

OLD PKK, NEW MAFIA

Summary

I- An active revolutionary guerrilla

II - Racket, extortion and traffics of all kinds: the PKK has a "mafious" behaviour

“Tigers of Eelam Tamil”, the Philippine’s “New People’s Army”, Colombian “Farc”, “Sendero Luminoso”, Sikh guerrilla, even “Khmer Rouge... Their shared feature is to fuel political activism with criminal activities. This mafious degeneration of political guerrilla groups is a major emerging threat for our societies.

Some only see the consequence of low intensity conflicts that would not call for a strategic reflection when these mutations generate a significant risk. Because it’s not there a simple enterprise of diversification but the transmutation of these groups that worsen their harmful effect in an exponential way.

Among these mutating terrorist groups, the Kurdistan Workers Party, the PKK ¹, is today one of the most active and dangerous ones. As a matter of fact, behind a political process that would look altruistic, the PKK kills... and finances its guerrilla with criminal activities.

Some doubt, others even have sympathy; the PKK itself outrageously denies, and always puts forward its “revolutionary” nature as an absolutory excuse for all its crimes.

But, in Germany, Belgium, Great Britain, Luxembourg, France and elsewhere, the PKK is considered a sophisticated criminal entity.

Considering its members, its subsidiary organisations and the companies it controls, the PKK gathers all the necessary components for this statement : murders, extortion, illegal immigration, children trafficking, all types of influence on the Kurdish Diaspora, drug trafficking and money laundering.

One can say the PKK has set up as a system the methodical exploitation of Europe considering it the means tank fuelling its “cause”.

A “cause” that mostly consists, with heavy guerrilla and blind terrorism, in shaking a country, member of NATO and associated with European Union. As, for the PKK, “Kurdish revolution means, at the same time, a revolution in Turkey” ².

I- AN ACTIVE REVOLUTIONARY GUERRILLA

The PKK appears with the Maoist wave that hits Turkey at the end of the Sixties. Turkish “Maos” go either with fighting communist organisations, like “Dev. Sol” ³ or the “Revolutionary Left”, either with Kurdish-nationalist Marxist-Leninist groups. It’s from that last trend that come - in 1974 - PKK’s founders.

Their leader is Abdallah Ocalan, aka. “Apo”. His goal, in a rigid Marxist-Leninist way - until very recently ⁴ - is to get the Kurdish people rid of its tribal system and found an independent Communist State in Turkey as well as in Iraq, Iran and Syria. Even if in a November 1996 interview ⁵, the fluctuating Ocalan refers to a “federalism”, the Party’s line as defined in May 1996 is “revolution in Turkey”, “liberation war”, “People’s democracy” and “Red Power”... At the same time he calls for a “Revolutionary Front” and claims an independent State for the Kurdish people ⁶.

Bloody methods, crude nationalist Leninism, cult of the leader, ferocity inside as outside the organisation, dogmatic stiffness - “Apo” even rules the sexual life of the militants ⁷ - peasant basis, rural and urban guerrilla. The PKK is a copy of the “Sendero Luminoso”.

The militants of the PKK are rather young and little or not educated : workers, peasants, unemployed. They are recruited sometimes willing, sometimes not and trained at the guerrilla in the Party’s camp, abroad ⁸.

Upstream, the PKK created a National Liberation Front in 1984, the ERNK ⁹, also supervised by Ocalan. The official speaker stays in Athens since 1985. This Front should have gathered Kurdish patriotic associations but has not really encroached upon the others moderate groups.

Downstream of the PKK, the Kurdistan Popular Liberation Army (ARGK), under the command of Cemil Bayik ¹⁰, leads the armed struggle in Turkey ¹¹. Since the end of the eight month “unilateral cease-fire”, August 15, 1996 ¹², there is no week, nearly no day without violent engagements in the South east of Turkey. Engagements that look more and more like heavy military operations, even more since the PKK uses missiles.

According to a classical pattern, the PKK uses its foe's reactions :

- locally, with psyops that are supposed to bring populations on its side ¹³;
- further, with a propaganda that should sensitise Europe and the US to the “war damages” endured by the civilian Kurdish populations ¹⁴.

Active rural guerrilla, also urban terrorism... For instance, three suicide-bombings from July to October 1996, all of them committed by young women. They were following the instructions of the PKK's “4th National Conference” of May 1996 when Ocalan exhorted his militants, “in the way of Hamas”, to “become human bombs”.

Urban guerrilla too, as the destruction of the Kirikkale ¹⁵ weapon plant, the largest in Turkey, last 3rd of July, held by ARGK's “Urban attack Detachment” (or “Urban Revenge Unit”).

“Classical” attempts also and constant threat against tourism : it's the leitmotiv-blackmail of the PKK.

Active guerrilla, but bloody guerrilla... One thinks that there is from 21 to 23 000 casualties since the beginning of PKK's armed struggle on August 15, 1984 ¹⁶.

These heavy operations, using huge and increasing means, call for legitimate questions about their funding.

It is true that the PKK has regional alliances with several liberation organisations. Either some States, unsteadily, help it : Iran, Syria, Libya but also Greece and... Russia. But another explanation comes from its criminal activities in Europe and from the income they produce.

PKK's other important target is Western Europe : political goal... not only.

The resumption of the guerrilla in Anatolia in 1984 launches a violent offensive in Europe. Ruthlessly, the Party begins to take the matters in hands, intimidating and eliminating - even within its own ranks - all that are suspected to collaborate with Turkey. In Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and France, the bodycount is around twenty between 1985 and 1987. And already in 1984, 18 PKK activists are deported from Sweden

The steering idea of the PKK is to control and exploit the Kurdish community as well as Europe's wealth using all its system's weaknesses and joints : political activism based on mafious methods.

The primary target of the PKK is Germany where the heart of the “European Front” was set, “ERNK-representation in Europe”. First legally, then clandestinely since its ban - on terrorism matters - in September 1993. Then the PKK moved to Belgium.

PKK is also active in France, commonly demonstrating for any matter. Forbidden in 1993, the PKK's screen associations, the “Comité du Kurdistan” and “Yek Kom” reconstruct themselves under the names of “Centre d'information du Kurdistan”, “Association culturelle des travailleurs kurdes en France” et “Comité national de solidarité avec le peuple kurde” : always playing confusion.

The PKK is settled in Sweden, Denmark, Great Britain, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Italy and is “persona grata” in Greece since 1985. PKK's propaganda is also very active in the US ¹⁷ and Canada.

Propaganda also, PKK choose Europe to perform its roving “Kurdistan Parliament in exile”. Its preliminary commission met in Brussels at the end of February 1995, in presence of Turkish DEP MP's. The first actual session was held in The Hague, April 12, 1995. It gathered 65 representatives, allegedly elected by the “Kurds of the Diaspora”, according to the Chairman, Yasar Kaya. Among them, 12 members of the ERNK, the others looking a lot like PKK stooges. Since, this “Parliament” has met in many European capitals ¹⁸.

However, behind this national liberation will and People's representation, one can foresee a new powerful mafia.

II - RACKET, EXTORTION AND TRAFFICS OF ALL KINDS: THE PKK HAS A "MAFIOUS" BEHAVIOUR

The natural route for the "Golden Crescent"¹⁹ heroin goes through Turkey where the PKK is particularly well installed : contacts with all concerned countries and local nets, sparking all over Europe. From there comes PKK's leading part in narco-traffic, in spite of Ocalan's continuous denials.

The PKK's heroin traffic works through politico-criminal connections between the Kurd separatists and the Chi'ite clans from the Bekaa valley, or with the Balouchistan rebel tribes. The members of the PKK settled in Iran play an important part.

Towards Syria and Lebanon, near the borders of Turkey, Nakhitchevan and Iran, this traffic can develop the shape of a triangular barter : luxury cars, stolen in Europe, are exchanged for heroin which in turn is changed into cash and arms.

Towards Europe, the bartering works too : the PKK's heroin could have been exchanged for Italian luxury clothes by the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta.

In Turkey, the circulation of heroin, management of the production laboratories and transport of precursor products are taken up by the PKK logistics in preference to its guerrillas. This traffic is made possible by the alliances with Turkish criminal clans sharing common interests with the PKK.

1996 is an important turning point in the PKK's involvement. Some of its members have already been arrested while carrying drugs in Germany, Holland and France. In those countries and in the UK, the racket and possession of arms were penalised. But there was still no proof of a direct link with the organisation.

Now we can see the involvement of the PKK as a fully beneficiary entity. Actually, the routes taken by money prove the narcotics traffic and other traffics, even tax evasion. In Europe, the PKK's turnover amounts to millions of US dollars, running through many bank accounts. It was important to have a good look at this.

On September 18, 1996, the Belgian police and Scotland Yard, acting simultaneously in Brussels and London, started operation "Sputnik". This large-scale operation aimed at MED-TV, the PKK Turkish TV channel, at the Kurdistan Committee, some elements of the "Kurdistan Parliament in exile" and at the homes of many Kurdish activists, including those of some Turkish ex-deputies of the now-forbidden DEP. Similar operations took place in Germany and Luxembourg.

The juridical foundation : money laundering. The criminal part of this hybrid entity is no longer hidden by its "political aura".

MED-TV, which has important funds, considers itself as a private firm. Always denying its links with the PKK, MED-TV has continuously worked for it, broadcasting its official statements, such as Ocalan's speeches -including those boosting armed struggle or suicide bombings. On June 15, 1997, when answering a phone interview, Ocalan was still calling for an increased guerrilla.

Terrorism of words and actions does not dissuade MED-TV. While insisting upon being independent, it claims it was created by the initiative of the Kurdish community in Europe, "whose many members support the nationalist movement without having

institutional links with it”²⁰. These are ambiguous and cynical words as we’ll see later that this support is not always self-willed.

The intervention of authorities was not due to opinion or censorship elements.

The “Sputnik” operation followed the seizure of 350 millions of BF deposited in Luxembourg, on a bank account in the name of MED TV. According to the police, this money came from drug traffic, arms traffic and human beings traffic.

In February 1996 a Canadian businessman was jailed in Luxembourg. According to the Luxembourg police, he tried to launder some money coming from drugs traffic, transferring cash from a Cypriot bank to the “Continental Bank”. He confessed he had acted on the behalf of MED-TV, for a commission.

The operations of September allowed the discovery of many documents, arms and ... children. Some records mention the names of Turkish businessmen and societies submitted to extortion by the PKK - the so-called revolutionary tax ? This is maybe how MED-TV conceives support...

It seems that the PKK manages its activities through some 15 companies in Belgium, which are used for laundering the illegal money. For the authorities, the “delocalisation” comes from both the interdiction of the PKK in Germany, since 1993 and from Belgium’s relative benevolence.

The operations in Great Britain, that interrupted MED-TV’s programs for over one month, and in Germany made possible the discovery of many records and money.

The “respectability” which sheltered the PKK and its members is now compromised as well as its communication antenna, its “Parliament in exile” and its various associations and screen companies. One may hope that this movement which started in spite of pressures, threats, indignation, difficulties and denials, will continue.

More criminal activities from the PKK appear day after day.

In UK, huge quantities of heroin are seized in 1995, one of them of 440 lb, coming from Turkey. Implicating three Kurds and one Czech bus driver, the affair is judged in August 1996. The judgement reveals that it was a PKK’s connection and that money - some \$ 90 million, retail price - was due to finance the Party.

The judge from Southwark inflicted particularly long prison punishments, 20 to 30 years. He declared : “I have said it before and I will say it again : hard drugs are the fifth horseman of the modern apocalypse”. We are far away from political respectability!

In Germany, mid October of 1996, three leaders of the Bavarian PKK are tried, ex officio, on criminal accusations : murders and “a long list of crimes” including racket and arson. Several lawsuits of the same type are introduced since.

April 14 1997, a German prosecutor indicts a Turkish citizen of Kurdish origin known as Murat E.. He would be a member of the executive board for Europe and especially its treasurer since 1995. One more time, it’s a matter of intimidation, extortion, arson : always mafious methods.

Then, April 9, 1997, the German Supreme Court “criminalises” two pro Kurdish periodicals “Biji” and “Kurdistan-Rundbrief”. They are blamed for having backed terrorist action by publishing PKK, ARGK and ERNK statements.

In France, the dissolution decision of “Yek Kom” and “Comité du Kurdistan” was based on their violent and political nature as they “indulge, on the French territory or from it, in manoeuvres leading to terrorist actions in France or abroad”.

Henceforth, it's the criminal side that dominates. October 29, 1996, several persons, mostly of Turkish nationality, are arrested in the Paris suburbs. That the end of a fraud ²¹, linked with Belgium, concerning about 150 victims, completed by weapons and... narcotics trafficking. The fraud is estimated 40 millions F.; the seized heroin, 6 kg, 20 millions. According to the investigators working on that case for eighteen month, it's an evidence that the benefits of all these operations were assigned to the PKK.

Moreover, in the same way as in Belgium and Great Britain, there are more and more trade companies created by Kurds. It looks like this method is now favoured because of a better penetration of the community and better exploitation of its advantages rather than associations that have a greater political look and are less operational. But this shows PKK's fast flexibility and its will of penetration.

So, if the PKK has attracted some ones, if he made some imagine that it was the defender of the Kurdish cause, its real image is more now the one of a new Mafia, murderous in Turkey and threatening for Europe. n

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1 : “Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan”

2 : 5th congress of the Party, “Resolution on Revolution in Turkey...”, January 8-27 1995. Cf. also “PKK's 4th national Conference” May 1-15 1996.

3 : now “Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partye” (DHKP/C).

4 : Cf. Ocalan's interview by David Corn, “Serxwebun”, April 1995.

5 : “Le Figaro”, November 20, 1996. Cf “Serxwebun”, ibid.

6 : “Arm the Spirit”, January 3, 1997.

7 : “Hurriyet”, 9/30/96.

8 : in the uncontrolled zone, north of Iraq, in Iran (these camps was exposed by a Turkish delegation visiting Teheran, “Sabah”, 9/30/96) or at the confines of Armenia and Azerbaïdjan. Some fighters, according to Ocalan, would be trained in Greece and some German “revolutionary” militants would also help the PKK, including Andrea Wolf, wanted in Germany (Reuter, 11/23/1996, quoting “Der Spiegel”).

9 : “Eniya Ruzgariya Netwa Kurdistan”

10 : in an interview with the “American Kurdish Information Network” - AKIN - 1/97, he deliberately explains his political and military strategies.

11 : According to Ocalan, the ARGK would have 15 000 fighters, including 4 000 women.

12 : anniversary of the beginning of the armed struggle, August 15, 1984.

13 : Cf. Ocalan on MED-TV, 6/15/97, exhorting village militias to lay down their arms.

14 : for instance “The European, 1/11/1996.

15 : AP, 7/5/1997

16 : in comparison, ETA would be responsible for 760 victims since 1968 (AP, 5/20/1996) and the IRA 1800 since 1970 (AP, 5/17/1996).

17 : Cf. AKIN, the “American Kurdish Information network” which is always well informed about PKK's activities.

18 : with permission or not : Vienna, Moscow, Copenhagen, Rome, Oslo ¶

19 : main source for Europe, 80% according to British sources.

²⁰ : Amir Hassanpour, MED-TV, “Britain and the Turkish State : a stateless Nation quest for sovereignty in the sky”, Freie Universitat Berlin, November 7, 1995.

²¹ : ÊIntexË company an a dozen of others