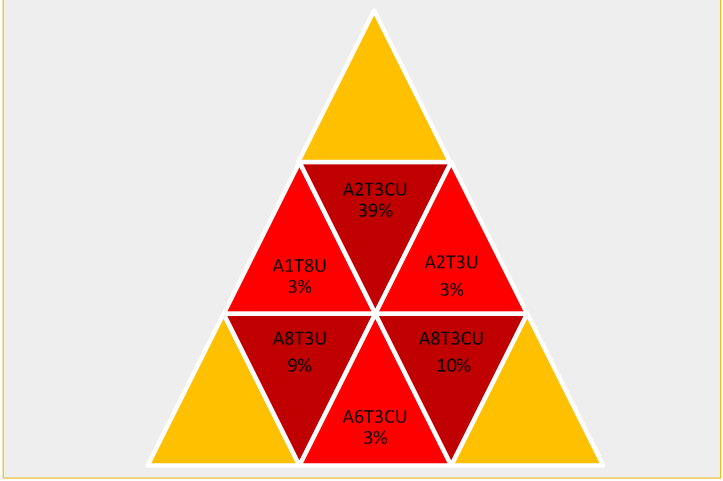

FIGURE 23. BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATION IN PERIOD III.



Tactical police and urban operation units shaped the nature of target selection in this period; combined operation forces of police and military became the top targets of the PKK as well as security personnel and state investments, such as oil and gas pipelines, and railroads. The selection of rural targets was made at the end of this period, and mostly focused on the rural military operation units.

The correlation between attack types, targets and security environment had 34 variations. The combinations displayed how the PKK emphasized its urban strategy in order to achieve the utmost impact by using intense violence. However, this period was the peak of the PKK's urban attacks, and no progress was made due to counter-security operations.

FIGURE 24. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD III.




The most applied correlation was the A2T3CU (ambush against tactical combined operation units of the police and military in urban area); A8T3CU (IED attack against tactical joint operations units of the police and military in urban area); A8T3U (IED attack against tactical police units in urban area); A2T3U (ambush

against tactical police units in urban area); A6T3CU (harassing fire attack on tactical joint operations units of the police and military in urban area); and A1T8U (assassination of security personnel in daily civilian life in urban area).

The PKK's armed wing infiltrated the urban areas and took the fighting over from inexperienced YDG-H elements. The PKK put almost all its efforts into claiming a military success before the public so it would be successful in declaring "liberated districts," which was the ultimate objective of the PKK's insurgency challenge. Although the PKK aimed to upgrade its strategic violence to mass movements, it lost the operational initiative and faced an irreparable defeat in urban areas. However, the PKK kept fighting to sustain the violence in the security environment in eastern Turkey. New challenges for the PKK were observed in Nusaybin, Yüksekova, Şırnak and small tests in Bağlar in Diyarbakır after the defeats in Silopi, Sur, İdil, and Dargeçit. Although the PKK sources tried to romanticize the sustainment strategy, they also seemed to agree with the reasons below.[124] The PKK's sustainment strategy in this period can be explained as follows:

– From a tactical point of view, the PKK aimed to keep the security forces busy in urban pockets at the time of retreatment to rural areas.

– From an operational point of view, the PKK foresaw that it was not able to establish a negotiation atmosphere as a defeated actor. The PKK did not accept the defeat.

– From a strategic point of view, the PKK aimed to break the radicalization impasse after its defeat through protracted violence and to build radicalization on sustainable hatred.

[124] Harun Ercan, Cizre'den Cezayir'e: Asimetrik savaşta zorun rolü, March 19, 2016, http://yeniozgurpolitika.com/mobile/index.php?rupel=nivis&id=10248

## PERIOD IV: THE FLUCTUATION PERIOD (MARCH 29, 2016 TO JULY 15, 2016)

The PKK understood that the defeat in urban centers was irreversible and created a survival problem. The PKK paid enormous efforts to fix the survival problem in the period between March 29 and July 15, 2016. Cemil Bayık was reported to have ordered the experienced HPG terrorists fighting in the urban areas to retreat into the rural areas.[125] Increasing the PKK surrenders in the theater of operations proves the PKK's setback in the urban fight. The PKK was presumed to end the ongoing fight in urban areas and intensify its activities in the following months. However, the IED attacks against security vehicles, car bomb attacks against the police and military facilities, and assassinations against the security personnel were expected in the urban areas in eastern Turkey.

Urban operations against the PKK in Yüksekova/Hakkari were completed on April 20 and a search operation began. In the search operation remnants of the terror elements were expected to be captured, trenches to be filled in, and arms and IEDs to be detected. Urban operations in Silopi/Şırnak were completed on April 21. Almost simultaneously, operations were started in the PKK's traditional rural strongholds in the area between the villages of Dibek, Arıklı, Çağdaş, Yolcati, Tepe, Serince, Beğendik, Esenli, Kabayaka, Uçarlı, Kayacık, Yalaza, Bağlan, Çavundur, and Dolunay in the last week of April. In addition to the rural operations in Lice, operations against the PKK elements in the rural areas of Silvan were also initiated. At the same time, upon the declaration of a curfew announced by the government, the PKK elements were engaged for weakening the terrorists in one the most important rural strongholds in the area between Kaso, Seydankara, Çaldere, Üçdirek, Dağcılar, Dolaplıdere, Alakuşak, Erkenciler, Ergeçidi and Bayrambaşı.

[125] "Cemil Bayık PKK'lılara çekilme talimatı verdi", *CNN Türk*, April 17, 2016, https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/cemil-bayik-pkklilara-cekilme-talimati-verdi.

As the rural operations expanded in the area of the PKK's hideouts, the PKK also engaged anew in areas of operation in the peripheral provinces of eastern Turkey. Gümüşhane and Giresun became a new front for the PKK to carry attacks against civilian targets and gendarmerie posts. However, the PKK had to orchestrate these attacks with the help of the Peoples' United Revolutionary Movement (HBDH), which is composed of 8 radical leftists groups together with the PKK because of the weak intelligence, logistics and operational capacity in the area.[126] Security operations also intensified along the Iraqi border, and the operations focused on the rural areas of Çığlı/Çukurca and Dağlıca/Yüksekova of Hakkari, and Uludere/Şırnak, which the tactical PKK elements chose for infiltrating from northern Iraqi base camps into Turkey.

Urban operations in Nusaybin/Mardin and downtown Şırnak were completed on June 3, 2016.[127] The PKK terrorists experienced the efficiency of IEDs during the urban lawlessness, and they employed this tactic against primary targets in rural attacks, namely motorized security units. Roadside IEDs are explosive systems that target security patrol vehicles, transportation vehicles, and security convoys. The PKK was expected to lay roadside IEDs between city centers, where the motorized security movement was high. The VBIED attacks were the second tactic that the PKK used against stationary security facilities such as rural roadside gendarmerie posts, police and other military facilities in city centers. While employing these tactics in the Turkish territory, the PKK also carried out armed attacks against the border security bases along the Iraqi border. Road blockade/arson against moving

[126] "PKK ve MLKP dahil 10 örgüt, Halkların Birleşik Devrim Hareketi'ni kurdu", *Evrensel*, March 12, 2016, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/274742/pkk-ve-mlkp-dahil-10-orgut-halklarin-birlesik-devrim-hareketini-kurdu.

[127] "Nusaybin ve Şırnak'ta terör operasyonları tamamlandı", *Anadolu Ajansı*, June 3, 2016, http://aa.com.tr/tr/gunun-basliklari/nusaybin-ve-sirnakta-teror-operasyonlari-tamamlandi/583799.

civilian traffic, IED attacks on GSM base stations, power plants, dam constructions and water projects were also attack methods in this period. The main charge used in IED and VBIEDs attacks was ammonium nitrate, which is easy to procure from agricultural markets in Turkey. Another explosive in IEDs was propane cylinders; in many rural areas, propane cylinders are still used for cooking and it is easy for the PKK to procure them from domestic markets at low cost. The Turkish government banned the use of agricultural fertilizer containing ammonium nitrate in eastern Turkey, and started to control the fertilizer markets closely. The sale of propane cylinders became subjected to registration by the buyer. These precautions were expected to alienate the PKK from accessing the commercially available explosives to some extent, however, the PKK was still able to carry out such attacks. The PKK employed a wide spectrum of attacks in order to distract the attention and weaken the gravity of the efforts of the security forces in this period. The distraction methodology had similarities to the one in the first period, when the PKK aimed to provoke the security forces and spill the violence over a broader region of eastern Turkey. Although the PKK targeted provocation and a violent spillover effect, the attacks aimed to cover the PKK's retreat to rural areas with a set of irregularities. The tactical objectives of the wide range of attacks in rural areas aimed to force security forces to fight in rural strongholds. This is why a set of terror attacks with a lack of successful coordination continued in this period.

The PKK returned to restoring prevalent rural attacks in this period. The PKK terrorists intensified their rural activities in four regions: (i) the Çukurca-Şemdinli-Yüksekova triangle in Hakkari along the Iraqi border to harass the security forces with armed attacks; (ii) on the road between Doğubayazıt/Ağrı and Çaldıran/Van to intimidate civilians by setting vehicles on fire and confront-

ing security vehicles with IEDs; (iii) the Ovacık-Pülümür-Tunceli triangle to target the security forces with IEDs along the highways and to carry out car bombs against the government buildings in city centers; and (iv) the Bingöl-Lice-Kulp triangle to intimidate the civilian traffic and confront the security forces with IEDs. Most of the IEDs were prepared in Lice, Kulp and Hani, and sent to surrounding provinces like Bingöl, Muş, and Diyarbakır.

The PKK's urban surge leaned on the pro-PKK municipality administrations and the PKK enjoyed tactical, psychological and political support from those municipalities. In the tactical context, the municipalities provided the PKK with excavators to dig trenches across the street in eastern suburbs, and with trucks for transporting the explosives to target areas. Some trucks used in VBIEDs were vehicles registered to the municipalities. The Turkish government decided to bring a proposal to parliament regarding the municipalities affiliated with the PKK, and the Turkish Parliament decided to assign new trustee mayors and administrations to the municipalities that had supported the PKK in this period. The PKK was quick to threaten these trustees with death.

Almost 40 years of the Turkish fight against PKK terrorism has evolved around a tactical engagement with the PKK's armed cadre in Turkish territory and in the northern Iraqi region. This paved the way for the PKK to embolden its protracted rural fight as engaging only one segment of the PKK's body never worked. The PKK has a leadership, armed cadre, auxiliary and underground network, and limited local support. Turkish security and intelligence bodies had a few successful operations against the PKK leadership. This was the capture of Şemdin Sakık in 1998, and Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. Both operations were achieved with the help of local and international partners. However, no other prominent PKK leader has been killed or captured since then. Today, some of the founding members of the PKK are still

alive and operative in northern Iraq. A local group in Syrian Hasake, allegedly motivated by the Turkish intelligence, attempted to assassinate Fehman Hüseyin near the Syrian city of Qamishli; he was able to survive the assassination with wounds. Fehman Hüseyin was the PKK leader in Syria who watched over the armed activities of the PYD's armed group, the YPG, which was trained and equipped by the U.S. Central Command.[128] It was the first time in the PKK's armed history that one of its prominent leaders was targeted beyond Turkish territory.

The PKK terrorists chose to mass surrender to the Turkish security forces following the prolonged urban violence in Nusaybin/Mardin. This tempted the Turkish government and security forces to breathe a sigh of relief, but it was not perceived as the end of the PKK. With its quick response ability, the PKK adapted itself to the defeat and continued the violence. The PKK was believed to be undergoing a regeneration effort in Iraqi and Syrian territories while carrying out rural attacks in Turkish territory. After suffering major losses in urban fights in Diyarbakır, Şırnak and Mardin, the PKK decided to shift its attacks to rural areas. However, the volunteer recruitment for PKK's rural elements dropped considerably since its rural atrocities started. The security forces stated that 12 people joined the PKK within the last five months, while 336 teenagers under 18 had joined the PKK in 2014, and 254 more in 2015. Two major causes for the decrease in recruitment are the decisive security operations since July 2015, and parental reluctance and rejection of the PKK.

The Turkish government promoted a new concept for the border security issue with Syria in 2015, following the increased terror threats in Syria. In addition to aerial patrol, advanced sur-

[128] Can Acun, Bünyamin Keskin, *PKK'nın Kuzey Suriye örgütlenmesi PYD-YPG*, *SETA Report*, 2017, https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/05/PYD_YPG_Tr.pdf

veillance with UAVs, border posts, ground border patrol and advanced ground surveillance, it was decided that a border wall was to be built along the border in four different lines. The walls were planned to protect illegal border crossings of terrorists, foreign fighters, refugees and smugglers. The walls were designed according to the modular T-wall system: 3 meters high, 2 meters wide and 7 tons in weight. T-walls were built with cement reinforced iron bars. The locations of the walls are as follows: Hatay (Yayladağı): 72 km.; Hatay (Reyhanli): 45 km.; Nusaybin/Mardin-Cizre/Şırnak-Silopi/Şırnak: 128 km; and Elbeyli/Kilis- Karkamış/Gaziantep: 82 km.

Some of the military, police and jurisdiction officials who had ties with the Gülenists (henceforth FETÖ, Fethullah Gülenist Terror Organization) attempted to overthrow the Turkish government by force on the night of July 15, 2016, when the Turkish counter-PKK operations had gained a momentum for a decisive victory. The coup was against the government and people, but it became a turning point in the fight against the PKK. Although the coup attempted to give an upper hand to FETÖ in Turkey, the PKK also enjoyed the vulnerabilities of the post-coup era. Nevertheless, the post-coup period has not worked in favor of the PKK. The PKK attacks in this period faded when the coup attempt was thwarted – this, however, did not bring an end to PKK terrorism.

FIGURE 25. THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD IV.

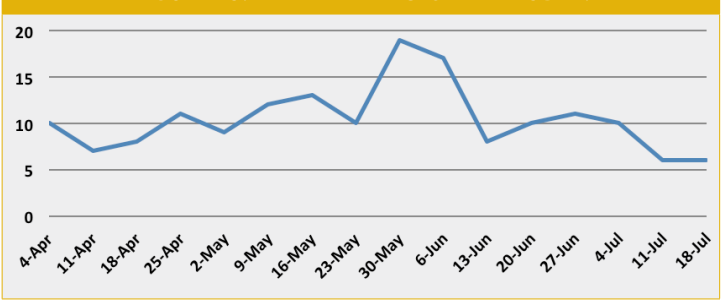


FIGURE 26. THE PKK ATTACK TRENDS IN PERIOD IV.

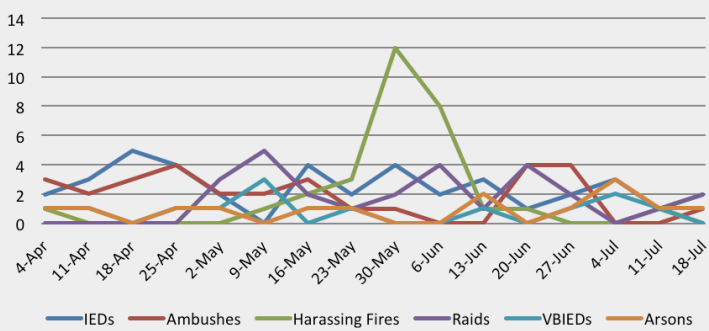
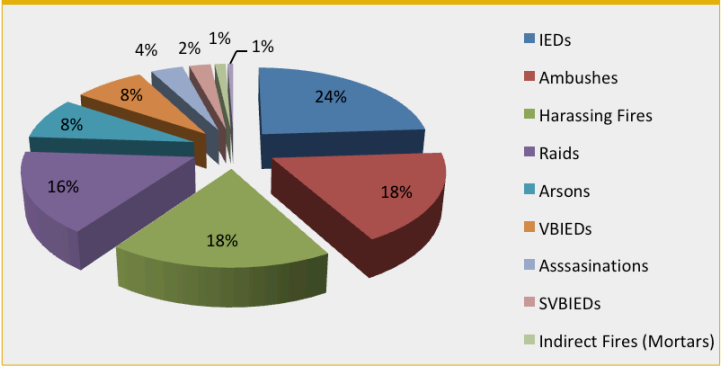



FIGURE 27. BREAKDOWN OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD IV.




Despite the fact that the number of attacks was the same compared to the previous period, the dominant attacks in the fluctuation period were IEDs. The rise in the use of harassing fire, arson, VBIED, SVBIED, assassination, and indirect fire suggests that the PKK was in search of low risk/high impact attack types in this period. The use of ambushes and raids was also a sine qua non of the PKK's modus operandi.

FIGURE 28. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD IV.

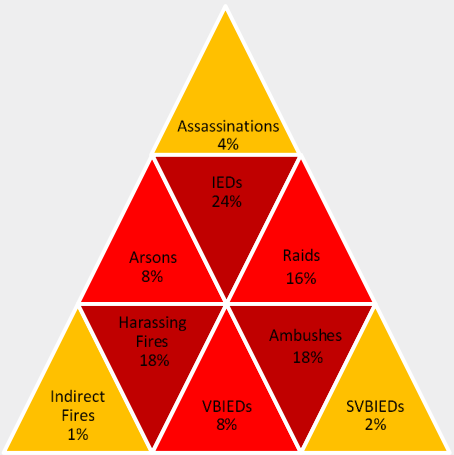
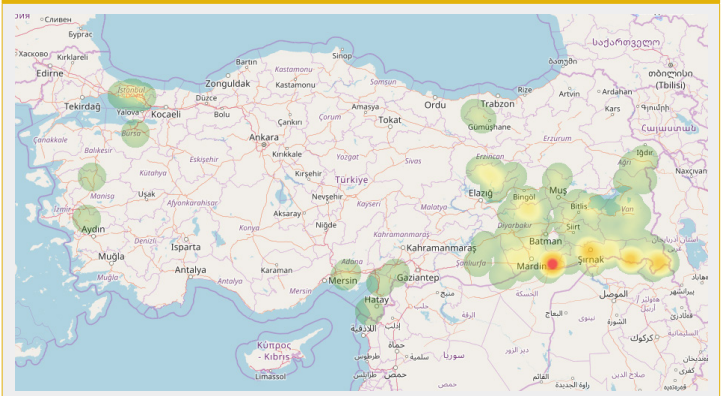



FIGURE 29. MAPPING THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD IV.




The correlation between attack types, targets and security environment presented 47 variations. The multiplicity of the variations suggests that the PKK was disoriented in terms of the attack types, target selection and security environment, abandoning its strategic perspective. The disorientation in the modus operandi strengthened the PKK's terrorist character, which led the PKK to act in an

unorganized pattern, and created a chance for the security forces to engage with the PKK elements more precisely. The attacks showed a hybrid nature of rural and urban environments.

FIGURE 30. BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD IV.

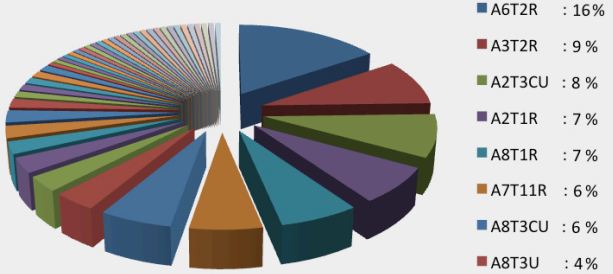
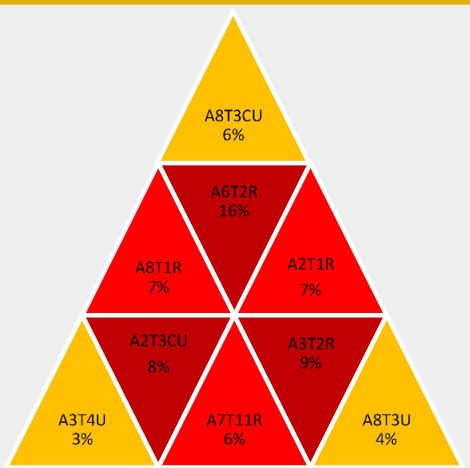



FIGURE 31. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD IV.




The PKK's modus operandi evolved around the variations of A6T2R (harassing fire attack on tactical military facilities in rural area); A3T2R (raid against tactical military facilities in rural area); A2T3CU (ambush of tactical joint police and military units in ur-

ban area);, A2T1R (ambush of tactical military units in rural area); A8T1R (IED attack against tactical military units in rural area); and A7T11R (arson attack on private assets in rural area).

The fluctuation period was the time of the PKK's total defeat in urban centers with mass terrorist casualties and surrenders. The fall of the PKK positions in suburbs and district centers, and the considerable numbers of terrorists killed and surrendered demoralized the PKK's inner circle, and the local tactical PKK elements followed an unorganized method for survival. The extensive use of IEDs, SVBIEDs, SVBIEDs and assassinations was the PKK's searching method to break the tactical stalemate. Therefore, the PKK put all its efforts on tactical survivability, while paying no attention to all kinds of casualties and damages.

The July 15 military coup attempt definitely created a negative impact on Turkey's counter-terrorism efforts and the PKK aimed to manipulate this development to stop its unexpected, unorganized and unplanned course of descent and reconsider its dispersed armed tactics. A new set of tactical openings was needed for the PKK not only to recover from the urban setback, but also to avoid the risk of neutralization in the traditional rural area of activities.

## PERIOD V: INTIMIDATION AND COERCION (JULY 16, 2016 TO DECEMBER 31, 2016)

It was the coup attempt on July 15, which helped the PKK's survival; the PKK was able to instill intimidation and coercion between July 16 and December 31, 2016 taking advantage of the pause in the Turkish security forces operational readiness. The coup attempt complicated Turkey's fight against the PKK at first glimpse, and a sharp rise in the PKK attacks was observed within five weeks after the failed coup. In this period, the PKK attacks were built on the pursuit of intimidating the security forces with tactical instruments, and coercing people with mass destruction via VBIEDs. The PKK

was active in the Hakkari-Van-Şırnak and Diyarbakır-Bingöl-Bitlis triangles via its HPG terrorists that supported the winter preparations. On the other hand, it was the classical urban tactics such as assassinations, IEDs and VBIEDs attacks that the PKK applied in the city centers during wintertime.

The Turkish-Russian rapprochement in August 2016 was a game-changing development that facilitated Turkey's fight against the PKK. The Turkish military carried out an offensive operation against the positions of DAESH and the PKK/PYD in Syria. The Turkish government's decision of offense was caused by the imminent DAESH threat and the increasing PKK expansionism in Syrian territory. Turkish forces aimed to set a safe zone between Azaz and Jarabulus, which was subject to extreme dispute between Turkey and the U.S. The operation had two objectives: clearing the DAESH-held area between Azaz and Jarabulus by setting a safe zone, and stopping the PKK/PYD expansionism as a strip along the Turkish border. In regard to the PKK/PYD dimension, the operation (named Operation Euphrates Shield, OES) helped to cut the geographical ties with the PYD/PKK in Afrin and Ayn al-Arab (Kobane), and to put pressure on the U.S.-PKK/PYD affiliation in Syria.

The Turkish government made an enormous move against the PKK's upper hand in city centers and removed 24 mayors from municipality offices on the charge of supporting the PKK. The government assigned trustees who were the local district governors. Those municipalities - Dargeçit, Derik, Mazıdağı and Nusaybin in Mardin, Sur and Silvan in Diyarbakır, Silopi and Cizre in Şırnak - were the key locations for the PKK's urban surge. Even if the PKK called for a mass demonstration against the trustees, people in cities were patient and waited for the trustee mayors' services. At the same time, Turkish security forces launched multiple rural operations, simultaneously, against the PKK's rural strongholds to eliminate the PKK elements before the terrorists reorganized for winter activity

in Lice, Dicle and Hazro of Diyarbakır; Çukurca and Yüksekova of Hakkari; and Hozat, Ovacık and Pülümür of Tunceli. The security forces killed more than 350 PKK terrorists in a period of the month between the last week of September and third week of October, and were able to control the rural strongholds in Çukurca in Hakkari. However, the PKK tried to compensate its defeat with sensational terror attacks in western cities; police stations, government buildings, military and police vehicles, and crowded civilian activities became the target of the PKK. Turkish security forces intensified their rural operations against the tactical PKK elements in Hakkari, Diyarbakır and Tunceli. At the same time, the PKK terrorists who were active in the southern Black Sea area suffered a huge loss between Koyulhisar/Sivas and Mesudiye/Ordu.

Based on the PKK's setback in urban conflicts in eastern Turkey, the PKK developed a tactical shift from rural areas to urban centers again. Following the decisive military operation against the PKK base camps and hideouts, which started three weeks after the coup attempt, the PKK activities considerably decreased in eastern Turkey, and the PKK lost key strongholds in the mountainous regions along the Iraqi border. Moreover, the winter conditions in eastern Turkey also caused the PKK elements not to operate actively in rural areas. In addition, the Turkish aerial dominance and the effectiveness of unmanned air vehicles (both armed and unarmed) paved the way to neutralize the PKK in rural areas. Tunceli, Hakkari and Diyarbakır were the most important PKK hideouts and the PKK was overwhelmingly neutralized in these locations.

Northern Syria became the PKK's primary destination for weapons, ammunitions and explosive procurement, and served the PKK to access the sophisticated American arm systems via the PYD. Therefore, the PKK aimed to infiltrate the Turkish territory through certain border towns of Şanlıurfa: the districts of Suruç, Akçakale and Ceylanpınar were the PKK hubs and the PYD tran-

sition between Turkey and Syria. Terrorists used the routes of Kobani-Suruç-Şanlıurfa-Diyarbakır, Akçakale-Şanlıurfa-Diyarbakır, and Ceylanpınar-Viranşehir-Mardin for weapon transportation. The threat of VBIEDs also increased because of the growing PYD terror dynamic emanating from Syria; the longstanding political and military greed of the U.S.-backed PYD elements encouraged the PKK's functional cell houses in Turkish metropolises to carry out such attacks. As the PYD leverage in Syria became strong, the PKK carried out more VBIED attacks in Turkey; crime scene investigations indicated that U.S. explosive charges were used in the Beşiktaş Stadium bombing.[129]

As can be concluded from the developments mentioned above, the Turkish government actively recovered from the shock of the coup attempt. Therefore, in the last periods of the PKK's urban surge the government initiated a series of legislative, judiciary and security activities. The government activities resulted in positive outcomes and the PKK was left with nothing but intimidation and coercion methods. This definitely brought the PKK back to the same tactical landscape that characterized it in the early 2000s: not capable of large scale rural and urban armed activities, but waiting for a political atmosphere to create a negotiation ground in Turkey. The most satisfying development for the PKK would be to have the potential to turn into a regional actor via the PYD in Syria; yet, a strategic, operational or tactical upper hand would not be easy on Turkish territory due to the securitized Turkish public, bureaucratic and political opinions after the lessons learned from the coup attempt. Turkish public, bureaucratic and political circles started to deepen questioning the reliance on the U.S. strategic partnership after the U.S. alleged affiliation with the PKK and FETÖ. Worsenning Turkish-U.S. relations lead the PKK work on developing new armed strategy.

[129] "Beşiktaş bombası ABD üssünden", *Ulusal*, December 16, 2016 https://www.ulusal.com.tr/gundem/besiktas-bombasi-abd-ussunden-h133917.html.

FIGURE 32. THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD V.

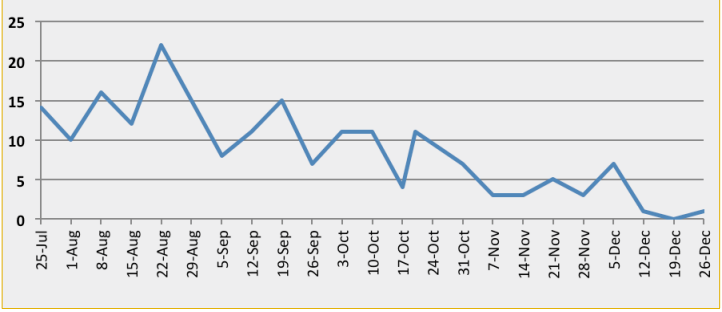



FIGURE 33. THE PKK ATTACK TRENDS IN PERIOD V.

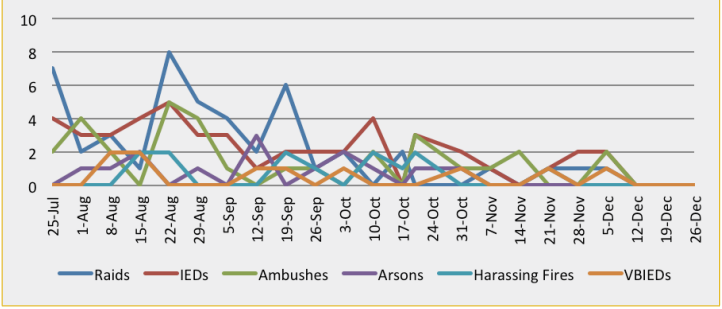
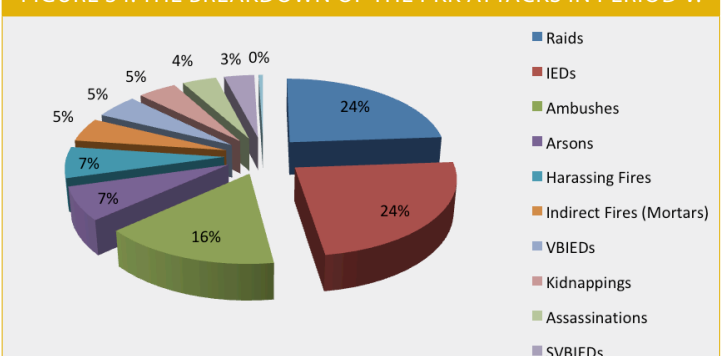



FIGURE 34. THE BREAKDOWN OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD V.




The use of harassing fire lost its gravity but it was replaced by the high volume of raids in rural areas. The use of IEDs was car-

ried out along with the raids. Ambush became an important means of attack in confronting the rural military operation units in the mountainous regions. The rest of the attacks were homogenized; no dominant means of attack emerges. This period was the first time that the PKK conducted an anti-tank guided missile attack (ATGM) in Turkey owing to the U.S. distribution of sophisticated weapons to the PKK/PYD elements in Syria.

FIGURE 35. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD V.

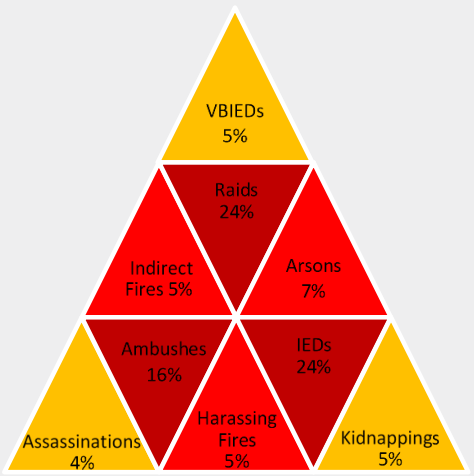



FIGURE 36. MAPPING THE PKK ATTACKS IN PERIOD V.

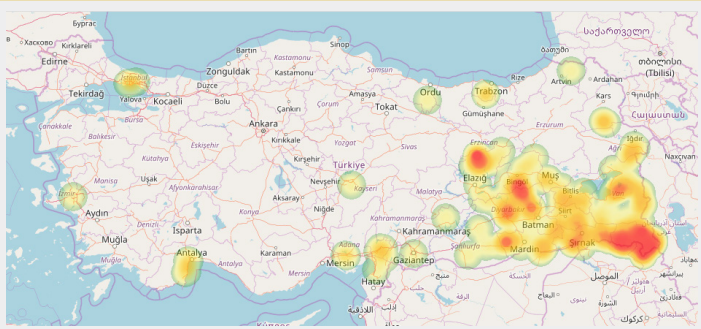


FIGURE 37. BREAKDOWN OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD V.

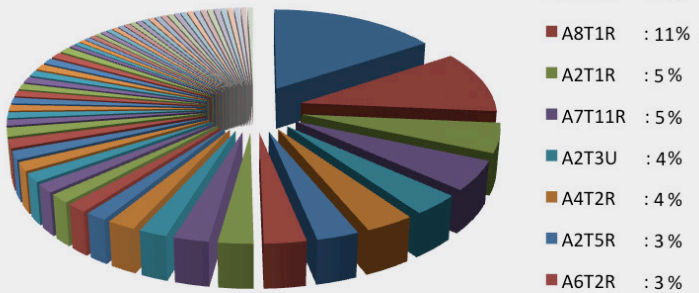
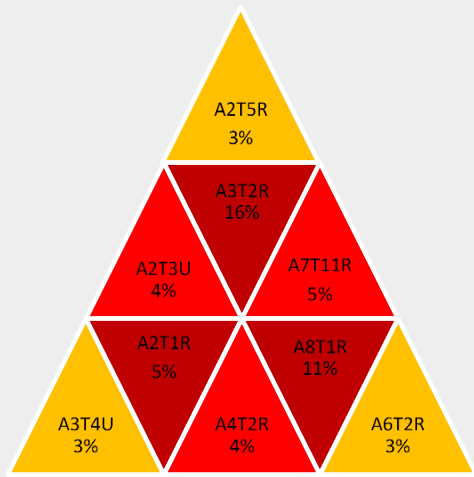



FIGURE 38. CENTER OF GRAVITY OF THE ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS IN PERIOD V.




The correlation of the attack types, targets and security environment presented the highest number during the PKK's urban surge with 63 variations. The high number of the variation suggests that the PKK lacked a centralized strategy as local PKK members tried to use all sources available to attack multi-

ple targets. The locally initiated attacks aimed to intimidate the government and security personnel and to coerce the local and domestic society.

The PKK's modus operandi evolved around the variations of A3T2R (raid against tactical military facilities in rural area); A8T1R (IED attack against tactical military units in rural area); A2T1R (ambush against tactical military units in rural area); A7T11R (road blockade and arson attack on the civilian entities in rural area); A2T3U (ambush against tactical police units in urban area); and A4T2R (mortar attack against tactical military facilities in rural area).

The fluctuation period was the time of the PKK's total defeat in urban centers with mass terrorist casualties and surrenders. The loss of all of the PKK positions in the suburbs and districts and the numbers of terrorists killed and surrendered demoralized the PKK's inner circle, while the local tactical PKK elements followed an unorganized method of survival. The PKK attempted to break the tactical stalemate with extensive use of IEDs, SVBIEDs, SVBIEDs, and assassinations. The PKK put all its efforts on tactical survivability, while paying no attention to casualties and damages.

The coup attempt without a doubt negatively impacted Turkey's counter-terrorism efforts and the PKK aimed to manipulate this development in order to stop its unexpected, unorganized and unplanned course of descent and reorganize its dispersed armed tactics. A new set of tactical openings was needed for the PKK not only for recovering from its urban setback but also to avoid the risk of neutralization in its traditional rural area activities.

The Turkish Operation Euphrates Shield was a test for the Turkish military capacity to carry a hybrid military operation - both conventional and non-conventional - against two different hybrid terrorist organizations at the same time. The Turkish military suffered a huge trauma with the coup attempt on July 15; mil-

itary personnel of every rank who took part in the coup attempt were detained and discharged from military service. Among those who were detained were generals; fighter jet and helicopter gunship pilots who affected the conventional warfare capacity of the Turkish Armed Forces; and special operation personnel who were experienced in unconventional warfare and counter-terrorism operations. Forty days after the coup, Turkey was active militarily in Syria, while fighting the PKK in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq at the time of an ongoing purge operation of FETÖ members in the military and other state institutions. However, the Turkish military was able to start a reorganization campaign and dared to carry out a cross-border operation in Syria. Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield in Syria has proved that the conventional means of fighting against DAESH is not enough. The FSA fighters had not been effective against DAESH's sophisticated defensive and offensive tactics, either. So, more elite Turkish ground fighters (Special Forces and Commandos) were needed to achieve the goals in Syria quickly while the PKK was expected to be more stable in the rural areas of eastern Turkey during winter. As more Turkish troops were sent into Syria, the duration of the Turkish military presence was expected to overrun. On the other hand, any major defeat against DAESH or the PYD could have a counter-effect.

This book focuses on identifying the fundamentals of the PKK's armed strategy during its urban surge, while the analyses of the correlations between the attack type, target selection and attack location contribute to a better understanding of the PKK's armed strategy. The correlations also reflect the compatibility of the attack components which frame the attack dynamics. The attack components are the objective, target selection, attack organization, and attack sustainment. The parametric explanations of each one of these components are provided below.

**Objectives.** Terrorist organizations apply violence for five objectives: recognition, coercion, intimidation, provocation, and insurgency support. The PKK has no problem of achieving a recognition objective; it has been recognized with its violent action locally, domestically, regionally, and globally. However, its modus operandi during the urban surge had the objectives of *coercion, intimidation, provocation* and *insurgency support*. The PKK attempted to force desired behaviors on individuals, groups and state agencies through coercive methods. Private investments, transportation and communication facilities, and the political party headquarters were all within the scope of target selection in terms of the PKK's coercion objectives. In terms of intimidation, the PKK attempted to prevent individuals, groups and agencies from acting. The intimidation objective is associated with the discouragement of citizens from seeking and accepting government affiliation. The PKK also benefits from reducing the effectiveness of security forces by making them afraid to act. The PKK's objective of provocation is based on provoking the government to overreact so that any oppressive act by the government creates public sympathy, and passive and active support for the PKK and its ideology. It is known that the PKK tried to transform itself from a terrorist organization to one with an insurgent character from its terrorist nature. Since there was no existing insurgency in Turkey, it is difficult to argue that the PKK's terrorist attacks were committed in support of insurgency. Hence, it should be noted that the attack patterns were based on the notion of the creation of an insurgency by forcibly brining about local civic involvement rather than supporting an existing insurgency. The PKK attacks mostly revolved around coercion, intimidation and provocation in terms of the objective component.

**Target selection**. Terrorist organizations do not select their targets indiscriminately - they select their targets to optimize their

objectives. Target selection is based on the target status, the impact focus, and impact expectation.

**Target status** is defined on the protection level; targets are categorized as *soft* and *hard*. Generally, soft targets are less protected and easily accessed, whereas hard targets are fortified with active and passive protective measures, and capable of reacting to threats. The PKK selected the optimum type of targets to attack to achieve its objectives. Soft targets mostly complied with coercive objectives, while hard targets were selected for provocation and intimidation purposes.

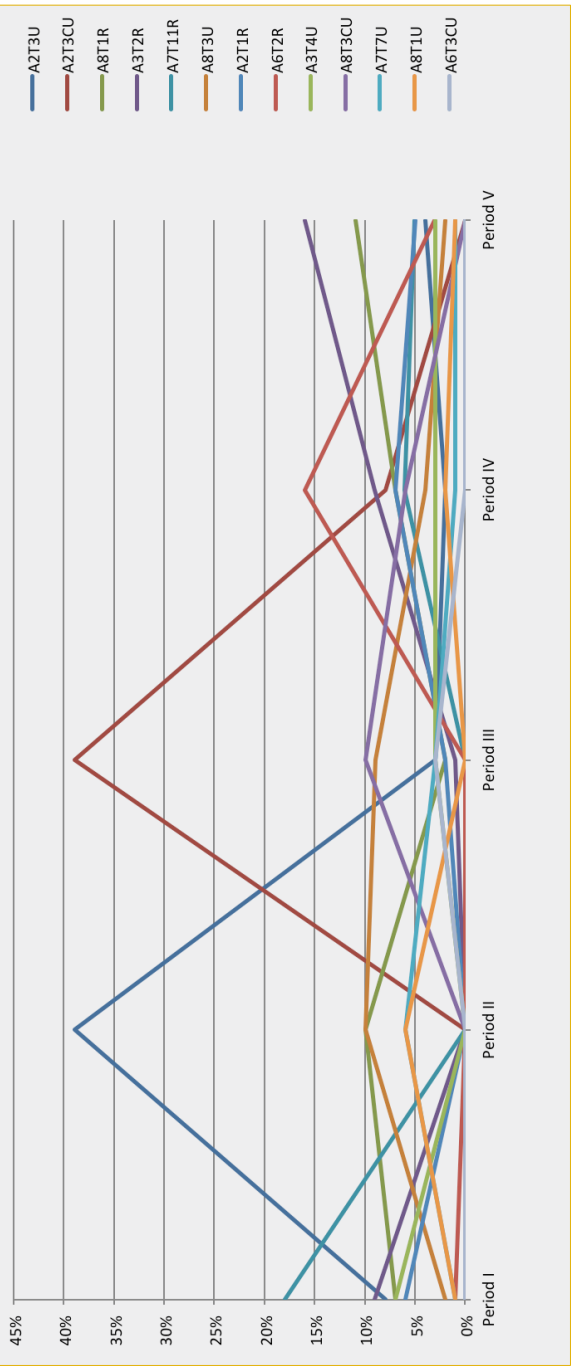
**Impact focus** relates directly to the *physical destruction* or *psychological devastation*. The PKK aimed to focus on the physical destruction of the security forces and security facilities. This served its provocation and intimidation objectives, and allowed the PKK to focus on the psychological devastation of the population by forcing them to change their daily routine through coercive methods.

**Impact expectation** is based on the *tactical*, *operational* or *strategic requirements* within the course of violent activities, and is related to the tactical, operational and strategic objectives. When considering the impact expectation, the requirements which correlate to the attacks are sought.

**Organization** is vital to achieving a successful execution of an attack. The size of the organization is formed in accordance with the desired objective, type of target, and the best course of action. In attacks, it is more secure and less risky to engage with a more basic organization. The more complex the organization, the greater the risks are. Therefore, the PKK tried to employ optimum organization of an attack by mitigating risks when pursuing the most effective impact. Organization is categorized as *basic* and *complex* when assessing the attack-target-location correlations.

**Sustainment** is the course of attacks based on the realization of incidents. The sustainment of the correlations was observed in the reported PKK attacks. Four classifications were employed in assessing sustainment: *intermittent*, *stable, incremental* and *increscent*. Sustainment illustrates the situational pressure on the PKK's decision-making process. The intermittency of the attacks reflects how the PKK suffered during attacks against certain targets in certain security environments with certain type of methods during the course of its urban surge. Stability reflects the PKK's capacity to apply certain types of attack against certain targets in certain environments during its surge. Incremental patterns indicate the capacity of maturing the attacks and the attack-target-location correlation, while the increscent patterns point to a deliberate shift among the correlations or a setback.

FIGURE 39. SUSTAINMENT OF THE DOMINANT ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS DURING THE PKK'S SURGE.



| FIGURE 40. ANALYTICAL CHART OF THE PKK'S SUSTAINED ATTACK-TARGET-LOCATION CORRELATIONS. | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attack Type | Objective | Target Selection | | | Organization | Sustainment |
| | | Target Status | Impact Focus | Impact Expectation | | |
| A2T3U | intimidation | soft | physical destruction | operational | basic | incremental-stable |
| A2T3CU | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | tactical-operational | complex | intermittent |
| A8T1R | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | operational | basic | stable |
| A3T2R | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | operational | complex | incremental |
| A7T11R | coercion | soft | psychological devastation | strategic | complex | intermittent |
| A8T3U | intimidation | soft | physical destruction | tactical | basic | increscent-stable |
| A2T1R | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | tactical | complex | stable |
| A6T2R | intimidation | hard | psychological devastation | tactical | basic | intermittent |
| A3T4U | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | operational | basic | stable |
| A8T3CU | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | operational | basic | intermittent |
| A7T7U | coercion | soft | psychological devastation | strategic | basic | stable |
| A8T1U | intimidation | hard | physical destruction | tactical | basic | stable |
| A6T3CU | coercion | hard | psychological devastation | operational | basic | intermittent |

The A2T3U attack (ambush against tactical police units in urban area) was the primary correlation during the PKK surge. While skyrocketing in the second period, the correlation has never lost its importance during the PKK's tactical surge. It had an objective of intimidating the police forces with physical destruction to restrain their activities. Organized PKK elements were able to sustain this attack correlation during all periods owing to the accessibility of the police units and their ability to hide in the masses. The major reason in the decrease of this correlation is assumed to be the intense police operations targeting the PKK networks and logistics sources in urban centers.

The A2T3CU attack (ambush against tactical combined police, military and security guard units in urban area) became the leading correlation as the urban conflicts were fought in more organized forms. The Turkish security forces were organized in joint force structures combining police, military and security guards in the theater of operation; these combat units engaged with the PKK elements. Despite the fact that the combined units had hard target characters, they were targeted while they were mobile with small arms fires, RPGs and sniper shots in the streets. Organized in complex formations, the PKK elements had an objective of intimidating the operation forces to stop or push back their advance movement with physical destruction. As the PKK resilience in their defensive positions was weakened, terrorists became unable to sustain organized ambushes in urban conflicts.

The A8T1R attack (Improvised Explosives Device attack against tactical/operational military units in rural area) was the correlation before and after the intensified urban fights. The correlation targeted the military units in order to intimidate them with physical destruction in order to prevent their mobility. The correlation was also used to cover the PKK's withdrawal to rural areas after its urban setback. The basic organization and execution, and low

cost/high impact of this correlation made it indispensable for the PKK. The PKK also utilized its widespread explosive caches in rural areas to conduct its attacks. It is one of the most stable correlations in term of sustainment.

The A3T2R attack (raid against tactical/operational military facilities in rural area) is a traditional correlation for the PKK since its first armed attack in 1984. The PKK was not able to carry organized raids against military facilities when the urban conflicts dominated the PKK's tactical preference. This is because the raids required more manpower, sophisticated organization, and logistical and intelligence support. In the same period, the PKK employed a high number of raids against the military facilities along the Iraqı border. The A7T11R correlation (arson tactic against private entities in rural area) is observed as a conflict initiator. Causing psychological destruction on soft civilian targets, the PKK aimed to coerce civilians into giving up their right to free movement in the theater of its activities. Aiming to coerce local civilians, the PKK also tried to isolate its claimed area of activity from civilian entry. This correlation had no application during intense urban conflicts, yet it gained its momentum when the PKK elements retreated to rural areas.

The A8T3U correlation (Improvised Explosive Device attack against tactical/operational police units in urban area) was not observed during the entire course of the surge. The PKK used IED tactics with poor organization against the soft police targets to cause casualties mostly when police officers were traveling in vehicles.

The A2T1R attack (ambush of tactical/operational military units in rural area) was the correlation that the PKK elements employed during rural security operations. Parallel to the number of the security operations in the rural areas, the PKK elements carried out ambushes against operation forces. Unlike the deliberate ambush in urban conflicts, the PKK elements conducted ambushes in a hasty and responsive manner during the rural terror activities.

The A6T2R attack (harassing fire against tactical/operational military facilities in rural area) had an important role in covering the PKK's withdrawal to rural areas. Targeting the combat units, the PKK elements tried to distract the security focus in the area of operation. As the PKK elements settled in rural areas, the PKK replaced the harassing tactics with raids.

The A3T4U attack (raid against tactical/operational police facility in urban area) was one of the most stable correlations, although it had limited numbers. Police stations and checkpoints were the primary targets of the PKK's target selection. The A3T4U correlation required basic organization and had limited physical but major psychological impacts on the selected target.

The A8T3CU attack (Improvised Explosive Device attack against tactical/operational police and military units in urban area) was one of the effective tactical correlations of the PKK. The correlation was seen during the street fights at the time of the advance of combat forces on foot and in vehicles. The wide spectrum of the IEDs placed in the streets and buildings made them harder to detect.

The A7T7U correlation (arson tactics against government entities in urban area) had the objective of psychologically impacting society. Targeting school buildings, public libraries and mosques, the PKK terrorists aimed to instill the feeling of insecurity among local people.

The A8T1U attack (Improvised Explosives Device attack against tactical/operational military units in urban area) was selected to harm or damage the military transportation in city centers. Military convoys became the targets of this correlation when driving through an urban area. The PKK elements targeted reinforcement elements and logistical support taking advantage of environmental opportunities.

The A6T3CU correlation (harassing fire against tactical/operational police and military units in urban area) was also sustained before the urban conflict reached its peak. Harassing fire against the combined police and military combat units had the tactical objectives of intimidating the security forces in order to disrupt organized operations.

## CONCLUSION

The PKK's surge seemed to consist of five periods until the end of 2016: the first two periods were assessed as part of a deliberate phasing and the other three as responsive initiatives. Each period was observed to have different focal patterns in terms of the attack types, selected targets and the security environment, while each period had different objectives. The analysis of the correlations for the attack-target-security environment illustrates that the PKK was able to maintain its armed capacity spontaneously in emerging situations. The analysis also suggests that the PKK was able to optimize the sources available and manpower with desired objectives under swiftly changing conflict conditions even if it had suffered huge losses. Despite the fact that this ability paved the way for the PKK to reposition its combat capacity for survival, it had a negative impact on its combat effectiveness. When analyzing the correlations, it is observed that the PKK was left with the only option of returning to its traditional tactics. The PKK's diminishing assault tactics were primarily observed in the innovative attack types which were mostly seen in urban environments. This also put an enormous pressure on the PKK to remove itself from the cities.

In the above analysis, it is seen that thirteen correlations were sustainable during the surge at stable, increscent-stable and intermittent levels. However, the five stable correlations explain the role of the attacks in sustaining the objectives, as well. The average ob-

jective shows that the attacks had more intimidating characters than coercion, which means that the sustained attacks were limited to the PKK's traditional modus operandi. This also gives an idea about the PKK's survivability concern in Turkish territory. The first two periods were designed to win a victory over a strong state with the help of a full-scale people's war. However, the PKK's utmost desire of a full-scale people's war seemed to have a major setback when the Turkish containment and intervention instruments worked well. The third period was a turning point both for the PKK and Turkish national security. The PKK, in the following periods, pursued survival while moving away from a victory claim.

CHAPTER 4

# FAILURE OF THE PKK'S URBAN STRATEGY: CAUSES AND CONTEXT

When examining the main driving factors that shape the collapse of the PKK's urban strategy, it is necessary to evaluate the strategy and tactical levels, on the one hand, and the security and political environments, on the other. Some studies seek to understand success and failure at the strategic level and how, from the terrorist organizations' perspective, the insurgency strategy does or does not contribute to the achievement of the terrorist groups' short- and long-term goals. Studies at the tactical level focus on the details of specific operations carried out through insurgency and define success and failure based on what happens when the tactics used by the organization itself are used against the security forces of any state.[130] Other studies focus on the security landscape where a terrorist organization operates and on the geopolitical environment where the counter-insurgency strategies are implemented by the state forces. Both for the terrorist organizations and security forces or states, the timing, the structure of the conflict space, the military and political capacity of the organization and the political atmosphere during the conflict are crucial components for achieving their goals.[131]

For instance, developing a strategy that takes urban areas into account is no easy task for a terrorist organization because there are many factors that affect the outcome of battles in densely populated and built-up areas. In case of a terrorist insurgency in populated areas, increasing civilian causalities and destruction of daily life

[130] Bruce J. Reider, "External Support to Insurgencies", *Small Wars Journal*, October 2014, file:///C:/Users/murat.yesiltas/Downloads/Small%20Wars%20Journal%20-%20External%20Support%20to%20Insurgencies%20-%202014-10-28.pdf.

[131] Christopher Paul Colin P. Clarke Beth Grill Molly Dunigan, *Paths to Victory Detailed Insurgency Case Studies*, RAND Corporation, 2013; Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-964-OSD, 2010b.

provide strategic and tactical room for maneuver for the group's capability of maintaining urban warfare.[132]

The counter-insurgency strategy is also extremely important in defeating terrorist presence and mobilization in populated areas. Since many historical cases show that urban warfare is extremely brutal, this fact needs to be taken into consideration by policymakers when they decide to commit troops to fight against terrorist militias in urban areas.[133] Therefore, the rules for terrorist militias as well as military troops are extremely different in nature in terms of operational tactics and the conduct of terrorist and counter-military operations are an art of their own.[134]

In the case of the PKK's urban surge between 2015 and 2016, the maneuver capabilities of its youth militias in urban areas, the firepower of the local units, the protection capabilities and leadership of the groups, and the intelligence capabilities were extremely crucial in sustaining the PKK's urban surge against Turkey. In contrast, for the Turkish security forces, how the military force engaged in combating the militias in densely populated urban areas was really important. Conversely, intelligence collection, civilian casualties, the rule of engagement, technological superiority in joint rounds of gunfire were also crucial for the Turkish counter-insurgency strategy and counter-terrorism operations during the surge. To maintain legitimacy during the counter-military operations, the Turkish security forces, carefully took local populations into account and alleviated grievances to the largest extent possible. All this makes urban conflict a more challenging task for the security forces in comparison to the terrorist organization.

[132] Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *Encyclopedia of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency: A New Era of Modern Warfare*, ABC-CLIO, 2013.

[133] Department of Defense, *US Army Counterinsurgency Handbook*, Skyhorse Publishing, 2007.

[134] Jennifer Morrison Taw and Bruce Hoffman, *The Urbanization of Insurgency: The Political Challenge of US Arm Operations*, RAND Corporation, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2005/MR398.pdf.

This chapter focuses on the main factors shaping the failure of the PKK's urban surge tactics from the perspective of the strategy and tactical level on the one hand, and the security and geopolitical landscape on the other. Apart from the aforementioned conceptual discussion presented in this section, there are many reasons behind the failure of the PKK's urban surge. These are the "lack of experience" of the YDG-H militants that were the main component of the PKK's surge tactics; the "lack of military capacity" that undermined the sustainability of the urban surge for the PKK and its youth militants; the "lack of public support" that restricted the PKK's strategy of expanding its operational area towards other parts of the cities; the role of the Syrian civil war that transformed the PKK's strategic priority to its survival within the Syrian war against other actors such as DAESH and anti-PKK forces; the role of the Turkish security forces' military reaction in containing the conflict; and the "lack of outside support" for the PKK's urban tactics. While the first two explain the failure on a strategic and tactical level, the last three driving forces underline the effects of the security and geopolitical landscape during the surge.

## LACK OF EXPERIENCE AND MILITARY CAPACITY

One of the important components of the PKK's urban strategy failure was the lack of experience of the YDG-H militants. As mentioned in the previous chapters, aged between 15-25 and mostly recruited from the local populace, these youth militias had no combat experience nor had they ever engaged in the operations in Syria and Iraq where the YPG/PKK conducted warfare against DAESH.[135] The PKK's urban strategy was originally designed to secure and hold the city centers in Diyarbakır (Sur), Cizre, Mardin (Nusaybin), Şırnak (İdil), and Hakkari (Yüksekova) by militarily consolidating the YDG-H's power over the population. The mem-

[135] Rıfat Öncel, interview by authors, Ankara, December 2017.

bers of YDG-H erected checkpoints and declared autonomous zones free from state control in these city centers.[136]

Even though the PKK's command and control of the YDG-H were clear, in terms of the military training of the youth militias during the "peace process" and the operational link of the YDG-H to the PKK's leadership, the bulk of the YDG-H forces were young and poorly trained members of the group's youth militias. Therefore, the lack of fighting experience was the main reason behind the failure of the PKK's urban warfare strategy. Some militias had experience and used tactics learned in Kobani to aid the waging of an urban insurgency; most of them, however, came from low-income families without any regular military training.[137]

A very small part of the militia was educated and university dropouts who joined the urban surge at the time of the conflict. The PKK terrorists appeared during the conflict to be advising the YDG-H and tried to mobilize ordinary people against the security forces. Most of the members of the YDG-H had not yet fulfilled their military service and were inexperienced in military conflict. Another group was the young people who were in the PKK's university structure and had received no military training before the surge in the conflict areas.[138]

The lack of experience was not limited to the YDG-H militias. The PKK's armed branch, the HPG, also had a lack of military experience in the fight against the Turkish security forces during the urban conflict. They had been mainly trained in accordance with

[136] Galip Dalay, "The PKK's Low-Intensity Warfare: Background, Causes, Regional Dynamics, and Implications", *Al Sharq*, February 15, 2016, http://www.sharqforum.org/2016/02/15/the-pkks-low-intensity-warfare-background-causes-regional-dynamics-and-implications/.

[137] "The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria", *Crisis Group Middle East Report* No 176, May 4, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/176-pkk-s-fateful-choice-northern-syria.

[138] Zana Baykal, interview by authors, Sakarya, December 2017.

the manuals of the rural tactics since the establishment of the PKK in 1978. During the early periods of the 1990s, the PKK firstly targeted isolated military posts, picking isolated soldiers on guard duty or traveling to or from their posts; and secondly it attempted to expand its operational areas into the cities. However, the lack of capacity regarding manpower to mobilize them in the city centers and the inexperience regarding urban territorial control prevented the PKK from using this strategy against Turkey.[139] During the urban conflict between 2015 and 2016, the main obstacle for the PKK was almost the same. During the early stages of the urban surge, the core manpower was composed of youth militias; the experienced HPG members were not able to join direct military confrontation with the Turkish security forces in city centers.[140] The PKK's main aim at that time was to mobilize HPG militias against the security forces in rural areas in order to strengthen the YDG-H defense against the security forces in city centers. As it can be understood from the number of terrorist attacks pointed out in the previous chapters, the HPG militias mainly targeted isolated military posts in rural areas.

There are a number of reasons that can explain why the PKK was not able to mobilize effectively its veteran militias into the city centers. Firstly, Turkish security forces quickly gained the military superiority over the PKK not only in city centers, but also in rural areas, and disconnected the main logistical line between the youth militias and the HPG militias.[141] This counter-insurgency strategy

[139] Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK: Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi*, Avsam Yayınları, 1999.

[140] Hümeyra Pamuk, "A New Generation of Kurdish Militant Takes Fight to Turkey's Cities", *Reuters*, September 27, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-kurds-youth/a-new-generation-of-kurdish-militants-takes-fight-to-turkeys-cities-idUSKCN0RR0DS20150927.

[141] "Terör Örgütünün 'Kurtarılmış Bölge' Hayaline Ağır Darbe", *Vatan*, December 9, 2015, http://www.gazetevatan. com/teror-orgutunun-kurtarilmis-bolge-hayaline-agir-darbe-892768-gundem/.

also prevented the PKK's mobilization in rural areas due to the technological superiority of the Turkish military force.[142] Here, the intense drone campaign consolidated the TAF's military effectiveness and prevented the PKK from gaining an advantageous position in rural areas.[143] Secondly, the PKK overwhelmingly focused on the YDG-H's military presence in city centers and could not effectively support them to sustain their fight. The striking example here was the lack of expectation among the youth militants that the PKK/HPG would be able to sustain its military assistance to them, and their skepticism on the success of the urban tactics. The youth militants mostly believed that establishing an autonomous unity by forming entrenchments and barricades in urban areas was a wrong strategy. The main reason was the potential of this move to create an endless cycle of conflict between the PKK and security forces, which would not consolidate their presence in city centers.[144] As a result of the combination of many interrelated driving factors, the PKK could not maintain its urban tactic with the inexperienced youth militias.

The second crucial factor that shaped the failure of the strategy of urban surge was the PKK's lack of military and organizational capacity. The first and foremost dimension of military capacity directly depends on organizational structure. More importantly, organizational cohesion is an integral part of the survivability of the conflict for violent terrorist organizations. The structure of a terrorist organization is also crucial in implementing violent tac-

[142] "Terör Nedeniyle Uygulanan Sokağa Çıkma Yasakları", *Anadolu Ajansı*, December 15, 2015, http://aa.com.tr/tr/ turkiye/teror-nedeniyle-uygulanan-sokaga-cikma-yasaklari/491531.

[143] "24 Temmuz'dan Bu Yana PKK ve IŞİD'e Yönelik Hava Operasyonları", *Hürriyet*, August 13, 2015, http:// www.hurriyet.com.tr/24-temmuzdan-bu-yana-pkk-ve-iside-yonelik-hava-operasyonlari-29803280.

[144] Mehmet Yanmış, "Resurgence of the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey: How Kurds View It", Rethink Institute, February 2016, p. 17. http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Resurgence-of-Kurdish-Conflict-Mehmet-Yanmis.pdf .

tics.[145] There are normally two structures that terrorist organizations adopt: hierarchical and networked structure. Hierarchical structure is more efficient in organizing, supplying, executing and coordinating the intended armed strategy, while the control in networked structure is more difficult due to its complexity.

In that context, the PKK is an organization that acts in a traditional hierarchical structure, in which the command, control and communication (C3) is well established. Yet, the attachment of the YDG-H element to the urban conflict areas brought along disadvantages in the management of C3 tools. This was caused simply by the complexity of the network. A complex network is normally an advantage for a terrorist organization when carrying covert activities. However, in the PKK's surge, the complexity of the YDG-H network did not have a positive effect when acting overtly in city centers. Moreover, the weak hierarchal ties in the networked structure also caused the YDG-H members to ease their organizational dedication when they faced strict responses from the security forces.[146]

The protraction of urban fights did not have a positive impact on the PKK's defensive tactics especially after the security forces contained and isolated the area of conflicts in the suburbs. The PKK's ability to access information about the operation forces was restrained because of the restrictions on civilian entry into the area of operation. Technical means also disabled the PKK elements from communicating with outsiders. Access to supplies and reinforcement for the fighting PKK elements in urban areas of operation was also limited because of physical measures taken by the security forces.[147]

[145] Ethan Frisch, "Insurgencies are Organizations Too: Organizational Structure and the Effectiveness of Insurgent Strategy", *Peace & Conflict Review* Volume 6, Issue 1, 2001, pp.1-23.

[146] Interview with security analyst, Ankara, December 2017.

[147] Interview with regional intelligence staff, Diyarbakır, May 2016.

The PKK elements which were equipped with small arms, RPGs and sniper rifles had no innovations at the operational level, but relied on the obstacles set up of barriers, trenches and IEDs. Defense in echelons in isolated and relatively small urban areas offered no benefit for the defenders due to the difficulty of recovering the disabled obstacles. The PKK could not sustain its defense based on the obstacles. On the other hand, the tactical innovations of using snipers, small IEDs inside buildings, and small unit (3-4 men) attacks had limited leverage for the operational concept and in stopping the security forces.[148]

The PKK's grave mistake was to employ rural terrorists in urban areas to recover from the YDG-H defeat in city centers. Rural PKK terrorists found themselves entrapped when the area of conflict was completely isolated by the security forces. This also caused the PKK terrorists to lose in rural areas; in addition to the dramatic drop in rural attacks, the PKK was also unable to operate the arms caches and supply routes from rural areas to support its surge.

The PKK terrorists were not able to control the civilians living in the areas of conflict due to the insufficiency of terrorist numbers and their inexperience in populace control. Since the civilians impaired the PKK terrorists in the area of conflicts, the PKK terrorists could not stop the civilians from leaving the conflict areas and they, thus, were alienated from human shields. Moreover, the terrorists had to save manpower to perform the flow of supplies which was supposed to be done by local civilians. Limited manpower had to be broken down into the tasks of combat, supply flow, civilian control, and material resource control. In general, it is a well-proven fact that no country has ever benefitted from protracted violence. Similarly, the PKK has contributed to terrorism

[148] Interview with regional intelligence staff, Ankara, December 2017.

studies the knowledge that there has never been a terrorist organization that has benefitted from protracted violence without the people's support in urban centers.

The PKK's tactics and target selection revolved around the expectations of environmental opportunism and organizational capacity. In terms of the environmental opportunities, the PKK attacks were carried out in a complex security environment that combined the urban and rural characteristics. This allowed the PKK only to embolden the nature of chaos, ambiguity and complexity. However, the surge and protraction of violence in the complex environment backfired and public support could not be mustered. Regarding the organizational capacity, a high number of attached YDG-H members were expected to contribute to the PKK's hope of spilling the violence over to the local population and social groups. The combat incapacity of the YDG-H members, the inability of supply flow, and the setbacks in defensive tactics formed the PKK's weaknesses.

## LACK OF PUBLIC SUPPORT

The second crucial factor that undermined the sustainability of the PKK's urban surge was the lack of public support towards its violent campaign against the security forces. During the urban conflict, the population became a main component for both sides' success. Public support for any insurgency and terrorist campaign is very crucial and depends on four top-level factors: the effectiveness of the organization, motivation, perceived legitimacy, and the acceptability of costs and risks especially for those who want to back an insurgency movement during the conflict.[149] Firstly, in order to gain public support, a terrorist organization

[149] Paul K. Davis, Eric V. Larson, Zachary Haldeman, Mustafa Oguz, Yashodhara Rana, *Understanding and Influencing Public Support for Insurgency and Terrorism*, RAND Corporation, 2012, p. xviii.

requires organizational effectiveness which is composed of leadership, ideological framing of the terrorist actions, and mobilization of resources, opportunism and adaptation to the circumstances. Secondly, motivation is one of the important factors in shaping public understanding of the conflict between the terrorist organizations and state forces. There is a necessity that people should have certain answers regarding the question of why they are fighting. Most people who support insurgency or any terrorist action believe that they are doing something positive such as fulfilling a duty or maintaining honor. The motivation of the public support is rooted in ideological loyalty constructed around religious or ethnic narratives. The appreciation of the social services provided by the violent terrorist organization during the conflict is also important to gain and maintain public support.

Thirdly, the perception towards the violence adopted by terrorist organizations is crucial in shaping the level of public support. Violence may be perceived as legitimate and a necessary move for many reasons. The reason in the case of ethnic-based terrorist organizations may be ideological or ethnic. Violence in that context is applied to provoke the government to strike back hard.[150] Thus, the terrorist organization may win public support to increase its level of violence. However, if the violence is adopted to undermine the population's regular life, the level of public support may change against the organization itself. Fourthly, the acceptability of costs and risks is a vital component of public support. If the general public perceives that the terrorist organization cannot survive organizationally, in order to maintain an insurgency strategy, the level of public support may decrease since the costs and risks can be high for the general public interest.

[150] Paul B. Rich and Isaballe Duyvesteyn, "The Study of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency" in *The Routledge Handbook of Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*, Paul B. Rich and Isaballe Duyvesteyn, eds., Routledge, 2012, p. 6.

In the case of the PKK, the public support in regards to its rural-base warfare strategy against Turkey has always been a contested issue. Many in Turkey perceive the PKK as a violent terrorist organization. However, a good percentage of the people particularly among the Kurdish cities see the PKK is an integral part of the historical Kurdish issue and perceive its violence "as a reaction against the wrong governmental policies." More importantly, some passive supporters who don't directly engage in any armed conflict see the PKK violence even against civilians as an unavoidable consequence of "the PKK's legitimate fight."[151] In this process of gaining public support, the PKK-controlled political parties provide the legal front and mobilize public support especially in activating passive supporters to join the PKK surge.[152] These draw passive and active supporters who promote the PKK's narratives and short- and long-term goals, encouraging Kurdish politicians to advocate increasingly radical positions.

The PKK's urban strategy was overwhelmingly based on gaining public support to intensify the conflict between the Turkish security forces and the PKK and transform this conflict to a people's war. Under the leadership of the KCK, urban committees had an important mission: to assume governmental functions. To this mission, the goal of the committees during the urban conflict was to politicize the masses and mobilize them for mass revolts. This strategy was originally designed as part of the PKK's "people's war" strategy and was reformulated by Bese Hozat (2015), the co-chair of the KCK, who published an opinion in *Özgür Gündem*, the semi-official newspaper of the PKK, titled, "The New

[151] SETA interview, Diyarbakır, June 2016.

[152] "Binlerce kişi İdil'den Cizre'ye yürüyor", *İMC TV*, December 24, 2015; "Cizre halkı 'Direne direne kazanacağız' sloganlarıyla yürüdü", *Evrensel Gazete*, December 22, 2015; "Demirtaş Sur'a yürüyüş çağrısı yaptı: Bugün abluka kalksın, yarın hendek ve barikat olmaz", *T24*, http://t24.com.tr/haber/demirtas-oturma-eylemi-baslatti-sura-yuruyus-cagrisi-yapti,330140.

Process is the Revolutionary People's War," where she declared the beginning of the PKK's offense. However, the main problem for this strategy was the lack of organizational capacity that could effectively help maintain the surge tactics against the state in order to create "liberated areas" under the PKK control firstly, and then extend these areas into "liberated zones," which would ultimately provide the PKK with a "territorial order." Therefore, the public support was at the center of the strategy of urban surge.

A good example can be seen in the reaction of Murat Karayılan, the so-called leader of the PKK, while the people and most Kurdish youths were not supporting the PKK's urban tactics. According to Karayılan, "The Kurdish youth should be presented in all aspects of the struggle for freedom" and "should be at the most strategic front."[153] However, the PKK's violent urban tactics did not gain public support and many people including the Kurdish youth did not choose to join the violent acts. This is not merely because of the lack of organizational capacity to deepen the urban surge; rather it was because the government's counter-insurgency measures outside the conflict zones were able to contain the possibility of mass violent mobilization against the security forces.

There are many reasons behind the lack of public support. The first reason was the ambiguity of the motivations of the youth militants and the lack of clarity regarding the PKK's revolutionary people's war strategy. According to the people in eastern Turkey, despite the political victory of the HDP after the June 7 general election, the PKK abused this victory in order to undermine the political power of the HDP.[154] The PKK un-

[153] "Murat Karayılan: HPG, şehirlere inmeden devreye girmeli", *Evrensel*, 29 March 2016, https://www.evrensel.net/haber/276228/murat-karayilan-hpg-sehirlere-inmeden-devreye-girmeli

[154] Gonca Şenay, "HDP, PKK'sız bir gelecek tahayyül edebilmeliydi" Interview with Vahap Coşkun, *Al Jazeera Türk*, December 6, 2016, http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/hdp-pkksiz-bir-gelecek-tahayyul-edebilmeliydi.

derstood that the political victory was a sign that people would also support "violent actions" against the Turkish state.[155] On the other hand, despite the mentoring and commanding role of the PKK's mountain squad, inexperienced YDG-H members could not earn the hearts and minds of the Kurdish people in the early stages of the urban surge. Behind this failure lies their misconduct of military operations as they used people's houses as safe havens, significantly disrupted daily life, and forced civilians and children to be either militants or human shields. YDG-H members were essentially radicalized young individuals rather than combat-hardened fighters. As a consequence, the entrenchment policy for ordinary people brought suffering rather than freedom as was expected by the PKK.[156] More importantly, as cities turned into battlefields with the actions of the YDG-H and the PKK targeted mostly the civilians in the western cities of Turkey, the situation became more irritating for most people and this new process began to deepen the Kurdish issue in the eyes of the ordinary people.

The second reason was related to the way in which ordinary people including non-PKK supporters perceived the legitimacy of the YDG-H and the PKK as political/security actors and their violent tactics against civilians and security forces. The violent tactics of the YDG-H and the PKK, first of all, destabilized daily life, displaced the local population, and deepened insecurities among different political groups particularly in the conflict zones. For instance, the Sur case provides an important example of how an urban surge faced difficulties in spreading the conflict towards other

[155] Burhanettin Duran, "HDP bu noktaya nasıl geldi", *Sabah Gazetesi*, November 5, 2016, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/duran/2016/11/05/hdp-bu-noktaya-nasil-geldi.

[156] Taha Akyol, "Hendek siyaseti", *Hürriyet Gazetesi*, February 24, 2016 http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/taha-akyol/hendek-siyaseti-40059289

parts of the city of Diyarbakır.[157] This was not the case in Cizre, Nusaybin and Şırnak during the urban conflict, which spread the conflict to the entire city.

The third factor that undermined the public support of the PKK's urban violence was the limited level of the acceptability of costs and risks. The people perceived that the YDG-H could not survive organizationally to maintain its surge against the security forces, and the cost and risk could be high for their public interests, such as sustaining their daily life, economic mobility and basic security requirements.

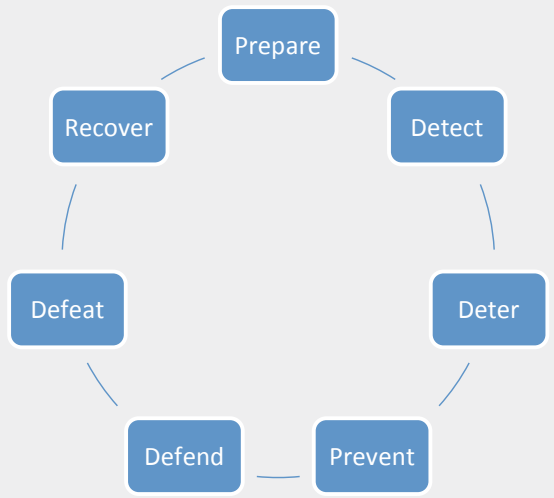
## RESPONSE OF THE TURKISH SECURITY FORCES

The third factor that shaped the failure of the PKK's urban surge was the early reaction of the Turkish security forces in preventing conflict spillover into other parts of the cities. The Turkish combat effort against the PKK during its surge strategy was conducted within the framework of the concept of homeland defense. As is mentioned in the U.S. *Joint Publication* by the Homeland Defense, homeland defense is framed with the military, security and intelligence activities of preparation, detection, deterrence, prevention, defend, defeat, and recover.[158] The activities should normally run in a cycle to sustain the operational continuum in order to combat the terrorists effectively. It could be argued that the Turkish combat against the PKK was fought with the purposes of defend and defeat as a matter of retaliation right in the heart of Turkey. This means that the first four steps in the Turkish fight against the PKK were simply ineffective until the PKK started its surge in July 2015.

[157] "PKK Sur'da sıkışıt", *Yeni Şafak*, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/taha-akyol/hendek-siyaseti-40059289 November 6, 2015 ; "Sur'da sıkışan teröristler teslim oluyor", *Hürriyet Gazetesi*, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/surda-sikisan-teroristler-teslim-oluyor-40057808 February 20, 2016.

[158] *Joint Publication*, 3-7, Homeland Defense, The Joint U.S. Chief of Staff, 29 June 2013, p.11.

FIGURE 41. OPERATIONAL CYCLE OF HOMELAND SECURITY




As soon as the PKK attacks began in multiple locations, the Turkish security forces reacted with the tactical methods learned from the rural counter-terrorism experiences. Different from the lessons learned through the past experiences, this time the threat had a different character with multiple and simultaneous means of violent actions in rural and urban security environments. Thus, the relevant Turkish agencies started to identify the activities, locations, strength, affiliations and possible courses of action of the threat while trying to balance the PKK violence with countering means.[159]

The situational assessment led the security forces to develop a strategy of securement, containment and engagement of the environments where the PKK had tactical strength, which could cause spillover effects on other locations before evolving into a large scale violent terrorist campaign with an insurgency component.

[159] Interview with military experts in the region, Diyarbakır, December 2016.

In the absence of the deterrence activities, security forces had to take obvious actions to secure Silvan, Sur, Nusaybin, Cizre, Silopi, Şırnak, and Yüksekova. The PKK and its youth wing, the YDG-H, were restricted from free movement when the security forces increased police patrols and checkpoints in city centers and the gendarmerie activities in rural areas under the supervision of provincial and district governors. Curfews and movement restrictions also helped for house and facility inspection that affected the activities of the PKK's auxiliary members denying them the flow of information and supplies.

The Turkish security forces, also, put enormous efforts to differentiate between PKK terrorists and civilians living in irregular urban areas and started mass evacuations form the conflict zones. This allowed operation forces to engage with the terrorists more accurately. Avoiding aerial bombing, operation forces continued vertical surveillance (aerial) and horizontal engagement that caused less damage.[160] This also let the PKK to protract the violence, yet at the same time it weakened the organization as a result of the absence of sufficient reinforcement, supplies, and morale. Taking advantage of the PKK's disorientation in the third period when terrorists lost their defensive strongholds, security forces generated a momentum to push for further operations.

## THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR

The fourth reason behind the PKK's failed violent urban surge was the conflict-spillover effect of the Syrian civil war that extensively prevented the PKK from consolidating and maintaining its violent tactics in Turkey. It can be argued that the regional dynamics that developed around the Syrian civil war played an important role not only in terms of transforming the PKK's post-Arab Spring strategy

[160] Interview with military and intelligence experts in the region, Diyarbakır, December 2016.

in Turkey but also in creating a new regional security landscape that restricted the PKK's mobilization in Turkey.

Firstly, the emergence of DAESH helped to consolidate the PKK's regional presence. Secondly, the lack of central authority alongside the Turkish border with Syria provided the PKK with a territorial space that could be governed independently. More importantly, with the increasing role of the U.S. as an outside supporter in the fight against DAESH in Syria, the civil war allowed the PKK to operate across the region, using its presence in each Kurdish community as a resource for its violent urban insurgency in Turkey. The identity dimension of the PKK's new mobilization articulated around the new interpretation of pan-Kurdish nationalism, which became a central component of the new strategy of the PKK at the regional level.[161] However, the PKK's manpower in mobilizing its sources, the nature of the conflict structure in Syria and the competitive environment of the violent non-state armed groups in northern Syria were the main determinant factors in shaping the PKK's strategy against Turkey.

It is believed that, as this book also mentioned in the first chapter, the initial strategic aim of the PKK was not to gain territorial control in Turkey. Rather, the PKK's violent surge tactics in city centers were designed in order to consolidate the PKK's influence in northern Syria. The PKK took advantage of the emerging regional antagonism between the Syrian regime's backers and enemies, and renewed the Turkish-Syrian relations to harness its Syrian affiliates to a new strategy attuned to the evolving situation.

Within the context of the changing regional geopolitical antagonism, the PKK reshaped itself through the new regional dy-

[161] Tuncay Kardaş and Murat Yeşiltaş, "Rethinking Kurdish Geopolitical Space: The Politics of Image, Insecurity and Gender", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, Volume 30, 2017 - Issue 2-3; Murat Yeşiltaş and Tuncay Kardaş (eds) *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: geopolitics, ıdeology and strategy,* New York: Palgrave, 2017.

namics. Three developments can explain how the PKK aligned itself with the Syrian regime and other regional players including Iran and the U.S. against Turkey. Firstly, in September 2011, the PJAK, the PKK's Iranian offshoot, implemented a unilateral cease-fire.[162] Secondly, in July 2012, the Syrian regime security forces withdrew unilaterally from northern Syria, allowing the YPG to take control.[163] Thirdly, in mid-2013, the KCK's so-called executive council reshaped its strategy of support towards those who partake in a political-military struggle against Turkey as a precondition in solving the Kurdish issue in the neighboring countries. During this time, Cemil Bayık's violent narrative was important to see how the Syrian civil war became a strategic opportunity for the PKK. By referring to the idea that the Syrian case is different than Turkey, Bayık championed a different view: "It is wrong not to mention Turkey when we speak about Syria, Iran and Iraq. Turkey is behind the crisis in those two countries. If you can't fix the Kurdish issue in Turkey first, you can't resolve it there either."[164] This view shows the way in which the PKK's game plan was articulated in accordance with the developments in Syria in order to gain a more strategic maneuver against Turkey.

According to the PKK's strategy of gaining territory and creating a "territorial order," location, personnel, and logistics were vital in implementing its revolutionary people's war strategy in Turkey. The situation in Syria would create an advantage for the PKK in all three areas and provide maneuvers to shape its influence on the

[162] Mehmet Orhan, "Transborder Violence: The PKK in Turkey, Syria and Iraq", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, Vol 7 No 1, 2014, pp. 30-48.

[163] Ghadi Sary, "Kurdish Self-governance in Syria: Survival and Ambition", *Chathamhouse*, Middle East and North Africa Programme, September 2016, https://syria.chathamhouse.org/assets/documents/2016-09-15-kurdish-self-governance-syria-sary.pdf.

[164] "The PKK's Fateful Choice in Northern Syria", *International Crisis Group*, Middle East Report No176, May 4, 2017, p. 4, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/176-the-pkks-fateful-choice-in-northern-syria.pdf.

so-called Rojava region, which is the Kurdish topographical name for northern Syria in the discourse of Kurdish nationalism. The length of Turkey's Syrian border, the lack of Syrian regime authority in northern Syria and the new political environment, particularly shaped by the conflict between the PKK and DAESH, provided a new recruitment pool for the PKK. The emerging cooperation between the PKK and the U.S. in the fight against DAESH consolidated the PKK's military capacity and logistics. However, the territorial ambitions and military overstretch of the PKK in northern Syria at the same time became the central source of the failure of its violent campaign in Turkey.

There are three reasons that can explain why the PKK's urban strategy collapsed in Turkey due to the Syrian civil war. The first one is the negative public perception in Turkey that the conflict spillover effect of the Syrian civil war would deepen the societal insecurity in Turkey, particularly in the southern part of the country.[165] In that context, the primary conflict-spillover effect was shaped by the deadly conflict between the PKK/PYD and DAESH in northern Syria. The first attempt to mobilize local people in Turkey was initiated by the PKK when DAESH started offensive attacks against Ayn al-Arab (also known as Kobani). The PKK and its political wing, the HDP, perceived the situation as the right time to initiate an uprising in Turkey, supported logistically by Qandil and Syria in terms of 'legitimacy' which the group thought it had gained through the fight against DAESH. As a result of projecting Turkey as a country that did not "allow the Kurdish fighters to pass the border" to fight against DAESH in Kobani, on October 6-8, 2014, much of the Kurdish southeast of Turkey

[165] "Halk hendek siyasetini onaylamıyor, 'ne için savaşıyoruz' sorusu cevap bulmuş değil", *T24*, December 16, 2015, http://t24.com.tr/haber/halk-hendek-siyasetini-onaylamiyor-ne-icin-savasiyoruz-sorusu-cevap-bulmus-degil,320541; "Uluslararası Kriz Grubu: Güneydoğu'da halk devlete kırgın ama PKK'yı da suçluyor", *BBC Türkçe*, May 2, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-39788087.

witnessed large-scale protests and violence broke out between the security forces and protesters. Following the violent demonstrations organized by the PKK and the HDP, in total, 51 people lost their lives during the clashes between the different political groups.[166] As a result of the increasing possibility of the escalation in the deadly conflict between different Kurdish political groups; the government timely reaction against the pro-PKK groups became a determining factor in preventing the PKK from spreading the violent mobilization to the mass population in the region. More importantly, the people's reaction towards the violence carried out by the PKK-affiliated youth was a crucial turning point, which implied that the region would quickly turn into an unstable environment like Syria.

The second reason for the PKK's failure in maintaining its violent urban tactics in Turkey is related to limited manpower. The heavy clashes between the PKK and DAESH in Kobani were perceived as the main threat for the survivability of the PKK. Following the liberation of Kobani, the PKK had to mobilize a significant percentage of its manpower in Syria in the fight against DAESH to defend the so-called "Kurdish homeland," indicated as "Rojava." This pan-nationalistic motivation made a profound impact on the PKK's strategy of mobilization of its core manpower, and forced it to focus on defending the stronghold zones and defeating DAESH through the military assistance provided by the U.S. During the post-Kobani period, the youth recruitment policy became a central component of the PKK's urban violence in Turkey as the Syrian civil war provided more opportunities.

Articulated as such, the nature of the PKK's manpower is important. While, locationally, the PKK was mobilizing its manpower

[166] "6-7 Ekim Olaylarının Bilançosu", *Anadolu Ajansı*, October 7, 2015, http://aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/6-7-ekim-olaylarinin-bilancosu/436002.

in Mt. Qandil of northern Iraq, northern Syria, Turkey and Iran, the main proportion of this manpower was organized in accordance with the PKK's strategic and operational priorities in Syria. In the early stages of the urban conflict in Turkey, and the conflict with DAESH in Syria, the most senior YPG militants came from Mt. Qandil, and the visible YPG leadership was composed of around 80% of PKK-trained cadres. The heads of the military brigades and other security apparatuses were nearly 50% composed of the PKK's Qandil cadres. This allowed the PKK to create a new base to recruit terrorist fighters for its fight in Syria and Turkey. However, as the fight against DAESH in Syria intensified, the PKK focused on northern Syria in order to expand its territorial control under the U.S. security umbrella, and tried to consolidate its manpower mobilization against DAESH in Syria.[167]

In the fight against DAESH, a significant percentage of the YPG militants killed in action were Turkish citizens. In the period from July 2014 to February 2015, roughly 16% of combat deaths were Turkish-born terrorists, and another 4% were Iraqi or Iranian, while only 65% of the deaths were known to be Syrian. September 2014 was also important, as the PKK overtly deployed 400 fighters that month, reportedly from Qandil, to reinforce the YPG in Ayn al-Arab. In addition, dozens of Turkish pro-PKK terrorists, possibly even hundreds, are believed to have crossed the border to support the YPG in Ayn al-Arab after the YPG called upon "all Kurds for assistances."[168] Therefore, the PKK had to carry out its violent tactics in Turkey with the inexperienced youth militias.

[167] "Turkey vs. ISIS and PKK: A Matter of Distinction", *Bipartisan Policy Center*, July 2016, https://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/BPC-Turkey-ISIS-PKK.pdf.

[168] Andrew Self and Jared Ferris, "Dead Men Tell No Lies: Using Killed-in-Action (KIA) Data to Expose the PKK's Regional Shell Game", *Defence Against Terrorism Review (DATR),* Vol 8, 2016, pp. 9-37.

## LACK OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT

The last reason behind the failure of the PKK's urban strategy is the lack of outside support. Outside support describes the frequency of which states, diasporas and non-state actors back an insurgency movement. It also assesses the motivation of these actors, and which types of support matter. Outside or international support in creating and sustaining insurgency has many dimensions. Out of the 74 post-Cold War insurgencies, surveyed by RAND Corporation, state support played a major role in initiating, sustaining, bringing to victory, or assisting 44 of them.[169] International support in many ways, therefore, plays a crucial role in maintaining the survivability of many insurgency movements. States can offer insurgents a wide range of assistance including providing them with armed fighters, money, diplomatic aid, materials and a safe place to train and organize an insurgency war against other states.[170]

In the history of the PKK, state sponsorship has had a profound impact on the maintenance of the PKK's violent conflict in Turkey. Articulated as such, states may contribute directly or indirectly to the violent activities of the PKK. In cases of direct support, states directly contribute to the violent attacks of the PKK by providing education and training camps, funds, arms and logistical aid. Indirect forms of support in this case include political support, peaceful propaganda, fundraising and transport of weapons.[171] Syria was the textbook example until the Adana

[169] Daniel Byman at al., "Trends in Outside Support for Insurgent Movements", RAND Cooperation, 2011, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2007/MR1405.pdf

[170] Idean Salehyan, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, David E. Cunningham, "Explaining External Support for Insurgent Groups", *International Organization* 65, Fall 2011, pp. 709–44.

[171] Belgin San-Akça, *Sates in Disguise: Causes of State Support for Rebel Groups*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 8-9.

Agreement,[172] signed between Ankara and Damascus in 1999, in terms of direct support to the PKK by providing many crucial warfare facilities. Until that time, the Syrian regime had provided a safe zone to the PKK in its territory to undermine Turkey's influence over Syria and beyond.[173] Iraq was another country that provided the PKK with a safe zone in Mt. Qandil, which was the main strategic ground for the PKK in maintaining its terrorist attacks against Turkey. While Syria and Iraq were the main critical state supporters of the PKK, in the 1990s Greece and Iran were the minor state-level supporters of the PKK in terms of providing training camps and military equipment, and accepting PKK militants who sought political asylum. During the urban conflict between 2015 and 2016, the PKK had the same sources particularly provided by Syria and Iraq in sustaining its attacks against the Turkish security forces in rural areas, yet the urban dimension of its surge was not sufficient to maintain outside support.

Turkey's strong military power and its role in regional geopolitics were the main obstacles, especially for the countries in the region, for avoiding openly supporting the PKK's surge tactic against Turkey. Turkey's close relations with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil and the central government in Baghdad at the time of the urban violence in Turkey, the increasing security cooperation against the PKK at the regional level, and the common threat perception between Ankara and Tehran prevented the countries in the region from openly supporting the PKK's

[172] "Statement Made by İsmail Cem, Foreign Minister, on the Special Security Meeting Held Between Turkey and Syria", October 20, 1998 (Unofficial Translation), *MFA of Turkey*, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/_p_statement-made-by-ismail-cem_-foreign-minister_-on-the-special-security-meeting-held-between-turkey-and-syria_br_october-20_-1998_br__unofficial-translation___p_.en.mfa.

[173] Aaron Mannes, *Profiles in Terror: The Guide to Middle East Terrorist Organizations,* Lowman and Littlefielfd Publisher, 2014, pp. 180-193; Hogeng Ose, "The PKK-Assad Regime Story: Harmony, Discord and Ocalan" *Now*, April 10, 2015, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/commentary/565108-the-pkk-assad-regime-story-harmony-discord-and-ocalan.

urban surge. It should also be considered that the weakness of the sovereign authorities to govern the entire country, particularly in Syria and Iraq, in the post-Arab revolutions era certainly shaped their reaction vis-à-vis the PKK's urban tactics against Turkey.[174] However, this does not necessarily mean that the countries in the Middle East did not directly or indirectly support the PKK's presence against Turkey during its urban urge. The specific example here refers to the degree to which the regional countries effectively supported the PKK's urban tactics in Turkey during the urban warfare. Articulated as such, the regional outside support was not sufficient for the PKK to sustain its urban tactics within Turkey.

In addition to the unwillingness of the countries in the region to openly support the PKK's urban surge against Turkey, international actors such as the U.S. and European countries have had the same view toward the PKK's violent urban tactics in Turkey. First and foremost, the U.S., NATO and the EU listed the PKK as a terrorist organization. Most of the countries perceive Turkey as one of the important players within NATO's security structure and particularly within European security policies.[175] During the urban conflict, the perception of Turkey in terms of its strategic importance in the Western security landscape was the same - not only in preventing mass refugee mobilization from Syria to Europe, but also in combating global terrorism especially in the fight against DAESH.

However, in terms of the indirect or unintentional support of European countries, the U.S. paved the way for the PKK to main-

[174] Cengiz Gunes and Robert Lowe, "The Impact of the Syrian War on Kurdish Politics Across the Middle East", *Middle East and North Africa Programme*, July 2015, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150723SyriaKurdsGunesLowe.pdf.

[175] "The PKK Conflict in the Context of EU-Turkey Relations", *International Crisis Group*, March 1, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/pkk-conflict-context-eu-turkey-relations.

tain its violent attacks against Turkey, especially in the post-2015 urban and rural conflicts. Large platforms provided PKK-affiliated organizations with more space to consolidate their influence in the eyes of the European public. For example, a federal court in Belgium ruled that the PKK activities couldn't be classified as terrorism, and fall under the definition of an "armed campaign."[176] The example is not limited to the legal difference between European countries and Turkey. While there is little cooperation between Turkey and its Western partners over the PKK in Europe, there is also a lack of cooperation on a policy-oriented level. For example, the number of PKK-affiliated individuals listed by Turkey compared to the ones listed by EU countries. EU countries host more than 100 individuals that have joined terror-related activities in Turkey but have not been extradited by the European authorities.

This became a crucial issue between Turkey and Western countries and especially between Turkey and the U.S. during the Syrian civil war. The emergence of DAESH and the U.S. military assistance to the PKK in Syria toward the fight against DAESH explains how another violent non-state actor directly supports an insurgency in another country through the support of an outside country. There are two important domains that can explain the PKK's outside support in this case. Firstly, the YPG was playing a vital role in the PKK's ongoing terrorist attacks against Turkey. The YPG, during the urban conflict in Turkey, was used by the PKK as an integral part of its urban tactic against the Turkish Armed Forces, both in terms of manpower[177] and military equipment.[178]

[176] "PKK activities 'armed conflict,' not terrorism, rules Belgian court." *Rudaw.* 3 November 2016, http://www.rudaw.net/NewsDetails.aspx?pageid=257679.

[177] Jared Ferris and Andrew Self, "Dead Men Tell No Lies: Using Martyr Data to Expose the PKK's Regional Shell Game." *Defence Against Terrorism Review* (DATR), Vol. 8, 2016.

[178] Can Acun and Bünyamin Keskin, "The PKK's Branch in Northern Syria: PYD-YPG" *SETAReport*,2017,http://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2017/04/PYDYPH_En.pdf.

Secondly, the PKK recruits foreign fighters for the fight against DAESH in Syria, and against Turkey. Armed YPG fighters have carried out terrorist attacks against Turkish civilians and security forces with weapons that were most likely provided by the U.S. and Russia to counter DAESH. Moreover, enhanced with foreign military assistance, YPG fighters have also called for European citizens to take up arms and fight against Turkey, pointing to a PKK-oriented insurgency in Turkey. YPG fighters have announced many times that they were militarily ready to fight against the Turkish security forces on Turkish soil. Based on these dynamics, the PKK has pursued its operational and tactical goals of easy access to military equipment and instruments in Syria, geopolitical expansion attempts in Syria, and attacks in Turkey.

The main dynamic behind the failure of the PKK's strategy to gain outside support was the PKK's belief that the international community, particularly the U.S. and the West, would harshly pressure Turkey during the urban conflicts. The group perceived the 'legitimacy' gained through the fight against DAESH energized the Kurdish diaspora around the world, which in turn provided the foreign nations' and high-level politicians' support for a "Kurdish uprising" in Turkey, which in turn would lead to the delisting of the PKK from foreign terrorist organizations.

## CONCLUSION

The reasons behind the failure of the sustainability of the PKK's violent urban tactics as part of its long years of popular insurgency strategy are multidimensional. Firstly, as many cases historically show, popular support behind an insurgency movement is the most important dimension for the effectiveness of the insurgency group's short- and long-term strategic goals. In the case of the PKK's surge tactics and strategies regarding public support, this chapter underlined that the lack of public support was the main determinant

factor behind the PKK's failure. Secondly, as the post-2003 regional security landscape in the context of the U.S. invasion of Iraq demonstrates, and the Syrian civil war strongly underlines, the cohesion of the organizational structure and military capacity of the violent non-state armed actors are the most important components of the insurgency movement in enabling their violent strategy. The PKK's lack of military capacity and its lack of experience in urban warfare played vital roles during the urban conflict between 2015 and 2016 in Turkey. The role of inexperienced youth militants, in that context, prevented the PKK from maintaining its urban tactics, and the rapid reaction of the Turkish security forces contained the PKK's ability to extend its violent mobilization.

Thirdly, from the standpoint of the PKK, the Syrian civil war constituted a main driving force behind the failure of the urban tactics. The conflict structure in northern Syria, the difficulties in regards to military mobilization in two different conflict zones at the same time, and the complex nature of the competitive environment in Syria and Iraq among various violent non-state armed groups weakened the PKK's urban tactics in Turkey. Last but not least, as many cases show, external support to the insurgents is usually a decisive factor in determining the outcome of an insurgency. The PKK case shows that during the urban conflict, the external support was not an easy task in consolidating the PKK's violent tactics as a full-scale popular insurgency due to the fact that Turkey was perceived as a crucial player in many ways by the potential outside supporters, not only in the Middle East but also in the international arena.

CHAPTER 5

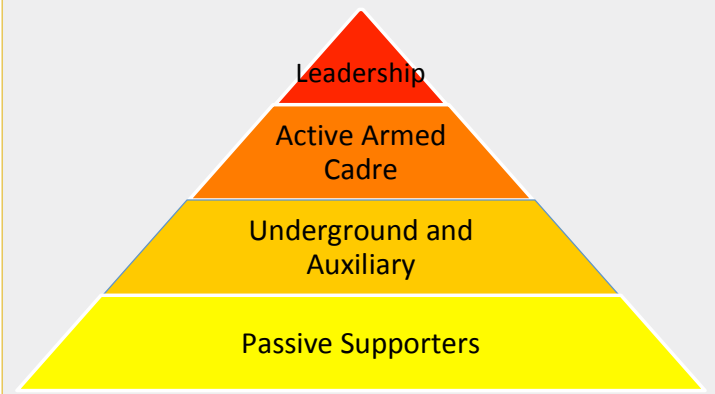
# LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PKK'S URBAN TERRORIST CAMPAIGN

The PKK's jailed leader conceptualizes insurgency in two categories: self-emerging and planned insurgencies.[179] He also mentions that the problem of the insurgency in eastern Turkey is a problem of execution by stressing a sustained and collective modus operandi. Öcalan points out that the course of insurgency is swift and extraordinary. He recalls organized efforts, underground activities, innovation and action for achieving the objectives of insurgency. Idolized armed violence played a pivotal role in waging, sustaining and ending the urban surge of the PKK.

The Turkish government responded to the PKK's urban surge unpreparedly, and tried to understand the dynamics of the PKK's new strategy. The stillborn efforts after the long solution process, the uncertain political atmosphere after the June 7 elections, the developments in Syria, and the worsening of the U.S.-Turkish relations in 2015 can be counted as the core causes of the unreadiness. Yet, soon after the PKK attacks dominated the security environment, Turkish security forces reacted with the intention of taking the operational initiative from the PKK. It was obvious that the miscoordination between intelligence, operation and public diplomacy had costs for Turkey in the fight against the PKK, in the early period of PKK's surge. However, the declaration of curfews, joint police-military operations, and the strengthened border security factors helped Turkey overthrow the PKK's urban standoff.

[179] Abdullah Öcalan, *Ayaklanma Üzerine Tezler ve Görevlerimiz*, 2010.

FIGURE 42. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF A TERRORIST GROUP




### The PKK Leadership

It is known that the ideology of a terrorist group is kept alive through the organization's leadership. The organization weakens or collapses when the leadership position is hindered by external intelligence efforts and special operations: as in the Osama bin Laden case, the elimination of a terrorist leader brought the organization to its knees.

It was in 1998 when Şemdin Sakık was brought to Turkey from northern Iraq with a special operation in coordination with local authorities. In coordination with the foreign intelligence services, Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya and was brought to Turkey by intelligence agents in 1999. No major operations have been carried out successfully against the other PKK figures since then. The PKK's leadership is located in northern Iraq, and exports ideology, policy and directives to the distant areas of activities in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Apart from the PKK's jailed leader Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK ideology and policies are run by the following prominent terrorist figures: Murat Karayılan, Cemil Bayık, Duran

Kalan, Fehman Hüseyin, and Dursun Karasu. Turkish special operations have been largely unsuccessful in eliminating the PKK's leader cadre; the figures above have been active since the foundation of the organization.

Turkish intelligence and security forces should adopt new tactics to engage with the PKK leadership. The decapitation of a terrorist organization is highly risky, but it is the most effective and low cost operation means. Turkey should address the issue of captivating the PKK terrorist leaders in order to destroy the PKK ideology, and to disrupt the operational sustainment of the organization.

### The Active Cadre of the PKK

A cadre consists of active terrorists who carry out attacks. For the PKK, the cadre represents the corporate memory, which inherits the tactical experience to be passed down to the new generation of terrorists. The PKK terrorists are known to commit to a certain ideology, only a few are believed to operate non-ideologically. During the PKK's surge between 2015 and 2016, it was reported that foreign terrorist fighters from European countries fought against the security forces in Turkey. In addition to the European terrorist fighters, terrorists from the United States and Canada also fought along with the PKK's Syrian offshoot, the YPG, in Syria.

The PKK cadre is estimated to number around 5,000 and is dispersed in northern Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The Turkish traditional counter-terrorism strategy has focused on the active cadre, which is an exhausting, prolonged and expensive process. Turkish security forces defeated the PKK in 1992, 1997 and 2012 militarily, and the active cadre suffered a considerable loss, however the PKK ideology survived. The Turkish military is capable of defeating the PKK in rural areas; and the same capability applied to the urban fights in 2016. There seems to be no major problem in fighting the PKK militarily.

### Underground and Auxiliary Elements

Underground members of the PKK are disguised in society, and carry out strategic activities such as sabotages, assassinations, and key bombings. Secrecy is vital for the underground members, and they operate in cellular structures, compartmentalizing each group from others. Once their identity is revealed they directly join the active armed cadre. The PKK is believed to have such members mostly in Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Şırnak, and Mardin. The auxiliary members do not commit violent acts of terrorism; instead, they provide logistics, information, transportation, medical, and legal services. Secrecy is also important for the auxiliary members, but it is not as strict as for the underground members. Auxiliary members are also loyal to the PKK's cause, but are skeptical in terms of their involvement in violent activities, because of the fear of being exposed.

Both groups are handled by intelligence and police operations, and are useful in tracking the active terrorism cadres in the area of operations. This organizational category is the second segment of the PKK's organizational structure, which the security forces proactively confront. Though security efforts in this regard require a considerable investment, it is still cheaper than engaging with the active cadres.

### Passive Supporters

Distinguishing passive supporters among the public is the most difficult task for the security forces. Passive supporters may be active in social media using the terrorist discourse or in civil disobedience sit-in protests. They make contributions to fundraising activities, and pose a striking threat in local communities. In the PKK case, most of the passive supporters are politicized, and they support the pro-PKK political activities; they are referred as the "mass population" when it comes to exploiting democratic rights.

The suburbs of Turkish metropolises and European cities are home to passive supporters. The Turkish counter-terrorism strategy should engage in the sphere of passive supporters with efficient public diplomacy. It is the public landscape, by which the PKK builds its ideology. The stronger public diplomacy emphasizes grievance in public space, the quicker passive supporters can move into a peaceful public space. Even though this may be viable for the domestic supporters, it may not be applicable for the Kurdish diaspora who are under the direct influence of the PKK ideologues, and the sponsoring countries.

## STRATEGIC LESSONS FOR TURKISH AUTHORITIES

– The PKK intended to transform itself from a terrorist organization into one displaying an insurgency character; Turkish authorities should thoroughly understand the nature of terrorism and insurgency, and develop a joint concept of civilian and security forces to achieve the utmost stability objective.

– The PKK aimed to create coherence between populism and urban tactics in order to drive an insurgency, based on the separatist discontent; public spheres in which the PKK's ideology forcibly prevails should be alternated with other moderate and non-violent Kurdish ideologies.

– The PKK seemed to urge its revolutionary people's war based on the regional developments and de-securitized the domestic environment in Turkey. Therefore, Turkey should, attentively, pay attention to the regional developments, and to the de-securitized domestic security environment, which the PKK might continue to exploit.

– The PKK enjoyed foreign support via its Syrian offshoot, the PYD, and harmed Turkey's international alliances with the U.S., NATO and European countries. Turkey should not rely

on traditional alliances in its fight against terror, and should invest in other regional and local state/non-state partners to avoid the traditional security dependencies.

– Certain urban centers utilized by the PKK's urban standoff, and the current urbanization structure did not help the Turkish security forces to take control of the situation sooner; hence, city planners should also work with the security personnel to develop a new urban security paradigm.

– Terrorists cooperated with local pro-PKK municipalities and enjoyed municipal resources to transfer weapons, ammunitions, and terrorists; municipality administrations and resources should be controlled by district or provincial governors, when such activities are reported.

– Sophisticated weaponry were needed during the PKK's urban surge; the national defense industry should be encouraged to develop national weapons using national resources.

## OPERATIONAL LESSONS FOR TURKISH AUTHORITIES

– The PKK terrorists were organized in rural and urban wings, and set a mechanism to bridge rural and urban attacks; a rapid reaction mechanism should be assigned in order to prevent the rural-urban terror solidarity.

– Terrorists aimed to shift the intensity of the conflict in urban areas as the rural attacks reached an optimum level; curfews should be set when urban terror activities intensify, and locals should be evacuated from the areas of conflict.

– The PKK used its YDG-H branch in overt rural attacks and aimed to link its cause with local people; the PKK's radicalization efforts should be intercepted and all the institutions affili-

ated with radicalization should be prevented from engaging in any type of activity.

– The rural armed element (HPG) was employed in city centers when YDG-H terrorists faced difficult conditions in sustaining urban fights; elite counter-terrorism units should be employed in the area of activities where the HPG terrorists are present.

– The PKK had no support, source or capacity to sustain the operational equilibrium, both in rural and urban areas at the same time; therefore, the PKK's operational concept that blended rural strategies with urban tactics failed.

– The PKK relied on setting operation bases in urban centers in order to carry out weakening offensive methods against local security forces, and to consolidate urban zones; security forces should synchronize all available resources and forces to effectively adjust to circumstances.

– The PKK utilized widespread terrorist tactics to achieve the objectives of intimidation and coercion; security forces should employ joint and combined operations.

## TACTICAL LESSONS FOR TURKISH AUTHORITIES

Tactical achievement runs on the skills of small unit leaders and the harmony between the leadership and tactical elements. In a complex combat environment, the leader and element rely on each other more than in classic security environments, and *team spirit* plays the biggest role. The complexity of an urban fight is characterized by the intensive use of IEDs, snipers, hasty ambushes, and the unpredictability of the emerging threats. Below are a few examples of what was learned from the PKK's urban armed tactics:

– The PKK terrorists drill holes between attached buildings to lay IEDs either in the entrance or exit locations.

- Terrorists take their positions on the opposite side of the walls when mechanical breaching voices are heard, and start firing at the breaching voice.
- Mobile (floating) IEDs are sent through sewage tunnels.
- Terrorists fire from certain reinforced locations constantly, and divert tactical security elements within range of a sniper's vision.
- Terrorists occupy firing positions on ground levels or on the first floors of buildings.
- Terrorists build two or three barricades one after another across the streets as a set of obstacles in order to stop the arrival of tanks; they know that tanks fire at the first barricade to breach, and they emplace the powerful IEDs in the second or third barricade.
- They set vehicle tires or houses on fire in order to severely curtail the vision of unmanned reconnaissance vehicles and block the sight of snipers.
- Terrorists target vulnerable security elements acting between armored vehicles and demounted units in order to separate them from each other.
- Houses loaded with IEDs are not used by terrorists to avoid self-casualties.
- Houses in the corners of key crossroads are loaded with huge amounts of IEDs.
- Terrorist also use the CCTV systems at school buildings, mosques and shops to monitor security forces.
- Photocells are used within infrastructures.
- Civilians are used as human shields; when the tactical disadvantage is high, they release some civilians to distract the security

forces' concentration, and divert their efforts from combat to evacuation.

- They enjoy sophisticated optical equipment, such as thermal cameras.
- They emplace IEDs in the walls of houses at the height of 50 to 180 cm.
- Snipers barely use rooftops to prevent getting caught by aerial surveillance.
- They emplace snipers behind suspended rugs or sheets across the streets or 1-1,5 meters above the buildings windows.
- Terrorists emplace IEDs in streets in line with the movement pattern of security elements.
- They place IEDs in the most possible entries of key buildings.
- After damaging a security vehicle with IEDs, terrorists do not fire at the target – they wait until the medical and maintenance crew show up in the vicinity and start a suppressive and grazing fire to increase the number of casualties.

Turkish security authorities should build model urban fight settings which reflect every possible scenario experienced in the urban conflicts in Nusaybin, Sur, Cizre, Yüksekova and Şırnak; all the elite counter-terrorism units and personnel should be trained in such sophisticated courses.

# CONCLUSION

The PKK's decades-long armed program revolved around subversive patterns from 1984 to 2015. PKK terrorists employed violence during this period to coerce local people, intimidate government officials, disrupt the security structure, and discredit state institutions in eastern Turkey. No one who studies irregular warfare would argue that the PKK was not successful in achieving the objective of recognition in the local, domestic, regional and global public spaces. However, the prolonged course of subversion allowed for very limited room for the acceptance of local grievances and the adjustment of PKK ideology. Nevertheless, the PKK became interested in a mass (population)-oriented method in 2015 based on the developments partially explained in this book, which covered the background of the surge. In the mass-oriented method, the PKK aimed to create a political and armed legitimacy in the existing state system by declaring autonomy in certain zones in eastern Turkey. Although, the PKK aimed to gain active and passive political supporters, the establishment of a model autonomous zone did not work. The PKK's initiative of adopting the mass-oriented method lacked an objective analysis of public support, self-capacity, and a rational response from the Turkish government. The PKK's urban surge had no incentives for involving local people, and failed to turn into an insurgency of mass character; yet, the PKK was able to carry out the urban dimension of its prolonged terrorism strategy.

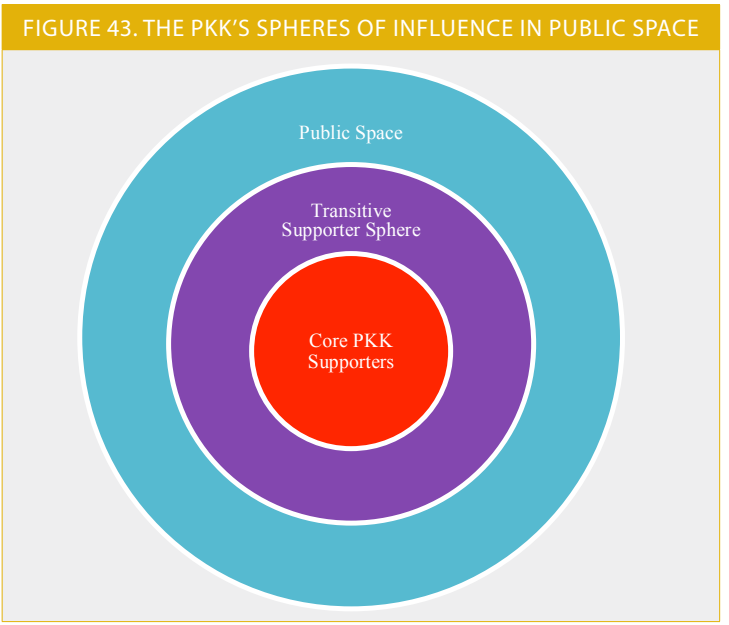
The PKK's urban surge ran on a broader strategy of seeking the Turkish state's failure via populist violent tactics in a de-securitized and destabilized political environment. The PKK sought to exercise the illicit functions of a state by trying to deliver se-

curity and political goods. The PKK's violent efforts of intimidation, coercion, and destruction of facilities had an objective of separating the people from the Turkish government, and compromising such state functions under its own initiative. The declaration of the self-governance by pro-PKK municipalities was the most structured challenge for the Turkish authority in certain towns of eastern Turkey. Oppressing the political will of the local people, the PKK also complicated the political landscape in eastern Turkey. Targeting local political figures of the ruling party, and threatening citizens into boycotting the elections or voting for the pro-PKK parties stands as evidence that the PKK aimed to paralyze the dynamics of the political environment in order to cast a shadow over the democratic process.

The PKK's decision to enter cities with its rural operational elements was a big challenge for the Turkish security agencies. The PKK's desire to deploy its rural terrorists in city centers was was in order to achieve its utmost offence on popular urban settings. Therefore, the urban surge between 2015 and 2016 could be assessed as a threshold stage of a totalitarian strategy to establish autonomy. In order to achieve its strategic goal of autonomy, the PKK had a set of exploitation methods in political, social and security spaces during the surge. The PKK's intention regarding the internal political landscape caused the suppression of the independent popular will to participate in the democratic system. The PKK considers the HDP and DBP as its political forces to fight against the Turkish state, and never gives up intervening in Kurdish politics. The PKK's tutelage of the HDP and DBP always jeopardizes the legal, political and moral legitimacy of these parties. Therefore, its political extension extension relies on the exploitation of democracy and should be problematized not only by the official state institutions but by civil society organizations

when fighting against the PKK. The democratic principles have no room for PKK's terrorism. The public opinion lent credence to the allegations that the PKK fought for Kurdish rights in the election of November 1, 2015. Therefore, the ideological fight against the PKK in public space should be waged with a political and social consensus. The emancipation of local volition from the PKK intervention should be prioritized and the political will in public space should be alternated with different political institutions. The PKK's presence in eastern and mostly Kurdish populated areas is sustained by two groups of supporters: core PKK supporters and transitive supporters. The core supporters have an irreversible character, and no mitigation efforts can work on them. This sphere should be confronted with intense police operations in line with the criminal code. The target of the efforts should focus on the transitive supporter sphere, which runs on the dynamism of radicalization. As the transitive supporter sphere narrows down in favor of peaceful participation in public space, the core supporter sphere will find less public leverage to sustain its ideological cause, and its fight will fray out. Therefore, the grievances of the transitive supporters' sphere should be well analyzed, and key policy implementations should be applied to satisfy their needs. Hope should be promoted among the target groups of the PKK's radicalization efforts; school-age youth, young labor and unemployed circles, civil, social and professional organizations, and unions should be involved in the local policy spectrum.

FIGURE 43. THE PKK'S SPHERES OF INFLUENCE IN PUBLIC SPACE




The PKK also enjoyed the de-securitized state stance in the security environment before and during its surge. The PKK is a pragmatic organization which filled the power vacuum in the spaces of intelligence, operation and public diplomacy in the absence of a state's firm authority. As long as the PKK terrorists are operative in the rural and urban theater of operations, the de-securitization policy never works. Instead of softening the state's security apparatus during the course of political steps, offensive measures should be applied to prevent, deter, respond, preempt, retaliate and intervene against terrorists, and no space should be left for the PKK's manipulation. The constant combat against PKK terrorism should be primarily conducted by counterterrorism activities, and it should be supported by anti-terrorism methods. The PKK's surge was carried out on the basis of direct and indirect foreign military support. The PKK's focal point in escalating the

violence in Turkey was when it acted under the cover of fighting against DAESH in Syria. The fight against DAESH became a rational cause for certain anti-DAESH coalition countries to legitimize their role of affiliating with the PKK via the PKK's Syrian offshoot, the PYD. It is mostly the U.S. forces in Syria that have provided the PKK with intelligence, recruitment, organization, training, weapons, ammunitions, and equipment. Even if the U.S. officials denied direct affiliation with the PKK, the U.S. Army Special Forces are known to help the PKK combatants in evasion and escape, medical evacuation, and resupply operations in Syria. Same as the U.S. policy towards al-Qaida, Turkey should put pressure on the UN to pass a resolution of recognizing the groups and individuals who affiliate with the PKK activities as terrorists. This will level the playing field in responding to the U.S. and other states' affiliation with the PKK.

The Turkish government should establish its single national counter-terror program, a combined policy that can address the domestic population, the international community, and the PKK terrorists. In this program, all intelligence, police, military and civil agencies should have unique component roles. In regard to the domestic population, the program should also focus on the local and domestic grievances to promote the viability of the government policies, while public opinion should be built on fair and firm policies in terms of providing security for the population. In terms of the international community, the program should call for cooperation, dedication and mutuality with consistent applications. There should be a rational balance between the national interests and international policies; similar cases should always be brought to the international arena to promote the mutual understanding and measures, even if there are conflicting interests. The roles of states should always be emphasized in dealing with terrorist problems.

### National Counter-Terrorism Program

The victory against the PKK cannot be achieved simply by suppressing an armed conflict. Rather, it can be achieved through a holistic program of combining security, information, and economic and political efforts. The separatist discontent of the PKK, and the regional PKK affiliations have a potential of exploitation due to the PKK's populist approach that can fuel a broader conflict. Focusing only on the tactical and operational concerns, may lead to the oversight of the implementation of a strategic endgame. In this case, the PKK will be able to penetrate people's areas of grievances and lean on popularism.

A National Counter-terror Program requires the full coordination between intelligence, operations, Public Affairs (PA), and Psychological Operations (PSYOP). Intelligence, information and operation superiority are vital to suppress terrorism activities. An effective combat against terrorism should be functionalized under three fundamentals: collecting and disseminating intelligence, organizing the information, and implementing operations. The most important factors in combating terrorism are the factors of a unified effort and legitimacy.

Combatting terrorism should be carried out in a legitimate way by united efforts. The Turkish government has not suffered serious legitimacy problems in domestic, regional, and global platforms when conducting campaigns against PKK terrorism. However, its legitimacy was tested after the PKK's involvement in the Syrian civil war. The Syrian civil war course and the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey proved the lack of unity of effort between the state institutions in combating terrorism and made Turkey more vulnerable to terrorism, to insurgency threats, and to security, political, social and economic risks. Therefore, the Turkish government must develop a policy with institutional components that can maintain intelligence, information and operation superiority

against the PKK and its affiliates through the coordination of intelligence, operations and public diplomacy. Decisive leadership and management with no tolerance towards PKK terrorism is another key to sustainable success against the PKK and any other forms of terrorism which have a potential to evolve into an insurgency.

The national counter-terror program against the PKK terrorism (should also be applicable to other threats in accordance with the threat level) should focus on the targets. Targets should be determined through a viable threat assessment. The threat assessment should be carried out by a threat assessment agency composed of intelligence, security, political, economic, and social agencies. The target context should be reached through risk assessment. Risk assessment may suggest the targets under three major categories: domestic population, international community, and terrorists. Target categories may vary or be detailed by the assessment. Each and every target context requires unique functional methods framing the methodology of the countering measures.

The policy regarding the domestic population should address the population differently in the provinces where the PKK is active militarily and in the provinces where the PKK operates through auxiliary and underground activities. The international community should be addressed regionally and globally. Regionally, the PKK should be assessed as a common threat to the all the relevant countries. Potential PKK-like threats should be studied in these countries and they should be manipulated in order to force the countries in the region to collaborate against the PKK. The terrorists' operational patterns and the area of activity should be analyzed, and terrorists should be confronted physically in three dimensions: domestic operations, border operations, and cross-border operations. Operations should be prioritized in accordance with the leadership, active cadre and active supporters of the PKK. Cross-border operations should focus on the elimination of the PKK leaders, on

conducting air operations and major military operations, and eliminating armed activities by local groups Border operations should be carried out through stationary and mobile border guard units. The units should be authorized to engage in any illegal activities to prevent the PKK members disguising as smugglers and refugees. The units should be organized and equipped to carry continuous surveillance missions and instant operations up to 10 km beyond the border. Clear rules of engagement should be provided for the border units. Domestic operations should cover the clandestine, police and military operations against the underground, auxiliary and tactical PKK elements within Turkish territory. Domestic clandestine operations should be carried out against the PKK's underground strategic, operational and tactical figures in the urban centers. Foreign secret service figures who are affiliated with the PKK elements should also be the focus of clandestine operations. Police operations should focus on the PKK's cell organizations and auxiliary members to stop the PKK's armed, logistics and financial activities. Domestic military operations should be carried out against the PKK's tactical elements in rural areas. Local paramilitary elements and volunteers should also be attached to domestic military operations.

A human jungle of complex infrastructures was utilized by the PKK's urban strategy to bring about instability and violence with the use of unique tactics. The PKK's urban terror realities suggested that the Turkish government, and civil and security agencies should prepare sufficiently for the ongoing and future urban contingencies. Contemporary terrorism threats are multi-dimensional and are not limited to a certain area of activities. The PKK is in pursuit of achieving its objective with military-political and military-military engagement in order to turn into a regional violent non-state actor in Turkey. Confronting the PKK requires new strategies that focus on inclusive strategic, operational and tactical paradigms. A

civil-military dialogue should be developed to establish fundamental approaches towards the PKK, and similar threats on a strategic level; a strategic mindset should focus on easing the unity of efforts rather than concentrating on tactical instruments of eliminating terrorists, confiscating weapons, and dismantling IEDs. At the operational level, new doctrines are needed to confront the PKK through the effective application of the security forces. At the tactical level, the small unit tactics and the team spirit should be enhanced by security training in purpose-built, customized security environments.

The PKK's urban surge strategy paved the way for the Turkish state to develop a permanent civil-military mechanism to address conventional and non-conventional threats. The political-military dialogue and cooperation in Turkey seem to expand and create an opportunity to understand diverse points of view. Yet, there is still an imminent need to develop strategic clarity. The crucial step in developing the strategic clarity seems to revolve around the following factors: understanding the nature of the threat, the capacity of the state, and the fact that victory requires a dedicated leadership in decision making.

This book is the result of a research project organized by the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı, SETA) born out of the need to understand the context-specific dynamics of the violent radicalization of the PKK and its urban strategy between 2015 and 2016. The aim is to explore the causes, new dynamics, and effects of PKK terrorism, and to explain the failure of its urban warfare tactics in Turkey.

Such an exploration is timely in two significant ways. First, the Middle East is witnessing an appreciable rise in terms of the violent rhetoric and terrorist actions of certain violent terrorist organizations. While the unfamiliar dynamics of this new radical extremist trend may differ from country to country, and from region to region, the PKK case is a textbook example regarding the question of how a terrorist group devastates the daily life of ordinary people, and destabilizes the nature of the regional order. Secondly, understanding and addressing the PKK's violent tactics require comprehending how the newly emerging regional geopolitical antagonism and disorder transform the strategy of a terrorist organization, and affect the nature of the conflict, especially in the post-Arab Spring period in the Middle East.

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