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Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

(Also known as: Freedom and Democratic Congress of Kurdistan, Hezan Parastina Gel (HPG), KADEK, KG, KHK, Kongra Gel, Kongra Gele Kurdistan, Kurdish Freedom Falcons, Kurdish Liberation Hawks, Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress, Kurdistan Freedom Brigade, Kurdistan Freedom Hawks, Kurdistan Halk Kongresi, Kurdistan Labor Party, Kurdistan Ozgurluk Sahinleri, Kurdistan People's Congress, New PKK, Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, People's Congress of Kurdistan, People's Defence Force, PKK, TAK, Teyrbazên Azadiya Kurdistan)

The following information is based on publicly available details about the PKK. To the Australian Government's knowledge, these details are accurate and reliable and have been corroborated by classified information.

Basis for listing a terrorist organisation

Division 102 of the *Criminal Code* provides that for an organisation to be listed as a terrorist organisation, the Attorney-General must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the organisation:

- (a) is directly or indirectly engaged in, preparing, planning, or assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur); or
- (b) advocates the doing of a terrorist act (whether or not a terrorist act has occurred or will occur).

Details of the organisation

Objectives

The PKK was formally established by Abdullah Ocalan in 1978. The organisation adopted a communist ideology but from its inception was primarily committed to the creation of an independent Kurdish state in south-eastern Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Turkey. After the end of Cold War, the PKK increasingly emphasised its role as a Kurdish nationalist movement. The group periodically has sought to increase its popularity by exploiting the religious sentiment of the Kurdish community, but the organisation remains predominantly secular.

The PKK's objectives have changed over time, in line with Turkey's evolving political environment. The organisation now calls for autonomy for Kurds within Turkey and seeks to promote and advance the rights of Kurds living in Turkey, specifically the right to maintain ethnic identity. The PKK has consistently demonstrated a willingness to use violence in order to achieve these objectives.

Leadership and Membership

Abdullah Ocalan, currently serving life imprisonment in Turkey, is still considered the leader and figurehead of the PKK; however, in practice, the group's day-to-day affairs are run by Murat Karayilan. Other key leaders include Cemil Bayik, Duran Kalkan, Fehman Huseyin and Riza Altun.

The precise strength of the PKK is not known; however, it is widely believed the group numbers approximately four to five thousand militants, the majority of whom are based in northern Iraq. Additionally, the group draws on considerable logistical support from a large number of sympathisers among the Kurdish community, particularly in south-east Turkey, but also in Syria and Iran.

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Funding and recruitment

The PKK derives most of its financial resources from drug trafficking, which is reported to generate hundreds of millions of US dollars for the group. At different times, the PKK is assessed to have controlled up to 80 per cent of the European illicit drug market.

In January 2012, under the US State Department's Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act, the US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated three Moldavia-based individuals as Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers for acting for or on behalf of the PKK. One individual was identified as a high-ranking PKK member.

The PKK also generates income through extortion, illegal immigration, human trafficking, money laundering and prostitution rackets. Revenue is also raised by collecting 'taxes', through voluntary means or coercion, from Kurdish diaspora communities around the world. PKK-related criminal activity is especially prevalent in Europe. The European Police Office warned in its European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2012 that the PKK remains committed to using Europe as a logistical support base for funding, as well as for recruitment, training and propaganda. Funds are also raised through publication sales, grants, aid campaigns and fundraising activities organised by PKK branches in Europe.

Most PKK members are recruited from the main Kurdish areas in south-east Turkey; however, some are drawn also from cities in the country's west. In addition, the group recruits from the Kurdish population in Iran and Syria and from the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Most recruitment in rural areas of Turkey occurs through personal acquaintance. In urban areas and in Europe, a network of PKK members and sympathisers working in non-governmental organisations and predominantly Kurdish political parties manage the recruitment process. The group's external recruitment practices were highlighted in February 2010 when police in France and Italy detained at least 20 people for alleged involvement in training and recruitment for the PKK.

Terrorist activity of the organisation

Directly or indirectly engaged in the doing of terrorist acts

The PKK has continued to have extensive, direct involvement in most terrorist acts occurring in Turkey since the group was last listed in 2009. The group has been particularly active since February 2011 when it ended a unilateral ceasefire in place since April 2009. Most attacks appear to be very specifically targeted, for example, armed assaults against Turkish military forces using small-arms fire. However, there also have been several indiscriminate, mass-casualty attacks employing both suicide bombings and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (IED). While most attacks have targeted Turkish security forces in the southeast, a number have targeted places frequented by civilians or tourists, including a shopping area in Ankara and a major shopping, tourist and leisure district in Istanbul. The PKK also was responsible for a ferry hijacking in the Marmara Sea, near Istanbul.

The PKK has also conducted kidnappings, including of Westerners. In the latest incident on 2 June 2012, a British tourist reportedly was kidnapped but was released the following day.

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Significant recent attacks for which responsibility has been claimed by or reliably attributed to the PKK include:

- 1 March 2012: Fifteen police officers and a civilian were wounded in a remotely controlled IED attack by suspected PKK militants targeting a police bus in the Imrahor Street area of Istanbul. The explosion reportedly occurred as the bus passed the headquarters of the ruling Justice and Development Party.
- 24 November 2011: Three Turkish employees of a Canada-based energy company were killed by PKK militants in an attack targeting the Selmo oil field at Kozluk, Batman province.
- 11 November 2011: A PKK militant carrying a suspected explosive device hijacked a passenger ferry and took hostage 18 passengers and six crew members in the Marmara Sea, near Istanbul.
- 29 October 2011: At least two people were killed and as many as 20 others wounded when a suspected PKK suicide bomber detonated her explosives outside a teahouse near the office of the Justice and Development Party in the town of Bingol in Bingol province.
- 27 September 2011: PKK militants kidnapped a total of eight teachers and a village guard in five armed attacks in the Pulumur district of Tunceli province; in the village of Gundogdu in Elazig province; and in the villages of Ciftlibahce, Dolunay and Cavundur in Diyarbakir province.
- 17 August 2011: Eight soldiers and a village guard were killed and a further 14 soldiers wounded when suspected PKK militants detonated four IEDs consecutively against a military convoy on the Hakkari-Cukurca highway in the Cukurca district of Hakkari province.
- 14 July 2011: Thirteen soldiers were killed and seven others wounded when PKK militants ambushed a security patrol with small-arms and grenades in Silvan district, Diyarbakir province.
- 26 May 2011: A police officer and seven civilians were wounded when suspected PKK militants detonated an IED at a bus stop near the Akmerkez shopping centre in the Etiler district of Istanbul.
- 4 May 2011: At least one police officer was killed and two others wounded in a combined small-arms and IED attack by suspected PKK militants targeting a bus transporting security force personnel on the outskirts of the city of Kastamonu in Kastamonu province. The attack occurred shortly after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan held an election rally in the city.
- 31 October 2010: Thirty-two people were wounded – including 15 police officers – when a suicide bomber attacked a bus carrying police officers in Taksim Square, Istanbul. An IED planted nearby failed to explode.
- 19 June 2010: Nine soldiers were killed and 14 others wounded when PKK militants attacked an army border unit in the Semdinli area of Hakkari province. A further two soldiers were killed in a separate IED incident in Hakkari on the same day.

Directly or indirectly preparing or planning the doing of terrorist acts

Under the HPG alias, the group issued a statement in January 2012 declaring that “2012 will be the year of a struggle to ensure a free Leader and Free Kurdistan through an effective resistance and a Popular Revolutionary War”. A military intelligence report, which was made public in mid-February 2012, warned also of a PKK plan to escalate its terrorist campaign. PKK leaders had reportedly discussed their

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intentions to conduct large-scale attacks throughout the south-east, with the aim of inflicting major losses on the Turkish military. The group also planned to attack police and civilians in urban areas using homemade explosives.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above information, ASIO assesses the PKK continues to directly and/or indirectly engage in, prepare, plan, assist, advocate or foster the doing of terrorist acts involving threats to life and serious property damage. This assessment is corroborated by information provided by reliable and credible intelligence sources.

In the course of pursuing its objectives, the PKK is known to have committed or threatened action:

- that causes, or could cause, serious damage to property, the death of persons or endangers a person's life; and
- with the intention of advancing the PKK's political, religious or ideological causes; and
- with the intention of intimidating the public and sections of the public.

Other relevant information

Links to other terrorist groups or networks

The PKK maintains close links with its Iranian affiliate, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK). Like the PKK, PJAK has training camps in northern Iraq. Iran has designated the PKK as a terrorist organisation and both Iran and Turkey are reported to have conducted probable coordinated military operations against both groups in their shared border areas.

Links to Australia

There are no known PKK links to Australia; however, it is likely elements of Australia's Kurdish community remain sympathetic to the Kurdish nationalist cause.

Threats to Australian interests

There are no known direct threats from the PKK to Australian interests. The PKK is not known to be engaged in any peace or mediation processes.

Proscription by the UN and other countries

The PKK is listed as a proscribed terrorist organisation by many governments, including the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. The organisation is proscribed by the United States government under the name of Kongra Gel. The PKK is listed by the European Union for the purposes of its anti-terrorism measures.

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