The dead end of nationalism

Turkey: Successor organization of the PKK curries favour with US

Bülent Kent
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The successor organization of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which in the 1990s led an armed struggle for a Kurdish state in eastern Turkey, today supports the American occupying forces in Iraq.

According to a report in the daily paper *Junge Welt*, last February Osman Öcalan, vice chairman of Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan People's Congress), which emerged from the PKK, left the organization's camp in northern Iraq and went over to the American occupying forces. Osman is the brother of Abdullah Öcalan, the longstanding chairman of the PKK who has been imprisoned in Turkey since 1999.

The *Junge Welt* reported that Osman Öcalan was apparently accompanied by executive committee members Nizamettin Tas and Hider Sarikaya, the former spokesman of the PKK in Europe, as well as several hundred other party members who all favour a close alliance with the US. For example, they have agreed to take over duties to protect the border between Iraq and Iran to prevent infiltration by Islamic resistance fighters.

The chairman of Kongra-Gel, Zübeyir Aydar, has apparently condemned this group and Abdullah Öcalan has criticized his brother as a representative of "a dangerous right-wing, nationalist course." But disregarding tactical differences, the open attempt to curry favour with the American occupiers is a logical consequence of the PKK's previous policies.

The founding of Kongra-Gel in November 2003 was already a reaction to the American conquest of Iraq, where PKK guerrillas had retreated into the predominantly Kurdish northern region after the imprisonment of their leader. The party's founding manifesto explicitly welcomed the US intervention. It stated: "By intervening against the Saddam regime, which so severely suppressed the Kurds and the entire population, the US has played an important role at the dawn of a new era. Kongra-Gel welcomes this intervention by the US, but wants to point out that constructive results can only be achieved if the Kurdish question is permanently solved."

In the following weeks, papers close to the party ran articles mimicking the American propaganda and even its choice of words. For instance, in the daily paper *Yeniden Özgur Günden* of December 28, Cemal Ucar condemned the Iraqi resistance with the words: "I am against calling the attacks on American soldiers 'resistance.'"

Ucar, who writes that he got an idea of the situation in the so-called Sunni triangle when he was in Iraq, rejects the description of the US an "imperialist occupying power" because the Iraqi resistance does not meet the necessary criterion: "Every resistance has a manifesto containing its intended aims. The resistance against the Americans not only lacks a manifesto but also lacks capacity and a base." Continuing with phrases that could come from G.W. Bush himself, he stated: "Washington is endeavouring to fight evil in Iraq, but at the same time has a problem in delivering what is good. This leads to the suffering of the people."

Ucar not only chooses to deny any connection between the suffering of the Iraqi people and the US occupation and pillaging of Iraq. He goes so far as to claim that these sufferings are a result of the actions of the Iraqi resistance: "These attacks that are taking place nearly every day don't lead to a solution of the problems but instead intensify them." Responsibility, according to Ucar, rests with the defeated clique of Saddam who took all the money with them and are thus capable of purchasing weapons and importing warriors from Arab countries.

With a hardly concealed racist undertone, he writes that if those "who lived on the expenses of the Saddam regime" and were "downgraded" after the war are added to those who have been released from custody and "tribes who (intellectually) live in the Neolithic Age," then an "aimless bomb is created." No one knows "when it will explode, how many civilians it will kill, how many people it will shock. The scientific name for this is terrorism."

The complete article is a collection of arguments aimed at verifying that chaos and anarchy prevail in Iraq and that peace and order will be restored more rapidly if the Iraqi population subjugates itself to the US.

Another article in *Yeniden Özgur Gündem* from January 4, 2004, written by the same author, reads: "Those who think that the occupation could be brought to an end by use of resistance will cause the occupation to last even longer."

Also the DEHAP, a party which propagates Kurdish nationalism with legal methods, welcomes the occupation of its neighbouring country by the US, even though in a rather more restrained tone.

For instance, on December 29, 2003, its vice chairman, Dr. Naci Kutlay, wrote in the left-wing Turkish daily *Evrensel*: "There can be no doubt that the US is an imperialist state. But the US invasion of Iraq and the capture of Saddam will change many things in the Middle East. Iraq will become more democratic, this is necessary. For the first time the Kurds will receive a status. Afterwards all states in the region will have to change. These changes will not take place as a result of internal dynamics but with the help of the world's biggest imperialist state. What we like or do not like does not change the situation. Instead of the suppression of the Kurds, the way will be open for new structures that will be democratic and based on human rights."

How is one to account for the fact that Kurdish nationalists, who

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used to place great weight on their left-wing anti-imperialist image, now support the most powerful imperialist power?

When the PKK was founded at the end of the 1970s, Turkey was shaken by severe class struggles. But the PKK's response to the barbaric suppression of the Kurdish minority was not to unite the struggle of Kurdish and the Turkish working class, but rather to call for an independent Kurdish state. Despite its name, the party insisted that the social struggle of the working class was secondary and dependent on the resolution in the first place of the national question.

Following the revolt by the Turkish military, which established a brutal dictatorship in 1980, the PKK turned to a course of armed struggle. As a result of the military's terror an organization which initially had only loose connections to the population became very popular. The aim of the armed struggle remained the establishment of a Kurdish state and this perspective was always bound up with the attempt to gain the support of regional powers as well as of some major powers. For many years the PKK was granted refuge in Syria. But because of the significant role Turkey played on the eastern frontier of NATO it was never able to win significant support within Europe or in the US.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War in 1991, the PKK lost its Syrian basis. The Syrian regime opposed Iraq alongside the US. The PKK began to look for a new orientation and openly offered its support to the major powers as well as the Turkish bourgeoisie. The PKK was ready to accept their predominance for a small share of power. Already during the Gulf War, Öcalan had met with the leader of the Iraqi Kurds, Celal Talabani, who was on good terms with Washington. He offered his services to the Turkish government to negotiate an armistice—but without success. In 1993 he announced a unilateral armistice and announced that he was willing to drop the demand for an independent state—again without any positive response in behalf of the Turkish government.

The appeals directed at the American and especially European bourgeoisie became increasingly louder. But in 1999 Italy refused to give Öcalan asylum and shortly afterwards he was taken by force from Nairobi with the support of the American secret services. This made unmistakably clear that the European states and the US had no interest in collaborating with the PKK.

The organization reacted by withdrawing its forces from northern Iraq and officially ending the "armed struggle" against Turkey. In a press statement from August 1999, the central committee of the PKK declared that it was necessary to adapt to the hegemony of the US and its new order in the Middle East.

Only a few months after the US government had declared a worldwide "war on terror" following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the PKK changed its name to "Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan" (KADEK). The new name was to underline the break with the party's militant past. But as the leaders of the organization disappointedly established two years later, this signal was not sufficient to "develop a dialogue between the key figures in the Middle East on the Kurdish question."

The US had begun to forcefully reorganize the region and had no use for KADEK. And the Turkish government didn't seem to be inclined to begin negotiations with its severely discredited opponent. The Turkish military even threatened to invade northern Iraq under its own steam, if the US would not act against PKK/KADEK. Washington reassured Ankara that the PKK would not be tolerated in northern Iraq and officially classified KADEK as a "terrorist organization."

KADEK reacted by disbanding itself in 2003 and founding the "Kurdistan People's Congress" (Kongra-Gel). They stated self critically that the program and organizational structure of KADEK "did not meet up to the necessities of a political struggle for a pluralistic and democratic society." "Remains of the Leninist party model, as well as Middle Eastern dogmatic structures of thinking, led to a narrowed down hierarchical structure that was incapable of including new social groups and democratic elements," they said. The continuity of personnel within the leadership had also led to the belief that "KADEK was simply a continuation of the PKK. Then this prevented international recognition and had a negative impact on the planned process of democratization."

Zübeyar Aydar, who was elected as Kongra-Gel's party chairman, is a man who has no past as a guerrilla fighter. Since 1986 he has worked as a lawyer. He has been active in the Human Rights Association (IHD) as well as being chairman of the Social Democratic Populist Party (SHP) in his hometown Siirt, and a member of parliament for the People's Labour Party (HEP). According to Kongra-Gel he was the target of two assassination attempts in 1993. In 1994 his immunity as member of parliament was lifted and the HEP was banned. Aydar left Turkey and was active for both the Kurdish parliament in exile and the Kurdish National Congress.

Following his election as chairman of Kongra-Gel in November 2003, Aydar responded to a question by a journalist asking if the US will attempt to negotiate by declaring: "We hope the US will initiate diplomatic negotiations." According to Kongra-Gel-online, Aydar responded to a remark by the journalist that an agreement existed between Turkey and the US to disarm the guerrillas by stating that the US had made attempts to do so. The US, he continued, should put pressure on Turkey rather than on the Kurdish movement.

The perspective of Kongra-Gel remains aimed at coming to an agreement with the Turkish bourgeoisie—with active support from the US. From here it is only a small step to offering one's services to the US as a police force in Iraq—an offer apparently made by the group around Osman Öcalan.

The logic of nationalism has led the PKK into a hopeless dead end. This nationalist perspective has nothing to offer to the impoverished Kurdish peasants and workers, many of whom in any event live and work in Turkish and European cities. To overcome suppression, poverty and lack of rights a socialist perspective is necessary to unite workers throughout the Middle East, Europe and the US.

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