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Kurdistan Workers' Party

Aka Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress; Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan; KADEK; Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan; Halu Mesru Savunma Kuvveti; HSK; Kurdistan People's Congress; People's Congress of Kurdistan; KONGRA-GEL; PKK; KGK; KHK; KCK.

Description: The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was designated as an FTO on October 8, 1997. Founded by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist separatist organization, PKK is composed primarily of Turkish Kurds who launched a campaign of violence in 1984.

Activities: In the early 1990s, PKK moved beyond rural-based insurgent activities to engage in urban terrorism. Türkiye became the scene of significant violence, with some estimates suggesting there have been at least 40,000 casualties during the 38 year-long conflict. After the arrest of the PKK's founder in 1999, the group abandoned the insurgency until 2004, when its hardline militant wing solidified control and renounced the self-imposed cease-fire. In 2009 the Turkish government and PKK resumed peace negotiations, but talks broke down after PKK carried out an attack in 2011 that killed 13 Turkish soldiers. Between 2013 and 2015, the Turkish government and PKK resumed peace negotiations, but the negotiations ultimately failed — owing partly to domestic political pressures and the conflict in Syria.

In 2016 the group claimed a VBIED strike against Sirnak 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.

Between 2018 and 2021, numerous attacks by PKK were reported against Türkiye security forces and government officials, including a 2018 roadside bomb against a bus carrying workers from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, killing 7 persons and wounding 13 in Diyarbakir Province's Kulp district; the 2019 assassination of a senior Turkish diplomat in Erbil, Iraq; several 2020 PKK-claimed attacks aimed at a Türkiye-Iran customs border gate, a natural gas pipeline near the Turkish-Iranian border, and a Turkish military base in northern Iraq. In 2021, PKK was accused of killing 13 Turkish hostages in Iraq.

In April 2022, the Turkish Army Forces launched an offensive against PKK targets in northern Iraq and have been engaged in heavy fighting with the group. In September, Türkiye blamed PKK for an attack on a police guesthouse in southern Türkiye in which one policeman was killed and another injured. In November, Türkiye accused the PKK of being responsible for an explosion in Istanbul that killed at least six persons and wounded 81 others. The PKK denied responsibility for the blast.

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

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

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