

Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)



OVERVIEW

AS OF APRIL 2025

The PKK, established in 1978 in Turkey, is a militant Kurdish separatist group with a Marxist-Leninist ideology. It originally sought to create a unified, independent Kurdistan and to gain control of Kurdish areas of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The PKK has moderated its calls for complete independence and advocated instead for a confederation of semiautonomous Kurdish regions.

The PKK views the Turkish Government as an obstacle to achieving its aims and has launched attacks against Turkish targets since its founding. The PKK is headquartered in Iraq and has targeted Turkish forces in Iraq and Turkey. In early 2025, the group's founder called for the PKK to demilitarize and dissolve, a statement that may mark a turning point in its identity.

Operating Area

Primarily in northern Iraq and southeastern Turkey; affiliated groups operate in northern Iraq, northern Syria, and western Iran.

Members

At least 4,000

Tactics And Targets

The PKK uses a mix of guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics. The group uses car bombs, grenades, IEDs, kidnapping operations, MANPADS, mortars, small arms, suicide bombings, and UAVs. Its primary targets are Turkish and Turkish-supported forces in northern Iraq and Syria, and Turkish personnel and infrastructure in southeastern Turkey. The PKK has also attacked Turkish Government personnel and security forces in Ankara and Istanbul.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated the PKK a foreign terrorist organization in October 1997.

KEY LEADERS



Abdullah Ocalan [DETAINED]

PKK founder captured in a Turkish operation in 1999 and sentenced to life in prison; continues to drive the PKK's political ideology and strategic direction



Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS *(continued)*

**Murat Karayilan**

Commander of the PKK's military wing; member of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council, which governs PKK activities; leader of the PKK in northern Iraq

**Cemil Bayik**

PKK founding member; cochair of the KCK Executive Council with Bese Hozat

**Bese Hozat**

KCK Executive Council cochair with Cemil Bayik

NOTABLE ATTACKS

23 October 2024**Ankara, Turkey**

Two PKK militants set off explosives and open fire at the headquarters of Turkish Aerospace Industries, killing five people and wounding 22.

10 December 2016**Istanbul, Turkey**

Operatives from the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK), an offshoot of the PKK, conduct a car bombing and suicide bombing outside the Vodafone soccer stadium, killing 44 people and wounding 155.

13 March 2016**Ankara, Turkey**

TAK detonates a car bomb at a bus stop, killing 37 people and wounding 125.

25 June 2006**Manavgat, Turkey**

TAK detonates a bomb at a tourist site, killing four people and wounding 28.

