

ETHNO-NATIONALISM AS A FOUNDATION OF TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS

Abstract:	<p><i>The understanding of ethnonationalism as the foundation of terrorist groups was long suspected to be true, yet only in the last decade, could the research prove to be so. These non-statal actors, which do not act in a violent manner, can become important threats for the national of international security, if provided with the right interest. Stating this, the implications for the regional and European security can be tremendous, as the civilian society will suffer greatly as an aftermath of a terrorist attack. Following this study, knowledge will be gained that will help to better understand the dynamics of relations developed between statal and non-statal actors.</i></p> <p><i>This paper is also an instrument underlying the concept of ethnonationalism and the connection of the term with terrorism, as we presently know it. From a methodological point of view, a qualitative method of research was used – the analysis of a case study, alongside a brief specialty literature review, in which research results regarding the topic were described. This article is open to any and all society members and can raise awareness of the public regarding the phenomenon of transformation of a non-statal actor, by providing some well-needed indicators.</i></p>
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Contact details of the authors:	E-mail: amoraru7104@yahoo.com
Institutional affiliation of the authors:	Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University of Bucharest
Institutions address:	Splaiul Unirii 176, București, România

Introduction

Terrorism can be analyzed from many points of view, being considered one of the most dangerous phenomena that have spread throughout the 21st century. While this is not the first time that warnings have been sounded about terrorist acts

around the world, it is clear that they have intensified in recent times with increasing uncertainty and ignoring and exacerbating the problems in poor countries that are characterized by multiculturalism.

In international law, terrorism includes attacks on diplomatic personnel, hostage-taking, embezzlement, some forms of money laundering and violations against state officials. In the United States, the "war on terror" initiated by President George W. Bush has had a huge impact on prioritizing counterterrorism, while formalizing the phenomenon. The abundance of the causes of the emergence of these organizations raises ethical questions regarding the establishment of the list of terrorist organizations in the world; often there are justified situations that led to the creation of such organizations such as violations of fundamental rights, injustices and the need to meet basic needs.

The term "terrorism" is etymologically a derivative of "terror", a word of Latin origin. Even before the Romans, in Greek mythology, terror - Phobus - and fear - Deimos were the names of the two horses that pulled the chariot of the god Ares, the god of war¹.

The waves of terrorism that hit Europe, America and the Middle East in the 1970^s have taken Western democracies by surprise. Violence has been initiated by states and citizens and directed against other states or their own citizens, in the absence of other opportunities to do justice.

The terrorist act must be seen "as a violent act against an individual, class or representatives of the authorities of a state, which seeks to intimidate or compel them to meet certain requests or objectives underlying its implementation"².

International terrorism is an act that is essentially politically motivated and transcends national borders.³ It is practiced by independent individuals who may or may not enjoy the support of sympathetic states. Through its scope and its ramifications, as well as its objectives, international terrorism has spread throughout Europe, and is already known as "Euroterrorism". But what defines international terrorism is the element of alienation.

The belief that all ethnic nationalists have is that "nations are defined by a common heritage, which usually includes a common language, a common faith, and a common ethnic origin"⁴. It also includes a common culture between group members and a common language; they are therefore different from nationalists, who claim that people can become members of a nation through cultural assimilation.

In this paper, we have analyzed a case study of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an ethno-nationalist terrorist organization. Despite the fact that some of its

¹ Florian Răpan, *Suport de curs: Globalizare, terorism și securitate*, București, 2016, p.5

² Gheorghe Bica, Mihail Burdușel, *Suportul financiar al terorismului internațional*, Eficient, București, 2001, p. 35

³ Cristian Popiștineanu, *Neofascismul, terorismul, pericole pentru lumea contemporană*, Editura Politică, București, 1981, p. 78

⁴ Jerry Muller, *Us and Them*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 87, No. 501/2008, pp. 9-14

claims can be considered justified and their actions, prior to the emergence as a terrorist organization, supported the US in the war on terror, the PKK is an insurgent group active both in its military wing and in its political side.

This scientific research presents qualitative methods (specialty literature review, case study) and aims to establish the indicators that can be observed from early-on of a possible mutation of ethnonationalist groups into insurgent or terrorist ones, as both of these non-state actors fight for common goals, only by different means. Another objective is raising awareness of the civil society on this topic, as currently, there are less and less reliable official sources, and people tend to believe unverified and propagandistic sources, usually through mass-media.

From a structural point of view, the paper contains 2 chapters, *Specialty literature review* and the *Case Study - Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)*.

Specialty literature review

Many authors have undergone exhaustive research on the topic of ethnonationalism, while others even established the link between the concept and terrorism. One of them is Wilson Robin, which in his research¹ he analyzed ethnonationalism in the Northern Ireland and former Yugoslavia regions. The results showed that these groups reconceptualize sovereignty through a mentality based on identity choices and a feeling of minority entrenchment.

Authors² exploring the migratory problems in the region have concluded that Kurds in Syria were subjected to state ethno-exclusion, economic and socio-political marginalization, impacting on their freedom and profoundly altering the demography of their region.

Professors from Warwick University³, while researching the communist-rule conflicts in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo through comparative case studies, have discovered that internal conflict dynamics are critical, especially interactions between ethnic majorities and minorities.

In more recent studies⁴ regarding the role of political and economic dimensions on civil war development, have concluded that inequalities between ethnic groups with political influence and statal actors promote ethnonationalist conflict.

¹ Robin Wilson, *The politics of contemporary ethno-nationalist conflicts*, "Nations and Nationalism", Vol. 7, No. 3/2001, DOI:10.1111/1469-8219.00021, pp. 365–384

² Cemal Ozkahraman, *Kurdish cross-border trade between Syria and Turkey: the socio-political trajectories of Syrian Kurds*, "Middle Eastern Studies", Vol. 57, No. 4/2021 DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2021.1874365, pp. 567-580; Daniel Meier, *Introduction to the Special Issue: Bordering the Middle East*, "Geopolitics", Vol.23, No.3/2018, pp.495–504

³ Maria, Koinova, *Ethnonationalist Conflict in Postcommunist States: Varieties of Governance in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Kosovo*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2013, DOI: 10.9783/9780812208375, pp. 78–99

⁴ Lars-Erik Cederman, Weidmann Nils, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch. *Horizontal Inequalities and Ethnonationalist Civil War: A Global Comparison*, "American Political Science Review", Vol. 105, Nr. 3/2011, DOI: 10.1017/S0003055411000207, pp. 478–95

In recent findings, other researchers suggest that ethnic identity is a significant factor in shaping Kurds' electoral choices and that majority of Kurds in Kurdish towns support the pro-Kurdish parties. For authors studying the Kurdish issue¹, data showed that ethno-national exceptionalism plays a significant role in determining the motivations of political violence among groups and radicalization. Other interesting discoveries are those of Recep Gulmez², whose research concluded that the Syrian refugee problem increased nationalist feelings in Turkey, determining a more violent approach towards PKK members. Other data³, obtained through a qualitative text analysis through the MAXQDA software, on the speeches of Kurdish parliamentary group, found that PKK employed socio-economic, relative deprivation and regional terrorism approaches in gaining influence. Regarding the same topic, Tuncay and Ali⁴ have shown that the Turkish state has consistently failed tackle the Kurdish issue, aspect which can be observed through analyzing the Kurdish Opening in 2009.

Special issues of terrorist-related journals⁵ have researched the connection between ethnonationalism and terrorism. These studies concluded that contemporary terrorism is mainly based on religious motives that characterized left wing and ethno-nationalist terrorism of the past.

Case study: Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

To understand why the PKK is listed as a terrorist organization in many countries around the world, we need to do a historical analysis of it.

In 1970, a group of students led by Abdullah Ocalan came together to form a Marxist-Leninist region in southeastern Turkey. They called their group PKK and

¹ Tahir Abbas, Ismail Hakki Yigit, *Perspectives on Ethno-National Conflict Among Kurdish Families With Members in the PKK*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", Vol. 28, Nr. 2, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2014.908774, pp. 297-315

Vera Eccarius-Kelly, *Surreptitious Lifelines: A Structural Analysis of the FARC and the PKK*, "Terrorism and Political Violence", Vol. 24, 2012, pp. 235-258

² Gulmez Recep, *The Securitization of the Syrian Refugee Crisis Through Political Party Discourses*, "Migration & Integration", Vol. 20, 2019, DOI: 10.1007/s12134-018-0637-2, pp. 887-906

³ Berna Öney, Torsten Selck, *What was the "Kurdish opening" all about? A qualitative text analysis of parliamentary group speeches in Turkey*. "Ethnicities", Vol. 17, Nr. 6/2017, DOI: 10.1177/1468796817700934, pp. 771-791

⁴ Kardaş Tuncay, Balci Ali, *Inter-societal security trilemma in Turkey: understanding the failure of the 2009 Kurdish Opening*, "Turkish Studies", Vol. 17, Nr. 1, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/14683849.2015.1126183, pp. 155-180

⁵ Ersun Kurtulus, *The "New Terrorism" and its Critics*, "Studies in Conflict & Terrorism", Vol. 34, Nr. 6/2011, DOI: 10.1080/1057610X.2011.571194, pp. 476-500

Alexander Spencer, *Sick of the 'new terrorism' debate? A response to our critics*. "Critical Studies on Terrorism", Vol. 4, Nr. 3/2011, pp. 459-467

their goal was to create a Kurdish state.¹ At the time, Turkey was dealing with the problems of the Cold War - a coup took place in 1980². Ocalan established the first PKK headquarters in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley with the support of the Syrian government.

In 1984, the PKK began an armed guerrilla campaign against Turkey. He began attacking state officials and civilians across the country. Villages were set on fire, children were abducted, and people were killed³. By 1990, PKK attacks had crossed Turkey's borders. There were highly coordinated attacks and demonstrations throughout Europe. During the same period, the US State Department published several reports on the involvement of the PKK in organized crime and drug trafficking. These events led to the organization being considered a terrorist organization⁴.

Under pressure from Turkey, Syria has also stopped harboring the PKK. This pushed them to relocate to the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq, just across the border from Turkey, where it has remained until now⁵.

Abdullah Ocalan was arrested in Kenya in 1999, but his arrest did not deter his followers. Although they did not act in any way for the next six years, the PKK consolidated its power and reorganized⁶. PKK, as a political party, operates under different branches in the region: there is PJAK in Iran, PCDK in Iraq and PYD in Syria⁷. They are all known to engage in violent activities. In recent years, the most active is the armed wing of the PYD-YPG.

In the next period, Turkey has seen a dramatic drop in terrorist attacks and deaths. However, the violence began again in 2015, when the ceasefire was unilaterally broken by the PKK and the main figure in the organization, Bese

¹ European Union, *European Union: Counter Terrorism Strategy, Programs and Activities Handbook*, 2011, p. 24

² Redacția Haber 7, *Önce ortam hazırlandı, sonra darbe*, <http://www.haber7.com/siyaset/haber/111090-once-ortam-hazirlandi-sonra-darbe> (2005)

³ Ion Necula, *Turcia a anunțat efectuarea de raiduri aeriene în nordul Siriei pentru anihilarea rebelilor kurzi*, https://www.stiripesurse.ro/turcia-a-anuntat-efectuarea-de-raiduri-aeriene-in-noudul-siriei-pentru-anihilarea-rebelilor-kurzi_1390185.html (15.04.2022)

⁴ Redacția TRT, *Rolul Organizației Teroriste PKK / KCK în traficul de droguri*, <https://www.trt.net.tr/romana/lume/2018/03/20/rolul-organizatiei-teroriste-pkk-kck-in-traficul-de-droguri-933983> (15.04.2022)

⁵ Redacția Daily Sabah, *Nurtured in Qandil, PKK terrorists move to NE Syria, terrorize wider region*, <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2019/07/30/nurtured-in-qandil-pkk-terrorists-move-to-ne-syria-terrorize-wider-region> (15.04.2022)

⁶ Redacția DW, *Liderul PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, îndeamnă susținătorii să predea armele*, <https://www.dw.com/ro/liderul-pkk-abdullah-ocalan-îndeamnă-susținătorii-să-predea-armele/a-16691455> (15.04.2022)

⁷Gareth Stansfield, *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2017, p. 325

Hozat, announced through the media that the time had come for a "revolutionary public war"¹.

Meanwhile, the fight against Daesh in Syria has intensified and the United States has shifted its allegiance to the YPG². With US support, YPG changed its name to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), receiving equipment and training. The US-backed SDF removed Daesh from the region in 2017, but then took control.



Foto 1. Kurdish fighters raise flag of PKK leader in centre of Raqqa³

According to the official CEDO website⁴, 70% of PKK's finances come from drug trafficking and tax collection. In 2015, Amnesty International published a report⁵ in which he presented how the SDF groups deliberately set fire to localities and forced the inhabitants to leave.

Turkey is also trying to erase its border with the group that blocked Turkey and killed hundreds of people. In 2016, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield. His goal was to drive out Daesh and the YPG in northern Syria. Then, in 2018, came the "Olive Branch" operation in Afrin. As a result of the two operations, at least 340,000 refugees were able to return home. Today, Turkey is

¹ Al Jazeera, *Claim: Ceasefire with PKK breaks down after Suruc attack*, http://factcheckingturkey.com/claim-ceasefire-pkk-broken-down-after-suruc-attack-65#footnote5_5lesk6i, (15.04.2022)

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, *PKK*, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa> (15.04.2022)

³ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/kurdish-fighters-raise-flag-pkk-leader-centre-raqqa>, (15.04.2022)

⁴ For details see <https://www.echr.coe.int/>

⁵ Amnesty International, *'We had nowhere else to go' Forced displacement and demolitions in northern Syria*, Peter Benenson House, London, 2015, <http://www.aina.org/reports/aiwhnetg.pdf>, (15.04.2022)

conducting Operation Peace Spring to create an area of 480 km long by 30 km wide that separates them from the Kurds¹.

Despite these actions, there are obstacles that prevent them from invading the region:

Since 1984, the PKK has been fighting the Turkish state, killing more than 40,000 people. According to a CIA Factbook², There are an estimated 12 million Kurds in Turkey. The PKK claims that it is fighting for the right of self-determination for the Kurdish people of Turkey.

This group is recognized as a terrorist organization not only by Turkey, but by many entities, including the EU, NATO, USA, Australia, Japan. However, the United States has been training and arming the FDS group since 2015. Despite its known affiliation with the PKK, the United States has seen the FDS as a key ally in its fight against Daesh in Syria. As of 9/29/2019, more than 300 civilians in Turkey have been killed by Daesh, and Turkey has arrested more than 5,000 Daesh terrorists and neutralized 3,500³.

An important question to ask is - Why didn't the US seek a partnership with Turkey in the fight against Daesh? "We are accused of supporting Daesh (Islamic State). It now provides support to terrorist groups, including Daesh, YPG, PYD. It is very clear. We have confirmed evidence with pictures, photos and videos"⁴, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the President of Turkey.

Instead, US support for the SDF has encouraged the terrorist group, which claims to be Kurdish interests, although most Kurds oppose the SDF and the PKK. In 2019, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the YPG had recruited 313 children and used many schools for military purposes⁵.

As Operation Spring of Peace continued, FDS released 800 prisoners from Daesh prisons to hamper Turkey's attempts to secure the area.

Conclusions

In conclusion, as long as the PKK gained the support of the West, not only the people of Turkey but also the Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen in the region suffered, despite the terrorist organization's help in capturing and killing Daesh-affiliated terrorists.

¹ Redacția TRT, *Op. cit.*

² CIA, *CIA factbook. Middle East: Turkey*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>, (15.04.2022)

³ Onur Orhan, *Turkey: 100 Daesh/ISIS terrorists arrested in raids*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-100-daesh-isis-terrorists-arrested-in-raids/1630733>, (15.04.2022)

⁴ Toksabay Ece, *Erdogan says U.S.-led coalition gives support to terrorist groups in Syria*, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKBN14G1EU>, (15.04.2022)

⁵ Betül Yuruk, *313 children recruited by YPG/PKK terror group: UN*, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/313-children-recruited-by-ypg-pkk-terror-group-un/1543354>, (15.04.2022)

The interpretation of the SDF as a terrorist organization by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish inaction and attempts to create conflict in the region - all this, together, lead to the creation of opportunities for Daesh. The history of this terrorist organization shows an evolution dependent on the environment, because in the periods when it received support, it offered help and behaved like a US ally, and when it received "anti-terrorist" treatment it behaved exactly like a terrorist organization. This leads to the idea that the terrorist organization, although an asymmetric threat, or perhaps that is why it should be kept close, used for the purpose of achieving global security, to receive a purpose and the means to accomplish it. With extreme caution and continuous surveillance, the PKK could help fight the Taliban, as well as other theaters of operations, alongside NATO forces.

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