

What lies behind the terrorist attacks in Turkey?

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At the end of August, five bombs exploded within 24 hours in three Turkish cities, killing three people and injuring more than 120, among them many foreign tourists. Besides Istanbul, the tourist destinations of Marmaris and Antalya were targeted by the bombers.

A group calling itself TAK (Liberation Falcons of Kurdistan) claimed responsibility. In its letter, it called on foreigners to stay away from tourist areas in Turkey.

As long as the leader of the PKK (Kurdish Worker's Party), Abdullah Öcalan, nicknamed "Apo," remains in jail, "bombs will go off everywhere in Turkey," the note threatened. In the past year, this organisation carried out a similar terrorist attack in the seaside resort of Kusadasi, where a mini-bus was blown up, claiming several victims.

It is clear that tourists are being targeted. The TAK justifies this with the argument that tourism is one of the most important sources of income for the "dirty war" against the Kurds.

In 2005, Turkey earned more than €14 billion from some 21.5 million vacationers. Tourism accounts for approximately 5 percent of the economy, employing some 1.5 million people. The "success" of such terrorist attacks will result in the loss of jobs by many Turkish and Kurdish workers in hotels and other areas dependent on tourism.

This tactic is thoroughly criminal and reactionary. It can only strengthen the most right-wing forces within the Turkish establishment and its backers on an international level, in the US government and elsewhere. Among working people in Turkey and other countries, such acts do not encourage understanding or sympathy for the Kurds, but instead discredit them and divide the international working class.

Behind the supposed radicalism of such actions lies political opportunism. The calculation is that the Turkish state, denounced by the TAK as "fascist," will be forced into an agreement with the Kurdish nationalists. This, however, will not improve conditions for poor and oppressed Kurds in Turkey.

Who are the TAK and what are its origins?

The origins of the TAK are very cloudy, and its relationship with the older and more influential Kurdish Worker's Party is disputed. Both say officially they are completely independent of each other. Some PKK supporters maintain that the TAK is full of agent provocateurs of the Turkish state, who want to sabotage the peace overtures of the Kurdish Worker's Party.

This is just as difficult to prove as the official Turkish position, shared by the US administration, that the TAK is a kind of front organisation of the PKK. The latter has condemned the recent terrorist attacks and expressed its condolences for the victims.

The following is what is known at present:

The TAK appeared for the first time in 2004. According to Kurdish sources, it recruits its members from disillusioned former PKK supporters in the student milieu, as well as from among young people in the slum districts of Turkey's large cities, from families that were driven out of Kurdish southeast Anatolia by the Turkish army.

The TAK has claimed responsibility for attacks mainly on civilian, tourist targets, and warns: "If the chauvinist and repressive policy against the Kurdish people is continued, our actions will also continue." From the beginning, the organisation, which emerged at a time of bitter factional fights within the PKK, has declared its loyalty to "Chairman Apo" (Abdullah Öcalan).

The Kurdish Worker's Party has renamed itself several times, most recently in November 2003, when it decided to call itself Kongra-Gel (Kurdish Peoples' Congress). The founding programme of Kongra-Gel supported the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the US and the entry of Turkey into the European Union (EU). It professes to respect the integrity of the Turkish state. The only reaction of the US and the European Union to this rejection of the former separatist goals of the PKK was to classify Kongra-Gel as a terrorist organisation.

At that point, a group around Osman Öcalan, the brother of "Apo," split off and sought—under the name PWD (Patriotic Democratic Party)—to move even closer to the Turkish state

and the Americans, albeit without much success. In June 2004, the PKK/Kongra-Gel announced its unilateral ceasefire.

The PWD leadership were mostly former longstanding PKK cadres, including among them Hidir Sarikaya. According to the conservative German daily *Die Welt*, he was told about the establishment of the TAK in August 2003 by Murat Karayilan, a devoted “Apo” supporter in the PKK leadership. Before splitting with the PKK, he claims he was offered the leadership of a new unit that would conduct terrorist operations exclusively against civilians, but he rejected this. According to Sarikaya, the TAK is subordinated to the PKK’s military wing “special forces,” led by a Syrian Kurd (Feyman Hueseyin).

This version of events should be treated with caution. Sarikaya has a political interest in ingratiating himself with Turkey and its allies at the expense of his former comrades. The credibility of various “confessions” by alleged TAK members presented by Turkish sources and the “intelligence” offerings of the Turkish secret service are also suspect. The Turkish security agencies are as notorious for their provocations as they are for their use of torture.

The PKK has never officially supported attacks on civilian targets, and has generally only engaged in actions against the state security organs. At the same time, it refuses to conduct a common struggle of Kurdish and Turkish workers, ascribing to the latter joint responsibility for the repressive and chauvinist policy of the Turkish state. This was the basis upon which it developed at the end of the 1970s. Its answer to the Kurdish question consisted of a policy of attacks and peace offers aimed at winning the favour of one or other imperialist power with whose assistance it could press a wing of the Turkish establishment to an agreement.

This has never succeeded. Turkey is dominated by the military, which rejects making any concession to the PKK. The geographical location of Kurdish Turkey between Europe, the Caucasus and the Middle East certainly makes the Kurds of interest to the European Union and the US as a means of exerting pressure. However, in the long run, it is the Turkish military that has always been more important to them.

The TAK terrorist attacks will not soften Turkey’s Kurdish policy, but intensify it. They coincide with a change at the top of the Turkish general staff. The outgoing Hilmi Özkök had advocated a relatively moderate policy and a limited degree of liberalisation in the interests of Turkish entry into the European Union, without evoking any great opposition.

In his inaugural speech, his successor, Yasar Büyükanit, has already made clear that he regards all criticism of the army, all calls for democracy and human rights as acts of

separatism and terrorism. A few months ago, he was implicated in the so-called “Semdinli affair,” in which army forces committed terrorist attacks in southeast Turkey that were then blamed on the PKK. Whether or not Büyükanit had any involvement in the recent TAK bombings, their timing was highly beneficial for him.

It is possible that Büyükanit will pursue a foreign policy course that is less oriented toward the European Union and more directed toward the US. The generally liberal *New Anatolian*, an English-language newspaper, praised his hard line against the Kurds as well as his pro-American orientation.

It wrote: “General Yasar Büyükanit has impressed us as a good diplomat as well as an able soldier who has a good grasp of what is going on in southeastern Turkey and about the Kurdish issue. He is well experienced on northern Iraq, which will be one of the most important foreign policy issues in the next two years. He knows well what the United States stands for in our foreign affairs and the value of being a close ally of Washington. The US is also aware of the value of the general, and that is why he was given such a warm reception in Washington last year.”

The likewise liberal and pro-Western newspaper *Radikal* hopes that by participating in the UN force in Lebanon, Turkey can garner support for its actions against the Kurds. “It won’t be the end of the world just because Turkey sends 1,000 soldiers to Lebanon. However, this symbolic gesture will make it easier for Turkey to defend its vital interests,” it wrote.

Intensified repression at home combined with mercenary services provided abroad—that is the course being followed presently by Turkey’s political elite. The TAK’s terrorist attacks only facilitate this, as the regime reacts to sharpening social tensions. The prescriptions of the European Union and International Monetary Fund, which are urging drastic market reforms, have led in recent years to the impoverishment of broad social layers.



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