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## Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 - Foreign Terrorist Organizations: Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

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**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 a Foreign Terrorist Organization 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 Turkey. In recent years, however, the PKK has spoken more about autonomy within a Turkish state that guarantees Kurdish cultural and linguistic rights.

**Activities:** In the early 1990s, the PKK moved beyond rural-based insurgent activities to include urban terrorism. Anatolia became the scene of significant violence, with some estimates suggesting at least 40,000 casualties. Following his capture in 1999, Ocalan announced a "peace initiative," ordering members to refrain from violence and requesting dialogue with Ankara on Kurdish issues. Ocalan's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment; he remains the symbolic leader of the group. The PKK foreswore violence until June 2004, when its hardline militant wing took control and renounced the self-imposed ceasefire of the previous five years. Striking over the border from bases within Iraq, the PKK engaged in terrorist attacks in eastern and western Turkey. In 2009, the Turkish government and the PKK resumed peace negotiations, but talks broke down after the PKK carried out an attack in July 2011 that left 13 Turkish soldiers dead. In 2012, the PKK claimed responsibility for multiple car bombings resulting in the deaths of at least 10 people. Primary targets included Turkish government security forces, local Turkish officials, and villagers who oppose the organization in Turkey.


Between January and mid-July 2015, the PKK carried out small-scale armed attacks against Turkey's security forces and military bases. A ceasefire, negotiated between 2012 and 2014, ended in July 2015 when the PKK killed two security personnel. During 2016, the PKK continued its terrorist activity in Turkey. Turkish officials blamed the PKK for the August 17 vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack at a police station in the province of Van, which killed four and wounded 72. The PKK also claimed an August 26 VBIED strike against Sirnak police headquarters, which killed 11 and wounded more than 70.

**Strength:** Approximately 4,000 to 5,000 members; 3,000 to 3,500 of which are located in northern Iraq.

**Location/Area of Operation:** The group is located primarily in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria.

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

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