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Winning a Low Intensity Conflict: Drawing Lessons from the Turkish Case

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Terms such as ‘unconventional warfare’ and ‘small wars’, which were used extensively during the Cold War era, began to be replaced in the late 1980s with the term low intensity conflict (LIC), particularly by American scholars and practitioners. Since the literature around the characteristics of LIC is still growing, it has not yet reached the stage of a well-developed and accepted terminology.

Discussions about LIC have often suffered because of a tendency to define the very concept by what it is not: conventional or nuclear war. Those attempts at definition are often criticized for being excessively broad and inclusive, and ultimately, therefore, considered as not useful for comprehensive generalizations and conceptualizations. This study of a very significant case of LIC, that of the approximately 20-year long struggle between the Turkish state and the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), is an attempt to contribute to the database about LICs in a manner that may suggest routes for further conceptualization and, eventually, a more comprehensive understanding of what is certain to be the dominant form of conflict for years to come.

On the basis of the following discussion of LIC, this article considers the Turkish/PKK struggle a ‘typical’ LIC and therefore an important case for the general study of LICs. On the one side we have the second largest army in NATO, one with long-standing traditions, highly trained and disciplined in the art of conventional warfare, and on the other we have the PKK, a classic example of the irregular combatant. Not only had the PKK leadership and militants fully absorbed the theory and practice of organized violence, they also had extreme familiarity with the battle terrain, excellent training and indoctrination, and highly extensive and effective international state support both within and outside the region.

This article identifies five challenges as having been crucial to the success and/or failure of the Turkish state’s dealings with the PKK in the 1974–2000 period:

1. Diagnosing the nature, scope, and capacities of the PKK insurgency;
2. Coordinating relations between the Turkish security establishment and the politicians;
3. Transforming and adapting the Turkish armed forces to an unconventional form of warfare;
4. Winning democratic popular support; and
5. Coping with international and regional support for the PKK.

Following a discussion of how LIC has been defined, the essay offers a brief background to some of the proposed challenges. The remainder of the piece explores the challenges themselves. Specifically, by giving chronological examples of key events and decisions, we will show the changes that were made over time in the ways in which each of the challenges were perceived and managed. By doing this we are able to suggest possible turning points, from unsuccessful to successful management, as well as identifying relations between the various challenges and the possible relevance of these interactions on the ultimate results of the conflict.

Identifying Low Intensity Conflict

One important reason for some of the definitional confusion about LICs stems from the fact that a wide variety of what can be considered as ‘forms of LICs’ may occur, either simultaneously or at different times. Some of these are termed counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, peacekeeping operations, and peacetime contingency operations. These can be either offensive or defensive.¹

Among the types of conflict considered offensive, insurgencies are a revolt or riot against a legitimate

government of a state by citizens of that state. These citizens create an organization in order to overthrow the existing regime or destroy the territorial integrity of the state, and do this without the support of external forces. The instruments of insurgencies against the ruling state are most frequently terrorism and guerrilla warfare, which can itself be further divided according to the circumstances of its origin, that is whether it is a spontaneous uprising of the people or whether it derives its main support from other countries or states.² Guerrilla warfare pits the weak against the strong, and generally constitutes an example of military-strategic asymmetry.³ Guerrilla warfare is rarely decisive militarily, but it can serve as a prelude to conventional warfare.⁴

Terrorism encapsulates the use of violence by non-military or irregular groups for political purposes against civilian and/or military/security personnel and facilities. If the terrorist acts are supported by a state as a part of its foreign policy, terrorism can be considered an offensive LIC operation. Offensive forms of LICs include peacemaking operations, which aim to reestablish peace through the use of military force or the threat of military force. Peacemaking operations take place either before a peacekeeping operation or following one that failed.⁵

Counterinsurgency is defined broadly as a 'defensive' operation undertaken by a government in order to try and defeat an insurgency, through the use of military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and/or civic actions.⁶ Aid-to-Civil power is a term more common in the British literature, and is used to describe a situation in which the challenge to a regime is not serious enough to be classified as an insurgency, but control by anti-terrorist operations alone is not possible. Thus the armed forces are required to assist the police in facing the challenge. In this kind of operation, civil power has primacy, and operations are conducted under the auspices of domestic law. Foreign Internal Defense (FID) is a term used primarily in the US military establishment to describe military assistance programs aiming to strengthen friendly countries' defense capabilities, particularly during LIC.

Another defensive operation is combating terrorism, which seeks to protect installations, units, and individuals from the threat of terrorists. Peacekeeping operations are military operations designed to maintain a peace that has already been achieved through diplomatic efforts. A peacekeeping force supervises and implements a negotiated truce to which the combatant parties have agreed. Finally, Peacetime Contingency Operations (PCO) are defined as 'politically sensitive military activities normally characterized by short-term, rapid projections or deployment of forces in conditions short of war which complement political and informational initiative'.⁷ PCOs encompass a variety of operation types, some of which may fall under the offensive or defensive heading:

- a. Shows of force and demonstrations;
- b. Noncombatant evacuation operations;
- c. Rescue and recovery operations;
- d. Strike raids;
- e. Unconventional warfare;
- f. Peacemaking operations;
- g. Security assistance surges.

In the Turkish/PKK case we can see both offensive and defensive LIC forms. In the early years of the conflict, from roughly 1979 to 1986, we see growing rural terrorism and guerrilla activities, and consequent counter-terrorism policy on the part of the state. Following the 1985 lifting of martial law in the southeastern region of Turkey, the army moved into a support role that could fall under the category of 'aid to civil power'. By 1992–93, the conflict could be characterized as an insurgency, with the corresponding counterinsurgency and counterterrorist efforts on the part of the state.

Several common aspects exist in all LIC situations. First, armies have difficulties fighting a LIC. Armies are trained to fight armies, and are not usually well prepared in terms of force structure, weapons, equipment, or strategy, to wage this type of conflict. Fighting LICs requires special forces, or training in the techniques of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. Second, the political aspect of LICs is crucial. In a conventional war all the elements of national power are present to support the military, whereas in a LIC the military is only one of the elements in the political, economic, cultural and social campaign. In other words, in a LIC the

ultimate aim is political rather than military in nature. The political level sets political targets, which are realized with military support. Thus a LIC requires the determination, dedication, and political acumen of both the politicians and military leaders. Finally, LICs are not short-term struggles, rather they are conflicts of attrition. Quick victories are virtually impossible, and commitment to a protracted effort is required. Meeting this requirement is often a greater challenge for a democratic state than for the irregular combatant, for example, a terrorist organization, since over time it becomes more difficult for the former to relocate resources for the struggle and to persuade public opinion to sustain casualties.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Two of the challenges identified in the struggle against the PKK require background discussion: coordination between the political and military levels, and the PKK's international support. It is important to note that civil-military relations in Turkey do have a fairly unique character. Full subordination of the soldiers to the politicians has never occurred, and the military realm has not only remained relatively autonomous from the political one, but has also appeared quite determined, in periods of military interventions, to try and counterbalance any civilian attempts at expanding their own sphere of influence. The primary reasoning and justification behind the military's resilient autonomy seems to be based on a widespread understanding that there are so many internal cleavages and external security challenges facing Turkey that an ultimate guardian is needed to prevent the final collapse of the country. The 'incompetent' and 'fragmented' political figures and parties are seen as unable to fulfill this role, due to their seemingly shortsighted seeking of political interests.

This understanding and possibly its manipulation has led not only to a bifurcated state system in which the military enjoys a certain institutional autonomy, but also to a *de facto* situation in which the military is automatically given full responsibility to deal with issues categorized under the rubric of national security. Although this was certainly the case at the end of the actual combat period against the PKK, the outset of the clash presented a shift in the usual structure of Turkish civil-military relations, due both to democratic expansion and to the unusual civilian leadership of Turgut Özal, Turkish prime minister and later president. Özal generally resisted leaving the PKK issue solely to the military, allowing for a clash between civilian political response and the security approach of the military. After Özal's death in 1993, the pattern returned to a more traditional one of full military control over the situation with complete budgetary backing of the politicians. Interestingly, the delay in taking command in the early years of the insurgency gave the military time to learn about the PKK, the type of combat that was to be involved, and to prepare a suitable response. One could even argue that in the early years the army was unwilling to accept immediate full responsibility for managing the PKK situation.

The second challenge requiring some background discussion is the international support for the PKK, which has taken on two main forms: state-sponsored support and transnational support through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). State-sponsored support has generally been embedded in geopolitical concerns. NGO efforts, on the other hand, have largely been linked to the increasing awareness in Europe and the United States of human rights and democratization, and have often been the result of the politically active Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

The transnational nature of the Kurdish issue—the dispersion of the Kurdish population in the Middle East, divided among neighboring countries—has turned the issue into a factor for conflict as well as for cooperation. At times, states which share this 'problem' have felt the need to cooperate to counter the unwelcome possibility of an independent Kurdish state. For example, during the period of uncertainty after the Gulf War of 1991, several trilateral meetings took place between Iran, Turkey and Syria, emphasizing a regional commitment to maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity.⁸

However, the cooperative mode has been overshadowed by a conflict: Iraq, Iran and Syria have rarely refrained from playing the 'Kurdish card' against each other and, in particular, against Turkey. These three countries have benefited from having much smaller Kurdish populations than Turkey, and also from being able to adopt very harsh military measures against any domestic Kurdish insurgency.

The three have also not been blind to the obvious rise in Turkish power on three fronts: economic, with the creation of the Southeastern Anatolian Project (GAP); strategic, *vis-à-vis* Central Asia and the Caucasus after the Soviet collapse; and military, as a US ally and via Turkish-Israeli cooperation. Finding it difficult to

balance the growing might of the rising regional power, Turkey, the three neighbors have often felt the need to play the Kurdish hand. Similarly, Turkey's location at the meeting point of Eurasia, the Middle East and Europe, has often bred additional friction, leading to further international support for the PKK from Greece and Russia.

Turkish attempts to counter Kurdish political efforts abroad were rarely successful, thereby creating extra pressure for the Turkish government and its security forces. Most of these political efforts stem from Europe, while pro-PKK elements in the United States generally failed to rally public support to a degree that they could influence US policy making.⁹

European growing awareness of the Kurdish issue and, eventually, sympathy for the PKK peaked in the late 1980s, with the release of pictures of the 1988 chemical attacks on a Kurdish town in Northern Iraq. Support deteriorated around 1994, primarily due to a series of violent and illegal demonstrations staged by the PKK in Germany. Despite the new image of the Kurd as a violent figure rather than a victim, it was too late for the Europeans to drop the Kurdish issue because it had by then become a European problem.¹⁰

For Turkish state officials, the Europeanization of the Kurdish issue created greater pressures. First, many politicians clearly did not want Turkey to have a bad relationship with Europe, since it was trying to become a member of the European Union. Europe also represented Turkey's single largest trading partner, and was home to 3 million Turkish citizens. The Turkish armed forces also felt pressure from Europe, as they were forbidden from using European-acquired weapons in their combat with the PKK. While the military conflict ended, the PKK's European network remained intact, and still constitutes a key player in the future development of the Kurdish issue.

THE PKK'S EARLY YEARS

The PKK was established in Ankara in 1974 by a group of communist students of Kurdish descent. Their leader, Abdullah Öcalan, the son of a peasant family from the southeastern city of anliurfa, was at the time a student of political science at the University of Ankara. Initially, the PKK was a small, insignificant terrorist organization and did not play an important role in the Turkish radical left political scene. The PKK members were called *Apocular*, or the followers of 'Apo'—a nickname for Abdullah Öcalan. The Apocu movement was not the only Kurdish political activity in Turkey in the 1970s, but it managed to distinguish itself as the most violent one. While other communist Kurdish organizations were targeting the Turkish state, the Apocu movement initially opted to attack and destroy its own political rivals.¹¹ By the late 1970s, the PKK began also attacking the members of the traditional political elite of southeastern Turkey, of Kurdish origin, who were loyal to the Turkish state and therefore seen as agents of 'imperialism and internal colonialism'.¹² The attacks on the members of the most powerful groups in the region aimed to impress the local people with their fearlessness. Moreover, by gradually fomenting strife between various Kurdish tribes, they were able to gain supporters (by supporting one side or another in these intertribal clashes), and in general to terrify the rest.

According to Turkish police records, by 1980 the PKK had killed a large number of people, approximately 350. In that relatively short time, the PKK was able to become one of the most important Kurdish organizations. It had created dedicated militant cadres and had gained supporters in southeastern Turkey. As a result of its attacks against the tribes, the socio-political strength and legitimacy of the tribal system had begun to erode. For a short time, the PKK was also able to control some local administrative bodies. Most importantly, the PKK had demonstrated that it was able to challenge state authority.

THE CHALLENGES

Turkish Miscalculations: Late 1970s-1985

In terms of the first of the challenges, correctly diagnosing the significance of the threat, by the start of the 1980s, the Turkish state had largely failed. By not targeting Turkish interests in the early years, the PKK was able to accomplish their goals without receiving significant scrutiny by the Turkish security establishment. Öcalan has described the 1973–78 period of the PKK as a time for ideological education and the creation of

an avantgarde leadership; the 1978–80 period as one for testing the political line of the party; and the 1980–84 period as a time for retreat and preparation for the struggle to come. By hiding from the government in the early years, the PKK was able to accomplish these goals without interference from the Turkish state. Thus, although the Turkish intelligence services were certainly aware of the PKK's presence at the time in the southeast region, they were tactically taken by surprise when the direct attacks finally came in 1984.¹³ The failure of diagnosis continued around 1985, when the PKK's unsuccessful performance led the Turkish army into an unwarranted state of confidence that they were winning the struggle.

At the PKK's second party congress, held in Syria in August 1982, the party officially decided to begin an insurrection in Turkey. Öcalan felt that the necessary conditions for guerrilla warfare were all in evidence: a vast land/fighting space, a rural underdeveloped population, and inadequate state communications and transportation. The duration of the struggle was projected by Öcalan to last well after the year 2000, by which time the PKK was expected to have become strong enough to establish a conventional army to destroy the Turkish army in southeastern Turkey.¹⁴

At that time, the loss of Baghdad's control over Northern Iraq due to the Iran–Iraq war (1980–88) not only provided an area for retreat for the PKK, but also the overall strategic conflicts between the regional countries and Turkey gave the PKK leadership an additional card to use in its struggle. Öcalan knew that he could benefit from exploiting regional animosities and by playing the regional states against each other. These included not just Iraq, Iran, and Syria—all of whom had strategic problems with Turkey—but also Greece and Southern Cyprus, and the Soviet Union, which throughout the Cold War supported subversive movements in NATO countries. Between 1979 and 1982 in particular, the PKK benefited tremendously from its contacts with Syrian intelligence, which was supported and infiltrated by the Soviets. In Northern Iraq, the PKK was able to work in harmony in this period with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), while Syria and Lebanon offered training grounds for PKK militants. For its part, Ankara sought to address the international factor in part by signing a treaty with Baghdad, granting Turkey the right to enter ten kilometers within Iraqi territory and to perform operations there. Many politicians and military planners failed, however, to grasp the importance of a guerrilla group's rear bases in a low intensity conflict, and thus, in the years 1983–88, Ankara did not make adequate use of its right to cross-border operations. When such operations took place, the goal was not to crush the rear bases of the PKK, but simply to appease Turkish public opinion.

By spring 1986, two additional international factors helped the PKK to infiltrate Turkey further. The first was the Turkish–Greek dispute in the Aegean, following which two elite commando brigades of the Turkish Armed Forces, the most effective military units against the PKK's infiltration from Iraq and Iran, were dispatched to the Aegean.¹⁵ Second, the Turkish security forces wrongly assumed that the PKK militants would continue to use only the Iraqi border to penetrate into Turkey, and did not attach enough importance to setting up security along the Iranian border. In return for Iranian support, the PKK shared intelligence it gathered on Turkey with Tehran, and avoided establishing contacts with (and thereby breeding revolutionary movements among) the Iranian Kurdish population. Iran also made sure to stipulate that the PKK carry out its attacks at least 50 kilometers away from the Iranian border, and thereby limited Ankara's ability to directly accuse its neighbor of aiding the PKK.

At that time, the PKK was able to take advantage of its own small size to outwit the comparably massive and powerful Turkish military and state intelligence structure. By observing total secrecy in all of their organizational activity, by being highly mobile and restricting themselves to action primarily at night, the approximately 200 PKK militants of the early 1980s were able to avoid being located.¹⁶ The first direct attacks on Erüh and emdinli in 1984 surprised the Turkish army, which transferred elite commando units into the region, but these too found it impossible to locate any PKK members.

Although the operations of the early 1980s were often successful (probably due to an unbroken chain of command achieved thanks to the fact that the region was under martial law), they also indicated many shortcomings of the armed forces. The number of security forces was not enough to control the region and protect each village. Intelligence gathering was inadequate. Communication facilities and the transportation system were inefficient, and did not allow Turkish security forces to arrive at remote villages and protect residents from PKK attacks or harassment. Adequate equipment was lacking. While conventional sweeps with helicopters were made after each PKK attack, these were mostly ineffective. For example, technical limitations of the Turkish helicopters made it impossible to carry out such sweeps at night. Most importantly

perhaps, the armed forces were not yet prepared at the doctrinal level to think of their task in terms of low intensity conflict, and thus their strategies were not suitable for fighting a modern guerrilla war. While they recruited anti-guerrilla teams from the police, and set up new anti-PKK training for the gendarmerie and army, these measures were all taken without a sustainable and comprehensive strategy. Instead, the army sought to address the obvious shortcomings by reactivating the Temporary Village Guard system (TVG) of the 1920s and 1930s, which had then been initiated to give peasants the opportunity to protect themselves against gangs. Nevertheless, the village guards in the 1980s were ill-armed, ill-trained and, subsequently, easy prey for the PKK.¹⁷

While the army failed to formulate a grand strategy, the gaps between the security establishment and the politicians, in understanding the situation, widened. When the first attacks were made by the PKK, the politicians of the Turkish government generally underestimated their significance, and labeled the PKK as a ‘handful of bandits’. This minimalist approach slowed down the Turkish security forces’ preparation for the task at hand.¹⁸

The PKK was somewhat less successful in the early years in the fourth challenge area— winning popular support. While PKK militants scanned the southeast to recruit local supporters and to find suitable places for guerrilla bases, they were largely met with resistance. Öcalan also admitted this failure on various occasions. Whilst the Turkish Kurds did not support the PKK for the most part, the local people also did not show any strong resistance, as long as the PKK did not cause any direct trouble.¹⁹ Following the PKK’s attacks on Eruh and emdinli and the security forces’ response, however, the attitude of the local people toward the PKK changed radically. Though previously ignored or regarded as common outlaws, PKK militants were now seen as playing with fire by attacking the state’s authority, and thus their presence became more threatening to the common people. Ankara’s harsh response increased this perception, eliciting popular opposition to the PKK. In some cases they gave information about PKK militants’ whereabouts to the Turkish security forces, in other cases they themselves arrested or even killed PKK members.²⁰ The establishment of the rather ineffective Village Guard system nevertheless became a symbol for the PKK, who saw the guards as a sign of the people’s readiness to support Ankara. When the PKK launched their ‘spring offensive’ in March 1985, all three operations were unsuccessful, in part because of the organization’s inexperience, but also due to the lack of popular support.

1985–90: A Strengthened PKK

Recognizing the importance of gathering popular support, the PKK established in March 1985 a political arm (the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan, or ERNK) to manage mass activities,²¹ press meetings, intelligence collection, party security activities, and financial and fundraising assets.²² By 1986, the struggle for societal support was officially on. The PKK leadership decided to begin attacks on those villages that were loyal to the Turkish state, in an effort to ‘isolate the enemy from the people’.²³ The logic of killing the peasants is depicted by strategy master Sun Tzu, as ‘kill one, frighten tens of thousands’.²⁴ Öcalan argued that by attacking ‘soft targets’ like peasants, village leaders, and teachers, he could show the people that the Turkish state was not able to protect its own citizens or supporters. Moreover, by frightening the people, the PKK aimed to cut the flow of information to the Turkish security forces. The PKK also initiated abduction of young people forcing them to join the PKK: the so-called ‘recruitment law’. The PKK leadership felt that this would serve the immediate purpose of enlarging the ranks of members, and would also ultimately increase public support by making the people accomplices to the PKK’s actions.²⁵ Although the families of the kidnapped recruits were initially angered, they would eventually provide food, shelter, and clothing to the militants. When their sons were killed by the Turkish security forces, the families and often entire tribes would become PKK supporters.²⁶ By 1988 the PKK had succeeded in increasing its numbers significantly, though far from its expectations. As Öcalan would later complain, ‘we look at the practices in many countries and see that the guerrilla began with 300 people and the number rose to 10,000 in two years. We too began with 300 people but we are now only 500 strong.’²⁷

On the other side, Ankara continued to fail to realize that low intensity conflicts are to a large extent propaganda wars, and that a significant portion of the battle is over the hearts and minds of the people. Moreover, it did not even recognize its own advantage in this arena. It neglected to explain and justify its

own position both domestically and abroad, and later would discover that this would prove a very costly mistake. Moreover, Ankara made the crucial mistake of repeatedly declaring that the PKK was destroyed. Each time the PKK then staged a spectacular counterattack on civilian targets, the government forces would lose credibility while the PKK would gain prestige by demonstrating its resistance to the powerful Turkish army.

As the second half of the 1980s progressed, Ankara continued to have problems due to the conflicting perspectives of the security establishment and the politicians to the problem. In 1987, as a result of gradual democratization, the Turkish parliament ended the martial law, which had been declared over the southeast in 1978, and instead declared a state of emergency in ten southeastern provinces. The army units that had been in actual combat with the PKK during the time of martial law were pulled out of combat, and replaced with new gendarmerie units who were lacking combat experience. During the transition between martial law and the state of emergency, the security forces experienced many setbacks. One reason was that as the PKK began to attack more frequently, the military targets were put under psychological pressure. The main aim of the commanders at this point became a defensive one of trying to stop and, primarily, avoid the attacks. The extra security measures included closing down some gendarmerie stations, halting night-time operations, and leaving smaller villages virtually on their own—at the mercy of the PKK. Another reason was that the hierarchy under the ‘state of emergency’ was complicated, with bureaucratic requirements that further hampered the Turkish military’s ability to react promptly. Perhaps most importantly, the establishment of the state of emergency revealed the politicians’ misunderstanding of the nature of the conflict. By openly limiting the use of its military against the PKK, Ankara did not heed the argument that a military campaign is doomed to failure when ‘the anti-guerrilla side puts a low value on defeating the guerrillas and does not commit its full resources to the struggle’.²⁸

By 1988, in the wake of the Iran—Iraq War, the Iraqi army was pushing north to occupy the territory along the Turkish—Iraqi border, forcing tens of thousands of refugees, including many Iraqi-Kurdish militants, to flee from the area. Baghdad sought permission from Turkey to pursue these Kurdish militants onto Turkish territory, but Ankara refused permission, and instead gave protection to the Kurdish refugees.²⁹ Unspoken Turkish concerns that Baghdad would cross into Turkey in pursuit of KDP fighters prevented Ankara from renewing their own ‘hot pursuit’ agreement with Baghdad. Officially, the reason given for this decision was that Iraq had now reestablished control over Northern Iraq and that Turkey had no need to stage cross-border operations.³⁰ The result of this decision was that the territory along the Turkish—Iraqi border became a PKK sanctuary, supported by the Iraqi forces. After a long period of cooperation with Turkey, Baghdad switched to support the PKK.³¹

The PKK’s objectives in 1988 were to supplement the guerrilla war by moving gradually into mobile war. The goals of this stage were defined as annihilating enemy manpower and conquering land. The main type of tactical operations were ambushes on security patrols, raids on gendarmerie guardhouses, sabotage against factories and transportation facilities, assassination of civil and military people, destroying schools, and killing teachers.³²

The PKK also began to question its policy of village massacres, as they seemed to back-fire in the quest to gain public support. While sharply reducing the number of the village raids and killings, Öcalan also sought to clear the PKK of some responsibility for the attacks, by attempting to shift the blame to local groups.³³ By 1989 the PKK had succeeded in gaining greater support of some of the Kurdish population.³⁴ By 1990 Öcalan ordered not only the complete cessation of all village massacres,³⁵ but also offered a general amnesty to village guard members who were ready to give up their arms and cooperate with the PKK.³⁶ These efforts had considerable effect, as witnessed by the beginning of demonstrations against security forces,³⁷ which the PKK referred to as ‘Serdilhan’, or the Kurdish *intifada*.

The causes of this shift in local public opinion were not only due to the PKK’s own policies. Turkish security forces engaging in the pursuit of PKK members were understandably suspicious of the villagers in areas known to be supportive of the PKK, therefore villagers were often given rough treatment as if they were all PKK supporters. This behavior caused alienation between the people and the security forces, and growing numbers of young people turned to the PKK. The volunteer recruits’ motives varied: some joined in order to enhance their personal fortunes, others were Kurdish nationalists.³⁸

1991–92: A Gradual Turn of the Tide

The end of the 1991 Gulf War gave yet another boost to the PKK, as they were able to capture new areas and stocks of weapons in Northern Iraq. Moreover, while the Iraqi intelligence service benefited from the information it received from the PKK, the latter was supplied with weaponry, including rockets and mortars, from Baghdad.³⁹ The PKK also received a new form of assistance from their Syrian backers, when the Syrian government began encouraging their own Kurdish citizens to join the military wing of the PKK. As an enticement to join the PKK, Syrian Kurds were exempt from military service in the Syrian army. As a result of this policy, the percentage of Syrian Kurds in the PKK ranks rose to 30 percent in the early 1990s.⁴⁰ In general, the PKK ranks were swelling at a rapid pace, and by the spring of 1991, the number of armed militants was estimated at nearly 12,000.

In 1991, the Turkish armed forces seemed very rigid, in many ways, in terms of their continued use of conventional warfare tactics and slow adaptation to LIC. In what was still a primarily defensive attitude, the Turkish military expended most of its energies on protecting its poorly armed gendarmerie units.⁴¹ This included planting defensive minefields around the guardhouses, and supporting each guardhouse with a tank and artillery team. Despite initial resistance by the Turkish General Staff,⁴² heavy artillery units were finally added in order to bombard attacking PKK units while reserve troops were sent out to surround them.

In the spring of 1991, however, the General Staff announced that the army would be adopting a battlefield domination concept in their fight against the PKK. In other words, the armed forces would be taking a more decisive involvement in the fight, using its numerical superiority to try to reestablish control of the field. Accordingly, some army units were reorganized and trained for counterinsurgency, and labeled as ‘internal security battalions’.⁴³ These battalions were mobile groups, whose main task was to block and annihilate any PKK units that penetrated into their patrol areas. The true impact of these special battalions would not be observed, however, until two years later, in the spring of 1993.

Another military change in 1991 was the resumption of cross-border operations into Northern Iraq. Ankara was determined to put an end to the sanctuary that the PKK had enjoyed in Northern Iraq since 1988. In the fall of 1991 it began a series of raids against PKK strongholds there. A five-kilometer-wide security zone was set up along the Turkish—Iraqi border, and was to be jointly patrolled by Barzani’s KDP and Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) forces, both of whom wanted to reduce the PKK political influence. In addition, Ankara began to create an intelligence network in Northern Iraq. Various units of the Turkish security and intelligence forces settled in the Northern Iraqi cities of Dokuk, Zakho, Arbil, and Salah-al-Din.

The Turkish escalation began causing some complications for the PKK. On the organizational side, the PKK was faced with a lack of proper commanders for its growing battalions. While it was a relatively easy task to lead groups of five or a dozen men, it was a much more complex job to lead units of hundreds. Moreover, the PKK engaged in open combat a fully fledged army that could put together joint operations and air force without themselves having air or artillery support. The growth of the PKK units also meant that secrecy could no longer be maintained. The movements of large groups could be detected in advance, and they were made vulnerable to air raids by the Turkish airforce or to attack helicopters. Increased wireless communication between the various PKK units also made them vulnerable to signal intelligence.

Despite these problems, the PKK’s relentless attacks along the border often resulted in heavy Turkish losses. The security forces’ still primarily defensive posture allowed the PKK units to operate freely in the region, including blocking traffic between the cities in the southeast. In Ankara, the politicians had grown pessimistic about the state’s chances to win against the insurgents, and looked for ways of establishing contacts with the PKK.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the Turkish security bureaucracy and the armed forces were still resisting any form of compromise with the PKK. The traditional characteristics of Turkish public opinion—patriotic and statist—tipped the balance firmly in favor of the security forces. While public support among the local populations of the southeast played a crucial role in the actual battle between the PKK and the security forces, the winning of Turkish societal support as a whole was crucial in the struggle between the security establishment and the politicians in terms of the large-scale management of the entire issue.

On the frontlines, the Turkish armed forces were gradually taking a more aggressive stance. 1992 saw even larger cross-border operations into Iraq. Nevertheless, the PKK was still dominant in large areas of the southeastern countryside. Then Öcalan felt that it was possible to mobilize the people of the region against

the Turkish state and lead them into a full-scale war. He was confident about the extent of public support for the PKK, and envisioned the combination of the PKK's continuous attacks with mass demonstrations and riots in order to secure concessions from Ankara. The PKK applied this combination in several small southeastern cities in March 1992 in an attempt to take the cities under PKK control. After a few days of heavy clashes in four cities, the security forces succeeded in maintaining control, gaining a powerful psychological boost. Increasingly offensive, the Turkish security forces immediately launched ground and aerial 'mopping-up' operations in areas under PKK control, and successive military operations along the border.

By the fall of 1992, Öcalan was aware of the sensitive psychological balance that had been reached in the war, and sought to break Ankara's will to fight by shocking the Turkish political system with the full occupation of a small city or town. Yet, Turkish security forces did not provide the PKK with any more opportunities to attack the towns again, restricting the PKK to continuing attacks on gendarmerie guardhouses. A major attack by 500 PKK militants on guardhouses in the emdinli–Derecik region was launched to raise spirits on the PKK side, but the Turks' use of Super Cobra helicopters allowed them to parry the attack,⁴⁵ and to kill 174 PKK fighters.⁴⁶ The PKK suffered heavier losses in subsequent attacks. Ultimately, the increasingly intensive usage of helicopters proved to be a major factor in the PKK's military defeat.⁴⁷ With ever growing confidence and resolve, the Turkish army launched its largest cross-border operation into Northern Iraq on October 12, 1992. 15,000 soldiers, supported by tanks, helicopters, and air force, took part in the fierce clashes along the border. Rather than retreat from the border region and harass the Turkish troops by raids, ambushes or sabotage, the PKK units fought a conventional-style war with the Turkish army, and in turn suffered heavy losses.⁴⁸ These losses have been attributed to the Turks' use of tanks and also to better Turkish intelligence, which allowed precise air bombings. The PKK also lost much of its infrastructure in Northern Iraq as a result of this operation. Supply and ammunition depots were destroyed, tons of food caches were captured, and perhaps most importantly, their already shaken state of mind was dealt a heavy blow.

The Turkish decision-makers finally did recognize the importance of having public opinion on their side, and so they recruited the mainstream media for help. The media began to voice their support for the new war policy. In addition, pro-PKK publications were banned. Stronger and more effective measures were taken to cut off the PKK's main source of revenue—drug smuggling. And, at the request of the government, the Turkish armed forces for the first time became engaged in the struggle at their full capacity.

In response to Ankara's total war policy, the PKK resumed its attacks on soft targets, killing teachers, state officials, and those Kurds who were openly loyal to the Turkish state. It also increased its attacks on construction machinery, communication systems, irrigation systems, and power plants, systematically working to regain control along the Turkish—Iraqi border. While some 2,000 PKK militants were able to settle back along the border, their attacks on the gendarmerie stations became less effective. Having lost the ability to launch large-scale attacks with 300–500 men, the PKK returned to small unit tactics. By this time the PKK's military units also received substantial support from the political and armed activities of the ERNK.⁴⁹ Under its new initiative and mandate, the Turkish security forces began operations in the city centers to crush the ERNK network. Large numbers of activists were arrested, and those who resisted were killed. ERNK's ability to organize the people dropped sharply.

1993–95: Turkey Gains the Upper Hand

Due in part to a temporary warming in Turkish relations with Syria and Iran at the end of the Gulf War,⁵⁰ the PKK declared a cease-fire from mid-March to mid-April 1993. While Ankara did not officially recognize it, the Turkish government did order the armed forces to limit their military operations. Meanwhile, the government continued to think in terms of political reforms. One month later, however, a group of PKK members killed 33 unarmed Turkish soldiers near the city of Bingöl. The assault elicited a strong reaction in public opinion and in the government, reducing support for reforms. As result, the government opted instead for total war against terrorism.

As a part of the 'total war concept', the Turkish army officially changed its threat perception in August 1993. Where formerly the number one threat to Turkish security had been Greece, it officially became the internal one posed by the PKK.⁵¹ Accordingly, the forces of Turkey's second army division, based in

Malatya, were reinforced. New special troops were established, and the structure of the Turkish army changed from division-based to a corps-brigade-battalion structure for rapid response.⁵² Aerial reconnaissance was stressed, and the army developed a two-step strategy to hinder the PKK's night operations. Better optical devices were distributed to the security units, and equipment was purchased to enable wintertime operations. A new program, the 'sergeant with tenure' initiative, increased the ratio of experienced personnel among the security force ranks, and were very important in achieving the military's goals in the 1990s. In terms of strategy, the armed forces began adapting anti-guerrilla tactics. Security forces laid ambushes, patrolled the mountains and, in a sense, lived and fought like the PKK members themselves. They also began to pursue relentlessly the PKK fighters after each attack.

In addition to shifts in the threat perception, equipment and tactics, the armed forces' overall strategy of 'battlefield domination' began to be applied more effectively. Gradually it became almost impossible for PKK militants to move without being detected. Extensive sweep operations were initiated, keeping the PKK fighters in a permanent state of run and hide, leading to psychological and physical exhaustion. Pinpoint operations against PKK strongholds were also implemented, and with the help of electronic devices, the army regained control over the border region and could prevent the PKK militants from penetrating Turkey.⁵³

In early 1995, Turkish troops continued their aggressive stance and entered Northern Iraq with 35,000 soldiers, making it the largest of the cross-border operations. While the PKK drew on the lessons from 1992 and avoided fighting conventional battles, the Turkish army nevertheless succeeded in occupying the entire border region and destroying the PKK's camps before retreating. Due to Western pressures, however, Ankara was forced to abandon a plan to keep some of its troops in Northern Iraq.⁵⁴

In light of the new Turkish strategy, Öcalan was forced to review his own strategy. As a good student of guerrilla warfare, he understood that 'if the weaker side is unable to develop regular forces and if the enemy is relentless in its pursuit of the conflict, the weaker side will eventually be overwhelmed'.⁵⁵ In order to prolong the war, therefore, the PKK leadership widened the battle zone, and also began a strategy of hit and run, while giving priority to political activities.

In addition to the military and diplomatic struggles, both sides in the PKK/Turkish conflict continued to fight for public support in the region as well. Turkish tactical intelligence advanced during this period due in part to improving relations with the local people, who were weary of the clashes in the region. Support for the PKK had also declined locally because the group was unable to protect its supporters. Ankara was now fully aware that popular support was crucial to win this kind of war, and was determined to make the gaining and retention of local public support one of the most important components of the new anti-guerrilla strategy. Aware that the PKK relied on the villages for recruits, food, and intelligence, the Turkish security forces began, on the one hand, to evacuate villages that were either supporters of, or threatened by, the PKK.⁵⁶ Curfews were placed on other villages, and still others were put under permanent observation. Food supplies to the PKK were cut. On the other hand, those villagers who were loyal to Ankara were encouraged to join the Village Guards, the ranks of which had grown to nearly 80,000 by the second half of the 1990s. At the same time, security forces began distributing medical supplies to local peasants and, working with civil administrations, sought to solve local grievances. Amnesty was offered to those who deserted the PKK, and many of them then joined the security forces, bringing with them extremely valuable information about the PKK network. By the mid-1990s, mass riots against the security forces had ceased, and the security forces were able to regain full control of the cities and towns.

1996–98: Winning the Military Conflict

By March 1994, the shift of defensive/offensive postures between the two warring parties was complete. The PKK's third Congress stated that it was time to 'stage all-out war in response to the enemy's all-out war of destruction'.⁵⁷ Öcalan spoke of the inevitability that the struggle would now be escalated, and claimed that the 'entire country' would become a battlefield. He directed members of the ERNK to organize attacks against targets in the cities. He sought to halt the distribution of Turkish media in the southeast, to stop the activities of political parties, and to attack various soft targets such as teachers.⁵⁸ While the PKK continued to lose the war in the countryside, it sought to shift its power to the cities. With armed militants beginning propaganda campaigns in the central Anatolian and Black Sea regions of Turkey, a Kurdish Parliament in Exile was set up in Europe in early 1995. The former move was aimed at diverting Turkish security forces

from the southeast, thereby relieving some of the pressure on the PKK militants. The latter move caused many diplomatic troubles for Ankara in the second half of the 1990s.

1995 was the last year of intensive clashes between the security forces and the PKK. In 1996, with recruits down to a minimum, the PKK turned to suicide terrorism.⁵⁹ Due to increased security measures, their efforts in this arena were largely unsuccessful, as were their attacks on tourism centers. At the same time, Turkish security forces continued with successful raids on PKK strongholds along the Iraqi border, thereby denying the PKK the chance to reorganize or to regain any initiative. The last attack of the PKK was launched from Northern Iraq on December 29, 1996. Turkey responded by sending a brigade-size force into Northern Iraq. A couple of months later, the Turkish army succeeded in taking complete control of Northern Iraq. By the fall of 1997, Turkish troops withdrew, leaving behind 1,000 soldiers to protect a security zone. This expansion of control into the heartland of the insurgents was the ultimate indication of the shift towards an offensive posturing of the Turkish army.

Although the PKK continued its efforts to enlarge the area of engagement as much as possible by the summer of 1998, security forces had succeeded in wiping out all PKK ranks from the Black Sea area, and reducing to just a handful those in Central Anatolia. The Turkish security forces captured the PKK's second-in-command, emdin Sakik in April 1998, and Öcalan himself a year later, destroying even the top echelons of the PKK hierarchy. By mid-1998, Öcalan admitted military defeat.⁶⁰

A positive development at international level was the official announcement in early 1996 of a Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership.⁶¹ Although the two countries had cooperated ever since the 1950s, military intelligence relations intensified immediately after the official announcement. Although there is no clear evidence that the Israeli intelligence services helped Turkish intelligence in combating the PKK, the alliance at least put Damascus under pressure and made it more cooperative.

As the military conflict with the PKK drew to a close, the Turkish military decided it was time to try and cut off the PKK's foreign support once and for all. In July 1998, the commander of the Turkish land forces criticized Syria severely and demanded that Damascus stop its support for the PKK.⁶² As the Turkish-Syrian crisis mounted, Turkey dispatched large military contingents to the Turkish—Syrian border to back up its harsh rhetoric. The Syrian leadership was finally forced to end its support for the PKK. The Syrian government forced Öcalan to leave Syria, and later signed an agreement in which it admitted its role in PKK terror, and declared itself ready to end support for the organization.⁶³ After a brief stay in Moscow, Öcalan was forced to leave there as well, finally seeking refuge in Nairobi, where he was ultimately captured by Turkish special agents. The PKK leader was returned to Turkey, where he was tried and sentenced to death, a decision which, due to recent parliamentary changes has been commuted to life imprisonment. Meanwhile, virtually all remaining armed PKK units have fled Turkish territory for Iran and Iraq. The Turkish military achieved victory in this low intensity conflict.

CONCLUSION

This account has shown several factors, which can explain the shifts in positions and in combating strategies over the course of this LIC. It seems, however, that the primary turning point came in 1992 when the Turkish state finally identified the PKK challenge as the number one threat not only to the territorial integrity of the country but also to Turkey's very existence as a nation state and republic. This declaration carried with it a determination to end such an attack on the Turkish nation state at all costs. This new formulation of the national security concept also meant that a total national mobilization for countering the PKK had to emerge. This mobilization was *de facto* led by the Turkish army, which at this point—conscious that it had both an open credit line and the full backing of the national will—increased its commitment to the counterinsurgency effort to the fullest.

It seems that such overarching energy and confidence at first affected the first adjustment of the army into the conditions of a LIC, making it possible for the security forces to gain the psychological upper hand. Even more importantly, it enabled the military to develop a shared understanding from the most senior general to the simplest foot soldier, that a transition from a defensive to an offensive role was truly taking place. This mobilization of spirit and adoption of an all-out war mentality, accompanied by increasingly visible military successes, had an automatic spillover effect on the other major factors, such as dealing with international support for the PKK. Only a general backed by such a full national commitment could have felt secure

enough to threaten Syria to end its support for the PKK, and only such a national commitment could make the threats credible.

Such a high degree of national commitment in the army was in turn highly influential in galvanizing the national/military counterinsurgency potential, so much so that the transition from an aid-to-civil power stage to a more comprehensive counterinsurgency stage, was able to take place even without the adoption of new laws or regulations. Instead, the necessary legal and regulatory changes were in fact implemented after the carrying out of the relevant counterinsurgency moves. It can be argued that this fast-track process served a purpose of its own, in that the existing national will was not given the chance to wane over the course of lengthy procedures and debates about new laws.⁶⁴

Is a military victory such as the Turkish a final solution to a low intensity conflict? Most likely not. It is virtually impossible to win a LIC without great national consensus about the political goal, something that has been absent in the Turkish case since the conflict began. This consensus included the Turkish political and military elite as well as public opinion about all the major characteristics of this problem, including ethno-sociological and political dimensions. Military operations constituted only one of the major elements-together with political and sociological responses.

It has become even more obvious in this case that it is impossible to defeat a LIC without developing political and psychological strategies to address the demands of insurgents and their internal and external supporters. In other words, military operations are not enough if you cannot win the fight in the minds of the insurgents or, more importantly, in the minds of the insurgents' supporters. In the Turkish case, despite the capturing of the PKK leader and a substantive military victory over its combatants, PKK elements continue to hold a significant amount of political initiative. All recent developments in Turkish membership proceedings with the European Union have proved this: Turkey's abolishment of the death penalty, which saved the PKK leader from execution; and recognizing the Kurdish language and educational needs, for example. Ultimately what has been lacking in the Turkish case has been a carefully prepared comprehensive political plan for dealing with the Kurdish issue. In such a project, admittedly difficult to achieve, the military dimension would have constituted only a necessary stage to serve political goals. It now looks as though the Turkish military victory has ultimately not delivered much in terms of putting closure to the overall conflict. Rather, it may mean only a postponement of the problem, if not even an inevitable political defeat.

NOTES

1. Vance C. Bateman, 'The Role of Tactical Air Power in Low Intensity Conflict', *Air Power Journal*, Vol. 5 (Spring 1991), p. 73. See also, J.A. Robbs, *Low Intensity Conflict: A War by Any Other Name* (Quantico, VA: Command and Staff College, Education Center, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, 1988).

2. Charles W. Thayer, *Guerilla* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. xvi.

3. Steven Metz, 'Strategic Asymmetry', *Military Review*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (2001), p. 26.

4. It has been argued that the case of the Viet Cong cannot, for example, be considered a case of successful guerrilla warfare against the Americans. Success should be attributed, rather, to the North Vietnamese Army, which successfully fought a conventional warfare with the use of guerrilla tactics by some of its units among the Viet Cong. Richard D. Downie, *Learning from Conflict: The US Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998).

5. Robbs, *Low Intensity Conflict*, p. 72.

6. Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, March 23, 1994.

7. US Military Regulation FM 100-20/AFP 3-20.

8. For more details, see Kemal Kiriçi and Gareth Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1997), p. 167.

9. The leading Kurdish activist in Europe, Kendal Nezan, speaking at a conference in Washington, criticized the inability of Turkish Kurds in the US to plead their case more effectively. 'The Kurds: Search for Identity', American University, April 17-18, 2000.

10. This was vividly seen in the words of the German Foreign Minister Fischer, speaking in Ankara in 1999, who said that the Kurdish problem belonged to Germany as well.

11. Their attacks were mainly against the Revolutionary Unity of the People, Liberation of the People,

Revolutionary Democratic Cultural Association, Tekosin, and the National Liberation of Kurdistan. By the late 1970s they also began attacking members of the Turkish right wing and state officials. Some radical leftist Turkish organizations also became targets of the PKK in the late 1970s. The PKK could arguably be considered the most aggressive organization on the Turkish political scene in the 1970s, with the main focus of its attacks being on the Kurdish organizations—feudal and otherwise.

12. David McDowall, *The Kurds: Minority Rights Group* (London: Public Interest Publishers, 1991), p. 2.
13. For a discussion of tactical surprise, see Michael Handel, 'Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise', in Douglas Dearth and Royal Goodden (eds.), *Strategic Intelligence: Theory and Application* (Washington DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, Joint Military Intelligence Training Center, 2nd edn. 1995), pp. 213–63.
14. 'Historical Background and Development', at: www.access.ch/tuerkei/GRUPF/Studies/Studies1.htm, Jan. 20, 2000.
15. Ali Nihat Özcan, 'Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri ve PKK', unpublished paper, Ankara, 2000.
16. This number doubled shortly after 1983 with the establishment of PKK camps in Northern Iraq, including the Lolan Camp on the Turkish-Iraq border.
17. Ay e Güne -Ayata and Sencer Ayata, 'Ethnicity and Security Problems in Turkey', in Lenore G. Martin (ed.), *New Frontiers in Middle East Security* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 135.
18. Nur Bilge Criss, 'The Nature of PKK Terrorism in Turkey', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1995), p. 20.
19. Ümit Özda , *Kuzey Irak, Türkiye ve PKK: Bir Gayri Nizami Sava in Anatomisi* (Ankara: ASAM, 1994), p. 36.
20. Cemil Bayık, *Parti Tarihi* (Damascus: PKK's Publishing, 1994), p. 92.
21. The aim of the ERNK has largely been to organize mass support for the armed forces of the PKK. *Partimizin Kitleli Karakteri ve Cephe*, PKK's secret document seized by Turkish security forces, 1988.
22. The PKK relied heavily on drug smuggling and trafficking for revenue. smet mset, *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News, 1992), pp. 207–17. Also, in a report by the British National Service it is stated that the PKK's income in 1993 from drug smuggling was DM 56 million. See also the report, 'International Narcotic Control Strategy', US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotic Matters, 1992. The PKK has also been found to have close links with the Medellin Cartel. Ali Köknar, 'The Turkish Connection, Combating NBC Materials and Narcotics Smuggling', *Journal of Counter Terrorism and International Security*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Summer 1997).
23. The concept was outlined theoretically in *Serxwebûn*, Feb. 1983, p. 14.
24. Richard Clutterbuck, *Terrorism and Guerilla Warfare* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 143.
25. Özda , *Kuzey Irak, Türkiye ve PKK*, p. 96.
26. Criss, 'The Nature of PKK Terrorism in Turkey', p. 20.
27. Abdullah Öcalan, *Parti Önderli inin Ocak çözümlenmeleri* (Damascus: PKK's Publishing, 1989), p. 170.
28. Samuel Huntington, 'Guerrilla Warfare in Theory and Practice', in Franklin Mark Osanka (ed.), *Modern Guerrilla Warfare: Fighting Communist Guerrilla Movements, 1941–1961* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. xvi.
29. Baskın Oran, 'Kalkık Horoz', *çekiç Güç ve Kürt Devleti* (Ankara: Bilgi Yayınları, 1996), p. 38.
30. Various interpretations of these events can be found. According to one scholar, Ankara did ask Baghdad to renew the agreement, but Iraq refused. Süha Bülükbaşı, *Türkiye ve Yakınımdaki Ortadoğu* (Ankara: Di Politikasi Enstitüsü Yayınları, 1994), p. 92.
31. Phoebe Marr, 'Turkey and Iraq', in Henri J. Barkey (ed.), *Reluctant Neighbor: Turkey's Role in the Middle East* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), p. 45.
32. Between 1987–88 the PKK destroyed some 137 schools, which they considered as instruments of Ankara's assimilationist policy. Chris Kutschera, 'Mad Dreams of Independence: The Kurds of Turkey and the PKK', *Middle East Report* (July–Aug. 1994), p. 6.
33. *Yolda Abdullah Öcalan'ın Yorumları* (Damascus: PKK's Publishing, 1996).
34. In March 1989 the PKK had supporters in local politics. It supported 18 mayoral candidates in Mardin, ten in Siirt, three in Hakkari, and ten in Tunceli. John Rees, 'Third World Communists May Yet Rule', *Orbis*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Fall 1992), p. 10.

35. According to at least one critic of the PKK, the group did not actually halt all killings of peasants at this time. As late as July 1991, nine civilians were murdered by the PKK in the village of Harmancik. Facts on File, *World News Digest*, July 18, 1991.

36. Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), p. 49.

37. Sami Kohen, 'Separatist Rebels Step up War of Liberation Against Turks', *Middle East Times*, March 27, 1990.

38. Martin van Bruinessen's assessment of the PKK's rise in the 1980s is an objective one. He maintains that throughout the 1980–85 period the PKK grew 'not least because it was treated as the most dangerous enemy of public order and because the pro-government popular press gave it much coverage. Civilian and military authorities during this period repeatedly stressed that the state was strong rather than, for instance, the just and benevolent protector of its citizens. By placing so much emphasis on strength, they implicitly announced the PKK, with its cult of violence and proven ability to survive all final blows that the army delivered, was the only serious alternative.' 'Shifting National and Ethnic Identities: The Kurds in Turkey and the European Diaspora', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (April 1998), p. 46.

39. *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1991 and *Associated Press*, Oct. 21, 1991.

40. *Turkish Probe*, Nov. 17, 1992, p. 5.

41. The cantonments were built in the 1930s for the primary purpose of preventing smuggling, and were thus unable to resist full-scale PKK attacks. Furthermore, the gendarmerie soldiers guarding them were poorly armed and trained, and often took heavy casualties when attacked.

42. Mehmet Ali Kılıçlı, *Güneydoğu Düğün Yoğunluklu Çatışma* (Ankara: Ümit Yayıncılık, 1996), p. 163. The Turkish General Staff first resisted the idea of sending artillery because it was assessed as a tool of conventional warfare.

43. Authors' interview with a Turkish Army General who was the commander of all units in the conflict zone, Ankara, Feb. 26, 2002.

44. President Özal voiced the possibility that Turkey could discuss the idea of a federation as a solution to the conflict.

45. When the conflict began in earnest in 1984, the Turkish army aviation unit had 85 UH-1 helicopters, and 40 of them were dispatched to the conflict region. The army purchased ten new UH-1 helicopters between 1984 and 1989, and ten more between 1989 and 1993. From 1989 onwards, between 50–60 UH-1 were flying in the region. Of these, however, only three were armed with XM-G3 and 2.75 rocket systems, and none were armored. Moreover, none were able to fly at night. In 1990, the security forces got the first AH-1 Super Cobra helicopters. Three were immediately dispatched to the emergency region in early 1991. In 1993 six AH-1 Cobras were purchased and four were sent to the region, and in 1994, five AH-1 W Super Cobras were purchased and three were sent to the region.

46. *Economist*, Vol. 325, No. 7780, Oct. 10, 1992.

47. Authors' formal and informal interviews with various security personnel from the region reveal a general consensus on this point.

48. Some Turkish sources report over 1,400 PKK militants being killed in the course of the operation, while Kurdish sources put the loss at only about 100. Though the disparity in these numbers cannot be denied, there is little question that this was a very significant hit against the PKK. smet mset, 'Beyond Operation PKK', *Turkish Probe*, Nov. 17, 1992, p. 5.

49. ERNK members could force business people to close their shops as demonstrations of PKK support. They organized mass demonstrations against the security forces, and put women and children on the frontline of riots.

50. The rapprochement was brought about by shared fears that the US, France and England were supporting the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. As a result, a protocol between the three countries was signed in late 1993, according to which Syria banned all PKK activities on Syrian territory. The cooperation between the three states broke down not long after, however, when Turkey attended the Dublin conference on Middle East Peace, and was therefore seen to be in the camp of the Americans and British. For more on the issue, see H.J. Agha and A.S. Khalidi, *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation* (London: Pinter, 1995).

51. Turkish Chief of Staff, General Doğan Güreş, stated that, 'As far as the strategic concepts are concerned, I have changed the priorities of the Turkish Armed Forces vis-à-vis the possible threats. I now say

that the question of internal threat is the first priority.’ See Stephen H. Button, ‘Turkey Struggles with Kurdish Separatism’, *Military Review*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Dec. 1995-Jan./Feb. 1996), p. 76.

52. The army forces were increased to 160,000, making the total number of security forces (including village guards, gendarme, police forces) exceed 300,000. Fire support was also strengthened to enhance the army’s long-range firepower and restrict the PKK’s mobility. Heavy cannon and artillery units were dispatched to the southeast, and all divisions of the army became armored.

53. Ki lali, *Güneydo u Dü ük Yo unluklu Çati ma*, p. 159.

54. Alan Makovsky, ‘Turkey Merits US Backing as it Hunts Terrorists’, *Christian Science Monitor*, April 18, 1995, p. 19–20.

55. Huntington, ‘Guerrilla Warfare in Theory and Practice’, p. xviii.

56. While there are only speculations about the total number of refugees from these evacuations, numbers range between 1.7 to 3 million. UNHCR, Background Paper on Refugees, September 1994 (UNHCR/CDR–Ref World Database). According to official data of the Turkish state, 2,253 villages were evacuated by the security forces.

57. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, p. 49.

58. More than ten teachers were killed in 1994, and 124 since 1984.

59. The first attack occurred in June, and caused the death of nine Turkish soldiers. Facts on File, *World News Digest*, July 11, 1996. For more information about suicide terrorism in Turkey in general, see Do u Ergil, ‘Suicide Terrorism in Turkey’, *Civil Wars*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 37–55.

60. MED-TV, July 15, 1998.

61. Efraim Inbar, *Israeli–Turkish Entente* (London: King’s College Mediterranean Programme, 2001).

62. His actual words were, ‘by supporting the bandit Apo, the Syrians have confronted us with the plague of terrorism. Turkey has made the necessary efforts for good relations. If Turkey does not receive any response to its efforts, it will have the right to take all appropriate measures. We have no more patience.’ Robert Olson, ‘Syria-Turkey Relations Since the Gulf War: Kurds and Water’, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (May 1997), p. 105.

63. *Anadolu News Agency*, Oct. 21, 1998.

64. In private talks with commanders of the transition era, it was confirmed that the laws of the time did not support the high degree of autonomy they used in designing and carrying out their tactics and strategies. They argue that if they had waited for the laws to change, they would not have been able to finish the job.