THE PYD/PKK'S DRUG TRAFFICKING & TURKEY'S WAR ON NARCO-TERRORISM

ÜMİT TETİK, KUTLUHAN GÖRÜCÜ

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	7
INTRODUCTION	8
THE PKK IN BRIEF	8
THE PKK'S NARCO-TERRORISM: ROUTES AND CASES	9
THE PKK'S NEW DRUG ROUTE: SYRIA	12
TURKEY'S WAR ON THE PKK'S NARCO-TERRORISM	17
CONCLUSION	19

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ABSTRACT

> This analysis mainly focuses on the description of the PYD/PKK's drug routes and Turkey's struggle against the PKK's narco-terrorism.

Since its founding in the 1980s, the PKK has involved organized crime methods which provide it with the ability to sustain its terrorist activities. Hence, the PKK and its offshoots, such as the PYD/PKK in Syria, are webbed criminal networks which use main international drug routes such as the Caucasus, Africa, and the Balkans in order to reach the European drug markets. The group has an annual income up to $1.5 billion generated only from drug trafficking in Europe. Turkey has conducted decisive narcotic operations against the PKK since the 1980s in order to halt the group's terrorist activities. These operations are mainly facilitated by Turkey's cross-border military campaigns towards Syria and Iraq where the PKK and its branches are located, and aim to eliminate Turkey's domestic threats. On the whole, the current analysis mainly focuses on the description of the PYD/PKK's drug routes and Turkey's struggle against the PKK's narco-terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all terrorist groups strive to survive in order to continue their attacks and attain other goals, and need illegal or "legal" financial resources consisting of criminal activities. Therefore, the PYD/PKK has used its network for transnational organized criminal activities comprised of illegal immigration/traveling of terrorists and new recruits, drug trafficking, illicit "taxes", use of violence, and smuggling of other goods.[1] For the time being, the PKK engages in such criminal methods - mainly drug trafficking - in a geographical area from Afghanistan to Western Europe in order to continue its terrorism,[2] while the PKK/KONGRA-GEL's "official" documents deny the existence of the "illegal" financial resources providing for the group's continuity.[3] According to international and national reports, the group's and its regional branches' annual income earned from its drug trafficking activities en route from Africa, the Caucasus, and the Balkans to Europe is estimated as $1.5 billion.[4] This analysis aims to explore the PYD/PKK's drug trafficking routes and point out Turkey's decisive counter narco-terrorism.

THE PKK IN BRIEF

Over 40 years, in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and partly in Europe, the PKK has pursued its strategic agenda which is based on state-building, namely Kurdistan, by "plucked" people from states (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran) mentioned above with secessionist, anarchic-nationalist ideology.[5] While dozens of Kurdish political groups peacefully took a position on political platforms by the end of the 1960s and 1970s, the PKK strengthened its political, armed and illegal network capacity in the late 1970s. Its bloody attacks starting in 1984 ignited the rise of the PKK's influence among secessionist left or anarchic Kurdish groups.[6]

In the 1990s, the terrorist attacks of the group intensified and peaked. Meanwhile, Turkey launched anti-terrorist operations against the group not only on its borders but also in its neighboring countries. In spite of the capture of PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in 1999, along with the PKK's subsequent unilateral ceasefire, the group has continued to commit terrorist attacks and criminal activities.[7]

The PKK's illegal and terrorist activities have victimized approximately 40,000 Turkish citizens among both non-combatants and se-

1. Nihat Ali Özcan, PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi)/Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi, (ASAM, Ankara: 1999), pp. 285-290.

2. "Romanian insurance consultant in fraud investigation", OCCRP, June 2, 2008, https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/99-romanian-insurance-consultant-in-fraud-investigation , (Accessed: March 19, 2019).

3. "KONGRA GEL Genel Kurul Üyelerinin seçimine ilişkin usuller ve seçim kurumu", *Serxwebun*, September 2004, p.17.

4." Drug Trafficking: Financial Lifeline of PKK Terrorism", Anadolu Agency, February 20, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/drug-trafficking-financial-lifeline-of-pkk-terrorism/1397868, (Accessed March 18, 2019).

5. Özcan, 1999, pp. 21-30.

6. Ali Balcı, *The PKK- Kurdistan Worker's Party's Regional Politics During and After the Cold War*, (Palgrave, Cham: 2017), pp. 1-3.

7. Juan Masullo and Francis O'Connor, *PKK Violence against Civilians: Beyond the Individual, Understanding Collective Targeting*, Terrorism and Political Violence, Volume 29, 2017, pp. 2-3.

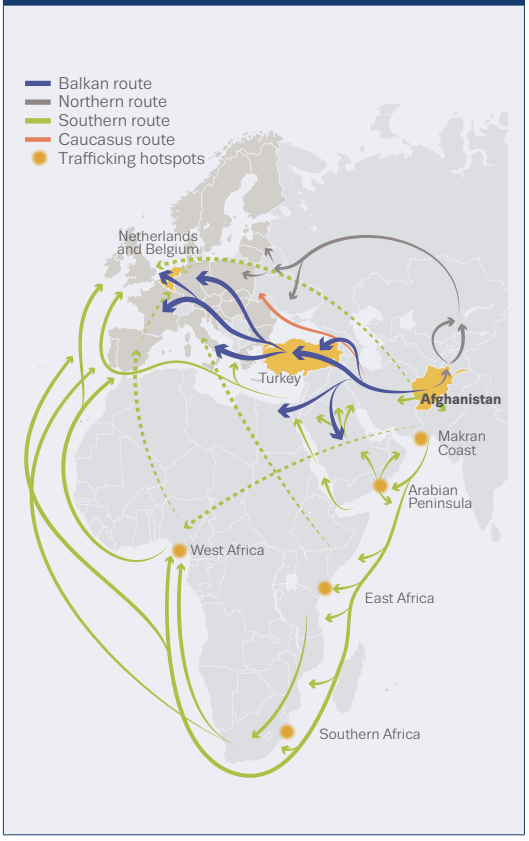
curity forces since 1984. As Turkey designated the PKK as a terrorist organization, the PKK was also added consecutively by both the USA and the EU to their list of terrorist organizations in 1997[8] and 2002 respectively.[9] Since it was formed, the PKK has resorted to illicit drug trafficking to fund itself by using some crucial geographical routes such as Africa, Balkans, and the Caucasus to Europe. Due to the fact that states now prefer to refrain from being sponsors of terrorist organizations, the PKK has fallen behind some of its planned activities. The PKK is recognized as a terrorist organization by a great number of countries many of which are allies of Turkey and perceived on par with other large-scale terrorist organizations and narco-terrorist groups.[10] Today, the PKK is also conducting drug trafficking and production at its Syria's branch, the PYD/YPG.

THE PKK'S NARCO-TERRORISM: ROUTES AND CASES

Narco-terrorism was defined "as a subset of terrorism, in which terrorist groups, or associated individuals, participate directly or indirectly in the cultivation, manufacture, transportation, or distribution of controlled substances and the monies derived from these activities" by the United States Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). According to the DEA, the PKK has been involved in drug transportation and is connected to local drug networks by using Turkey's southeastern border and drug trafficking routes such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Africa.[12]

As many terror organizations that seek to appear as rebel or insurgent groups, the PKK does not want its drug trafficking activities or narco-terrorism to be known to the general population and its supporters. Hence, it engages various methods, usually using Kurdish ethnic groups

FIGURE 1. DRUG-TRAFFICKING ROUTES INTO EUROPE[11]



8. "State Department Maintains Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)", U.S. Department of State, March 1, 2019, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2019/03/289833.htm (Accessed: March 19, 2019).

9. Council Decision, June 18, 2002, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32002D0460&from=ro, (Accessed: March 3, 2019).

10. For more: https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/253316.htm and https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/att-194336-en-td3112366enc-final2_0.pdf

11. "Europol in the EU Drug Markets Report 2016 - In-depth Analysis", http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/2373/TD0216072ENN.PDF p. 86, (Accessed: March 11, 2019).

12. "International Drug Trafficking and Terrorism" , U.S. Department of State, January 20, 2001, https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/9239.htm (Accessed: March 19, 2019).

to do its bidding, rather than doing it itself.[13] Similarly, whilst transporting heroin from Iran-Turkey to Europe, the PKK employs local groups on its route such as Albanians and Bulgarians.[14]

In its 2016 report *In-Depth Analysis of the European Drug Markets*, Europol states, "Turkish Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) are the main importers and facilitators of the distribution of heroin in key regions of Europe" with Albanian and Turkish speaking OCGs having only a secondary role.[15] The main Turkish OCG presented in this situation is the PKK. A 2008 report published by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) quotes an annual report by the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Department of Anti-smuggling and Organized Crime, or KOM, in stating that while the PKK does occasionally traffic drugs itself, it usually prefers to exact a levy on the actual traffickers, and to act behind the scenes where there is less risk. The report further suggests that ethnic Kurds "control most of the heroin trade through Turkey into Europe, having displaced the organized crime networks from the Turkish Black Sea region that dominated the trade in the 1980s and early 1990s."[16]

It seems likely that these organizations do not have the necessary connections to traffic the heroin themselves and, thus, cooperate with the PKK. On the other hand, the PKK does not want to risk its reputation or its men for the transportation of heroin.[17] Similarly, Iranian and Georgian groups cooperate with the PKK on the Caucasus route to transport the drugs across the Black Sea, making use of the organization's extensive network and knowledge of smuggling.[18]

Both Turkey and the PKK's some strongholds are not amongst the major drug-producing locations. Hence when the PKK is trafficking heroin, it has to cooperate with multiple organizations.[19] The first and foremost amongst these organizations are the Balochi and Pashtun groups that smuggle the heroin produced in Afghanistan to Iran, delivering it to the various groups which operate in and through Iran, such as Azeri, Arab, Persian and Kurdish groups - the Kurdish ones here being crucial. While Iranian, Arab, and Persian groups are usually involved in either trafficking the heroin inside the country or transporting it from one end to the other, it is the Kurdish groups living along the Turkish border in Iraq and Iran who usually transport it across the Turkish border.[20] However, according to drug traffickers arrested in 2013, nobody crosses the Turkish border on any point without the PKK. Traffickers are either obliged to pay a certain amount of tax to the PKK for trafficking the heroin or they must be a part of the organization itself.[21] The report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reaffirms the claims that traffickers have to make payment to the PKK so as to cross the border and adds that the PKK taxes heroin not only inside of Turkey but also via the Kurdish criminal groups

13. "KONGRA GEL Genel Kurul Üyelerinin seçimine ilişkin usuller ve seçim kurumu", *Serxwebun*, September 2004, p. 17.

14. "Europol in the EU Drug Markets Report 2016", pp. 86-90.

15. Ibid.

16. "Romanian Insurance Consultant in Fraud Investigation", OCCRP, June 2, 2008, https://www.occrp.org/en/blog/99-romanian-insurance-consultant-in-fraud-investigation , (Accessed: March 19, 2019).

17. "Uyuşturucuya bulaşmadım", Hürriyet, June 5, 1999, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/uyusturucuya-bulasmadim-39083725 , (Accessed: March 10, 2019).

18. "Europol in the EU Drug Markets Report 2016", p. 88.

19. Buğra Sarı and Murat Tınas, "Terrorism Threat Against Humanity and Democracy: The PKK Case", Turkish National Police Academy, 2018 https://www.pa.edu.tr/Upload/editor/files/PKK_Case_Report_ENG.pdf ,p.25-27, (Accessed: January 20, 2019).

20. "The Globalization of Crime a Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment", UNODC, 2010 *https://www.unodc.org/res/cld/bibliography/the-globalization-of-crime-a-transnational-organized-crime-threat-assessment_html/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf* ,p. 123, (Accessed: March 10, 2019).

21. Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *Surreptitious Lifelines: A Structural Analysis of the FARC and the PKK, Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 24, 2012, pp. 246-248.

in Europe.[22] How far these groups are spread is evident in the fact that PKK-affiliated criminal groups have spread throughout Europe; there are either among the biggest criminal groups in each country or the biggest.[23]

A French liaison officer said that many "asylum seekers" who came from Turkey in the 1990s formed links to the PKK, strengthening the group's activities in the country. The scenario of asylum seekers and immigrants turning towards the PKK's organized crime in Europe is seen commonly in European countries, with Germany, the U.K., and France being prime examples.[24] *The Spectator*, a British weekly magazine, relies on British security services in stating, "…according to the British security services sources the PKK is responsible for 40 per cent of the heroin sold in the European Union…" in the end of the 1990s.[25] Yet, in the 2000s, the most crucial information regarding the PKK's operations in Europe came from a French liaison officer. He claimed that French police cares less about Turkish OCGs and more about the PKK, with the PKK controlling around 60% of heroin traffic in all of Europe. These groups can be further split into Turkish OCGs, Kurdish OCGs, and PKK-related OCGs.[26] Furthermore, he added that while the PKK used to only extort money, the amount gained was not sufficient, pushing the PKK to the alternative heroin trade flowing through their territory in Turkey. While the other criminal groups which are active in France need to cooperate, such as the Albanians and Bulgarians, with the Albanian OCGs transporting heroin and the Bulgarians distributing it, the PKK has no need for assistance, as it is very capable of operating completely by itself, when compared to the Columbian terrorist group, named Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).[27]

> The PKK's income gained solely from the drug trade throughout the 1990s was between $300 million and $500 million. Yet, in recent years, these numbers have increased up to $1.5 billion annually.

With the PKK gaining money through conducting, organizing, or taxing these trafficking actions, the organization is noted for its connection with the organized crime and the trafficking of narcotics in Europe.[28] A relevant instance of the PKK's drug trafficking is the Baybaşın case from the U.K., the Netherlands, and Turkey. The Baybaşin clan controlled the region around Lice in the southeast of Turkey, cooperating with the PKK in their heroin trade. The then leader of the clan, Hüseyin Baybaşın, eventually moved to the U.K. upon becoming an informant for the British HM Customs & Excise. His brother Abdullah followed shortly after requesting asylum in Britain, bringing their entire clan's criminal activity to the U.K. and taking control of around 90% of the heroin trade within the country. Until the 2000s, their activities resulted in the murders of at least 25 members of rivaling gangs and, according to an article in the *Guardian* also to "a shoot-out across a busy shopping street in north London on a Saturday afternoon."[29]

22. "The Globalization of Crime a Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment", UNODC, p. 123.

23. Ibid., p. 124.

24. Ibid., pp. 120-125.

25. WikiLeaks, PKK Structure and Links, https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/8/8745_PKK%20STRUCTURE%20AND%20LINKS.doc (Accessed: March 15, 2019).

26. SETA Interview, 2017, Paris.

27. Kelly, 2012, pp. 240-243.

28. Bruce Hoffman et al., *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, RAND, 2007, p. 2.

29. "Feared Clan Who Made Themselves at Home in Britain", *The Guardian*, March 28, 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/mar/28/drugsandalcohol.ukcrime (Accessed: March 10, 2019).

The clan and its leaders had close connections to the PKK, owning many opium refineries in the territories they controlled. The HM Customs and Excise was a pioneer in assisting the gang and its members to settle from Turkey to Britain. One of the most crucial aides in this process, Tony McNulty, eventually became Minister of Immigration. Hüseyin Baybaşın was arrested in the Netherlands on various charges and was sentenced to life in prison in a maximum-security facility in 2002. His brother Abdullah Baybaşın, who took over the lead of the organization after his brother's arrest, was also convicted and imprisoned for similar charges.[30]

In another case, the Hackney Bombacilar, which was the intimidation and execution gang under Abdullah Baybaşin, fought against other Kurdish and PKK-related gangs like the "Tottenham Boys/Tottenham Turks," which it was revealed were also closely related to the PKK, funneling money into the PKK's terrorist apparatus.[31] However, how close the PKK itself is to the drug trafficking can be seen in the decision of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Treasury to freeze the accounts of Murat Karayilan and the PKK's top leaders in Europe, Ali Riza Altun and Zübeyir Aydar (Zubayir Aydar).[32] To counter international drug trade, the U.S. declared Murat Karayilan, Ali Riza Altun, and Zubayir Aydar, three leaders of the Kongra-GEL and the PKK, as significant foreign narcotics traffickers under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act) on May 30, 2008 and later froze their assets on October 14, 2009, under the same act. The move was very welcomed by Turkey. According to the press release of the U.S. Department of Treasury, the KONGRA-GEL was "active in southeastern Turkey and northwestern Iraq, and supported by some of Europe's Kurdish community, […] was designated as a significant foreign narcotics trafficker for its more than two decades-long participation in drug trafficking." Almost 300 of its members were arrested in Europe under drug trafficking charges. The organization had "units on the borders of areas it controlled to collect money from drug traffickers and a number of Turkish drug smugglers have been reported to have given money to the organization."[33]

THE PKK'S NEW DRUG ROUTE: SYRIA

With the start of the popular uprising in Syria in 2011, the Syrian branch of the PKK increased its PYD/YPG activities, and after the gradual withdrawal of the Assad regime, it dominated the Ayn al Arab, Afrin, and Qamishli regions. The PYD/YPG, which was not seen as a significant actor in the Syrian area until the attack by DAESH on Ayn al-Arab in 2014, became dominant in about 1/3 of Syria in 2019 with the support it received from the U.S.-led International Coalition. At the beginning of 2018, the PYD/YPG lost the Afrin region as a result of the military operations of the Turkish Armed Forces and the Turkish Armed Forces-backed Syrian National Army. Now, it only controls the areas of Manbij, Tabqa, and Tall Rifaat in the west of the Euphra-

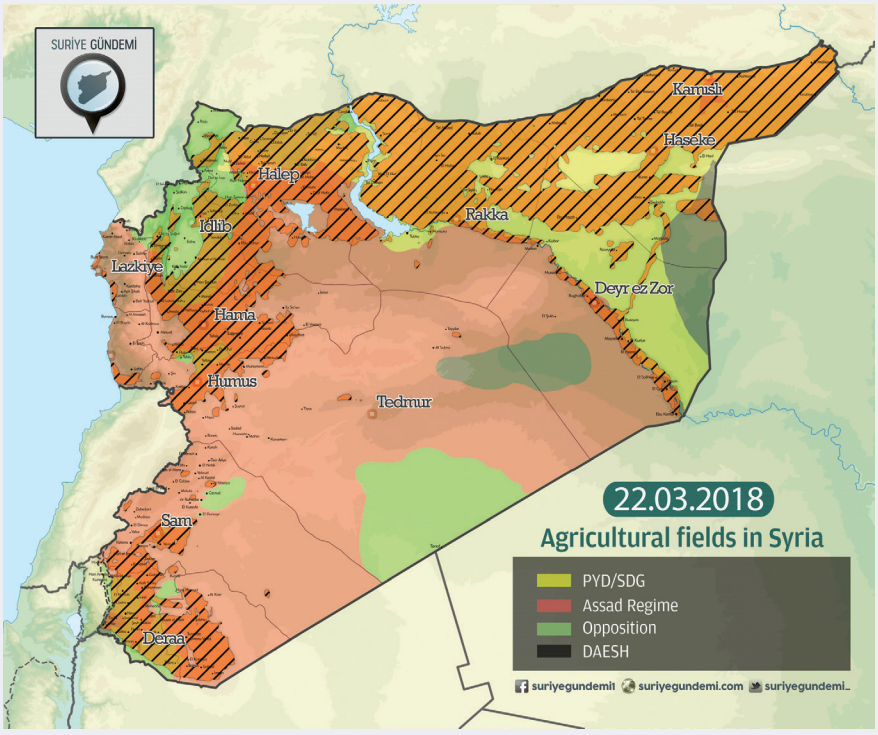
30. "Courts in Crisis: Britain's 'Heroin Godfather' Is Freed After Smuggling Retrial Collapses", *The Times*, October 23, 2010, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/courts-in-crisis-britains-heroin-godfather-is-freed-after-smuggling-retrial-collapses-8qrg2pcfjbz (Accessed: March 11, 2019).

31. "Heroin Gang Boss to Appeal Conviction", *Daily Mail*, May 16, 2006, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-386410/Heroin-gang-boss-appeal-conviction.html (Accessed: March 10, 2019).

32. "Treasury Designates Three Leaders of the Kongra-Gel as Significant Foreign Narcotics Traffickers", U.S. Department of The Treasury, October 14, 2009, https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg318.aspx (Accessed: March 1, 2019).

33. "Treasury Sanctions Supporters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) Tied to Drug Trafficking in Europe", U.S. Department of The Treasury, February 2, 2012, https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1406.aspx (Accessed: March 1, 2019).

FIGURE 2. AGRICULTURAL FIELDS IN SYRIA, *SURİYE GÜNDEMİ*, MARCH 22, 2018.[34]



tes, and in the east of the Euphrates, from Ayn al Arab to Baghuz and the Syrian border.

During the Ayn al Arab Conflict, the PYD/PKK took control of many regions in the eastern part of the Euphrates and Manbij, supported by the political and military engagement with the U.S.-led International Coalition. Near the border with Turkey, northern Syria -in what might be called the Euphrates River and its two arms- is suitable for agriculture. The most important oil and natural gas fields of Syria are located in the east side of Deir ez-Zor. The PYD/YPG have the potential to generate $1.3 billion in annual revenue from Syrian oil.[35] Together with the oil, the organization is effective in the agricultural sector. The PYD/YPG control approximately 57% of Syria's agricultural land. Before 2011, about $2 billion of the $12 billion export of the Syrian state was formed by the agricultural sector.[36] Today, the majority of the most fertile land and water resources are under the YPG/PYD control. When an average calculation is made according to the pre-2011 period, the YPG/PYD has the potential to generate more than $1 billion in income only from the agricultural sector. In addition, the YPG/PYD earns significant income from drug raw materials sown in arable lands.

One of the main sources of income for the PYD/YPG, and hence for the PKK, has historically been drugs. This income has gradually increased

34. Suriye'deki Tarım Arazilerinin Kontrolü, *Suriye Gündemi*, March 22, 2018, http://www.suriyegundemi.com/2018/03/22/suriyedeki-tarim-arazilerinin-kontrolu/

35. For more details: Kutluhan Görücü, Mehmet Çağatay Güler, "Suriye Petrolü YPG/PKK Terörünü Finanse Ediyor", Anadolu Agency, February 19, 2019, https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/analiz-haber/suriye-petrolu-ypg-pkk-terorunu-finanse-ediyor/1396901.

36. Mehmet Çağatay Güler, "Suriye'nin Su Politikaları ve Öncesi, Suriye Gündemi", p. 10, December 27, 2018 http://www.suriyegundemi.com/2018/12/27/suriyenin-su-politikalari-2011-oncesi-ve-sonrasi/

as the organization gained space in Syria. The PKK has two different known source for drugs. It comes from the fields they planted in Syria with the shipments coming from Qandil from the Afghanistan-Iran line. In the lands where the PYD/YPG cultivates poppy, marijuana, or cannabis in Syria, the lands were designated as treasury lands during the Syrian regime.[37] Apart from this, drugs are being planted by people who help the organization. It is known that the terrorist organization carried out cultivation in the Qamishli, Al Malikiyah, Ras al Ayn, Raqqa, Al Hasakah, Ayn al Arab, and Tall Abyad positions.[38] The lands, where drug cultivation occurs according to the area's sources, are located in the region of the River Julab in the east of Tall Abyad and the River Khabur in the Al Hasakah region. Both sides of these rivers are reported to have planted drugs.[39]

Local sources say that corn has been planted on the land around Tall Abyad/Raqqa, and drugs are planted in the middle of the cultivated land. The most suitable region for cultivation based on climate, irrigation, and favorable soil are the two shores of the Julab river. It has been reported that there has been drug cultivation in the villages of Hammam Turkmen, Um Izam, Dimashliyah, Tall Fende, and Bagdik. In this region, drugs are sown in corn fields and hidden from society and the media. Drugs produced in the Tall Abyad/Raqqa region are brought to the production facilities in Raqqa and Ayn al Arab. There are also illegal drug suppliers in these regions. One of the known manufacturing centers is located in the village of Dimashliyah, south of the Hamam Turkmen village.[40]

Efforts were made to hide the agricultural lands around River Khabur from society and the media. However, cotton is generally cultivated in this region instead of corn and drugs are cultivated in the middle. Regional sources report the villages of Amirat and Abu Rasin as the villages with the most well-known drug lands. The drug's raw material is known as *gınneb hindi* (Indian hemp). The YPG/PYD has assigned fully-integrated staff to protect and hide the area of the drug cultivation.[41] Sources in the region refer to *gınneb hindi* as very suitable for cultivation in the abovementioned regions. It can be harvested twice a year. In fact, it is suitable for agriculture in cultivated land and thrives in the local climate and irrigation conditions.[42]

The organization carries out these activities under the name of the so-called Ministry of Agriculture which it has established under the roof of the North and East Syria Autonomous Administration. The harvested raw materials of drugs are taken to production areas. It is known that there are production facilities in the districts of Hilaliyah and Qaddur Beqk in Qamishli. In addition, regional sources state that drug trafficking in these regions is public.[43]

It is reported that there is a "Dello" identifier at the top of the drug traffic in the Qamishli region. "Dello" has been arrested several times by Free Syrian Army (FSA) agents for drug trafficking. It is stated that the Assad regime had relations with Muhammad Mansour, the former head of Military Intelligence Unit No. 222, and worked under his auspices. Mansour works with the YPG/PYD and is one of the supporters of the organization. It is believed that "Dello" produced drug pills in the residential area of the Qamishli airport road. "Dello" finances the YPG/PYD with this drug

37. Interview with an anonymous Syrian politician.

38. Interviews with an anonymous Syrian politician; an anonymous Syrian activist; and an anonymous senior member of the Syrian National Army.

39. Interviews with an anonymous senior member of Syrian National Army and an anonymous Syrian politician.

40. Interview with an anonymous Syrian activist.

41. Interviews with an anonymous Syrian activist and an anonymous Syrian politician.

42. Interview with an anonymous Syrian politician.

43. Interview with an anonymous senior member of Syrian National Army.

FIGURE 3. FIELDS WHERE THE PYD/YPG HAS SOWN DRUGS; QAMISHLI.[44]

trade under its aegis. It is also stated that "Dello" has an important position in the delivery of drugs, and in this context, has relations with Hezbollah regarding the delivery of the drug to Lebanon.[45]

Apart from drug shipments to Lebanon, it's also said that drugs are brought to Turkey by using the Alouk village in the east of the Ras al Ayn. One of the important figures in the region's drug trade is Anwar Alloush. Alloush is also a close friend of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan and former PYD co-chairman Salih Muslim. When Ocalan arrived in Syria, he stayed in Alloush's house in Ayn al Arab. Alloush, who stated that he stayed in Salih Muslim's house in Spain, was arrested in Spain because of the heroin trade.[46] Zozan Alloush,[47] the daughter of Anwar Alloush, who is currently working with the PYD's political wing, is the founder and director of the Women Development Organization. Prior to her involvement with the UN, Zozan Alloush worked as a presenter and journalist for the PKK's media outlets.

The PYD/YPG increased consumption of drugs in the region, a development that was facilitated by the local production. Drugs are easily sold in many places. The price of drugs is even cheaper than the price of cigarettes. In addition to the cannabis used in the region, the most known drug is Capticol. During the operation in Afrin, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) captured millions of Capticol pills and ceased production facilities in many regions.[48] The Capticol pill is sold in Syria for 600-700

44. الرقّة تُحكم بهوى الحشيش, Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently, July 22, 2018, https://www.raqqa-sl.com/?p=5254

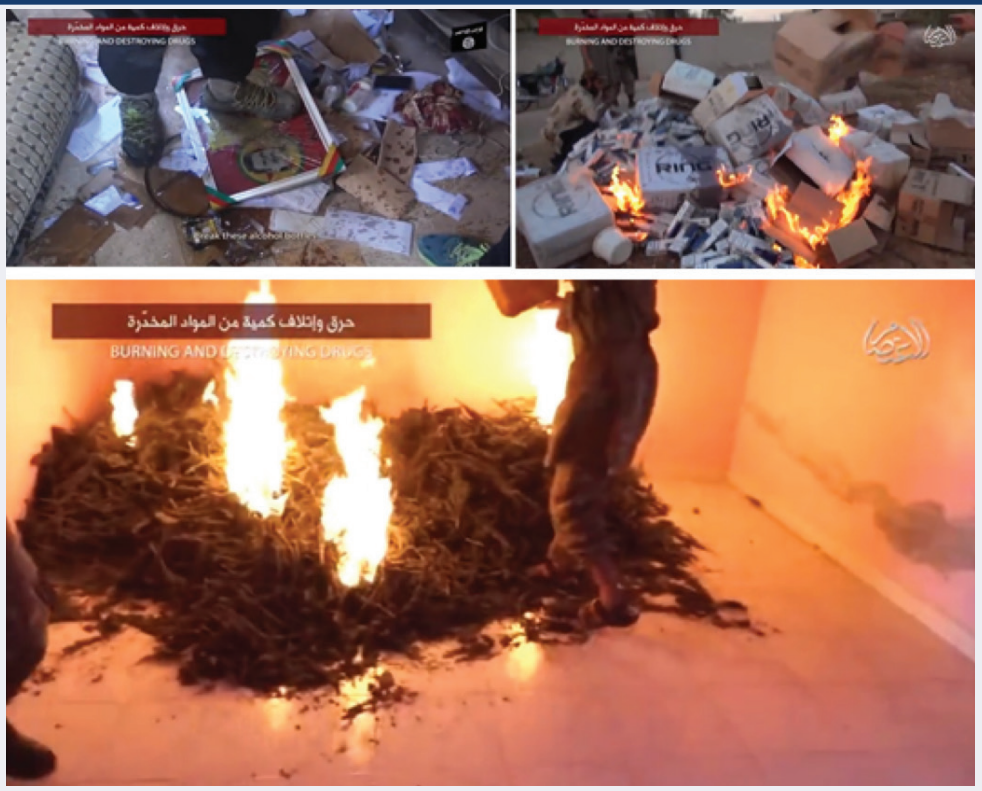
45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. Zozan Alloush has a photograph taken in her childhood with Abdullah Ocalan. Alloush has a close relationship with the PKK's political wing operating in Europe and the United States. She has photos of many European bureaucrats and diplomats, including the UN's Former Special Envoy to Syria. Alloush, whose support for all fractions of the PKK is open, participates in negotiations with state authorities, despite the fact that the EU has declared the PKK a terrorist organization.

48. "PYD/YPG'nin Afrin'de kurduğu uyuşturucu hap üretim tesisi kapandı", *Sabah*, February 14, 2018, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2018/02/14/pydypgnin-afrinde-kurdugu-uyusturucu-hap-uretim-tesisi-kapandi; "İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soylu: Afrin Harekatı, uyuşturucuya darbe vuracaktır", Habertürk, March 9, 2018, https://www.haberturk.com/icisleri-bakani-suleyman-soylu-afrin-harekati-uyusturucuya-darbe-vuracaktir-1869591

FIGURE 5. ALCOHOL/TOBACCO/DRUGS DESTROYED BY DAESH, DAILYMOTION, 2015.



Syrian Pounds, approximately 8 Turkish Liras.[49] The cheap and free circulation of drugs and pills is becoming increasingly common as a result of the psychological traumas inflicted in the war zones. In this regard, the YPG/PYD management considers drugs as a tool; rather than taking measures against them, they promote them in order to make the population more manageable by rendering them ineffective. It also sees it as a means of fighting. The YPG/PKK militia uses drugs in order to increase fight motivation, including Arab elements within the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Ekrem Dede, the founder and president of Free Tall Abyad Local Assembly in 2012, said the following about the drug issue: "The PYD/YPG terrorist organization has destroyed our social structure and has caused great losses, especially by making our youth dependent. For years, we will suffer this loss because of the PYD. The collapsed buildings are rebuilt but it is very difficult to correct the structure of a society that has deteriorated."[50] In total terms, the YPG/PKK's control of a wide geography in Syria has led to the creation of illegal economy sectors and by professionalizing them and giving them an organizational mentality, they have gained serious revenues. The fact that this is realized under the shadow of the U.S.-led International Coalition is also a matter of consideration.

49. Muhamad Al-Khabure, "The 'PYD' Gang Turns Raqqa into a Big Market for Drugs and Cannabis, *Al Raha Magazine*, pp. 12-13, no. 6, September 15, 2018.

50. "Eski Tel Abyad Meclis Başkanı Ekrem Dede ile Röportaj", *Suriye Gündemi*, February 2, 2019, http://www.suriyegundemi.com/2019/01/02/eski-tel-abyad-meclis-baskani-ekrem-dede-ile-roportaj/

Since 1984, Syria has seemed a safe haven for the PKK. It has provided military, financial, and logistic support to the group. According to resources of another terrorist organization, namely DAESH, the PYD/YPG, the PKK's Syrian offshoot, has continued drug manufacturing and trafficking with the PKK's other branches in the region.[51]

As the PKK is known to widen its dominance through other PKK-supported terrorist organizations, it is no coincidence that the YPG, one of the branches of the umbrella terror group,[52] has recently been discovered to take part in drug trafficking on behalf of the PKK. For instance, a large amount of PKK drugs – particularly Captagon, also known as "chemical courage" - was found by the Turkish military during the operation to clear Barsaya Mountain of the terrorist organization's Syrian affiliate, the Democratic Union Party's (PYD) People's Protection Units (YPG). This is tangible evidence of the lengths to which the PKK goes to administrate its narcotics business.

TURKEY'S WAR ON THE PKK'S NARCO-TERRORISM

As it is located in a tumultuous region where erratic events seldom cease to occur, Turkey continues to keep a resolute stand in order to promote its national security primarily in relation to the PKK and its branches. Turkey has aimed to widen and diversify the scope of its counterterrorism operations - such as counter narco-terrorism - against the PKK, since the terrorist organization's foundation in the midst 1970s. According to the Turkish and European drug reports, the PKK has ties with Turkey's neighbors in Africa, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. These ties have provided protection for the terrorist group to be able to transport drugs to Europe. Of the various routes illegal narcotics take to Europe, Turkey's Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions play one of the biggest roles in both illicit cannabis cultivation and distribution of the drug to Europe. This situation and Turkey's decisiveness in counterterrorism grow out of the coordination with almost all European countries which have a problem with the PKK's terrorism. [53]

The PKK or KCK terrorist group has regarded drug transportation and trade as a tool and a lucrative means to carry out terrorist activities and provide sustainable proceeds for the group's members. According to the German Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, the PKK has seized control of 80% of drugs in Europe.[54] These allegations have also been reaffirmed by Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu.[55]

CHART 1: TOTAL OUTCOMES OF NARCO-TERROR OPERATIONS BETWEEN 1980 AND 2018[56]

Seized Material	Quantity
Cannabis/kg	132,023
Heroin/kg	21,191
Cocaine/kg	10,521
Hemp plant/unit	96,704,135

51. "The Resolve of the Defiant - PKK/PYD Drug Cartel Is a Criminal Organization", Dailymotion, 2015, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x29lvl5 (Accessed: March 1, 2019).

52.Bayram Ali Soner, Ömer Aslan and Hakan Kıyıcı, PKK's Regional Franchise of Terror, https://www.pa.edu.tr/Upload/editor/files/PKK%E2%80%99S%20REGIONAL%20FRANCHISE%20OF%20TERROR_01_05_17.pdf p. 11-15. (Accessed: March 2, 2019).

53. *Fight Against Narcoterrorism Drugs and PKK/KCK*, Türkiye Cumhuriyet İçişleri Bakanlığı, February 2017, pp. 36-40.

54. Ibid., pp. 45-50.

55. "PKK Controls 80 pct of Drug Trade in Europe, Earns $1.5B Annually, Interior Minister Soylu Says", *Daily Sabah*, November 11, 2018, https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2018/11/08/pkk-controls-80-pct-of-drug-trade-in-europe-earns-15b-annually-interior-minister-soylu-says (Accessed: March 3, 2019).

56. *Fight Against Narcoterrorism Drugs and PKK/KCK*, p. 51.; Erol Başaran Bural, *Türkiye'nin 2018 Yılında Terörle Mücadelesi*, 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü, December 26, 2018, https://21yyte.org/tr/merkezler/islevsel-arastirma-merkezleri/terorizm-ve-terorizmle-mucadele/turkiye-nin-2018-yilinda-terorle-mucadelesi (Accessed: March 3, 2019).

Chart 1 above provided a complete picture of the data of the PKK narco-terror operations conducted by Turkish law enforcement agencies from 1980 to 2018. The huge quantities of seized drugs seen in Chart 1 are indicative of Turkey's effective counter narco-terrorism to cut down the PKK's drug manufacturing and transporting. Chart 2 below affirms that - particularly since 2016 - Turkey has achieved one of its vital national tasks thanks to its competent authorities. In addition, there has been a considerable and exponential increase in the number of seized materials. In 2018, Turkey carried out nearly 148,000 counter narco-terrorism operations against the PKK[57] resulting in the seizure of 89,239 kilograms of cannabis, 16,542 kilograms of heroin, over 1,140 kilograms of cocaine, and 88,556,098 units of hemp plants.

CHART 2: TOTAL OUTCOMES OF NARCO-TERROR OPERATIONS BETWEEN 2016 AND 2018[58]

Seized Material	Quantity
Cannabis/kg	89,239
Heroin/kg	16,542
Cocaine/kg	11,411
Hemp plant/unit	88,556,098

CHART 3: INDEX OF AVERAGE PRICE OF DRUG PER GRAM IN EUROPE*

Cannabis/$	15
Heroin/$	72
Cocaine/$	82

*Bases on data of three consecutive years (2016, 2017, and 2018), the chart offers the estimated average price per gram of cannabis, heroin, and cocaine, the trafficking of which generated the narcotics-based income of the PKK.

57. "Nearly 280,000 Terror, Drug Raids in 2018", *Daily Sabah*, February 23, 2019, https://www.dailysabah.com/investigations/2019/02/23/nearly-280000-terror-drug-raids-in-2018 (Accessed: March 4, 2019).

58. *Fight Against Narcoterrorism Drugs and PKK/KCK*, p. 51.; and Erol Başaran Bural, *Türkiye'nin 2018 Yılında Terörle Mücadelesi*.

Charts 3 and 4 pertain to the total value of the PKK's drugs confiscated by the Turkish National Police. The numbers regarding counter narco-terrorism demonstrate that Turkey undermined the PKK's biggest income resources: cannabis, heroin, and cocaine. In containing the PKK's drug threat, there have been several crucial factors which influence the efficiency of Turkey's counter narco-terrorism operations. Initially, after the July 15 failed military coup attempt, Turkey's anti-narco-terrorism operations increased by reason of the fact that many top police officers who had contact with the Gülenist Terror Organization (FETÖ) and were responsible for anti-narcotics operations, were captured and dismissed by Turkey.[59] Another two factors that led to the eradication of the PYD/PKK's drug trafficking routes from Turkey's south border to Europe as a part of the national security strategy to combat terrorism, were Turkey's cross-border counterterrorism operations towards Syria, namely Operation Euphrates Shield in the end of 2016[60] and Operation Olive Branch in 2018.[61] In addition, since 2018, the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) have conducted "Operation Decisiveness" against the PKK's bases in the northern part of Iraq. This has cut the PKK's two biggest drug routes: Afrin in Syria and Kandil in Iraq.[62]

59.For more: https://www.ahaber.com.tr/galeri/gundem/iste-ihrac-edilen-polislerin-tam-listesi/5, https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/eski-polis-uyusturucu-parasini-fetoye-aktardigini-itiraf-etti , https://www.trthaber.com/haber/turkiye/fetonun-uyusturucu-trafigi-tescillendi-397545.html

60. For more: Murat Yeşiltaş, Merve Seren, and Necdet Özçelik, *Fırat Kalkanı Harekatı: Harekatın İcrası, İstikrarın Tesisi ve Alınan Dersler*, SETA, https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2017/10/R91_FKA.pdf (Accessed: March 3, 2019).

61. For more: Necdet Özçelik and Can Acun, *Terörle Mücadelede Yeni Safha: Zeytin Dalı Harekatı*, SETA, https://setav.org/assets/uploads/2018/04/Rapor_TEM.pdf (Accessed: March 3, 2019).

62. "Uyuşturucunun üretim merkezi Afrin ve Kandil", *Sabah*, January 27, 2018, https://www.sabah.com.tr/yasam/2018/01/27/uyusturucunun-uretim-merkezi-afrin-ve-kandil (Accessed: March 4, 2019).

CHART 4: TOTAL VALUE OF DRUGS CONFISCATED BETWEEN 2016 AND 2018	
Cannabis/$	1,338,585,000
Heroin/$	1,191,024,000
Cocaine/$	93,562,000

Chart 4 demonstrates how Turkey with its substantially comprehensive and effective operations has been able to block a huge amount of potential funds for the PKK since 2016. Between 2016 and 2018, along with the Turkish National Police's domestic anti-narcotics efforts, drugs approximately worth $3 billion trafficked by the PKK and its branches such as the PYD/YPG were seized (Chart 4).

The above charts are also of great significance as they lift the veil of mystery of the PKK's funds. Meanwhile, Turkey has actively taken a step towards the bilateral or multilateral organizational cooperation of law enforcement agencies in both national and international dimensions to eliminate the PKK's drug routes. The European Drug Market Report highlighted Turkey's role in the fight against narco-terrorism:

Turkey, in terms of both organized crime activities and anti-trafficking measures, remains of central importance, especially given its proximity to areas of instability in the Middle East. Potential connections between flows of heroin and other drugs and terrorist groups in this region are a major concern, and Turkey is a key partner to help counter these threats.[63]

As stated above, whilst conducting counter narco-terrorism operations and exerting extra efforts to eliminate these terrorist groups causing mayhem, Turkey makes the most of its own institutions which are capable of prioritizing narco-terrorism and carrying out large-scale operations in order to neutralize the PKK and its offshoots. The national institutions dedicated to this cause are displayed in the table below.

63. Europol in the EU Drug Markets Report 2016", p. 74.

NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ESTABLISHED BY TURKEY TO COUNTER DRUG TRAFFICKING/ DRUG-RELATED CRIME/DRUG ADDICTION
Anti-Smuggling & Organized Crime Department (KOM)
Turkish International Academy against Drugs and Organized Crime (TADOC)
Turkish Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (TÜBİM)

Since the PKK is known to have multiplied its routes to Europe, Turkey often needs international cooperation to disarray the PKK's narco-terror activities and the menace the PKK poses to society. For this reason, Turkey has initiated joint operations and works with certain institutions listed below.[64]

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS PARTICIPATED BY TURKEY
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)
Southeast Europe Law Enforcement Center (SELEC)
European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)

CONCLUSION

Intelligence reports estimate that the current budget of the PKK is over $50 billion, with the main sources of income being drug trafficking and money laundering. The flow of proceeds are then used for purchasing firearms, munitions, and other equipment used by the terrorists.[65] The entire scope of the illicit money trafficking of the PKK has been confirmed and highlighted

64. "Turkey's Contributions in the Fight Against Drug Trafficking", Republic of Turkey: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-contributions-in-the-fight-against--drug-trafficking.en.mfa (Accessed: March 5, 2019).

65. WikiLeaks, PKK Structure and Links.

in national and international narcotics reports by the Anti-Narcotics Crime Department of the Turkish Police, which organizes many effective operations. The PKK's income gained solely from the drug trade throughout the 1990s was between $300 million and $500 million. Yet, in recent years, these numbers have increased up to $1.5 billion annually.

In spite of the fact that some EU countries are aware of the PYD/PKK's offshoots and the clans generating income through drug trafficking, like certain well-known "mafia families," they are still connected and have established relations with the top members of such groups like Remzi Kartal and Zubeyir Aydar. In this context, the USA, the EU, and Turkey should promote their regional and global partnerships in order to eliminate the narco-terrorist ties and presence of the PKK. The organization still utilizes geographically crucial points to transport its drugs from the Middle East to Europe for sustaining its terrorist activities such as bombed attacks in the Middle East and propaganda and recruitment activities in Europe.

THE PYD/PKK'S DRUG TRAFFICKING & TURKEY'S WAR ON NARCO-TERRORISM

ÜMİT TETİK, KUTLUHAN GÖRÜCÜ

SETA | ANALYSIS

Since its founding in the 1980s, the PKK has involved organized crime methods which provide it with the ability to sustain its terrorist activities. Hence, the PKK and its offshoots, such as the PYD/PKK in Syria, are webbed criminal networks which use main international drug routes such as the Caucasus, Africa, and the Balkans in order to reach the European drug markets. The group has an annual income up to $1.5 billion generated only from drug trafficking in Europe. Turkey has conducted decisive narcotic operations against the PKK since the 1980s in order to halt the group's terrorist activities. These operations are mainly facilitated by Turkey's cross-border military campaigns towards Syria and Iraq where the PKK and its branches are located, and aim to eliminate Turkey's domestic threats.. On the whole, the current analysis mainly focuses on the description of the PYD/PKK's drug routes and Turkey's struggle against the PKK's narco-terrorism.

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