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COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM 2017 - CHAPTER 5 - KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY

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.

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. The PKK foreswore violence until June 2004, when its hardline militant wing took control and renounced the self-imposed ceasefire. 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.

Between January and mid-July 2015, the PKK carried out small-scale armed attacks against Turkey's security forces and military bases. In August 2016, the group claimed a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device strike against Sirnak police headquarters, which killed 11 people and wounded more than 70 others. In January 2017, Turkish officials blamed the PKK for a car bomb and shooting outside of a courthouse that killed two people. In June, the PKK attacked a military convoy in southeastern Turkey, using mortar and machine gun fire to kill over 20 soldiers. Since 2015, the group has been responsible for the deaths of over 1,200 Turkish security officials and civilians.

Strength: The PKK consists of 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 and Iraq.

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