

Government crackdown against the Hezbollah in Turkey

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For weeks state security forces in Turkey have been carrying out an extensive operation against the Islamic terror organisation Hezbollah (Arabic for the “Party of God”). The group does not have a mass base in Turkey and reportedly has no ties to the one operating in Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries under the same name.

Up to now 900 persons are said to have been arrested and interrogated and numerous houses have been searched. In the course of the raids police have confiscated thousands of documents, as well as innumerable computer discs, weapons, money and credit cards.

The corpses of several dozen persons have been found. The bodies are of victims who were kidnapped, tortured and then killed by the group. The Hezbollah made many video films of their victims as they were being tortured to death.

Amongst those apprehended is the majority of the organisation's leadership. At the beginning of the operation, the group's head and founder, Hüseyin Velioglu, was shot by police snipers during a raid on a villa.

At the same time the state has undertaken action against another Islamic organisation, the IBDA-C (Turkish for “Islamic Great East Raiders Front”). On January 25 security forces stormed the prison wings where IBDA-C members are being held. These prisoners had, as a result of a number of prison revolts, achieved most of their demands and established de facto control of their own prison wings. The security forces brutally broke the prisoners' resistance and proceeded to distribute members of the group to various other prisons, confining them to smaller cells.

Although the Turkish state has carried out individual actions against the Islamists over the past three years, the latter were able to operate virtually without hindrance throughout the 1990s. The Turkish army, police and secret police worked closely with Hezbollah as well as right-wing death squads and Mafia terror groups. The result is over 3,000 “unsolved (political) murders”. This state of affairs has been an open secret for some time in Turkey and is now being more or less openly admitted by the media and many well-known politicians.

Right-wing militias have been especially active in the predominately Kurdish south-east of Turkey, terrorising the population and killing mainly Kurdish nationalists and intellectuals, as well as human rights activists, critical journalists, left-wingers and trade unionists.

A series of articles in the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Politika* referred to numerous sources which confirmed that it was not a question of “an individual traitor in the state apparatus” closing his eyes to what was going on, but rather the state as a whole systematically supporting and sponsoring the Hezbollah as part of the so-called “counter-guerrilla” forces. The population in south-eastern Turkey used to call Hezbollah “Hizb-i Contra” (“Party of the Contra”).

In February 1991 the magazine *2000'e Dogru* published a report based on the testimony of witnesses and sympathisers of Hezbollah which stipulated that the organisation had been trained at the headquarters of the local mobile state task force in the town of Diyarbakir. Two days after the publication of the report, its author was murdered.

In an interview with the *Turkish Daily News* the lawyer Mustafa Yilmaz, who in 1993 was a Social Democratic member of the inquiry into unsolved murders, declared that the Hezbollah occupied training camps alongside quarters of the Turkish special police in a number of south-eastern Turkish towns. In response to the report, a few security officials who were willing to give a statement were sacked. The claims were never properly followed up or brought to the attention of parliament by any of the parties.

Over the past weeks there have been continued reports in Turkish papers about connections between the Hezbollah, right-wing Mafia circles and organs of the state. The papers have expressed the conjecture that Hezbollah leader Velioglu was shot because he knew too much.

On January 25 the Turkish newspaper *Hurriyet* quoted President Suleyman Demirel, who contested allegations of collaboration between state forces and the right-wing groups, but in the same breath indirectly and cynically confirmed such collaboration: “Hezbollah is a derivative of

the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). It began life with the aim of having people defend themselves from the PKK. But [later] it became a terrorist, separatist and 'religionist' organization."

It does appear that in recent years the Hezbollah has increased its independence and has also kidnapped and murdered Islamic businessmen from the Kurdish south-east loyal to the Turkish state. This is why Hezbollah has now become a threat to the stability of the Turkish state, something which the European Union (EU) and the United States are insisting must be maintained, under the euphemism "democratisation".

Turkey is regarded as a decisive Western bridgehead to the countries of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The country is being transformed into a fortress bristling with weapons from which Western powers will be able assert their demands in the region.

Turkey cannot seriously fulfil the role of regional power and a bastion for NATO if it is continually being rocked by domestic conflicts between the Kemalists, the Islamists and Kurdish nationalists. This is why the EU and the US are putting pressure on the Turkish government to end these conflicts in the name of "democratisation".

The PKK no longer poses an obstacle to such a development—quite the opposite. In a statement published in the *Özgür Politika* on January 16 the central committee of the PKK declared: "The internal and external forces which are trying to prevent Turkey from going forward need to be stopped. Then it will be seen that everybody is proud to be part of Turkey and Turkey is a strong country in the region and the world.... Turkish leaders with common sense, democratic forces and nationalists can be sure that our party will not tolerate any force weakening Turkey or harming its interests. The Kurdish people will help to build a democratic republic like they did during Turkey's liberation struggle. Our party and people will co-operate with the democratic forces of Turkey." (*Kurdistan Observer*, January 17).

Following the neutralisation of the PKK, the state is levelling its blows at the Hezbollah. The Islamic terror group is, however, only the most extreme excrescence of the web of Mafia and death squads, which has penetrated so deeply into the state and economic structures of Turkey that it is referred to as the "deep state".

The present action against the Hezbollah does not change these structures, but rather serves to secure and stabilise them. One arm of the structure which is proving more harmful than beneficial is being severed. This will not resolve the deeper lying conflicts inside the establishment.

The export-orientated, neo-liberal economic policy introduced first by Turgut Özal following the military putsch of 1980 and continued since then has produced a new layer

of unscrupulous social climbers and newly wealthy employers, mainly from the east of the country. These now find themselves in conflict with the old Kemalist establishment and the "deep state" over rich pickings to be had in the country.

Accordingly, the Turkish army has reacted in hysterical fashion to charges by the Islamic Virtue Party (FP—the largest oppositional party in parliament) that the military had tolerated the Hezbollah. The army general staff issued a statement levelling abuse at the FP, which had also called for the establishment a parliamentary committee of investigation.

The general staff virtually demanded a ban of the party, which is currently subject to an official procedure with the same aim. The procedure is entering its final stages.

There have also been reports of sharp disputes within the ruling elite about what to do once Hezbollah, the Frankenstein monster of the state, is eliminated. Sections of the military, in particular, are said to be pressing behind the scenes for a wholesale campaign of oppression against all independent manifestations of Islamic tendencies, no matter how moderate or conservative they may be.

Following sharp warnings from Washington and Europe, all sides are now concerned to de-escalate the conflict. Leading representatives of the FP emphasise that they would never harm the image of the army or seek to question Kemalism or the state order. The military has refrained from further statements and Vural Savas, the highest state prosecutor who enjoys the closest relations with the army, has made assurances he will not use the dispute as ammunition in the official process weighing the legal status of the FP.



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