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Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - Chapter 5 - Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

Aka the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress; the Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan; KADEK; Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan; the People's Defense Force; Halu Mesru Savunma Kuvveti; Kurdistan People's Congress; People's Congress of Kurdistan; KONGRA-GEL

Description: Founded by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist separatist organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was designated as an FTO on October 8, 1997. The group, composed primarily of Turkish Kurds, launched a campaign of violence in 1984. The PKK's original goal was to establish an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Türkiye.

Activities: In the early 1990s, the PKK moved beyond rural-based insurgent activities to engage in urban terrorism. Anatolia became the scene of significant violence, with some estimates suggesting at least 40,000 casualties. The PKK foreswore violence from 1999 until 2004, when its hardline militant wing took control and renounced the self-imposed cease-fire. In 2009 the Turkish government and the PKK resumed peace negotiations, but talks broke down after the PKK carried out an attack in 2011 that killed 13 Turkish soldiers. Between 2012 and midyear 2015, the Turkish government and the PKK resumed peace negotiations, but the negotiations ultimately broke down — owing partly to domestic political pressures and the conflict in Syria.

In 2016 the group claimed a VBIED strike against Şırnak Province police headquarters, which killed 11 people and wounded more than 70 others. In 2017, Turkish officials blamed the PKK for a car bomb and shooting outside of a courthouse that killed two persons and an attack on a military convoy that killed more than 20 soldiers.

In 2018, numerous attacks by the PKK were reported against Türkiye's security forces, including an attack claimed by the PKK against a Turkish Army base, which resulted in dozens of casualties. Also in 2018, a roadside bomb struck a bus carrying workers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, killing 7 persons and wounding 13 in Diyarbakir Province's Kulp district. The government blamed the PKK for the attack.

In 2019 the PKK was accused of assassinating a senior Turkish diplomat in Erbil, Iraq. Later that year, the PKK attacked a Turkish military vehicle in Hakkâri province, killing two soldiers and wounding another.

In 2020 a PKK-claimed rocket attack on the Gürbulak Customs Gate with Iran killed two Turkish Customs officials. That same year a PKK affiliate claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing on a natural gas pipeline near the Turkish-Iranian border, taking the pipeline offline for months and PKK militants fired rockets at a Turkish military base in northern Iraq, killing two soldiers and wounding another.

In February the PKK was accused of killing 13 Turkish hostages in Iraq.

Strength: The PKK is estimated to consist of 4,000 to 5,000 members.

Location/Area of Operation: Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Türkiye

Funding and External Aid: The PKK receives financial support from the large Kurdish diaspora in Europe.