

# University of Cincinnati

Date: 8/24/2016

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It is entitled:

**The Freedom Fighter: A Terrorist's Own Story**

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THE FREEDOM FIGHTER:  
A TERRORIST'S OWN STORY

A DISSERTATION

submitted to the

Graduate School

of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the

requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

In the School of Criminal Justice

of the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services

August 2016

by

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## ABSTRACT

The ability of terrorist groups to incur widespread death and destruction has markedly increased with technological advances in the areas of communication, transportation, and weapon capability. Using these new tools and networks, terrorists now seek to inflict mass casualties worldwide by bringing down airplanes and bombing critical infrastructures in urban centers. Given these realities, it is essential to research the factors that underlie a terrorist group's origins, grievances, and demands. Such insights might help to respond more effectively to insurgencies, especially when military campaigns to capture or kill every terrorist have proven unsuccessful.

Within this context, this dissertation contributes to the radicalization literature by exploring why so many Kurdish males and females—especially young adults—join the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and conduct terrorist acts. Employing the approach taken by Clifford R. Shaw (1930) in his classic *The Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*, this issue was explored through the life-history method: having a PKK terrorist—or “freedom fighter”—tell his own story. Over five months in Turkey, I interviewed an imprisoned terrorist, Deniz. He proved an insightful subject because of his diverse experiences during his nearly two decades in the PKK. The final product, a detailed life-history of Deniz told in his own words, is presented in this dissertation. This account provides extensive information on the PKK, including the group's recruitment, training, military tactics, organizational procedures, and goals for peace.

In turn, using a life-course perspective, the dissertation concludes by examining the factors that led to Deniz's onset into, persistence of, and desistance from his life as a terrorist. The analysis suggests that four factors encouraged Deniz's radicalization and entry into the

PKK: (1) a sense of injustice, (2) personality traits, (3) opportunity structures, and (4) a sense of duty and honor. The life-history account also reveals that Deniz remained in the PKK for a lengthy period because of: (1) a strong sense of purpose, (2) a belief that death was inevitable, (3) personal traits, (4) support from his comrades, (5) experiencing military success, and (6) his advancement in the PKK organization. Finally, Deniz identified four factors that lead PKK insurgents to desist from terrorism: (1) being a casualty of war, (2) the inability to cope with the physical strains and challenges of life as a terrorist, (3) fear of being held accountable and punished by the PKK for misconduct or military failure, and (4) experiencing retaliation for unjust treatment.

Importantly, to achieve peace, Deniz indicated that the Kurds desired two concessions from the Turkish community. First, this community should understand that the Kurdish problem did not begin with the founding of the PKK. Historically, the Turkish state has rejected true diversity in favor of cultural cleansing and the annihilation of any Kurdish resistance. The PKK emerged only after years of enduring these repressive measures. Second, the Turkish citizenry should know that the Kurds do not hate them. They simply want to live together as two mutually respectful people connected politically but diverse culturally.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation would never have been possible without the support, advice, and guidance of my chair. So, I would like to thank first to Dr. Francis T. Cullen, who not only helped with this dissertation, but also provided invaluable assistance and numerous opportunities throughout my entire career at the University of Cincinnati. The time and wisdom you made available to me taught me much about being a quality researcher, scholar, and teacher as well as the importance of being a good human being throughout the process. The values you instilled in me will be something I will carry with me throughout my life. I look forward to working with you for the remainder of our careers and to remaining a student of your art.

I must express my appreciation to the rest of my dissertation committee. To Drs. Benson, Wilcox, and Johnson, thank you for your patience and willingness to help me finish this dissertation. I am grateful for your coaching and support throughout not only this dissertation process but also my graduate school career.

I would like to thank as well all the other faculty members and staff in the School of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati. Being surrounded by so many great scholars and having the opportunity to learn from them in and out of the classroom has enriched me greatly. You all created an invaluable learning experience for me that could not be received anywhere else.

I am also grateful to my friends in the School of Criminal Justice who have supported me on my journey to the doctorate. Without all of you, these past five years would not have been as enjoyable or successful. From the beginning to the end of my graduate school journey, you have been an absolute blessing.

Mom and Dad, I could never thank you enough for all the guidance, advice, and love you have always given and continue to give me. None of this would have been possible without the support and encouragement of both of you!

Finally, the completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife. Your love and support has been so instrumental to my journey and development to this point. You have always given me just what I needed, and many times much more than I deserved. In many ways, this accomplishment is equally yours! I love you, I thank you, and I look forward to spending the rest of my life enjoying the memories that we have built together. Teşekkürler...

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## **PART I. TERRORISM IN CONTEXT**



## CHAPTER 1

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although the attention to terrorism has increased during the last decade, terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon. For centuries, terrorists have carried attacks against non-combatant targets causing massive destruction. Examples go back as far as the first century after Christ (Horgan, 2005). However, some trends have significantly changed the nature and degree of the terrorism threat in the last twenty years. September 11, 2001 is one result of these developments.

With technological advances in the areas of communication, transportation, and weapon capability, the ability of today's terrorist groups to bring widespread death and destruction has markedly increased (Bjorgo, 2005). Their objectives are now more deadly. They are seeking to inflict mass casualties, planning to attack crowded New Year celebrations to bring down airplanes, to destroy military barracks, and to bomb critical infrastructures at city centers, and they intend to do such acts all over the world. Today's terrorist organizations have transnational networks that are difficult to predict, track, and penetrate. That is, international terrorists are now borderless and flexible, and this situation poses major challenges in responding to terrorism (Crenshaw, 2012).

In response to these new facilitators of terrorism—but especially after 9/11—there has been an impressive and rapid increase in the publication of books, articles, and reports. The study of terrorism was flooded by a variety of experts from various fields claiming to bring unique and valuable perspective to understand and prevent it (Horgan & Braddock, 2012). Funding has become available for multi-million dollar projects involving teams of researchers

distributed across national and international boundaries. Important contributions have been made within political science, international relations, security studies, psychology, and economics.

Despite these efforts, international terrorism still poses an increasingly dangerous and difficult threat to democratic countries. Terrorists are still able to kill and injure hundreds in European capitals such as London and Madrid. The continued vitality of terrorism is partly because little or no attention has been allocated to understanding the origins of the social factors that sustain support for a terrorist organization and in particular the apparent contradictions that underpin terrorist support. Instead, large proportion of the literature produced on terrorism following 9/11 yielded an abundance of non-theoretical speculation (Horgan & Braddock, 2012). Stereotypes pervaded popular perceptions and some regions, ethnic groups, and even religions, most notably Islam, have been used to explain the motivation of individuals' participation in terrorist acts (Duyvesteyn, 2012).

However, involvement in terrorism is a complex process of accommodation and assimilation (Crenshaw, 2012; Della Porta, 2012). Terrorists come from all parts of the world and fight for a range of different causes. If we want to understand why terrorists deliberately blow up a school or a government office building or kill passengers on a subway, we need to conduct in-depth analysis with individuals who took part in these groups. This requires disregarding second-hand accounts and assertions and gain firsthand knowledge about the subject matter—a technique that has been widely used in Chicago school of criminology.

By entering into the lives of individual terrorists', we can begin to see the assumptions about being a terrorist, the tactics they use, their suppositions about the world, and the constraints and pressure they are subject to from the point of view of the terrorist. Although interviewing

members of terrorist groups is not without challenge, the perspective of individuals who have intimate personal experience of recruitment, volunteerism, and indoctrination practices can be of an immense value to scholars.

In this context, this dissertation seeks to contribute towards the implementation of life history approach into PKK terrorism—a Marxist leftist group denounced by the United States, Turkey, and much of Europe as a terrorist organization. To enhance insights on the PKK and terrorism more generally, the current project intends to use interviews to gain knowledge on terrorism—from its causes, triggering factors, and sustaining influences to its trajectories, and eventual consequences that are currently lacking in the literature. It is an attempt to undertake a life-history in the tradition of Clifford R. Shaw's *the Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*. By employing a life history approach, this work aims to gain insights into the processes through which PKK is formed and into why people join, stay, and leave the organization. I have no intention of proffering opinion on whether the PKK's mission is right, its ideology is true, or actions are moral. The only hope is to produce the knowledge and insight to formulate appropriate responses that would be most effective in terminating this insurgency in a peaceful manner.

Toward this end, seven central issues are examined in this chapter. Section one provides the context for the biggest challenge in terrorism studies —how to define terrorism. A unique feature of this section will be a focus on the identification of the distinguishing characteristics of terrorism from other types of crimes.

Section two explores why individuals become terrorists and how this process is generally not related to any personality disorder. It will explain how the idea of terrorism as the product of

mental disorder or psychopathology has been discredited over time. It will then argue that behaviors, norms, and values are learned through social interactions.

Section three will focus on the issue of radicalization—the process of becoming a terrorist. It will elaborate the gradual learning process that leads to involvement in terrorism. It will investigate issues such as how and why individuals decide to become involved in terrorism, and how terrorists view themselves and others.

Section four describes the distinguishing characteristics of “new” terrorism from the “old” one. It will explore some of the fundamental ways in which terrorist organizations are currently abusing.

Section five will discuss why aggressive military retaliations have never been a permanent solution to the problem of terrorism. It will explain the reasons why strength and power alone are not enough to defeat terrorism although they are widely seen as popular response to terrorism.

Section six will provide a potential new direction in counterterrorism based on the need for an analysis of the social factors that sustain support for terrorist organizations. It will highlight the importance of understanding terrorists’ deeper feelings, the alienation, the humiliation, and the greed that push them into these organizations. It will argue that this task can be accomplished by focusing on understanding the life history of individual terrorists. In so doing, it will attempt to provide a rationale for this dissertation.

Final section will explain the methodology. It will briefly explain how Turkey has been unable to establish lasting peace and stability in the Eastern Anatolia region despite the extreme use of military force against the PKK. Then, it will highlight the importance of talking to those people who are part of the PKK to identify the root causes of their insurgency.

## WHAT IS TERRORISM?

Terrorism is a complex set of phenomena covering a diverse set of groups with different origins and aims. Today, it is nearly impossible to define terrorism. Numerous definitions can be found in the literature. At a fundamental level, there is discrepancy over what the term actually means and who can fairly be described as a terrorist and who cannot (Gibbs, 2012; Gupta, 2006; Horgan, 2012; Richardson, 2006; Silke, 2003; Stern, 2003). This definitional debate has led some researchers to suggest that terrorism should be considered as a matter of perception.

The main problem with this lack of definitional consensus is that one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter (Weinberg, Pedahzur, & Hoefler, 2012). This obstacle blocks efforts to reach a reliable understanding of terrorism and its impact. Indeed, one reason for the limited international cooperation against terrorism over the past thirty years is the reluctance of some to apply the label of "terrorist" to a group fighting for what are considered legitimate goals.

Despite this controversy, most scholars agree that terrorism has two characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of violence. First, it involves the use of random violence primarily against non-combatants (Stern, 2003). Victims are chosen at random or as a representative of some larger group. Today's terrorists have learnt out that random violence has a more disquieting impact than discriminate violence, because if nobody is selected, then nobody is safe. Thus, the identities of people traveling on a bus in Tel Aviv or a train in Madrid, dancing in Bali, shopping in Kenya, or bond trading in New York were of no consequence to those who killed them. This characteristic of terrorism distinguishes it from war fighting. Second, terrorists use violence to achieve a psychological effect of fear on others rather than on immediate targets (Silke, 2003). That is, victims of the violence and the audience the terrorists

are trying to reach are not the same. Victims are used as a means of altering the behavior of a larger audience, usually a government. By attacking the soft underbelly of the enemy, such as unprotected and vulnerable civilian targets, terrorism offers the possibility of achieving high political impact with limited means.

Another issue meriting attention is that terrorism does not have a single cause. Rather, certain forms of terrorism are outcomes of certain combinations of preconditions that set the stage for terrorism in the long run (i.e., historical, cultural, economic, and socio-political characteristics that create an enabling environment for a terrorist group to capitalize on) and of precipitants (i.e., the specific events that immediately precede or trigger an outbreak of terrorism) (Taylor & Horgan, 2012). There is a broad spectrum of terrorist groups and organizations, each of which has a different psychology, motivation, and decision-making structure and each of which has taken place in rich countries and poor, under authoritarian regimes and democratic governments. Terrorism has been practiced by the right as well as by the left, by atheists and religious millenarians, by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and members of most other religions (Rapaport, 2012; Vertigans, 2011).

### **SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TERRORISTS**

For decades, terrorists have carried out attacks against non-combatant targets causing massive destruction. But why do these people participate in these brutal attacks? Much of the psychological research and analysis on terrorists of the past for decades has revolved around the search for a terrorist personality. In the early 1970s, scholars first attempted to explain these acts by diagnosing its perpetrators as having paranoia, schizophrenia or delusion or by presenting them as crazy people and cold blooded murderers (Silke, 2003; Sprang, 2003). The belief was

that only people who were mentally ill or who possessed a deviant personality would be capable of committing the horrific acts carried out by terrorist groups. Although these claims have never been substantiated by empirical research, researchers have attempted to explain participation in a terrorist organization as the manifestation of pathology, low intelligence, and ego-centrism (Schmid, 2012). By contrast, analysts have shown little interests in explanations of individual motivations and have considered individual motivations as irrelevant or simply untruthful in explaining terrorist acts.

As the years passed, however, one of the most robust findings in terrorism studies has been that terrorists are psychologically normal people (Horgan & Braddock, 2012; Merari, 2005; Pape, 2012; Richardson, 2006). There now seems to be little or no evidence of particular or distinctive individual traits that could justify the classification of terrorists as psychotics, neurotics, fanatics, or psychopaths. The idea of terrorism as the product of mental disorder or psychopathology has been discredited by various scholars. That is, Osama Bin Laden or Abdullah Ocalan are not distinguishable from other ordinary people, and they have no priori traits that would predict their risk of involvement in terrorism. Thus, terrorists are marked by their normalcy. They have goals they are trying to achieve, and in a different set of circumstances they, and perhaps we, would lead very different lives. For the most part, people who become involved in terrorist activity do so by intention. Therefore, it is now more useful to see terrorists as rational and intentional actors who develop deliberate strategies to achieve political objectives. Similar to normal people, terrorists make their choices between different options and tactics on the basis of the limitations and possibilities of the situation.

## **WHERE TERRORISTS COME FROM? THE PROCESS OF RADICALIZATION**

### ***Inspirational Leaders and their Followers***

Counterterrorism scholars now believe that being a terrorist often requires an incremental progression in socialization and cognitive restructuring. An individual seeking revenge does not become a terrorist in a vacuum. First, it requires a charismatic leader or a functioning organization to mix these feelings with the desire for revenge and turn them into action (Della Porta, 2012). The role of the leader is important in turning the eager volunteers into an organized force. The leader not only arranges training but also provides an ideology, identifies the enemy, and articulates a strategy. Extreme conformity and strict obedience are organizational cornerstones that leaders institute to enhance the smooth, effective running of a secret and illegal organization.

### ***Becoming a Terrorist: Process into Groups***

Thus, becoming a terrorist is a process. It is not usually something that happens overnight; quickly, or easily. The followers of Osama Bin Laden do not appear fully fledged as terrorists; rather they become a terrorist through involvement in these activities. There is a gradual learning process that appears to typify involvement in terrorism. When individuals are prevented from encountering alternative viewpoints or open debate, when their parents, teachers, friends, and religious leaders all reinforce a common theme of hatred toward others, radicalization can become the norm (Crenshaw, 2012). Thus, individuals are often introduced to the fringes of violent extremist groups by friends, family members, and authority figures in their communities. They are then trained both in terms of what terrorist do and in terms of how terrorist make sense of what they do. They acquire their commitment gradually, often through



belonging to a group. Involvement follows a trajectory that becomes noticeable initially through attendance at demonstrations and meetings, before members are involved in more integral roles such as distributing leaflets and fund raising and eventually committing attacks (Bjorgo, 2005). Over time, intensive ideological, religious, and political exposure associated with heavy discussion environments and peer pressure strengthens their involvement.

These kinds of initial activities often confirm and sustain further involvement and close off potential escape routes. These individuals engage in various activities that form a continuum of successive points of no return for them. Exposure to danger increases emotional intensity and cohesion whereas dismissing all ties with outsiders forges the commitment to the group (Della Porta, 2012; Gupta, 2008). The greater the pressure from outside, the more cohesive they become. Group identity provides a foundation of relative stability upon which disenfranchised or isolated members of a society build a base of commonality and join together. By belonging to a group, otherwise powerless individuals become powerful (Horgan, 2003).

Illegality also isolates the members of the group from the society and encourages the development of distinctive values, norms, and standards of behavior. Individual identities become so embedded in the group that the militants believe that it is not possible to live outside the group or even that it is not worth living outside it (Della Porta, 2012; Horgan, 2005). A feeling of dependence is created, leading them to believe that they cannot be self-sufficient and that other members are essential to them. Over time, individual recruits form a social contract in their mind that is extremely hard to break. Deviation from group standards becomes unthinkable because of mutual interdependence, peer pressure, and security risks. With blood on their hands and having burned all the bridges back to mainstream society, most terrorist groups and

individuals continue their underground struggle because the only alternative is long-term imprisonment or death (Post, 2003).

### ***Impoverished Terrorists: Stereotype or Reality***

This is how a group of 19 people sacrificed themselves to perpetrate 9/11 attacks. None of these perpetrators suffered from poverty, lack of education, or the privileged lifestyle of the Western world. They were well educated and came from comfortable middle-class Saudi and Egyptian families. Even Osama bin Laden himself is the 17<sup>th</sup> of 25 sons of a multi-billionaire Saudi construction magnate, whose financial empire and wealth come from a special relationship with the Saudi royal family (Horgan, 2005; Krueger & Malekova, 2003). His second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is a doctor. Mohamed Atta, the leader of the 9/11 team, was the son of an Egyptian lawyer and had earned a Ph.D. in urban planning (Mohammad, 2005). They took part in this action because they felt inspired by a group of so-called Islamic preachers and influencers. They justified their attacks by listening to historical, linguistic, and religious narratives from their leaders.

### ***Alienation and Revenge***

Feelings of interdependence and attachment towards the enemy had to be sufficiently weak if individuals are to become willing to be part of the group that seeks to injure, scare or destroy. Thus, their leaders drew a picture of dichotomous confrontation for them. An absolute enemy, the United States, was defined for the followers. This stereotypical enemy is presented as both unrelentingly hostile and morally corrupt (Pape, 2012; Post, 2003; Richardson, 2006, Silke, 2003). Over time, the enemy is dehumanized in a way to allow the followers to deny any responsibility for doing harm on the victims. They were consistently taught that those who pay

taxes to a government are responsible for their actions (Stern, 2003). Bin Laden declared that “He is the enemy of ours whether he fights directly or merely pays his taxes” (Richardson, 2006, pg. 6). Recruits are taught that things are far worse than they really are in order to increase their support for the radical ideology. In the end, terrorists see the world in black and white terms; they identify with their enemy; they desire revenge. They have a highly oversimplified view of the world in which good is pitted against evil and in which their adversaries are to blame for all their woes (Silke, 2003).

Such individuals find the polarizing absolutist rhetoric attractive: it is not us—it is them. The notion that “they are the cause of our problems” provides a psychologically satisfying explanation for what has gone wrong in their lives. “They,” the establishment, are the source of all evil in vivid contrast to “us”, the freedom fighters. And, if “they” are the source of our problems, it follows the logic of the terrorist that they must be destroyed (Bin Hassan, 2012). It is the only just and moral thing to do. We are good, they are bad. God is on our side. Everything we do is justified; everything they do is provocative, inhumane, and cruel. We are innocent, they are guilty.

Lacking a private life, the militants experience the loss of individual identity, which in turn compels them to rely more and more on the group (Crenshaw, 2012). A collective identity is gradually constructed in which the members willingly subordinate their own identities. Thus, individuals’ value systems and perceptions of the external world become those of the group and their motivational structure is transformed (Della Porta, 2012).

### ***9/11 Atrocity: Terrorism's Zenith***

By internalizing the group's ideological systems, the militants saw the situation as war and the United States as the evil. The results were sudden, concentrated, and dramatic. These followers have caused the most destructive terrorist attacks in the history of the world. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center of New York had a shocking effect in the world. This attack struck America at home, exposing that America's oceans and geographic locations no longer sufficed to keep its enemies at a distance (Duyvesteyn, 2012). The American public was confronted with the reality of globalization. The world was a smaller place and they no longer felt safe. Terrorist held individual Americans collectively accountable for the actions of their government. They turned passenger planes into weapons of mass destruction, levelling the World Trade Center in New York City and crippling the Pentagon in Washington, DC.

The scale of the atrocity committed on that day was unprecedented in the lengthy annals of terrorism. In little more than one hour, almost 3,000 people from more than 80 states were killed (Hoffman, 2012). The death toll was equal to the number of deaths caused by global terrorism from 1988 through 2000. Massive property destruction occurred at the Pentagon, the center of U.S. Military command, and at the World Trade Center, a symbol of the world's financial markets. It was not even possible to estimate the economic costs because it required calculations beyond the extent of property damage or summing up the number of dead and injured. For the first time terrorists had succeeded in killing very large numbers of people, the kind of casualties that had previously only occurred in interstate wars.

The government scrambled to establish security both on the ground and in the air. The United states, the greatly shaken nation, and the world watched in horror as the media repeatedly

covered the events in graphic detail— injured and alarmed victims ran for their lives through dense cloud of smoke, jumped to their deaths from the higher floors of the World Trade Center. The inability of the authorities to prevent the act and protect the citizenry undermined the confidence in security institutions and the democratic way of life. For the perpetrators of the violence, 9/11 was a glorious blow by the weak against the strong. In their eyes, these vengeful individuals sent the message that harmful acts will not go unanswered (Hoffman, 2012). They thought their act fulfilled a range of goals including righting perceived justice, restoring the self-worth of the vengeful individual, and deterring future injustice (Horgan, 2005).

### **CURRENT AND FUTURE TRENDS IN TERRORISM**

Thirteen years have passed since the 9/11 attacks. However, international terrorism still poses an increasingly dangerous and difficult threat to democratic countries. Their objectives are more deadly; terrorists are designing attacks to kill as many people as possible. They are now seeking to inflict mass casualties, planning to attack crowded New Year celebrations to bring down airlines, to destroy military barracks, and to bomb critical infrastructures such as Holland and Lincoln tunnels in New York, and they intend to do such acts all over the world. Terrorists are less dependent on state sponsorship and are instead forming transnational affiliations based on religious or ideological affinity (Merari, 2005). These new transnational terrorist networks are difficult to predict, track and penetrate. They rely on variety sources of funding and logistical support (Pedahzur & Ranstorp, 2012).

Unlike the 1980s, their networks of support include both front organizations and legitimate business and non-government organizations. By penetrating into an NGO or legitimate business, terrorist gain not only access to funding and international logistics networks,

but also the legitimacy of cover employment with a humanitarian organization. Links to terrorism have been found with businesses involved in agriculture, construction, livestock, fish, and leather (Duyvesteyn, 2012). Their funding and logistical networks cross borders, are less dependent on state sponsors, and harder to disrupt with economic sanctions. They now use internet and cell phones to communicate quickly and securely. These changing characteristics of terrorist organizations enable them to be more dangerous and difficult to counter. Unlike the past, today's terrorists attack randomly, targeting people whose only fault is to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. These terrorists are more violent than their predecessors are more probably to use weapons of mass destruction.

Statistics indicate that in 2012 alone, a total of 6,771 terrorist attacks occurred worldwide, resulting more than 11,000 deaths and more than 21,000 injuries. In addition, more than 1,200 people were kidnapped or taken hostage by the terrorist organizations. On average, there were 564.25 attacks, 62.83 deaths and 1,804.33 injuries per month in 2012. Although terrorist attacks occurred in 85 different countries in 2012, they were heavily concentrated geographically. Over half of the attacks (55 percent) and fatalities (62 percent) occurred in just three countries: Pakistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan (START, 2013).

Osama bin Laden and several other senior al-Qaeda leaders have been captured or killed, their operation of freedom has been severely curtailed, and their command, communication, and training systems have been destroyed. Even so, al-Qaeda is still able to inspire, plot and launch regional and transnational attacks from its safe havens towards the Western targets (Hoffman, 2012). In Yemen, al-Qaeda members are increasingly using asymmetric tactics in a campaign of bombings and assassinations against government targets, soldiers, civilians and foreign diplomatic personnel. In Somalia, al-Shabaab is carrying out attacks against the new

government, killing innocent civilians, causing fear on the streets. In Libya, the dispersal of weapons stocks in the wake of revolution presented terrorists with new opportunities and enabled them to storm diplomatic missions with antiaircraft weapons and rockets propelled grenades and even kill the American ambassador and three members of his staff. In Syria, al-Qaeda is establishing a long-term presence under the pseudonym of al-Nusra Front due to the vacuum created by the internal war. The Syrian government is still providing terrorists with safe haven; allowing them to operate over a dozen terrorist training camps in the Syrian controlled Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, and permitting the Iranian government to resupply these camps. In Gaza, there is a sharp increase in the number of rocket attacks launched by Hamas and other extremist groups. In West Africa, Boko Haram is exploiting the grievances of northern Nigerians to gain recruits and public sympathy. In Kenya, violent extremists are storming public avenues and killing and injuring hundreds of innocent people in the name of God. In the Middle East, Iran is still the most consistent and most active state sponsor of terrorism. Iran still sponsors terrorism through its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Hezbollah, and it provides funding, training, weapons, logistical resources, and guidance to a variety of terrorist groups. The regimes of Syria, Sudan, North Korea, Cuba, and Afghanistan are all providing funding, refuge, training bases, and weapons to terrorists (Hoffman, 2012; Start, 2013). In Europe, anarchists in Greece and Italy are launching periodic attacks, targeting private businesses, foreign missions, and symbols of state. In Northern Ireland, dissident Republican groups still continue their campaign of violence. People of Europe are still feeling the shocks of Madrid and London bombings, which killed three hundred people and injured thousands. In Turkey, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) is still active and launching attacks against the government forces.

Democratic nations have begun to combat terrorism through a coordinated and integrated manner at all levels of government, especially among the political, diplomatic, law enforcement, intelligence, and military establishments since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. They reinvigorated the collection of intelligence about terrorists' plans and now using all available legal avenues to disrupt and prosecute terrorist activities. However, the picture drawn above indicates that the world continues to witness terrorist activities.

### ***Why the War on Terror Can Never Be Won?***

But why this is all happening despite the increased efforts in combating terrorism since 9/11? The answer lies in the reality that the world is not the same world it was three or more decades ago. The opportunity structures available to terrorist organizations are so wide (and most of them are legitimate) that, it is nearly impossible to block all of them. One simple example is that thousands of people from countries officially declared as state sponsors of terrorism are currently studying in the United States, in England, and in many other developed countries (Vidino, 2012). Although the vast majority of these students contribute to these countries' diversity, there is a risk that a small minority may exploit their student status to support terrorist activity.

One of the terrorists involved in the World Trade Center bombing had entered the United States on a student visa, dropped out, and remained illegally as a sleeper (Stern, 2003). Sleepers serve as a kind of reserve army in the targeted country, and they are unlikely to know precisely what they have been recruited until immediately before an attack. For example, Al Qaeda recruits university students and send them to the universities in the target countries to study science and engineering. The organization instructs sleepers in the art of disappearing in enemy territory by shaving their beards, avoiding typical Muslim dress or expressions, not chatting too



much, and wearing Western style outfits. Sleepers are urged to find residences in new apartment buildings, where neighbors are less likely to know one another. They live in these countries for years until they are commanded for their mission (Richardson, 2005).

Western intelligence agencies estimate that by September 11, 2001, between 20,000 and 30,000 radical sleepers had graduated from Al Qaeda training camps and had been sent to different parts of the world (Pedahzur & Ranstorp, 2012; Richardson, 2006). By dispatching any one of these sleepers into any Starbucks, subway station, theatre, or a shopping mall in the country so as to blow it up, a terrorist group could demonstrate that the most powerful country in the history of the world has not been able to defeat it.

Another factor that facilitated the terrorist attacks is that terrorists are using the same modern computer and communications technology as the rest of the community does. A significant number of recent terrorist plots within the United States and the United Kingdom have involved individuals whose radicalization process and their only real link to al-Qaeda has been through the internet. Young people that are born and grow up in Europe are joining al-Qaeda to commit terrorist actions by attaining the support of a virtual umma that spread disinformation through the internet (Vidino, 2012). Thanks to the powers of internet, it is possible to gain access to terrorist websites, to read and watch endless propaganda against the West, or to communicate with terrorists in any part of the world, all from one's bedroom in Europe. In the case of London bombings, for example, two young men, Khan and Tanweer, were both born in England and were radicalized by what they had heard of American actions in Iraq and Afghanistan through online communication with radical people (Taylor & Horgan, 2012). Never having been either to America or to Iraq, they murdered commuters in London. These people do not come from a community that overtly supports their actions, nor do they

suffer discrimination or privation themselves. However, the internet has provided the means of globalizing terrorism.

With the advent of the technology in the areas of communication, transportation, and the capability of the weapons, the ability of today's terrorist groups to bring widespread death and destruction has markedly increased. International terrorists are now borderless and flexible, and this situation poses major challenges in responding to terrorism. Knowledge is transferred from one terrorist organization to another, even across significant distance in time, space, and ideological orientation (Hoffman, 2012; Weinberg, Pedahzur & Hoefler, 2012). A variety of social institutions supports such knowledge transfer in the terrorist world. They learn from the strategies and tactics of other organizations by studying each other's' training manuals, videos, and other forms of information by surfing the internet or simply by following the news on CNN (Crenshaw, 2012; Duyvesteyn, 2012; Vidino, 2012). The prime-time news coverage provides a platform for the terrorist group's efforts to disseminate their ideology, share tactics and attract followers (Pfefferbaum, 2003). These opportunities make far too easy for terrorists to carry out their violent actions. This is why the war on terror has not brought victory in any country dealing with it.

When the United Nations first took up the issue of terrorism in 1972, two schools of thought existed. One school was primarily interested in addressing the root causes of terrorism, whereas the other school was more concerned with fighting with the manifestations of terrorism itself (Horgan & Braddock, 2012). The second school of thought has become much prominent over the last three decades. Until recently, scholars and government officials objected to addressing root causes because they fear that talking to terrorists could somehow justify terrorism and encourage those who engage in violence to continue their atrocities (Della Porta,

2012). Thus, terrorism, itself the extreme use of violence and force, has long encouraged the view that forceful and violent responses are obligatory. Governments have been invariably placed under enormous pressure to react forcibly and fast in the wake of a terrorist attack.

### **MILITARY RETALIATIONS**

Military operations have generally been widely approved also by the public when they have been employed. In polls and surveys carried out in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, a clear majority consistently voiced approval of their government's use of military force against terrorism. Although condemned internationally, the U.S. Strike against Libya in 1986 was approved by 77 percent of US citizens polled. The strikes authorized by President George W. Bush against Afghanistan received massive domestic support, with 87 percent of the US population expressing their approval (Pedahzur & Ranstorp, 2012). These results indicate just how common vengeful attitudes are. An individual does not have to be a terrorist to believe that the use of violence is appropriate and justified even when it incurs the loss of innocent life and bypasses nonviolent means of responding to the problem (Muldoon, 2003).

Ultimately, for any government that wishes to make a widely popular response to terrorist violence, aggressive military force is by far the most obvious choice. Such reactions are understandable, but they show a poor awareness of human psychology. One consistent finding in the terrorism literature is that major military retaliations have never led to a reduction in terrorism (Bin Hassan, 2012; Bjorgo, 2005; Browne, 2003, Crenshaw, 2012, Della Porta, 2012; Pedahzur & Ranstorp, 2012; Richardson, 2006; Schmid, 2012; Silke, 2003; Silke, 2005; Steger, 2003; Stern, 2003; Vertigans, 2011, Weinberg, 2012). On the contrary, terrorist attacks either

stubbornly remained at their original levels or even worse, increased dramatically in the months after the retaliation.

Strength and power alone are not enough to defeat terrorism for the following reasons. First, there are limits to power when it comes to applying coercion within a constitutional democracy. Therefore, democracies cannot hope to bring order through harsh police and military action alone. A few Latin American cases exist in which the military was successfully deployed against terrorism domestically, but never by a democracy (Richardson, 2006). In these instances, the military operated in a fashion that is entirely inconsistent with the principles of liberal democracy.

Second, retaliatory policies can have deterrent effect but only in the short term. Watching children, wives, fathers and relatives in the camps in the aftermath of bombing attacks shaking their fists in rage suggests that such tactics are only contributing to new rising generations of terrorists (Browne, 2003). In Osama bin Laden's words, "if killing those who kill our sons is terrorism, then let the history be witness that we are terrorists" (Richardson, 2006, pg. 4). Violence brings more violence. The Russians had not been able to translate overwhelming military force into victory in Chechnya. Rather, the conduct of the war has radicalized the terrorist movement in that region. While initially Chechen terrorists were nationalists seeking independence from the Russian Federation, they have now been infiltrated by radical people and consequently are becoming more absolutist, less willing to constrain their violence, and less likely to accept a negotiated settlement.

Despite having a better trained, equipped, and motivated army, Israel has won many battles but has been unable to translate its military victories into political success against Hezbollah (Silke, 2003). Israel resorted to two full-scale invasions of Lebanon (1978, 1982) to

deal with Palestinian terrorism. Each time, over 20,000 troops poured over the border backed up by tanks and jets. In the resulting fighting the Israelis killed some 4000 people and left 400,000 people homeless (Steger, 2003). But did all this military force have an effect on terrorism? What did all this bloodshed achieve? Did terrorist attacks against Israel decline thereafter? Most Israelis believed that these strikes sent a powerful warning to states and groups who were contemplating terrorist attacks against Israeli targets. However, Israel's invasion of Lebanon was not a significant deterrent to terrorism, and has led to a significant short-term increase in terrorism directed against the Israel and its close ally, the United States. Far from being cowed into submission, Lebanon increased its commitment to terrorism and began to sponsor even more acts of terrorism than before (Pedahzur & Ranstorp, 2012).

From Chechens to Tamils to Palestinians to Saudis from women to men, from young to old, the words of volunteers for suicide are replete with the language of revenge (Bloom, 2012; Pape, 2012; Pedahzur, 2005). A senior member of al-Qassam reports: "after every massacre, every massive violation of human rights and defilement of our holy places; it is easy for us to sweep the streets for boys who want to do a martyrdom operation" (Hassan, 2001, p.38). Thus, the heavy-handed tactics in which soldiers are trained can have an enormously powerful and negative effect when deployed in a civilian context. Its physical presence cannot help but instill fear, incite resentment and intimidate the public.

Third, the use of armed forces might even be counterproductive, especially when terrorists try to militarize a conflict situation in the hope provoking an overreaction of the security forces. The situation can worsen when the government forces are perceived as making little or no distinction between the supporters of the terrorists and the population at large. The clear examples of these are PKK and the IRA. How, in less than two decades, could the PKK

and the IRA turn into the largest, best-equipped, best-funded terrorist organization in the Middle East and Europe? From being parochial movements, how did the PKK and IRA become fiercely supported organizations that enjoyed massive local endorsements and tolerance and became the benefactor of millions of dollars of donations from sympathizers spread around the world? A major factor in the growth of both PKK and IRA was not the acumen of its leaders and members, but more the ineptitude of the manner in which Turkey and England chose to subdue them (Drake, 2012; Gaston, 2003, Weinberg, 2012).

Today, one robust reality about terrorism is that, it is neither a military nor a police problem. To prevent terrorism, it is impossible to disregard the conditions that nourish it. Throughout the history, terrorism has remained, and will continue to remain, fundamentally a problem of civil society. As explained above, terrorists are not markedly different from the members of the communities they claim to represent. When long-standing injustices in society are left unresolved for years, desperate people, and some others supporting their cause, are willing to die and kill for what they perceive to be a just cause. This highlights the need for an analysis of the social factors that sustain support for a terrorist organization and in particular the apparent contradictions that underpin terrorist support.

### **EXPLORING THE SOCIO-CULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS OF TERRORIST PSYCHOLOGY**

Although academic criminologists and political scientists who profess expertise about terrorism have rarely gained first-hand knowledge about their subject matter, they now argue that the solution to end terrorism lies in understanding these people (Crenshaw, 2012; Della Porta, 2012; Stern, 2003). It is now believed that in order to really understand the motivations of terrorists, it is necessary to talk with them directly. We need to know more about why people

become terrorists and how they experience their lives as a terrorist. That is, we will never be able to explain terrorism to others until we can completely empathize with the pain and frustration that cause it. It is important to point out that empathy does not imply sympathy. As scholars, we should understand and share the feelings of another without necessarily having feelings of pity or sorrow for their misfortunes, agreeing with their sentiments or opinions, or having a favorable attitude toward them.

We should talk to terrorists to understand: What are the grievances that lead these individuals to join terrorist organization? Who convinced them to join these movements? Who is more likely to become a terrorist? Why do they want to become involved in a group that engages in violence? Did they really know the situation before they joined? Once they join, what makes them stay? What roles or tasks they fulfill once a member? Why do they risk their lives? Do they expect to die? How do they get to the point of scarifying themselves? Why people kill themselves as a means of killing others? Is it thrilling to plant a bomb or kill innocent people? What causes these people to be so immune to the suffering their actions cause, and what do they hope to achieve by inflicting it? What are the payoff structures? Do these people have moral affirmation? What make terrorists different? Why and how do they affect other members at various stages of their own and others' involvement? What do their families think when they decide to join terrorist organizations? How do these people see the world, the major powers? Do they appreciate their current situation? Why and how do they ultimately want to, or have to, leave the organization? Why do human beings decide to kill others they do not know in furtherance of an objective unlikely to be realized in his lifetime, and in so doing place themselves outside the law and dramatically increase the likelihood that he will be killed or imprisoned and his family will be at risk? Why do people participate in these terrorist actions?

Is it a mix of guilt, shame, political grievance, inequality, oppression, or a perceived sense of humiliation and hopelessness or an overwhelming desire to avenge the perceived injustice wrought to their land? And most importantly, why is it still so few people engage in terrorism? While the terrorists may be largely tolerated within their communities, the number of individuals actively involved in the campaign of violence is always relatively low. Very few individuals of aggrieved minorities go on to become active terrorists. So, we should learn why did these particular individuals engage in terrorism when most of their compatriots did not? The person who engages in terrorism is different or special?

We cannot develop a response to terrorism without analyzing the terrorists' methods, including skillful marketing of grievances to generate support. For terrorists, their supporters and the communities around them, becoming a terrorist is not a deviant act. Rather, terrorist recruits are often seen entirely as normal, transparent and unremarkable members of their communities, and the decision to join while not always endorsed can still be seen in sympathetic terms (Taylor & Horgan, 2012). Although we see terrorists as evil, violating all moral codes in pursuit of power and domination, terrorists see themselves to be perfectly good, working heroically for the benefit of others, not for themselves. They see themselves as the victims trying to seek justice; defending the weak against the strong and punishing the strong for their violation of all moral codes. They believe that they are creating a better world. There is no room for the other side's point of view. Because they believe their cause is just, and because the population they hope to protect is purportedly so deprived, abused, and helpless, they persuade themselves that any action is justified.

From a counterterrorism point of view, this distinction is important. If the goal is to affect the incentive structure that causes people to join or leave a movement, knowing how they



join in the first place is essential (Steger, 2003). Unless we understand the appeal of participating in extremist groups and the seduction of finding one's identity in opposition to other, we will not achieve success in our attempts to stop terrorism. That is why we need to understand their deeper feelings, the alienation, the humiliation, and the greed that fuel terrorism.

Therefore, the answer to why a person becomes involved in terrorism as opposed to those who do not share similar backgrounds and living context is central to addressing the problem of terrorism. This task can be accomplished by focusing on understanding the life history of an individual person—a strategy long used in the Chicago school of criminology.—Having a terrorist tell his own story. Criminologists have long used the life-history approach to re-script the pasts of criminals and then make sense of the things happened in the light of subsequent events.

Although a serious study of terrorism must start with the proper understanding of human motivations for joining a terrorist organization, the complexity of terrorist subjectivity has not yet been extensively studied by most terrorism experts. That is, most scholars have not yet used the empathetic tools in order to understand hidden origins of the conflicts and ambivalences from the perspective of terrorists. The field of counter-terrorism is a human science. Thus, the essential aspect of what it is to be a terrorist should not be left out of the social enquiry.

Governments often resist talking to terrorists for fear that doing so misleads to confer legitimacy on them, or to reward their terrorism (Silke, 2005). However, only by overcoming this reluctance it is possible to discover how terrorists see the world, the importance they assign to particular goals, and their assessment of their own position in fighting for a cause. Ignorance of our enemy has only served to strengthen them. For these reasons, whenever possible, it is best

to talk to dissident groups to understand the source of their grievances the take necessary steps to tackle it.

The grievances of these groups may be virtual, imaginary, or historical. If their demands are nonnegotiable, the focus should be to isolate them from their communities. But not all grievances of terrorists are baseless (Reinares, 2005; Richardson, 2006). Thus, the global community must recognize the need to address the legitimate grievances of disaffected people in a meaningful way. Not doing so will only fuel resentment and increase the threats of terrorism. These implications need to be considered carefully. Relying solely on military in control of countering terrorist tends to lead to a neglect of addressing the social and political causes of conflict and can lead to a protracted war on terror lasting for decades (Post, 2003). We must keep in mind that terrorism thrives on conflict, and that we have to address the underlying conflict issues.

This recommendation does not imply that resolving a conflict's root causes will automatically terminate the insurgency peacefully. When hatred is bred in the bone, and passed from generation to generation, it does not yield easily to peace. When young children are socialized into cultural value systems that celebrate martyrdom, revenge, and hatred of other ethnic or national groups, they are at risk of supporting or committing violent atrocities when they grow up (Bin Hassan, 2012; Bloom, 2012; Browne, 2003). Thus, there is no short-range solution to the problem of terrorism. Once individuals are in a terrorist group, it is extremely difficult to influence them. It will require years to reduce the attractiveness of terrorism for those who have been raised in a climate dominated by hopelessness and despair so that extremism and violence have increasingly come to be seen as the only course (Della Porta, 2012).

Still, redressing the grievances that give rise to terrorism offer the best prospects for reducing terrorist violence in the long run. Committed terrorists are not likely to change their views or mode of action due to political reforms, but their social and political support base is far more likely to dry up. On the other hand, some insurgent movements are inherently extremist and not interested in compromising their demands, such as militant religious fundamentalists who are intent on establishing highly authoritarian theocratic states. Thus, it is important to distinguish between insurgents' legitimate and illegitimate grievances. For example, if the presence of Jewish settlers in the heart of Palestinian territories in West Bank and Gaza Strip is considered to constitute one of the underlying root causes for continued Palestinian hostility, then evacuating and resettling those settlers in Israel may prove to be a solution to addressing those Palestinian demands that may be judged to be legitimate.

#### **UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TERRORIST: EMPLOYING THE LIFE-HISTORY METHOD**

This sense of inadequacies of the field led me into a study of PKK terrorism. The goal was to try to establish why an otherwise responsible Kurdish parent, student, or teacher would choose to join a terrorist movement and remain in one and why a group of people would collectively choose to kill innocent people they do not know in order to advance some goal unlikely to be achieved in their lifetime.

In this context, I will explore the rise of the radical Kurdish nationalist sentiment in Turkey and uncover what motivated so many young Kurdish men and women to join PKK—a group denounced by the United states, Turkey, and Europe as a terrorist group by employing a two staged life story strategy; (1) intensive interviewing, including the ongoing preparation of

semi structured questions and (2) successive visits in which there is a running dialogue between field notes, observation's and conceptual framework.

Lives have been lost because Turkey's failure to understand the nature of the enemy we face and its unwillingness to learn from the experiences of others in countering terrorism. Turkey has made violent retaliation the cornerstone of the national effort to combat and defeat terrorism, rather than entering into a negotiated settlement. The destruction of the enemy's personnel and resources has not achieved victory over them. When the Turkish government introduced harsh measures to tackle the PKK, recruits and support flooded to the organization. When PKK terrorists have been bombed, the Kurdish citizens of Turkey increased their involvement and buttressing of terrorism rather than pulling away from it. When PKK members have been killed and other sanctions have been imposed, the sense of perceived injustice increased, particularly considering the high loss of innocent life—driving more recruits into extremist groups and increasing sympathy and support for these groups not only among the Kurds but also in the international community.

Although the broader Kurdish population has not themselves engage in terrorism or even openly approved of it, they have not turned the terrorists in. They have looked the other way and provided crucial, albeit often passive, support. When the authorities investigate, these terrorists have been simply absorbed into the community. As a result, Turkey may win skirmish after skirmish in these terms but still find itself unable to establish lasting peace and stability in the Eastern Anatolia region.

If past experience is instructive, such measures are not proficient at defeating or diminishing the threat of terrorism in the long term. We cannot defeat terrorism by smashing every terrorist movement. An effort to do so will only generate more terrorists, as happened

repeatedly in the past (Gibbs, 2012). The solution lies in understanding why people become terrorists and support terrorist groups. To understand why a terrorist group's ideology resonates, we have to examine the kind of political, social, economic, religious, or other insecurities and grievances that a local population may have and that are used by the terrorist group to radicalize the use of violent acts. We should look behind the violence and understand the factors that fuel it, and then introduce social, political, and religious reforms to alleviate the conditions that breed support of violence.

Sean MacStiofain, the provisional IRA's chief of staff supports this argument by telling that; "Most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries in the first place, but by the stupidity and brutality of governments" (Gupta, 2008, p.195). The true irony of retaliation and military force as a tool of counter-terrorism is that in the one moment it is a child of, and a father to, the cycle of vengeance and the common human desire for revenge and retribution (Richardson, 2006). Social psychology has long indicated that groups in conflict become deeply polarized in their views of each other (Muldoon, 2003). That is why harsh blows administered in response to Irish, Kurdish, Palestinian, and Libyan terrorism did not quell the conflict or subdue protagonists. The violence continued, often more destructive and intense than before, consuming more lives and resources.

Thus, an effective anti-terrorism planner must learn to think like a terrorist. Since we all have our ethnocentric limitations—that is, the set of values and beliefs we develop as we mature in our own cultural setting—developing a terrorist mindset is a challenge. Therefore, to resolve terrorist insurgencies, it is essential to research and systematically map the spectrum of root causes underlying a rebellion's origins, grievances, and demands through interviews (Crenshaw, 2012; Della Porta, 2012). First-hand research, primarily through interviews is necessarily

limited by a number of different practical issues, not at least fears for personal safety. However, such research is possible, and the experiences of a small number of researchers have demonstrated that terrorist organizations generally tend to cooperate and be facilitative of researchers' approaches.

In this way, policy makers will have a greater knowledge of the factors and circumstances underlying insurgencies that radicalize and drive terrorists into carrying out their violent actions. Insurgent conflict may be caused by political or socio-economic deprivations or disparities that are exploited by the insurgents. It is hoped that such identifications of root causes will then produce the knowledge and insight on the part of the governments to formulate appropriate responses that would be most effective in terminating a terrorist insurgency. In ideal cases, a government's conciliatory policies that address and resolve that conflict's root causes may succeed in peacefully winning the affected populations "hearts and minds".

To understand the PKK, or any such movement, it is necessary to talk with those people who actually are or were part of it. The life-story approach, if it is done well, has the potential to provide the details of that process whose character we would otherwise only speculate about. It will describe those crucial interactive episodes in which new lines of individual and collective activity are forged, in which new aspects of the self are brought into being. By employing this strategy, this dissertation will not only explain the group's attraction for so many Kurds, but also what has kept people fighting despite hardships and misgivings and finally the capture of the PKK leader.

## CHAPTER 2

### A TERRORIST TELLS HIS OWN HISTORY

Terrorism studies have grown enormously in the last decade, spreading from sociology and political science to other fields of knowledge, as varied as criminology, history, psychology, and anthropology. With the growing interest in the terrorism, there also has been an increasing need for methodological guidance for empirical research. This chapter introduces a new trend in terrorism studies—life-history approach.

Life histories are a particular type of in-depth interview, in which a subject tells his or her history for the specific purpose of the research. Although this kind of technique has been widely used in research on deviance, youth, and delinquency, the life-history approach has been rarely used in terrorism studies, especially for the analysis of militants of terrorist organizations. There is a growing recognition that capturing or killing every terrorist is not a realistic strategy, and thus that scholars need to spend more time exploring the radicalization process—what motivates people to become extremists in the first place (Jacobson, 2010). In this context, the use of the life histories is a promising approach for obtaining insights into the radicalization phenomenon because it captures lived experience and perspectives of critical actors (della Porta, 2012).

Toward this end, three central issues are examined in this chapter. Section one discusses why life-histories—the own history of terrorists—are valuable based on the prior studies conducted in several academic fields. The chapter will then incorporate the story of early “own stories” published by criminologists—Clifford Shaw and his colleagues— to show how useful this method is for generating empirical knowledge that cannot be acquired through other methods.

Section two will present the later life histories published by Chambliss (1984), Kelly and Heymann (1978), Klockars (1974), Rettig, Torres & Garret (1977), Snodgrass (1982), Steffensmeier (1986), and Steffensmeier and Ulmer (2005) in the criminology field. It will present how these later life histories played an important role in the further explanation of criminal behavior by providing a wealth of information about the trajectory of criminal careers by highlighting their five main contributions. Finally, this section will also analyze the works of authors who used similar methods to understand the radicalization phenomenon within the PKK terrorists.

Finally, section three will lay out the research strategy of this dissertation. It will show how the early and later life histories provided a context for the current study.

### **THE VALUE OF THE OWN HISTORY**

The present study is an attempt to gain an understanding of the process of radicalization through an intensive study of the lives of individual terrorists, seeking particularly to uncover various factors that may be found behind their acts of violence. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will begin by discussing the value of “an own story,” as it was called in the classic work by Shaw in his *the Jack-Roller*. A life-history study of a terrorist makes at least six contributions to counterterrorism and criminology in general.

First, the unique feature of a life-history document is that it records an individual’s experiences in the first person—that is, in the subject’s own words. Unlike most scholarly investigations, the subject’s accounts are not translated by researchers into language. Thus, in contrast to other social science methods, researchers do not include their own interpretations on interviewees’ explanations of their behavior; as such they minimize their influence on the



subjects. This feature of the life history is important because researchers can potentially gain insight on the effects of opportunity structures, delinquent subcultures, social norms, and other commonly invoked explanations of behaviors by seeing them from the actors' point of views (Shaw, 1930). Consequently, the life-history approach enables readers to see how significant events were understood as well as individually and collectively constructed or responded to by persons who experienced them.

In addition to conveying the original accounts of the subjects without any significant change, subjects' interpretations are fully presented in these studies regardless of whether the information is important to the subject. This feature distinguishes the life-history method from the autobiographical method in which authors share their life to us by selecting only some of the events that they would prefer us to know (Shaw, 1966). Therefore, autobiographers can omit what would be trivial to them, even if this information could be of interest to researchers.

In contrast, life histories are presented essentially as they are written with the exception of three considerations. First, when conducting a life history with terrorists, it might be necessary to protect the terrorist from law enforcers and other interested persons who might wish to discover their identity. So, it is necessary to change names, dates, places and descriptions of events to make sure that terrorist's true identity cannot be established. Second, subjects may not be fully able to express themselves in grammatically correct language. Thus, it might be necessary to correct the grammar to transform the material into the true meaning of the text. Finally, if only limited information is provided on certain key issues, it might be necessary to urge subjects to elaborate further. Thus, scientists who conduct a life history may ask the interviewee about the events that require amplification. This process of elaboration may continue until the life history is completed.

Therefore, the life-history method adheres as closely as possible to the original wordings of subjects with the exception of modifications that are necessary to disguise the identity of subjects as well as a few changes in grammar and punctuation of content. That is, these studies are conducted with a minimum level of researcher influence. By minimally interfering with subjects, researchers produce a work purely from the perspective of the subjects—readers understand why people engage in crime or terrorist acts by seeing how it looked to them, what they thought by behaving like that, what alternatives they saw open to themselves. Thus, life histories are envisioned as a product of the interaction and desire for understanding between teller and listener (Peacock & Holland, 1993).

Second, the life-history method may provide information on the causes of terrorism that other research methods cannot access in as much detail. Statistical methods might not be able to provide detailed information about the ongoing processes in the formation of a terrorist's mindset or the factors and circumstances that radicalize and drive terrorists into carrying out their violent actions. For example, a statistical analysis of terrorism may make assumptions about radicalization by examining the characteristics of a region, social class, demographics, and background of the terrorists, and a host of other matters that are likely to influence the participation in insurgent movements.

Using large samples, these studies can generate hypothesis by suggesting probable associations, such as that terrorism is most likely to persist among people who are young and who have suffered from poverty, lack of education, or have been denied a privileged lifestyle (Geddes, 2002). Although statistics can indicate these associations by examining various variables, these methods might not be able to offer complete insights on the terrorists' lives, their psyche and personal experiences (Shaw, 1930).

By contrast, a life history can be especially valuable when these associations acquired through statistical analysis require elaboration. Through life-history method, we can extend our knowledge beyond the statistical findings and understand terrorists' deeper feelings, the alienation, the humiliation, and the greed that push them into radical organizations. We can explain how these people are introduced to terrorist groups, how they experience their lives as a terrorist, why they are willing to injure and destroy people; how they deny the responsibility for doing harm on the victims, and host of other matters.

Therefore, by using life-history method, scholars can supplement or expand upon the data drawn from quantitative methods. For example, delinquency has been attributed to the negative circumstances confronted by youngsters, such as material disadvantage, conflict with parents, or abuse. Wayward youths are portrayed as driven unhappily into crime. However, qualitative research has shown that offenders are often pulled or lured into crime because of the fun and benefits it provides (Shover, 2011). That is, breaking the law has a seductive quality. Notably, in their life histories, Clifford Shaw and his colleagues learned from youths that delinquency was, in a sense, fun—as the excerpts reveal:

Never a thought occurred to me as to whether it was right or wrong; it (stealing) was merely an interesting game. The apple or orange didn't make as much difference as the getting of them. It was the taking of them that I enjoyed (Shaw & Moore, 1931, p.58).

Stealing coal from the cars on the tracks was one of the things that we did most. It was more fun than anything else (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938, p.111).

Additionally, the life-history method potentially serves as a window on the lives of terrorists by offering a more inward and subjective perspective on why these people join, stay, and leave terrorist groups. Researchers produce valuable information about the subject's psychological dispositions and dynamics by entering into the lives of terrorists and providing

insights about terrorists' suppositions' of the world, their personal experiences of recruitment, volunteerism, triggering factors, and psychological issues (Peacock & Holland, 1993). By examining the information acquired through the life-history method, scholars might provide insight on the complex mechanisms through which these people radicalized and then evolved into terrorists. Therefore, a life-history study of a terrorist provides a more complex and multifaceted image of causality that supplements statistical techniques.

Third, the life-history method provides insight into the development of a career in terrorism by describing the sequences or steps that those drawn to terrorism go through as their lives unfold. Scholars now agree that many of the behavior traits (as well as tendencies towards crime) of individuals can be traced to habits and attitudes that were developed during the early periods of their lives (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993). For example, by examining youngster who persist in serious offending, Moffitt (1993) and Sampson and Laub (1993) recognized that antisocial conduct and criminal behavior often had their origins in childhood. That is, many serious offenders embark on a life-course trajectory that will lead to a career in crime in the first few years of life.

In this context, Chicago school scholars who used the life-history approach—including Shaw and his colleagues (1930, 1931, and 1938) and Sutherland (1937)—discovered that the delinquency trends of older offenders often originated during the early years of individuals' lives. What occurred in the childhood of Sidney, Stanley, and the Martin brothers were related to what happened in their juvenile years and adulthood. These kids' behavior patterns and personality unfolded in a process through which they were continually reshaped according to the influences of norms, rules, and associations in their immediate environment.

In a similar way, the successive process involved in the gradual formation of the terrorist career might be analyzed with the life-history approach. By conducting a life history of a terrorist, scholars can explore the radicalization's onset (how one gets into a terrorist organization), persistence (how terrorists stay in these organizations), and desistance (how and why terrorists get out of terrorism).

Consequently, scholars can uncover how complex set of factors—for example, ineffective and rejecting parenting, delinquent peers, harsh military measures, and individual differences such as difficult temperament—combine to increase a person's risk of being exposed to terrorist organizations. Additionally, by revealing the details about the factors that facilitate onset, persistence, or increase in radicalization through life-history approach, at-risk youngsters can be identified early in life and potentially intervened with at that point. Thus, it might be possible for policy makers to combat terrorism through means that do not necessarily involve imprisoning or killing terrorists.

Fourth, analyzing the life history of a terrorist can provide data that might be used to develop theories of radicalization. Although terrorists are often tolerated within their communities, the number of individuals from these communities actively involved in a campaign of violence is always low. Very few individuals of aggrieved minorities develop into active terrorists. Accordingly, scholars should explore why these particular individuals engage in terrorism when most of their friends do not.

In this context, the life-history method might provide insight into the causes of terrorism and how they operate in a person's life by exploring the first-hand accounts of rationalizations, motivations, and other factors that help scholars to generalize to other situations and persons. Using this method, scholars look behind the violence and understand the factors that fuel it. It is

hoped that such identifications of root causes will then produce the knowledge and insight on the part of the scholars to formulate appropriate theories explaining why a person becomes involved in terrorism as opposed to those who also share the similar backgrounds and living context. Therefore, life histories are potentially a rich source of materials for developing theoretical understanding. For example, information garnered through a life history might help scholars to develop a theory for why an otherwise responsible Kurdish parent, student, or teenager would choose to join and remain in a terrorist movement.

Fifth, the life history can serve as a case that either supports an existing theory or serves as a negative case that tends to falsify the theory's claim. As Shaw (1930, p.xi) noted, life histories do not in and of themselves provide definitive proof of a theoretical proposition because they often involve the examination of single cases. However, life histories, through detailed examination of a subject by consideration of various factors from childhood to adulthood, can be used as "negative cases" that helps researchers to decide whether a proposed theory is adequate.

Negative cases involve settings, events, and reasons that are not consistent with the propositions and explanations of main body of theories and evidences. Occurrence of negative cases would damage the reliability and accuracy of theories. Thus, existence of these cases is often sufficient to reject a theory (Bloor, 1997).

Accordingly, theories of radicalization must explain or at least be consistent with the findings of this dissertation, if they are to be considered fully valid. If the relationship between variables reported in this life history appears contrary to the contentions made by radicalization theories, this fact can be evidence that the perspective may be deficient in certain respects. Thus, terrorism scholars might have to revise, modify, and broaden their model to explain why the case in question is contrary to the expectations and assumptions of theories. Therefore, efforts to

explain negative cases that are acquired from life histories are integral to strengthening theoretical understanding because such cases offer the opportunity to develop more nuanced and accurate theoretical explanation.

Sixth and finally, the life-history method reveals the social world of a terrorist by describing to those in the rest of the society what it means to be a kind of person that they would never come into contact in their lives. Similar to other people in a society, terrorists are social in nature. They seek to contact and interact with each other and influence the behaviors of one another. They are part of a social life that has profound implications on their routines. This social life has its own social patterns, shared expectations, and common understandings that shape terrorists' routine in everyday interaction with other terrorists. In other words, terrorists become who they are because the groups in which they live constantly influence them in a certain direction.

In this context, a life history of a terrorist will explore the culture in which terrorists' were raised, the family in which they were grew up, their interactions with other people, and the social situations and structural conditions—economic, political, demographic, cultural and historical— that channel and constrain their behavior in certain directions. In this way, our knowledge of the terrorist's social world will rest on a deeper foundation and go beyond the speculations offered in more popular outlets. Scholars will have a richer understanding of how terrorists interact with others, how decisions are made within their groups, how do they deal with conflicts and so on. As a result, the life history of a terrorist will provide a living and vibrant account of how terrorists, as individuals, understand and move about in their social world and make their choices within their community.

In summary, six major advantages of the life-history method have been discussed. As outlined above, the life history will potentially provide rich insights into the cognitions—sentiments, attitudes, and conceptions—and social world of those who become terrorists. A more intimate knowledge of the terrorists acquired through life-history method would potentially enable greater identification and provide deeper information about why people join, stay, and leave terrorist groups. This knowledge will then have criminological implications in terms of understanding the origins of terrorism, the life-course of terrorists, and assessing theories of terrorism.

It is also hoped that such identifications of root causes through the life-history method will then produce the knowledge and insight on the part of the policy makers to formulate appropriate responses that would be most effective in terminating a terrorist insurgency. Therefore, the situations revealed in the life histories will not only enable us to diagnose the fundamental nature of terrorism, but will also provide a basis for devising a plan of treatment.

### **EARLY LIFE HISTORIES: THE CHICAGO SCHOOL**

Clifford R. Shaw and Henry D. McKay are prominent members of the Chicago School of criminology. They are well known for their use of crime mapping to explore the distribution of juvenile delinquency across the urban landscape, showing in particular the concentration of high rates of crime in the inner-city area, known as the “zone in transition.” Between 1929 and 1969, Shaw and McKay published three studies to explain the high juvenile delinquency rates in Chicago. Their most significant work was published in their classic book, *Juvenile Delinquency in Urban Areas* (1949/1969). Their first study was published in their earlier volume, *Delinquency Areas*.



As noted, Shaw and McKay started by showing empirically the distribution of crime across communities in Chicago. However, their crime mapping was guided by Ernest Burgess's model of city growth, called the "concentric zone theory." According to Burgess (1967), it was possible to differentiate Chicago into five concentric zones that emanated outwards from the center of the city. He named these zones as follows: (1) Central Business District or Loop (2) the "Zone in Transition" (factories, abandoned buildings, and deteriorating housing); (3) the "Zone of Workingmen's Homes" (single-family tenements); (4) the "Residential Zone" (high-class single-family homes with yards and garages); and (5) the "Commuter Zone" (suburbs beyond the city limits) (Shaw & McKay, 1969).

It was this—Burgess's concentric zone theory—that helped to lead Shaw and McKay to develop their social disorganization theory. After plotting juvenile delinquents' residential addresses into the zones created by Burgess on a Chicago map, Shaw and McKay (1949/69) discovered that juvenile delinquency rates were consistently highest for the *zone in transition*. This concentration of delinquency occurred even as different ethnic groups moved into and out of the inner city. A group's rate of delinquency depended on the zone into which they moved.

Thus, the distribution of delinquents was closely related to the location of industrial areas and then to the composition of population. There was a stable, high to low offending pattern from the *zone in transition* to the other zones. This finding occurred, not just in Chicago but also in twenty other cities in the United States (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007). That is, the juvenile delinquents were mainly concentrated in low rental areas near to the industries and the population in these areas shared the characteristics of foreign born, high proportion of recent arrivals, aliens, and migrants from the rural south (Shaw & McKay, 1949/69).

Using Burgess's concentric zone theory of the city, Shaw and McKay argued that these high rates of crime were due to "social disorganization." The offending pattern was higher in those areas because the zone in transition was located at the intersection of poverty, heterogeneity, rapid population growth, transiency, and family disruption. The physical undesirability of these areas reduced the rents. As a result, mixture of immigrants (mostly unskilled industrial workers) started to live in this zone, which was previously owned by a single homogenous group.

According to 1920 federal census, more than thirty foreign groups—with divergent definition of behaviors and standards— were living in the area (Shaw & Moore, 1931, p.15). Therefore, the existence of divergent cultural standards and also the continuous change in the composition of the area prevented the establishment of a neighborhood tradition. For example, what was approved in some groups was condemned in other groups. In some groups, personal status could be enhanced by manifestations of criminal skills, whereas in other groups the commission of such as act would definitely result in ostracism. Thus, there was a confusion of standards. Children living in this community were exposed to a variety of interests, forms of behavior, and stimulations, rather than a consistent pattern of conventional standards and values (Shaw & Moore, 1931).

On the other hand, in this zone churches were poorly attended, schools were marked by disorder, families were disrupted and political groups were ineffective. Thus, adult resources to control and supervise youths were depleted. As a result of the ethnic heterogeneity, there was less uniformity and consistency of conventional values and wide diversity in norms and behaviors for child care.

In their 1969 edition, Shaw and McKay were able to compare the residences of juvenile delinquents for three different time periods: 1900-1906, 1917-1923, and 1927-1933. In this way, they were able to analyze whether the high delinquency rates were related to a specific immigrant group since the population living there had changed multiple times during this lengthy period (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2007). As the ethnic groups acquired enough wealth, they moved to outer zones, and the places they vacated were invaded by newly arrived immigrants. Findings indicated that delinquency rates were constantly high for the *zone in transition* although the ethnic groups living there had changed. Therefore, Shaw and McKay argued that the high rates of crime could not be the result of the characteristics of the residents—immigrant ethnic groups— but the results of the ecological environments. They argued that the structural density (large social forces resulting from transiency, poverty, heterogeneity, and urbanism) and the intersection of this large social forces created stress in some part of the city (Shaw & McKay, 1969).

In other words, these neighborhood characteristics led to social disorganization by weakening the community's ability to provide informal social control and socialize youth thereby leading to higher levels of crime. Even the immigrants did not prefer to live in these neighborhoods; indeed, they left these neighborhoods at the first opportunity they had. Therefore, commitment to community was weak. Additionally, ethnic heterogeneity impeded social organization, because each ethnic group had a different language, tradition, and value system. People living in these areas often had difficulty communicating with each other. Thus, they were unable to realize common values or solve commonly experienced problems.

Although Shaw and McKay were able point out that juvenile delinquency was mainly concentrated in the *zone in transition* due to *social disorganization*, the mapping of criminals by

concentric zones did not tell them why these youngsters living in the zone in transition were going into crime. As developed by other Chicago School scholars, writing about social disorganization provided insight on plausible reasons why disorganized neighborhoods were criminogenic. Still, Shaw and McKay sought another source that could provide richer insights into the lives of the youths drawn into delinquencies in Chicago's inner cities. Importantly, they turned to life histories to furnish the lived reality experience by these wayward youngsters.

Accordingly, Shaw and his colleagues published three detailed life histories as a part of a sociological research program for the Chicago Institute for Juvenile research; *the Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story* (1930/1966), *the Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (1931/1976), and *the Brothers in Crime* (1938). All these life histories threw light upon some important aspects of delinquency by explaining how different personalities were formed under situations in the family, neighborhood, and playgroups, and how some other factors combined to initiate a criminal career and facilitated progress in it.

Shaw and his colleagues came to know juvenile delinquents, which they referred to as Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers (John, Edward, James, Michael, and Carl, and then stayed in contact with them for a prolonged period of time. Through the life-history method, Shaw et al. were able to secure an intimate understanding of the social factors that conditioned the beginnings and the persistence of the wayward conduct. A key insight they draw from their investigation was that in disorganized areas, families broke down and informal controls became weak. They also observed, however, that the kids went into crime because criminal traditions had emerged in their social surroundings and were transmitted from older siblings to younger siblings and from older residents to younger residents.

In this context, they discovered that Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers lived in the most deteriorated and disorganized sections of the Chicago during their infancy, childhood, and early adolescence. The streets were filled with large accumulations of trash. The buildings that Stanley and others lived were physically deteriorated and surrounded by factories, junk yards, and warehouses (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Low incomes, high rates of unemployment, poverty, and economic dependency were the key socio-economic characteristics of the families living in this zone. A high proportion of the families, including those of Stanley, Sidney, and Martin brothers, were living on financial assistance (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

For example, according to Martin brothers' statements, there were periods when the supply of food was extremely low in the family. The members of Martin family all wore used clothes that were supplied from relief agencies or obtained through begging. The father was often visiting the local stores to collect disregarded fruits, vegetables, and meat. Due to this severe economic condition, the parents ignored their offspring's begging or stealing activities. Although the parents did not approve the stealing practices of their sons, they were in a dire economic need (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

The way I would try to explain why we got in trouble is that there was not enough to eat at home and we had no money. When we went out to steal and beg we did not look upon it as stealing, just a way of getting money or something to eat. In other words, it was just like a job to us. I believe it was the poor conditions at home that started us off wrong. (Shaw et al. 1938, p.313)

Others that found it hard to make a living sent their children out to earn and steal whatever they could, just to bring home the bacon as we say. (Shaw & Moore, p.19)

Further, Shaw and his colleagues observed that the beginning of wayward conduct for Stanley and Sidney was directly related to the family disruption—the death of Stanley’s mother and Sidney’s father when the subjects were at early ages. Their stepparents often beat and insulted the subjects. There was little or no emotional bond between the kids and their stepparents. Therefore, these kids had no intimate contact within their family with whom they can frankly speak and talk about their own problems. According to Stanley and Sidney, one important aspect of their current situation was the emotional hostility that they saw from their stepparents (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976).

The stepmother favored her own children in every way. They received what luxuries were to be had, while my brother and sister and I had crumbs to pick off the table. She let her children eat at table, and made us wait. My father couldn’t interfere because if he did, the stepmother would threaten to leave. The stepmother let us go starved and half-naked on the street. (Shaw, 1930, p.49)

He (Sidney) was born bad like his mother. All that is no good in him comes from her. She is sneaky and lies to protect him but no protect to me. He deserves to suffer. I don’t care to know about him... (Shaw & Moore, 1931, p.49)

Additionally, these youngsters engaged in delinquent activities before they were distinctly aware of the fact that petty stealing or burglary was in violation of the laws and moral standards of the social order. Stanley and others engaged in stealing because it was one of the forms of activity which prevailed and seen as an approved practice within their community. For example, Stanley’s stepmother often encouraged him to steal and bring whatever he can stole to home (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

One day my stepmother told William to take me to the railroad yard to break into box-cars. In the cars were foodstuffs, exactly the things my stepmother wanted. We filled our cart and proceeded toward home. After we arrived home with our ill-gotten goods, my stepmother would meet us and pat me on the back and say that I was a good boy and that I would be rewarded. Rewarded with kicks and cuffs. (Shaw, 1930, p.53)

Further, Shaw and his colleagues discovered that their subjects' parents frequently had to work outside the home to supplement the family income due to severe economic hardship. The parents very often had to leave the home very early in the morning to work in vegetable gardens outside the city. They were staying on the farms until the late evening. During these absences, the children remained at home without any kind of adult supervision. For example, in the life history of the Martin brother, it was observed that the younger children were left to the care of older ones for more than eight years. Older brothers were already incorporated into the life of the neighborhood groups whose norms and mode of life were opposed to those of their parent. Thus, these norms were transmitted to the younger brothers in the absence of parental supervision and monitoring. Therefore, it became much harder for the parents to teach their traditions and norms to their children who already got accustomed to delinquent traditions of the neighborhood (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

On the other hand, Sidney's life history revealed another negative aspect of the family disruption—due to father's repeated desertions, the mother had to assume the economic and parental responsibility of the family. As a result, Sidney's mother worked at farms that were located far from the home. She had to leave the home early in the morning and return late at night. Thus, aside from the father's indifference towards him, Sidney received practically no parental supervision due to her mother's long term absence during the daytime. All of his activities were unsupervised (Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976).

In the other cases, Shaw and his colleagues revealed an important aspect of the family situation that increased the participation in delinquent activities— the conflict between the European born parents and the American born children. In the New World, most parents were newly arrived immigrants. The parents of Martin brothers, for example, were born in an

agricultural community in Europe. Their educational standards were low, they were unable to speak English, and also unfamiliar with the customs and practices of the New World. Their intimate contact was limited largely to other adults who were also unfamiliar with the customs and traditions of the New World (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

In contrast to their parents, the Martin brothers incorporated into the street crowds, play groups and gangs and quickly acquired the language of this New World. As the parent could not understand English, the children thought themselves superior to them and began to do things according to their own understandings and against the teachings of their parents.

My parent always treated us fairly and did everything they could to prevent us, kids from going wrong, but they were bucking the surrounding neighborhood and it was too strong for them. Our contacts and companions were stronger than their pleas. They often told us that the things we were doing would lead us into a lot of trouble from which we would not be able to extricate ourselves, but we were young and thought we were pretty smart and ignored their pleadings. (Shaw et. al, 1938, p.221)

Thus, due to the language barrier and cultural differences, the older generations were helpless for transmitting their cultural heritage to the younger generations. To a great extent, children were not receptive of their parent's values because their attitudes, ideas and interests were product of a very different social world. As the brothers engaged into the neighborhood groups, they developed forms of conduct of which the parents disapproved.

In an effort to cope with the problems of their children, the parents of Martin brothers often resorted to corporal punishments. However, infliction of pain as a form of punishment had the adverse effect of alienating the brothers. They first deserted their homes and then joined gangs. These groups afforded satisfaction and exerted influence upon them (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).



Overall, the life-history method revealed four important aspects of the family situation that influenced the behavioral outcomes of the subjects: (1) the early disorganization of the families as a means for control and transmission of social values, (2) the unsympathetic and intolerant attitudes of the step parents, (3) communication problems among the youths and the parents due to language barrier, and (4) the economic hardship (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Shaw and his colleagues also discovered that the youngsters went into crime because delinquency was a permanent aspect of the social activity of the playgroups in the zone in transition. These play groups exercised a large influence and created a culture that not only tolerated, but also fostered delinquent and criminal practices (Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976, p.229). Thus, in addition to the absence of effective control and moral restraints in the family and the community, the life histories revealed that the behavior of the youngsters who lived in the immediate vicinity of these groups were largely determined by their choice of companions outside the home (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

That is, as the parental control weakened, youngsters became involved in the play activities and delinquencies of the gangs. As Stanley and others spent more time with fellow youths in spontaneous and unsupervised activities, their moral values were shaped by the code prevailing within these playgroups. Therefore, association with these groups marked the beginning involvement of Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers in such delinquent behaviors as pilfering, shoplifting, and burglary.

The life histories revealed that the boys took part in delinquent activities at early ages with older boys. For example, Stanley's and Sidney's participation in their first delinquent acts

was tied up with the play activity of the groups and encouraged by companions who were already skilled in various forms of stealing (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976).

Stealing in the neighborhood was a common practice among the children and approved by the parents. Whenever the boys got together, they talked about robbing and made more plans for stealing. I hardly knew any boys who did not go robbing. (Shaw, 1966, p.54)

Most of the conversation in the playgroups was about crime; everybody talked and thought things in crime. It was crime, crime, and more crime. (Shaw & Moore, 1931, p.74)

The youngsters developed criminal because the techniques for specific offenses were transmitted by older generations to succeeding ones through interpersonal relationships within play groups, street crowds, and gangs. For example, the Martin brothers became instrumental in introducing and encouraging each succeeding sibling into delinquent practices (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

The way each member of my family started to steal was probably by being led by one another. I don't know much of my oldest brother's ways, because at the age he started to steal I was still a child. But, Edward was largely responsible for mine, as well as my other two younger brothers' faulty and criminal ways. (Shaw et al. 1938 p.59)

I believe I was started out by my brother Mike. I think each of us was started by another brother in the same way. It is the only explanation I think there can be for it. After a certain length of time it gets to be a habit like working in a factory or office and receiving pay for it. (Shaw et. al., 1938, p.313)

James and Michael used to take me on their trips to rich neighborhoods when I was very young. We would go begging from door to door asking for food, clothing, and money. I would ring doorbells to find out if the people were at home. If they were, I would beg. If they were not at home, I would call my brothers and they would help me break into the home by the way of windows, ice boxes, and transoms. (Shaw et al. 1938, p.75)

Over time, these groups had more control over the children than their families. The traditions, activities and moral standards that Stanley and other boys learnt from these groups on the streets and in the detention homes were important factors in the development of their

delinquency. The boys tried to win the approval of their criminal fellows by participating in their activities. Thus, their initial practices of petty stealing turned into serious crimes such as robbery, through the continuous process of education, habituation, and increasing sophistication in techniques within the delinquent groups (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

For example, the life-history approach revealed that Sidney's contact with Burns Athletic Club marked the beginnings of his involvement in serious criminal behavior. Immediately following his association with this group, Sidney started to engage in armed robbery with guns and in the theft of automobiles. His delinquencies became increasingly serious. Through this club, Sidney came into contact with prominent racketeers and notorious criminals. Thus, the pattern of inflicting violence upon others was established within this group before his final criminal act of rape (Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976).

Shaw and his colleagues also discovered that Stanley and other boys' lack of appreciation of the moral significance of their crimes was mainly due to their contacts outside the home environment, which were limited largely to delinquent and criminal groups. Their playgrounds were alleys, streets, and railroad yards. Their activities were unsupervised and random, and simple forms of stealing were common. This continuous contact with criminals caused Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers to identify themselves with the criminal world and adopt moral values prevailed in these groups. Therefore, the youngsters engaged in delinquent activities before they were distinctly aware of the fact that their activities were in violation of the laws and moral standards of the social order (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Never a thought occurred to me as to whether it was right or wrong. It (stealing) was merely an interesting game. The apple or orange didn't make as much difference as the getting of them. It was the taking of them that I enjoyed. (Shaw & Moore, p.58)

For example, until Sidney read the newspapers and became aware of the shocking nature of the crime he committed (rape), he had little appreciation of its huge moral significance and the effect it would have on the public. It is because he was a part of a criminal world in which murder and other crimes of violence were frequent and in which promiscuous sexual relations were encouraged and openly discussed (Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976).

In addition to play groups in the neighborhood, the life-history approach indicated that the early institutional experiences were important in the continuance of criminal careers. Following the period of begging and petty stealing, the criminal careers of Stanley and the other subjects progressed at different tracks due to the companionships that they established during their stay in correctional and penal institutions. Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers all renewed their contacts and established relationships with new companions at these institutions. As a result of these new contacts, youngsters not only involved in more serious crimes but also acquired added knowledge and sophistication with regard to criminal world (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

The Juvenile Home is where I really learned a lot of things. While in here, I spent most of my time in conversation. We would tell each other stories about all the crimes we had committed and how we tricked the police and a lot of other things. I heard of stealing and stripping cars, strong-arming people, picking pockets, hold-up with a gun, stealing from telephone boxes, and breaking into stores. Some of the things I heard for the first time in the detention home. Here I heard about sexual intercourse with girls. I learned many new ways of committing crimes. By discussing our crimes from all angles, we learn more about crime and how to evade capture (Shaw et. al, 1938, p.342).

For example, the Martin brothers were separated from each other because they were confined in different correctional institutions during their adolescence years. During this period,

each brother had established new contacts with different offenders. Their history indicated the specific kind of crime each brother committed as an adolescent was shaped by the type of criminality that was common among the offenders that the brothers met during their confinements. For example, Michael formed an association with two experienced robbers and then embarked on a career on robbery (Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Further, the life histories of Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers revealed that arrests, probation, confinement in detention homes, time spent in correctional schools, and parole supervision were not effective in deterring the subjects from further criminal acts. Each time the subjects were released from probation or parole, they returned to the same community situation in which their initial delinquencies occurred. Thus, even if these institutions were successful in instilling conventional ideals, these prosocial influences were often undermined when the subjects returned to their delinquent groups in the community. It was learned that there was no effort by the formal authorities that was made to deal with the neighborhood groups that fostered the tradition of delinquency. As a result, these institutions intensified rather than resolved their conflict with the society (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Finally, Shaw and his colleagues also discovered that Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers always had a moral sanction necessary to sustain their interest in crime. The aspect of the life of the community, in which the youngsters engaged, provided the encouragement and justification of their participation in delinquent practices. On the contrary, the community as a whole offered little organized resistance to delinquency (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Many times I went to work and really tried to stick to the job, but my friends lured me back to the racket. I think that if my folks lived anywhere but a big city like Chicago, I or any of my brothers would never even have seen the inside of any state institution or prison. (Shaw et. al, 1938, p.250)

Down in my heart I hated to go out and steal with other fellows, but I went with them to avoid ridicule. (Shaw et al., 1938, p.250)

Everything looked rosy for the mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers who did not care how the one or many brothers were making all the money that came into the family. The little fellows were impressed by the big fellows and got the idea that stealing was an easy, rosy way to make big money. This is something about the neighborhood I lived in during my childhood. (Shaw & Moore, 1931, p.20)

There were other factors indirectly contributed to the delinquency of their subjects.

These included junk dealers and residents who purchased stolen goods, the presence of dilapidated buildings that encouraged junking, and the acceptance of such forms of stealing and junking by some families. Aside from families who sent their children out to steal, there were families and residents who bought these stolen goods from these children. This practice in the community gave approval and justification to the children for their participation in delinquent practices. Further, employment opportunities were limited and employers were skeptical with regard to kids who had criminal records. For many of these people who returned to their community from a penal or correctional institute, crime was virtually inevitable. Thus, the subjects' delinquency was an adjustment to the social world in which they lived (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

In summary, by using the life-history method, Shaw and his colleagues were able to describe the factors and the continuous process involved in the formation and fixation of the delinquent career and personality traits: the loss of a loved parent at an early age, having an abusive stepparent, the discrimination in favor of the step siblings, broken homes, poverty, living in a socially disorganized neighborhood and delinquency area, the long established pattern of

delinquency, confusion of cultural standards, economic insecurity, participation in gang groups, education offered to subjects by their associates in the correctional and reformatory institutions, the thrill and adventures of crime, etc. (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Through the life-history method, Shaw and his colleagues uncovered how social disorganization impacted youths and the processes that resulted in the emergence, development and the continuation of Stanley, Sidney, and the Martin brothers' delinquent careers: (1) lack of control and (2) the transmission of criminal values. They revealed that in disorganized areas, families broke down and informal controls became weak due to poverty and other structural conditions including rapid population growth, heterogeneity (the existence of various immigrant groups), and transiency (rapid population turnout). These conditions disrupted the core social institutions of the society (such as family, church, and political groups) and caused social disorganization.

They also observed that the kids went into crime because criminal traditions had emerged in their social surroundings and were transmitted from older siblings to younger siblings, and from older residents to younger residents. As youths freed from adult control, they roomed the streets and associated with older juveniles. These older juveniles transmitted the criminal values and skills to youth and they also encourage them to go into crime.

As a result, lack of control and learning of criminal values led the youths living in the zone in transition into crime. These two ideas later became important for the development of social bond theory, macro-level control theory, and the differential association theory as the criminology field evolved. Therefore, the life-history method was essential for the development of important theories in criminology.

Similarly, Sutherland (1937) conducted a life history of a thief named Chic Conwell, which also discovered the casual importance of the transmission of criminal attitudes (or definitions) and techniques. Chic Conwell was raised in a pro-social family environment. However, he married to a chorus girl while he was working as an usher in a theater in Philadelphia. After marrying her, he began to use drugs, left home, and became a pimp. Over time, he met thieves and learned how to steal from them. Based on the descriptions provided by Chic Conwell, Sutherland (1937) argued that Chic learned to engage in criminal behavior through interaction with his criminal friends.

A person can become a professional thief only if he is trained by those who are already professionals. It is ridiculous to imagine an amateur deciding to become a pickpocket, con man, penny-weighter (jewelry thief), or a shake man (extortioner) without professional guidance. He learns nothing of the rackets, its technique or operations, and he can't learn these things out of books. (Sutherland, 1937, p.21)

Several bellboys who were stealing everything possible in the hotels where they were employed drifted into the professional ranks when no more hotels would employ them. Their contacts with professional thieves were made while they were disposing of the goods they stole while still employed by the hotels. They became sneak thieves, boosters, and one finally arrived at the status of safe-blower. Two hotel clerks, who came into contact with professional thieves living in their hotels, are among those who came to be professional thieves. (Sutherland, 1937, p.22)

Therefore, contact with the criminals was an important factor in determining future conduct, because it was through these contacts that people learn the values and definitions that are favorable and unfavorable to violation of the law. The life history of Chic Conwell also revealed that, people who were selected into this profession and trained become a professional thief. In other words, a person can be a professional thief only if he (in this case they were nearly all male) is recognized by other professional thieves as such.

Do not let it be understood that a waiter, cab driver, hotel clerk, or bellboy simply quits his job and, deciding to become a professional thief, immediately becomes one. In all cases the severance of legitimate connections is followed by a period of unemployment,



forced or otherwise, hanging around places frequented by thieves and generally known in person by the thieves through previous work. He is first filled in for a day's work on a particular job of no great danger and calling for no particular ability. If he does this unimportant part well, he may be called on later for more important parts, and gradually acquire the expert skill of the professional. (Sutherland, 1937, p.23)

Sutherland also discovered that the professional thief has a body of knowledge that includes its own codes, rules, abilities, skills, and understandings just as other formal occupations have their codes and rules. Rackets and mobs have techniques that are developed by education and these techniques can be secured by association with other professional thieves. That is, this knowledge is transmitted to the newcomers by *apprenticeship method* (Sutherland, 1937, p.217). If somebody is accepted into a racket, he or she would first be given verbal instructions in regard to the act of theft and also the principles of the racket. They would be assisted by older professional thieves in their first criminal acts. Promotion to more important duties occurs only after the person successfully undertakes the initial criminal enterprise.

During the initial period, the racket assimilates the neophyte with its own "*general standards of morality, propriety, etiquette, and rights which characterize the profession of the theft*" (Sutherland, 1937, p.213). The life history of Chic Conwell indicated that thieves have to learn how to plan and execute their crimes. They have to learn the methods of disposing of stolen goods and fixing of the cases if they get caught during the execution of theft. As these neophytes spent more time in the rackets, they increase the number of acquaintances with other thieves, lawyers, police, and fixers that are necessary both for security in their profession and keeping themselves away from penitentiary.

As a result of this training of the tutelage, the neophyte learns the techniques of theft and the codes of the organization and develops methods to control situations that may arise during the act of theft. If a person fails to acquire these specific techniques and codes of professional

theft, he or she is dropped from participation in further activities. Otherwise, he is “*gradually admitted into differential association with older thieves and given tentative status as a professional thief*” (Sutherland, 1937, p.214).

Any man who hits the big-time in crime, somewhere or other along the road, became associated with a big-timer who picked him up and educated him. Then, if first he had the guts and second the ability, he gradually turned into a professional big-time racketeer. But no one ever crashed the big rackets without education in this line. (Sutherland, 1937, p.23)

All the rackets involve manipulation of suckers by nonviolent methods. For this purpose the skills required in the different rackets differ from one another somewhat. But in all of them the thief must be a good actor a good salesman in order to manipulate the sucker. The thief who has not been taught these skills cannot be a professional. (Sutherland, 1937, p.43)

In order to send a thief to the penitentiary, it is necessary to have the co-operation of the victim, witnesses, police, bailiffs, clerks, grand jury, jury, prosecutor, judge, and perhaps others. A weak link in this chain can practically always be found, and any of the links can be broken if you have pressure enough. There is no one who cannot be influenced if you go at it right and have sufficient backing, financially and politically. (Sutherland, 1937, p.83)

Similar to the Shaw and his colleagues’ works, Chic Conwell and his friends also learned new techniques when they served in the house of correction and penitentiaries.

At about the same time, another pimp killed a man because of a woman. During a long stay in jail he became known to professional thieves who were continually in and out by a shake mob. When he beat the murder rap, he was filled in by a shake mob. He made considerable money in this line and on the sneak. (Sutherland, 1937, p.22)

At the end, Sutherland (1937) discussed how these insights confirmed his differential association theory. He argued that selection and tutelage were two important factors to be a professional thief. The life history revealed that a person cannot be recognized as a professional thief unless that individual had the tutelage in professional theft through contact with older professional thieves. Thus, people learn to engage in criminal behaviors by differentially associating with criminal culture. This contact with professional thieves provides the tutelage

and values that are necessary to perform criminal acts. The tutelage is a continuous process. Frequent contact with the older thieves and exchange of experiences advances a thief's position in the professional theft (Sutherland, 1937).

### LATER LIFE HISTORIES

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Chicago school scholars employed the life-history method as a key tool to understand the factors involved in the development of juvenile delinquency. Using this method, Shaw and his colleagues revealed how ecological factors, family environment, poverty, and criminal associates affected the onset and development of wayward behavior on youngsters. Sutherland, on the other hand, discovered how criminal traditions and codes were transmitted from the older generations to the younger ones through differential association. These early studies conducted by investigators who championed the use of life-history method still preserve their validity on their justifications of the causes of delinquency.

Realizing the benefits of the life-history method, other criminologists also used this method in the later decades of the twentieth century and in the beginnings of the twenty-first century. During this period, the life-histories published by several scholars included such titles as *the Professional Fence* by Carl Klockars (1974); *Manny: A Criminal-Addict's Story* by Richard Rettig, Manuel Torres, and Gerald Garret (1977); *Assault with a Deadly Weapon* by Dianne Hall Kelly and Philip Heymann (1978); *The Jack-Roller at Seventy* by Jon Snodgrass (1982); *Harry King: A Professional Thief's Journey* by William Chambliss (1984); *The Fence* by Darrel Steffensmeier (1986); and *The Confessions of a Dying Thief* by Steffensmeier and Jeffrey Ulmer (2005). These works all played an important role in the further explanation of

criminal behavior by providing a wealth of information about the trajectory of criminal careers, especially for those involved in hustling and fencing.

In this context, this section will illustrate how these life histories have been used to contribute to the development of the criminology field by focusing on their five key contributions. First, it will be discussed how family disruption, differential association, and neighborhood disorganization were identified as important factors (as they were in the early life histories) in the development of criminal careers for each of the subjects.

Second, an effort will be made to explain the specific methods and tactics that the subjects of the life histories developed and used during their fencing, hustling, and other types of criminal activities. The discussion will also show how these offenders bribed the police, district attorneys, judges, court clerks, and many other people to acquire and retain their so-called license to carry out their criminal acts.

Third, it has been discovered in the life histories that offenders often employed well-developed justifications to rationalize their criminal activities and life-styles. These rationalization/neutralization techniques that help Harry King, Vincent, Sam, and John Allen to see themselves as regular businessmen and their activities as normal will be discussed in this section.

Fourth, the discussion will present insights from the subjects of the later life histories on the negative aspects of the prison and correctional facilities, such as the lack of rehabilitation and education at these places, the sexual vulnerability of young inmates, and furtherance of criminal skills through association with older inmates.

Finally, this section will explore the individuals' thoughts and feelings about their criminal life-style during their childhood and adulthood when they get older. An attempt will be

made to highlight the subjects' statements about whether they successfully disengaged from crime, whether they had any regrets or remorse about their previous life-style, and whether they would choose to live their lives in the same way or wish they had chosen a different path.

***Family Disruption, Differential Association, and Neighborhood Disorganization***

Similar to the early life histories conducted by Shaw and his colleagues, the later life histories indicated that family disruption combined with the poverty, school failure, and differential association with other criminals were the key factors for the initiation of the wayward behaviors in subjects' lives. Vincent Norfior, Manny, John Allen, Harry King, and Sam all had families that were disrupted at very early stages of their lives due to either the sudden death of a parent or divorce (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Mothers, who had difficulty supporting all of their children economically, often placed the older siblings into covenant homes. For example, both Vincent and Harry King were placed into parental schools when they were children. They stayed there as long as three years. When they were released, both Vincent and Harry were unwilling to live with their mothers due to the hatred grown in their heart for being sent over there (Chambliss, 1984; Klockars, 1974). For example, Vincent preferred to spend most of his time outside the home and on the streets because he did not want to see his mother's face at the home.

The nun said, "Here is your mother." I said, "That is a lie. I aint got no mother." She came over to me and tried to hug me and all, but to me she was just a strange woman. I don't know if I was just scared or if I hated my mother for sending me away. Instead of eating at home I begged for stuff on the streets and in the shops. I didn't want to take nothing from my mother. (Klockars, 1974, p.33)

Therefore, Vincent roomed the streets just to stay away from the home environment. During his stay on the streets, he met hustlers, Paul and Hoppo, who introduced him to the hustling business (number running, bootlegging, prostitution, selling narcotics and stolen goods) (Klockars, 1974).

Harry was also very upset because he could not understand why his siblings were able to at home but he was not. He thought that his mother had rejected him. During his stay at the parental school, he gradually lost his affection and respect for his mother and began to closely associate with the other youngsters. He learned great deal about criminal behavior and skills during his stay at this institution through his contacts that had been placed there by the court for stealing bikes (Chambliss, 1984).

They taught me how to steal and where to steal them and where to sell them. Incidentally, some of the nicer people were the ones who bought the bikes from the kids. They would dismantle the bike and use the parts: the wheels, chains, handle bars and so forth. Learned the names of legitimate dealers who would pay a dollar a piece for a bike, which is quite a large sum of money for a youngster. (Chambliss, 1984, p.4)

Through their criminal associates, Vincent and Harry learned how to make money in easy ways. They both expanded their criminal opportunities by increasing the number of criminal associates in their neighborhoods to earn even more money. Vincent's life history revealed that he was earning two times more than an adult through hustling business when he was only a child (Klockars, 1974).

In the summer of 80, I hustled real well. I was bringing in seventy or eighty bucks a week when grown men weren't making forty dollars. I was earning twice as much as my teachers. (Klockars, 1974, p.36)

Some parents welcomed this money with full knowledge of its illegitimate source. For example, Vincent's mother, who was offering hiding places for thieves who needed a place to disappear in return of money, never asked or complained about Vincent's bringing such large amount of money to home (Klockars, 1974). On the other hand, some families discouraged their

children from wayward behaviors. For example, John Allen's mother, who was also in a poor condition and often had trouble paying the bills, always questioned John when he brought food or money to home. When he was only seven years old, Allen started to hang out with older people in the neighborhood to learn about easy ways of making money to contribute to his family. Since his mother was a pro-social person, he had to invent different excuses whenever he brought home food or money (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

As the oldest kid, I always felt that I was supposed to not only contribute to the family but look out for moms too, and I am glad that I did realize that an early age. When I was small I was a great finder; I used to find everything. Where did you get this boy?" "Oh, I found that around the corner." "Where did that stuff come from" "Well, I found it" or "the nice lady gave it to me." (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.28)

When I was ten or eleven, a day never passed without me stealing some things or getting into some fights. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.37)

As Vincent and Harry became accustomed to making easy money through criminal means, they both bristled at the discipline imposed on them in the schools (Klockars, 1974; Chambliss, 1984). For example, Vincent, who earned more than his teachers, had to change three schools just in one year because of his wayward behaviors. He was labeled as a troublemaker in each of the schools he attended (Klockars, 1974).

I never had a childhood. I mean I never played baseball or basketball or football like other kids. All I ever wanted to do was work. I always wanted to be able to buy anything I wanted to. I used to watch what we used to call Park Avenue boys. They would get taken to school in a limousine, they'd have nice clothes, anything they wanted. That is what I worked for. I set a goal, you know, I always liked nice things. (Klockars, 1974, p.38)

Additionally, John Allen's life history revealed some negative aspects of the school conditions that were important for policy makers. For example, Allen often mentioned that bullying was common in the school. Students had to enroll to protection rackets so that the gangs in the school would refrain from victimizing them. According to Allen's statement, a

student had to pay some amount of money (usually ten cents a day) to one of the rackets to freely walk in the corridors of the school. On the other hand, teachers were rough; they were bereft of pedagogical practices to educate their students in a pro-social way. These teachers often beat the students, and there was nobody to investigate these issues. Finally, Allen mentioned that the classrooms were filled by so many students that capacity of the rooms was exceeded. As a result, individual attention or direct instructing was not provided to the students. So, there was not actually an effective teaching environment but an environment filled with the horror of being beaten by teachers or rackets (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

For me and my friends coming up, school was only a place to be when it got too hot or cold out in the street. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.31)

Going to school didn't really teach me to do nothing besides the things I ended up doing. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.54)

You had the man teaching, and he was always rough and ready to fight; and as soon as you said something smart, he'd go right up side your head. Whap! So, it was pretty rough. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.54)

I really had no chance to learn 'cause classrooms were so filled. Always was filled. Never really had time to get to each individual, and I think in my earlier years that's what I needed. More individual attention as far as learning goes, 'cause after a time of being neglected, I just got uninterested. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.55)

In addition to family disruption and ineffective schooling, the later life histories also revealed the importance of neighborhood socio-economic conditions for the initiation of criminal careers. Manny, Allen, Harry, Vincent, and Sam lived in neighborhoods where their criminal activities were continuously reinforced (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). For example, although Manny was born in a middle-class Puerto Rican family, the death of his father and the fraudulent legal appropriation of his father's inheritance forced his



mother to move to a lower-class neighborhood where gambling, prostitution, and protection rackets were normal, part of daily activities (Rettig, Torres, and Garret, 1977).

When they moved to Third Avenue, Manny and his brother joined to the local gang named Young Stars. As they associated more closely with the gang, family life and school became relatively unimportant for Manny. The gang life played an important part in defining his identity and future criminal activities. Soon, he fell into a lifestyle that left little room for prosocial activities. The neighborhood, on the other hand, supported these gangs without much opposition because there was sort of a collective justification for their misconduct (Rettig, Torres, and Garret, 1977).

I was in the gang because everybody else was in a gang. Why do you eat? Because, if you don't eat, you die. So, naturally, you eat. I was in my gang because it was the natural thing to do. (Rettig et al., 1977, p.23)

Everybody's uncle or brother or nephew was working in the rackets. (Rettig et al., 1977, p.180)

The guys in the neighborhood would think it was funny to take me to a card game and I would sit there and play like an old timer. (Rettig et al., 1977, p.30)

Notably, Sam and Manny's life histories revealed that youngsters engaged in criminal activities and wayward behaviors because they enjoyed the excitement resulting from those acts. For example, Sam described fencing as a kind of adventurous game in which the uncertainties, the anxiety, and the risks involved were an intrinsic source of pleasure. He was drawn to the excitement and action of making money from crime. The risk of getting caught by the police during fencing was a serious source of stress and tension. However, Sam indicated that he actually liked excitement resulted from those risk. In his later life history, Sam repeatedly expressed that he missed this very excitement of fencing (Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Fencing is hard work, don't get me wrong, but I like the excitement of it. It was never boring, always something happening. There is a thrill there. See, there is a risk in fencing—with the cops, with whether you can get rid of what you buy, is your back covered? To me, that risk was tension, but it was enjoyment, too. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.225)

Similarly, Manny's statements indicated that youngsters initially joined these gangs because they enjoyed the excitement that resulted from the fights with rivalry groups. Gang groups usually started as social clubs just to play athletic games with other neighborhood groups. However, during these games, rivalry groups usually had arguments and both sides often resorted to fights to settle their disputes. Manny's statements indicated that these youngsters actually enjoyed these fights and they arranged athletic games just to have an opportunity for fights (Rettig, Torres, and Garret, 1977).

It got so that we enjoyed the fighting most of all. So, we'd set up a stickball game, but we knew for openers that it was all a front. There wouldn't be no game. We were going to have a rumble. We'd just set up the game and go bust heads or get our heads busted. That is the way it came down, and it got to be habit. (Rettig et al., 1977, p.25)

John Allen's statements also confirmed that the neighborhood disorganization was an important factor in shaping a youngster's future. The majority of the people in his neighborhood did not work in a legal job. Rather, hustling was their most common job. Only a few families had a fatherly figure at home. Most of the families were broken because the father was either in jail or dead. Violence, on the other hand, was widespread in the neighborhood and was seen as normal. John Allen, for example shot one of his friend in the gang to secure the gang leadership when he was only twelve years old. Later, he shot another person just to protect his personal honor (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

Somebody was always doing something in each family. If it wasn't the adults, say the mother or father, then it was the son or daughter. I was sticking up; one of my brothers was stealing; one of my sisters was bootlegging; one of my uncles wrote numbers; one of

my grandmothers occasionally wrote numbers; and my grandfather bootlegged. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.1)

The neighborhood was pretty wild. It would be nothing for us to be on the front steps playing hide-and-seek and all of a sudden you hear bang, bang, bang, and people are shooting at each other in the street. And everybody ducking and hiding. This was normal. Eventually you'd be taking all this in. It is just a way of survival. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.XX)

On the other hand, as Sutherland informed in his *the Professional Thief* study, the later life histories also indicated that the subjects' introduction to criminal activities occurred in the context of differential association—either by neighborhood criminal groups or significant others including elder siblings or uncles. The supportive nature of these criminal friends and antisocial significant others played an important role on the development of criminal careers on Manny, Allen, Harry, Sam, and Vincent and influenced their split from the pro-social life style (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

For example, in the absence of prosocial role models, the gang leader Leo and his team became an important figure in the eyes of Manny. Manny imitated Leo's acts and habits and soon became a dedicated worker for him. He started to smoke cigars just because Leo smoked them. On the other hand, Manny's other associates in the gang encouraged him to try other illegal drugs. He first experienced these drugs under the influence of gang members. Therefore, through his contacts within the gang, Manny experienced a culture and tradition that fostered criminal identity and perspective (Rettig, Torres, and Garret, 1977).

Freddie changed my life. Bobby and I met him in the hallway one day and he was standing there smoking a joint. He asked us if we wanted some. I had never smoked weed before. So, what the hell, I tried a joint. Because, you know, Freddie was an all right guy, and besides I just wanted to try it. I tried it and I liked it. About the second time I smoked weed I got higher than a kite. Soon, I was smoking weed several times a day. (Rettig et al, 1977, p.32)

Why did I turn out to be a dope fiend? It was that most of the people in my neighborhood turned out to be dope fiends. (Rettig et al, 1977, p.181)

It has also been discovered that significant others played an important role in the criminal life-style of the subjects. For example, John Allen's statements indicated that he was the key factor in his brother's career in the criminal world (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

Stick up—armed robbery—was my thing, and I could do that very well. After Leonard got a certain age, he began to start sticking up people. I said “This is what you want to do, this is what you're gonna do, then you might as well know the right way.”...Whatever I was telling him, he was listening, especially if it was something about sticking up somebody. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.9)

Similarly, Sam's life history indicated that significant others were important in encouraging others into wayward behaviors. It was discovered that Sam had his first sexual intercourse by the motivation and help of his uncle at a whorehouse. Sam's parent split when he was only one year old. He never had a chance to meet his real dad. His mother had move and lives with the grandparents due to economic hardship. At his grandparent's house, he grew up with his uncle who introduced him to his first sexual experience (Steffensmeier, 1986).

My Uncle Howie was a lot older, maybe fifteen years older than me. He done time in Midstate Prison for a hot car. Was kind of a gambler, a hustler type. Liked the fast life. Was always out for chasing women, really liked the young stuff. Howie was the one that took me to the whorehouse. I was hardly fifteen years old. That was my first experience with a woman, first time I got pussy. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.37)

Further, Manny's addiction to heroin started after his uncle's visit while the mother was not at home. His uncle talked to him about how to use dope and encouraged him to try it. He convinced Manny to use heroin by telling him how an unbelievable excitement he could get just getting a piece from it (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977).

He throws his three dollar bag of doggie on the kitchen table and says, “Try some.” I say, “Eddie, I ain't about to put any of that shit in my arm.” He acts real surprised. “Hey, Manny, I am not talking about shooting. I mean, you can snort it and get drove into the next country.” So, he shows me how to take a book of matches and cut off the

end of a paper match and mash it between my fingers till it is like a spoon. And I stick it in the heroin and hold it up to my nose. (Rettig et al, 1977, p.33)

After the second use, Manny became an addict. The availability of the drugs in the neighborhood was another factor contributing to Manny's addiction. In his later life, Manny committed various criminal acts including the professional thievery, hustling, robbery, and boosting to obtain money to purchase heroin and marihuana. His life became drugs. All of his friends were dopers and he constantly tried to find new ways of making money to satisfy his addiction. The life history of Manny revealed the shocking nature of what Manny would be willing to do just to acquire drugs when he is in need of them. His statements indicated that Manny could go as far as killing his own mother and friends just to fix his need of drug (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977).

There is no such thing as values for a dope fiend, none at all. The only livin' thing that counts is the fix. That is all that counts, nothin' else means a shit. Like, I would steal off anybody—anybody at all, my own mother gladly included if it meant the difference between a fix and non-fix. I would do anything for money to fix. I would con, I would beg, I would cry; I would break bad and threaten. If I hadn't been so skinny and ugly I'd of sold my ass for dope. I had a lot of friends at one time. But I burned all my friends for dope. And that is not all, I'd of killed them, too, for heroin, if that'd been necessary. (Rettig et al, 1977, p.14)

I think I kind of got hooked behind the excitement and feeling of power- the symbol of the gun in the guts of society- there for a while. But, you gotta remember that robbery wasn't my sole interest at all. I don't ever remember pulling a job except that I needed the bread for dope. A dope fiend is always looking for more dope. (Rettig et al, 1977, p.183)

### ***Methods and Tactics***

The later life histories also provided valuable information about specific methods and tactics that the subjects developed and used during their fencing, hustling, and other types of criminal activities. For example, Manny's life history revealed how the youngsters abused the

laws and regulations to engage in wayward behaviors. Manny indicated that although he and his friends in the neighborhood engaged in small criminal activities including petty stealing, fighting, and hustling, they were never placed into a jail or correctional facility. These youngsters soon figured out that, they would not be put into prison for ganging since they were too young. This knowledge of being immune from the prison system relieved Manny and his associates, and, as a result, they increased their antisocial and criminal activities (Rettig et al, 1977).

The gangs ran the schools, and they damn sure ran the streets. People didn't like us because we scared them and they didn't know how to handle us. At first, they figured we were wayward children, so they tried to treat us like little kids. And this didn't work because all we wanted do was to beat them over their heads. But they couldn't treat us like adults 'cause we weren't adults. So, most of the time they didn't know what to do with us. That gave us a free hand. While all the experts were discussing how to handle juvenile delinquency problem, we had a free hand, and we knew it! (Rettig et al, 1977, p.24)

On the other hand, the life histories of John Allen, Vincent, Sam, and Harry King revealed their tactics and methods on how to make their illegitimate conduct indistinguishable from the normal activities of the legitimate business world. For example, Harry King, who spent a decade in criminal enterprise from gambling to drug peddling and from pimping to robbery, explained important details about how his narcotics business operated, where his gang obtained the morphine and opium, how the heroin distributed to the local markets, and how the narcotics sold through the young kids who sell newspapers at the corners of each street (Chambliss, 1984).

We all worked for the narcotics Syndicate in San Francisco, which at that time was run by Black Tony. It was a pretty big operation even then. The Syndicate used to get its morphine from Germany and its opium from China. It came in through New York and was handled by local narcotic wholesalers. Then it was shipped out to the West Coast. (Chambliss, 1984, p.8)

I rode around with Red and I carried papers. I gave; let's say a hundred papers to each guy on a corner. I gave him twenty five papers that had a bundle of narcotics in each one. They would be folded so that he knew which was which. (Chambliss, 1984, p.9)

On the other hand, Sam's statements indicated that fencers had other tactics to protect their businesses and earnings. Sam argued that a conviction occurred only when the prosecutor and the police were able to prove what he had was stolen. Thus, Sam developed some methods to prevent the items from being detected as pilfered. For example, Sam often merged stolen merchandise with legitimate stock to make it harder for the police to detect the stolen ones. On the other hand, he sometimes prevented the identification of goods by altering them slightly. Additionally, Sam used false or vague receipts to legitimize his possession of particular goods. He kept a supply of purchase receipts of legitimate goods that cover purchase of similar stolen goods at a later date in his store to protect against proof that they were stolen (Steffensmeier, 1986). Finally, Sam often asked for cash by making extra discounts to the customers. In this way, even though he was questioned by the police, he was able to claim that the merchandise was not bought from him since there was no record.

More than anything I tried to have receipts that covered different items I was handling at the time. Say, I was at an auction. I might buy TVs, lawn movers, furniture, and that which was selling cheap. Maybe it was even junk. Just to get the receipts. Then if I would get jammed up on TVs or whatever, I had this piece of paper and my back was covered. This is where Cletus at the Salvation army was a big help. He would give me a fistful of blank slips, with the "Salvation army": inscribed right on it. I could fill them out whatever way I wanted. The Salvation army is a charity and who would ever suspect them. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.143)

Tell'em, pay in cash and I don't bother to write it up, no tax. This was a break for them and then there would be no record either. I could always say, hey, they didn't buy that from me. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.140)

Further, Sam's life history revealed that the police were shirking some of their duties that were originally planned to prevent fencing by decreasing the business between the dealers and thieves.

For example, although the secondhand dealers were supposed to inform the police within twenty-four hours about what they buy from the street, Sam's narratives indicated that the police actually did not want to be bothered with hundreds of dealers visiting them with receipts every day (Steffensmeier, 1986).

Now, it turns out the police don't wanna be bothered. See, for a while I was taking sales slips up to city hall pretty regular. Then, one time I went up with a whole fistful and the cop says: "Goodman, what the hell you doing bringing this crap up here? What the hell we gonna do with all those damn slips?" Then I knew I had clear sailing, didn't have to worry about having the slips. Too much trouble for the police, didn't want to take the time to keep track of'em. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.131)

Further, the life histories indicated that the subjects often advanced their tactics and methods through real life experiences acquired during their criminal enterprise and also by information sharing with their associates. Thus, these people were progressive in their criminal conduct. They often watched the situation, picked up on methods, adjusted them according to specific conditions of an environment, and changed them if it was necessary for their later criminal transactions. For example, Harry King accidentally figured out a tactic to avoid the police who often picked him up for investigation while he was watching a joint. By altering his waiting method in a car, he successfully committed theft without being disturbed by police (Chambliss, 1984).

I found that a policeman would come along the street and I would be watching a joint, laying on it, and he would pick me up for investigation if I was sitting in the car by myself. Several times I would be swearing at some guy necking with a girl in a car because I was trying to case the joint and he was sitting there necking with this girl. It suddenly dawned on me, why not get a girl and sit in the car and neck with her every time a policeman came by. So, I acquired this girl, had her in mind previously; I was living with her. We would go out and lay on a joint. Every time a policeman came by we would start necking. I could case the joint real easy. The policemen would never pay any attention to it. (Chambliss, 1984, p.14)



Notably, subjects of the life histories indicated that moving around was the best practice to escape police attention. They argued that if they stayed in a city long enough, their methods of operation would be known and they would be easily caught by the police. Thus, Harry King and other subjects often expressed that moving around and also being quiet were the key factors for the survival of their criminal enterprise.

The only way you can beat the law is by moving all the time. The law is easy to beat as long as you keep moving. But you have to continuously move. We've proved that stealing can be very profitable by moving around all the time. (Chambliss, 1984, p.91)

In addition to these tactics, the subjects informed that they were able to conduct their criminal acts by obtaining immunity from the criminal justice system through their relationships of interdependence, mutual favors, and exploitation with the police and the judiciary (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Sam continuously reiterated that fences could not operate without the cooperation of somebody from the police departments. That is, there was always a mutually beneficial agreement between the police and a fence. For example, the police might allow a particular fence to practice his trade in return for his help on assisting them in making arrests by giving them the names of some thieves (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

However, Sam's narratives also indicated that fences would never risk the confidence of the thieves by betraying them because of two reasons. First, the fence who snitched on police could often face a violent reaction from the thieves. Second, most of the professional thieves would avoid doing business with a fence that was widely known as a snitch in the criminal underworld. That is, a fence known as a snitch might have to close his business if his merchandise sources perished. Thus, Sam reported that fences often just snitched on a few

useless burglars and dopers (especially the black ones) to help the police clear out their records (Steffensmeier, 1986).

You can't be a dealer like me or Louie, without the police knowing and being taken care of. You can't operate without their cooperation. One way or another they have to give you some slack, really a license to steal. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.147)

A Fence can give himself some slack if he is willing to be a snitch. What the police can get out of it is to keep their arrests up, clean their books. Makes the detective look good and the chief, too, 'cause in the public's mind they are solving all those crimes. It is all bullshit. What they do is get the fence to snitch on a few burglars or a couple of dopers. And the ones the fence is turning in are usually your real lackeys, the penny ante thieves and the blacks who are into dirt. They will end up admitting crimes they didn't even do. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.149)

To prevent the potential risks of snitching, Sam and Harry King chose to resort to other methods to keep their businesses open. For example, the life history of Sam revealed that he had many police officers visiting his stores to look at the merchandise and he offered them very inexpensive prices for the goods they desired. According to Sam, he was buying the police off by allowing them whatever they wanted from his store with low prices. In return, the police were acting slowly in responding to complaints against Sam related to his fencing activities, or they were simply obstructing an ongoing investigation. Additionally, Sam reported that the police did not see this mutual benefit as bribery because they were not getting cash directly. It was just a favor or gift that the police would get from any businessman for disregarding their minor violations (Steffensmeier, 1986).

On the other hand, Harry King's life history indicated that the gangs were actually bribing the police to be able to conduct their criminal businesses. For example, it was standard for Harry to meet a captain of a shift to talk to him about how much it would cost to free the gunmen of the gang who were arrested in a car with pistols. Further, Harry's statements revealed that, on the East coast, the police departments were regularly collecting some amount of money

from each illegal establishment including gamblers, prostitutes, thieves, and fences in return for giving them a free hand on their businesses. However, Harry reported that the police would break this mutually beneficial agreement if there was too much adverse publicity in the media about the increasing rates of crimes or if the insurance companies placed pressure on the police to catch the thieves (Chambliss, 1984).

In the East, they have what they call the bag man; in fact there is that in any town. The police department will designate one guy that they hope is honest and wont swing with all the money. And he goes around every month and picks up all the bribes. Different joints pay off different amounts. Any town that is running gambling—and they all do—has a bag man. (Chambliss, 1984, p.66)

When I was rooting we were very close to some policemen. In Portland we used to have to pay off twenty percent to the chief of dicks. You see, the criminals haven't got all the rackets; the worst ones are the upright members of society. (Chambliss, 1984, p.85)

Harry also reported that the thieves would be encouraged to clear the unsolved crime records by accepting responsibility for them even though they did not commit these acts. They would just sign a confession and help the police to keep their prestige. In return for this cooperation, the district attorney would not send them to prison and the police would allow them to continue their criminal enterprise in their district (Chambliss, 1984).

In the old days we used to make a deal with the police. We knew we were going to make a deal, or the dicks knew we were going to, and they would have a lot of unsolved crimes. So, to make it easier for everybody we'd just what we called "clean the slate" for them. They'd say, "I got fifteen capers here we haven't been able to solve; will you clean them up for us?" That's all. We'd just sign a confession. (Chambliss, 1984, p.84)

The later life histories also revealed that if the strategies to avoid arrest and police investigation failed, the subjects would exploit the remaining agents of the criminal justice system. Harry and Sam informed that there were always a couple magistrates that could be paid off to stop the case going to trial. The bribed magistrate would usually throw the case by arguing that the evidence was insufficient for a conviction or that there was some technical error made by the police.

Thus, the case would be dismissed during the hearing before it could go to trial. On the other hand, if the case managed to go in front of a judge, then the subjects often reached to the people who were known as the fix. (Chambliss, 1984; Steffensmeier, 1986)

According to Sam, a criminal could arrange a fix anywhere in the United States. The only issue was to find the right connection (Steffensmeier, 1986). Harry King reported that a good fix could be reached by bribing a jailer. The fix usually knew everybody that worked in the criminal justice system. He or she could be a criminal attorney or just a regular person. They were often the friend of the district attorneys or someone who could get to district attorneys easily. The fix did not directly talk to judges. However, they would bribe the district attorneys to convince the judges to prevent the case going to a jury and for the release of their criminal customers. According to Harry King, the money given to district attorney was split between the attorney and the judge (Chambliss, 1984).

Frankly, after sitting down and analyzing it I come to the conclusion that the only people that really profit from theft is the fix, the judge, and the district attorney. They are the guys who make the money, not the guy who stole it. The guy who stole it is always getting pinched, and they are shaking him down for what he's got. I have had them flat pinch me on the street and shake me right down, take me in the car and shake me down and take every penny I had on me. (Chambliss, 1984, p.85)

There is no such thing as justice in criminal courts. If you have got the money you get the fix. If you haven't got the money, you don't get it. It is just that plain and that simple. (Chambliss, 1984, p.90)

American City is a fucking corrupt town, probably more than most. But every city will have its share. Different ones will have a license to operate—say, in gambling, in the fencing, or in the higher up drug dealing. It would be very hard to get rid of the corruption. 'Cause too many people are involved and it is hard to pull back once someone is involved. He will like the extra bread, and now he has skeletons in his closet, too. It is like a spider web really, the way it is joined together. There is something in it for everybody. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.156)

### ***Rationalization and Neutralization Techniques***

The later life histories revealed that the subjects used well-established rationalization and neutralization techniques to excuse their deviant acts and criminal life-styles. These individuals sometimes used rhetoric such as “Everybody does it, why should not I,” or they put forward other problems such as financial pressures and personal crises to rationalize their acts. On the other hand, they argued that the rest of the society was as corrupt as them because the police, lawyers, teachers, doctors, judges, and many other respectable people were willing to buy the stolen goods with the advance knowledge that they were stolen (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

For example, Vincent Norfior and Sam Goodman, subjects of the life histories by Klockars (1974) and Steffensmeier (1986), denied the responsibility for their fencing activities by pointing to the difference between stealing and receiving stolen goods. They often claimed that they were not the cause for the stolen goods because they were just regular businessmen who bought and sold the stolen property in their legitimate store. Although they encouraged thieves to engage in further criminal acts by approving of their stealing activities, Vincent and Sam always saw fencing as a legitimate business. Both Sam and Vincent separated their criminal identity from other stereotypical criminals such as drug addicts, robbers, kidnappers, rapists, and murderers by claiming that the fence was a person who made the best out of a bad situation. Because, by the time a thief brought a stolen item to them, the crime was already committed. No one or nothing could change it. Thus, their role began after the victims had already been harmed. On the other hand, both Sam and Vincent noted that if they did not purchase that merchandise, there would always be somebody else willing to buy these goods. That is, fencing would occur

regardless of whether Sam or Vincent participated. So, they argued that they should profit from this otherwise someone else would (Klockars, 1974; Steffensmeier, 1986).

A thief is out there stealing, breaking into people's places, and he would have a tendency of hurting somebody if he was caught, or try to struggle to get away. A fence would not do that. A fence is just buying what the thief brings, he is not the one crawling in windows. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.238)

The fence is no angel, but he is no devil either. Think about it. He is not mugging old ladies, he is not pushing drugs on kids, he is not burning down buildings. The fence doesn't force himself on anybody, doesn't take advantage of them that way. He is not into the dirt either, like the baby porn shit, doesn't lower himself that way. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.240)

The way I look at it, I am businessman. Sure, I buy hot stuff, but I never stole nothin' in my life. Some driver brings me a couple of cartons, though, I ain't gonna turn him away. If I don't buy it, somebody else will. So what's the difference? I might as well make money with him instead of somebody else. (Klockars, 1974, p.139)

On the other hand, Vincent's statements indicated that there was an extensive violation of the law against receiving stolen goods even among the educated people including the police, judicial officials, and doctors. Usually known as the respectable layer of society, these people frequently visited Vincent's store to bargain for the stolen goods. Seeing these respectable people buy goods they know that they were stolen while also maintaining a friendly relationship with him led Vincent to conclude that he was doing a legitimate job. That is, this widespread illegal trade with him affected how Vincent thought about his own behavior (Klockars, 1974).

I got to know my doctor real good when I was in for my last operation. Somebody told him about me, I guess. Well, I started tellin' him about stuff, you know, buiyin', sellin', thieves, boosters. He just couldn't get over it. He wanted me to get him some hot suits. You know, have him pick out the suits and send some boosters in to get'em. He really wanted to do it. You shoulda seen how excited he was talkin' about swag. Imagine a guy like that, a big doctor an'all, getting' so excited about hot stuff. (Klockars, 1974, p.147)

Similarly, Sam Goodman's life history indicated that he saw himself as a businessman because the respectable layer of the society often frequented his store and maintained friendly

relations with him. Sam interpreted this association and friendliness as evidence of his acceptance in the local business community. Additionally, many of Sam's customers who were also decent people were glad to shop from his store without judging how he was able to sell inexpensively or why he wanted be paid cash only. According to Sam, although his customers knew that the merchandise was all stolen, they did not questioned him because they did not want to face the reality. As a result, Sam argued that fencing was not much different from many legitimate activities (Steffensmeier, 1986).

Not as a fence, not as a hustler, not as a thief. I didn't think of myself any of those ways. A dealer, yes. But more as a businessman 'cause my legit business always done good (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.242)

I look at it this way, I was a businessman. That is the way I saw myself. That is the way other treated me. Even those that didn't do business with me in the hot stuff, respected me, accepted me for what I was, and I respected them. I would have coffee and that with them. They might stop at my store, I might stop at theirs. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.224)

Many times you can read between the lines or surmise that something is warm, but really you prefer not to know. It works the other way, too. Many of the ones I sold to don't wanna find out if its stolen or not, 'cause they don't want to have that facing their conscience and 'cause this way the prosecution can't prove there was knowledge, that they knew the stuff was stolen. What they are doing is turning a blind eye—figuring what you don't know can't hurt you. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.135)

Sam Goodman's and Harry King's (Chambliss, 1984) life histories also revealed that Harry and Sam did not repent from their criminal activities because they saw the legitimate society—especially the judges, the policemen, and the prison officials—as hypocritical and corrupt. For example, Harry stated that thieves had higher moral values than these respectable citizens because they often admitted their criminality and they were ready to pay the price for it. On the contrary, corrupt officials and businessmen were hypocrites because they always tried to hide their larcenous deeds. Harry mentioned that he had little respect for society because many of the underworld characters that he dealt with were legitimate people in the upper reaches of the

social order. He stated that he and his associates always sold the things they stole from rich people such as jewelry, watches, and furs to legitimate dealers (Klockars, 1974). Similarly, Sam also questioned the law-abiding people including local police, lawyers, district magistrates, clerks, businessmen, and judges who were willing to purchase stolen goods from him they knew were stolen. Thus, his justifications often relied on the metaphor of “everyone does it or everyone has some larceny in them” (Steffensmeier, 1986).

...this morning I went to mass and there is the judge that I’ve done business with two or three times; he is in there lookin’ very pious this morning and I watched him for a while. That is why I don’t have a lot of respect for society. When they go to church on Sunday and the rest of the week they got their hand out all the time, not all of them but quite of few of them and I unfortunately have come in contact with all that type. So it’s got me just a little soured. I’ve met some real wonderful people since I started to go straight, though, I will tell you. But, I just can’t accept this society. (Chambliss, 1984, p.23)

To me, the people who buy are as guilty as the ones who steal. Listen to this. The public and your ordinary businessman is buying from me, knowing or surmising the stuff is hot. I get popped for fencing and the lawyer takes my money that I made fencing to defend me. He’s receiving money that I made from receiving stolen goods. The DA’s brother and the cops are shopping at my store, patronizing me, looking for bargains and asking me to keep my eyes open for something they needed. Where does this end? (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.256)

Most people would steal if they had the nerve to do it. Will take the extra dollar if they can get away with it. Everybody, if they don’t steal in a big way, they steal in penny. Which is just the same goddamn thing. I don’t know of anyone, very few in fact, that ever would walk away from something hot if it was cheap. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.370)

Notably, Vincent and Sam also denied moral responsibility for their fencing activities and thievery by arguing that there was not an actual victim or injury resulting from these criminal activities. For example, Vincent claimed that these acts were often committed against the big firms that make huge moneys each year. He provided an example of how he stole a truckload of merchandise from a local Sears Store and how Sears announced that year that the company had the largest profit in their history. Further, Vincent argued that at the worst case scenario, these



firms could recover their losses from insurance payments or through tax write offs. He further claimed that these large companies were also corrupt because they were often breaking the law to cover their expenses by setting up fake robbery scenes to get payments from the insurance companies (Klockars, 1974). Similarly, Sam and Harry King contended that their fencing or stealing activities often caused little injury because the victims were usually individuals or businesses that could afford the loss or could recover most of their loss from insurance payments (Steffensmeier, 1986).

Carl, if I told you how many businessmen I know have a robbery every now an' then to cover expenses you wouldn't believe it. What does it take? You get some trusted employee, and you send him out with an empty truck. He parks it somewhere an' calls in an' says he was robbed. That's it. The driver makes a couple hundred bucks and it's an open-an'-shut case. You can't do it every year but once in a while it's a sure thing. (Klockars, 1974, p.149)

Oh, there is millions a ways to do it. You can come in in the mornin' an break your window. Call the cops, mess some stuff up. Bang! You got a few thousand from the insurance company. I am telling' you, it happens all the time. (Klockars, 1974, p.151)

I don't feel I hurt any little people's cause most of the stuff did come out of business places and big places, which were insurance write-offs and which they will many times mark it double what it was. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.241)

I have got nothing to be ashamed of. I never robbed any poor people, or hurt any individual, I just robbed big companies, and I thought it was legitimate. (Chambliss, 1984, p.160)

Different from these rationalization techniques, John Allen (Kelly & Heymann, 1978) blamed his friends and community for his career in the criminal world. He often pointed to the fact that there was nobody in his surrounding who would talk to him about pursuing an educational career, getting a job, or acquiring a skill that would be useful for obtaining a job. Rather, his friends usually encouraged him to break into places, to rob and to use violence when necessary. Even though her grandmother wanted him to be a doctor, his associates in the neighborhood talked to him about how many years he would have to spend to be a doctor and

how he would wither away before becoming one. Thus, he rationalized his criminal acts by arguing that he did not know how to be a prosocial person because he had nobody around him to teach him those skills and values (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

But, nobody ever talked to me about getting a job, going to college part-time or in the daytime. I never knew. No one ever taught me anything else. My old friends and I never saw the light-there was no one to show us the right things to do. But, there was someone always ready to show us something slick or hip. We listening with all ears, but they never told the part about jail. We had to find that out for ourselves. And there we learned more and couldn't wait to hit the streets again to try out something new. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.53)

People constantly saying, why don't you do better? Why don't you do this or why don't you do that? I don't know how to do that. This is all I know. I know how to steal. I know how to be hard on broads. I know how to stick somebody up better than anything. I know how to take a small amount of narcotics and eventually work way up and make me some money. I know how to do all that. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.53)

Additionally, John Allen's statements revealed that around the ages of 58 and 59, he tired of criminal life style and tried to live in a decent way around the ages of 58 and 59. Accordingly, he obtained a job and also enrolled in night-time courses to develop his prosocial skills. John also cut his contact with his associates from the criminal underworld and stayed in the house in his spare times just to be away from them. Nonetheless, his background made him vulnerable to being questioned by the police and arrested. The police visited him nearly every day and questioned him about crimes no matter what happened. They pressed him to admit charges even though he did not commit any crime. Notably, although John Allen sought help from his parole officer, the parole officer refused to talk to the police department by arguing that the police would have grounds to suspect him of breaking the law. Due to this daily harassment, John gave up this new prosocial life style and returned to his criminal enterprise and associates (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

I kept on getting arrested unnecessarily. Two famous police in my life-officer Morgan and one other officer-they are the cause of 50 percent of my arrests. These two guys used

to press me no matter what happened. If somebody got their pocketbook snatched, they know that I wouldn't do it, this wasn't even my thing. Still, they will come and get me. If somebody got killed up the street, they'll come and get me. I got tired. I trying to tell my parole officer. I say, "Man, these guys pressing me. There is no way I am doing all of this. I am trying to get it together." My parole officer says, "well, if you wasn't doing something, they wouldn't keep bothering you." So, I just got right on back to the bag I was in. And after that I never slowed down no more, just kept right on going from one thing to another. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.107)

Similarly, Harry King's life history revealed that the harassment of police actually forced these guys to persist in criminal careers. Upon release from the prison, the Portland police continuously harassed Harry to re-arrest and send him back to the prison. They put a prowler car in front of his apartment and watched him during the nights. The neighbors got disturbed from this surveillance and they cut their contact with Harry. Further, the police visited Harry's workplaces and talked to his bosses about his past criminal career and how dangerous he was. This situation went on for four jobs. Harry's bosses often had to fire him due to the pressure from the police department. Notably, it was Harry's parole officer who was telling the police about his new jobs so that the police could go and talk to his bosses. In the end, Harry came to a point where he gave up on pro-social life style and turned back to his criminal career on the streets. Neither the police nor the parole officer was willing to give him a second chance to straighten himself (Chambliss, 1984).

One thing I always believed, that when a man was arrested, convicted, sentenced to a penitentiary or an institution of some kind, that he paid his debt to society and then when he came out of the institution that his record should be clean, not erased, but just clean. But when I came out the police hounded me continuously, trying to run me out of Portland or find some cause to re-arrest me and send me back to the institution. (Chambliss, 1984, p.132)

I had a parole officer who was a personal friend of this detective who hated me so bad so when I'd get a new job—why the parole officer would tell this detective and he'd immediately go out, or send somebody out, to talk to my boss about it. (Chambliss, 1984, p.134)

Finally, the individuals in the later life histories compared their good and bad acts to rationalize their criminal activities. For example, Vincent Norfior often highlighted some of the good things that he did for the poor and for those in need through his fencing activities. He cited how he helped a thief to buy a house in a good neighborhood, how he helped the poor people with his generosity, or how he provided a Sister coming from House of good Shepherd with free toys, children's clothes, shoes, and other good. Thus, although society saw his fencing activity as a criminal enterprise, Vincent claimed credit for his good actions that he was able to do through fencing business (Klockars, 1974).

Sure I've done some bad things in my life. Who hasn't? Everybody's got a skeleton in his closet somewhere. But you gotta take into account all the good things I done too. You take all the things I done in my life and out 'em together, no doubt about it, I gotta come out on the good side. (Klockars, 1974, p.151)

Similarly, to rationalize his criminal activities and life style, Sam Goodman cited his generous activities, including the deals that he offered to poor people, charities he donated to, and the friends he helped through legal referrals or loans. Accepting that he did wrong things in some ways through the fencing business, Sam argued that the good things he did would definitely outweigh the bad things (Steffensmeier, 1986).

I did a lot of good, helped a lot of people. I had the best prices in town which helped a lot of poor people. They came to me like I was the last one on earth. There were many of them that put me up on a pedestal like you wouldn't believe, 'cause I gave them easy credit and everything. The Red Cross and Hope Rescue would come to me to help out this or that family. This was a very good feeling. Like I was the last one on earth they could turn to. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.224)

I done wrong things in some ways, I know that. But I do know I done a lot of good, too. Anybody that came in my store that was on the level, got a fair shake from me. I'd see a needy person, anybody that came in with nothing, I took care of. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.245)

### *Negative Aspects of the Prison and Correctional facilities*

Subjects in the later life histories also provided important insights about the negative aspects of the prison and correctional facilities, including the lack of rehabilitation and education, the sexual vulnerability of young inmates, the furtherance of criminal skills through association with older inmates, and the cruelty of facility administrations on the inmates. Manny, John Allen, Harry King, and Sam all observed that prison life strengthened rather than weakened their commitment to criminality. Most people that these individuals encountered in prisons guided them along the pathway of further deviance. Thus, through the criminal associates while incarcerated, the subjects in the later life histories solidified their self-identity as a “criminal” (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

For example, Sam’s life history revealed that his prison experiences strengthened his commitment to crime. He learned and advanced his criminal skills, including safecracking and methods of avoiding arrest, through his association with older criminals. Sam also made new contacts in prison that he later used frequently to advance for his criminal activities (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

But, in a way, I learned how to crack a safe at Highpoint, from hearing different ones talking about it. Main thing I got from the safecrackers and them was that crime was a business. I learned that crime is a business. Really, I met a lot of people, learned a lot of things in the penitentiary. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.43)

In addition to the advancement of criminal skills through differential association, the subjects in the later life histories revealed that there was a high rate of sexual victimization, especially among the young and physically weak inmates. The subjects even argued that almost all homosexuals in correctional facilities were the result of being made that way inside the

prisons. Manny and John Allen noted that the incident of rape was common among the inmates. They both stated that the newly arrived young inmates were often turned into homosexuals through sexual practice with older inmates (Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977). Similarly, John Allen observed that older inmates, especially those who are Black, often raced with each other to rape the newly arrived, young, and weak inmates (Kelly & Heymann, 1978). John Allen's life history also revealed that once a young inmate was sexually victimized, this label would go with him to every institution he was transferred. As a result, he would often be sexually abused at other institutions as well (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

Often the pervert pays young kids to let them practice fellatio (oral sex) on faggots. Mother! Perk up and take notice; this is what your nice young boy is going into if the state is going to take him in hand and rehabilitate him. There is the possibility of living hell in prison, but no redemption. (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977, p.102)

Rape is fairly frequently event in the joint, but it is not the only homosexual activity in prison. (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977, p.187)

I went to jail at a very early age. If I had been weak and somebody would have taken advantage of me then, it would have carried all the way over into now. Dudes that come in that maybe never been to jail before and not strong enough, once it happen, long as one of them jailbird niggers see him, then he will always be a faggot. Simple as that. It wouldn't make no difference where he went, it would always follow him. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.124)

Manny revealed that although the prison staff was fully aware of the problem of forceful homosexuality, they did not take any precaution to prevent this victimization. Rather, the administration just turned a blind eye to it on the assumption that nothing could be done to stop this sexual victimization. In addition to not protecting the young inmates against sexual victimization, Manny's life history revealed that some of the guards were sexually abusing the young inmates. Many revealed how one of the guards regularly raped young inmates in the middle of night. These young inmates did not raise their voices because they were getting protection against the older inmates in return for their sexual victimization (Rettig, Torres

&Garret, 1977). Thus, the stronger individuals, including the prison officials, were taking what they wanted sexually from the young and weak inmates. Cumulatively, the later life histories indicated that there was an atmosphere in prisons that actually encouraged homosexuality and criminality in these institutions (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

In my experience, the prison staff is aware of the problem. But they feel that nothing can be done to stop it, so they tend to look the other way. Therefore, because of lack of opportunity for normal sexual relationships, and the implicit encouragement on the part of prison guards and administrators, homosexuality thrives in most joints. (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977, p.187)

The subjects in the later life histories also reported that the prison administration and the guards were often undereducated and tough. They indicated that the inmates were never provided with any kind of education or training (other than the basic reading and writing education) that could help them to function like normal people when they were released. For example, Harry King's statements revealed that as a result of lack of training and education, The adjustment to society and a normal life was extremely hard when an inmate was released (Chambliss, 1984).

On the other hand, John Allen, Harry King, and Sam Goodman indicated that the guards were very brutal. They would throw the subjects into cells without light even for minor infractions and then three or four the officers would gang up on and beat the subjects if they dared to complain verbally (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Steffensmeier, 1986). Harry King noted that many inmates would die because of this harassment in any given month but nobody would investigate the reason for it. Rather, the prison administration would keep the bodies until it was necessary to seal them due to smell of decay to prevent the further investigation by the families and authorities (Chambliss, 1984). Thus, it was discovered that the

prison administrations actually struggled to break down the subjects rather than rehabilitate them.

No matter what a guy died from, nobody investigated. If his body was shipped to home, which was very unusual, it was always in a sealed coffin. They would hold the body there until it was necessary to seal the coffin right at the institution. Then they would ship it home and warn the parents or relatives not to open the coffin. (Chambliss, 1984, p.103)

According to Sam Goodman's and Harry King's life histories, the animosity between the guards and the inmates was mainly because the guards were often selected from the lower class who would be willing to work for low salaries. These guards were usually undereducated and had no pedagogical training. They would prefer to physically punish inmates than provide them with the rehabilitation needed for a successful transition to society. As a result of this brutality, the subjects indicated that the inmates would try to kill the guards whenever the opportunity presented itself (Chambliss, 1984; Steffensmeier, 1986).

I don't know which came first, the chicken or the egg. It was the same with those criminals. Whether the institution created the bad criminals or the criminals created the bad situation, but they were both very tough. The guards were tough and brutal. They used to beat up on the guys all the time. The cons would kill the guards when they got the opportunity or would let something fall on them or something like that. (Chambliss, 1984, p.118)

I have a terrific animosity toward the type of people they hire in these penitentiaries. They pay them the lowest salary there is and get the lowest type of labor. And they get very personal picking on guys and things like that to debase a man. (Chambliss, 1984, p.107)

The subjects in the later life histories also revealed that due to their low salaries, the guards could often be bribed very easily. For example, Sam Goodman noted that the inmates would bribe the guards with goods they made—such as wallets, bags, and women's handbags—in return for narcotics and other items that they were not able to acquire in the prison. In return,



a friend of an inmate would usually slip the drugs to the guards and then guards would drop it to inmates' cell (Steffensmeier, 1986).

They (the guards) will do anything else for money because they are underpaid. So, you don't draw a very good class of man to an institution. (Steffensmeier, 1986, p.141)

Lots of people have a quaint notion about life in prison. They think that there is no dope or booze or sex in there. That is just a place where guys in striped shirts break rocks all day and lock up all night. There is all kinds of dope in prison. The walls can't keep it out. Sometimes I scored better dope in the joint than I did on the streets. (Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977, p.72)

### ***Continuation or Disengagement***

In addition to disclosing invaluable information about the subjects' lifestyles, criminal method and tactics, rationalization tools, and other social conditions and circumstances that promoted their criminal careers, the later life histories provided important insights on the individuals' thoughts and feelings about their past criminal life-styles. It was discovered that Stanley and Harry King partially disengaged from crime, and they both showed remorse over what they did during their early lives (Chambliss, 1984; Snodgrass, 1982). On the other hand, other subjects, such as John Allen and Sam Goodman, often stated that they were not sorry for anything that happened throughout their criminal careers. They even expressed that they would choose to live their lives in the same way if they were given a second chance to live it again. However, although praised his criminal past, John stated that he would never want his children to follow his criminal life course (Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

John Allen, who spent his life as a hustler on the streets and alleys of Washington, D.C., stated that his past life was extremely exciting and that he enjoyed all of its moments. His life history did not indicate any remorse or regret about his criminal past. However, John often

expressed that he was deeply sorry for his younger brothers and sisters who were also engaged in criminal underworld. He even stated that his younger siblings or children did not have to steal because they had good opportunities such as school counselors who would help them to find a job to earn money during the summer time. Therefore, although John Allen stated that he really enjoyed his criminal career and was not sorry for what he did; his desires and wishes for his children and younger siblings implied that John actually did not like the lifestyle of criminal underworld (Kelly & Heymann, 1978).

I very much want my kids to be square... (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.228)

Ever since I've been talking, I have been telling about myself-my life and how exciting it was, that I am not sorry for nothing that happened or something I did. But, in reality, and to be actually truthful as well as fearless, I believe I am kind of sorry about some of the things that happened. I know if I think about it too often, I get emotionally upset. I often look at my brother and just get the urge to grab him and hold him close to me. Maybe I am hoping for something different for my kids and my younger brothers and sisters. When I was their age, there wasn't a thing where you go to school and then at the summer vacation you report to the counselor if you want a job. They have got a little more of a chance. They don't have to steal. (Kelly & Heymann, 1978, p.227)

Similarly, the trajectory of Sam Goodman's life disclosed that although his offending pattern in burglary and fencing declined when he got older, Sam never completely desisted from criminal enterprise. Upon release from the prison, Sam continued to be a fence, an activity that he consistently pursued for more than twenty years before his imprisonment. His statements indicated that Sam enjoyed the easy rewards of fencing and theft as well as the company of other thieves, hustlers, and underworld people. He even indicated that he would enter the fencing business at a very early age if he was given a second chance to live his life over.

I do not feel sad about my life. I did what I thought I had to do at the time. I would always tell your students, "No, I don't feel bad for what I done. If I had to live my life over, I would not change it. Except get into the fencing sooner. And not get caught. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p.373)

Sam maintained positive attitudes toward his criminal entrepreneurship throughout his life because his well-established criminal capital—skills, reputation, investments, opportunity structures for easy money, other rewards, and criminal associates—was attractive and rewarding to him (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). At the same time, his strong commitment to his criminal capital inhibited his full desistance from crime. Although he reduced his offending pattern and engaged in less serious criminal acts after release from prison, Sam often resorted to criminal ways when he was in need of money.

Especially if you are in an inch (financially), it is easy to fall back into it—not all the way like you once were but on a smaller scale. Lotta guys don't retire, don't quit all the way. Just slow down or shift to other areas. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p.335)

The money is good. There is satisfaction in knowing you can do it, knowing you can handle whatever comes up. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p.380)

Steffensmeier and Ulmer's follow-up life history study titled *Confessions of a Dying Thief*, also confirmed that Sam continued to enjoy his fencing activities due to its easy and quick rewards. However, this follow-up study revealed that Sam's increased age and his stable domestic partner prevented him from engaging in these activities to the same degree as he did early in life. Away from any remorse or feeling of guilt, Sam's statements again indicated that he was mostly missing the money that he made when he was younger (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

I will tell you what you miss. The money, mainly. What money can get for you, of people knowing you have the money? That and being able to get what you want. If I wanted something, or I wanted to gamble big, the money was there. I miss that. (Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005, p.231)

Contrary to Sam Goodman's and John Allen's positive attitudes toward their criminal past, both Harry King's and Stanley's life histories showed that they regretted their early careers in the criminal underworld (Chambliss, 1984; Snodgrass, 1982). However, Stanley's statements

in this regard were recorded only when he reached the age of seventy. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if he exited the criminal life due to a change in perspective and personality or due to the physical weakness resulting from his increased age. Nonetheless, his words at the age of seventy indicated how he appreciated the pro-social lifestyle—the value of having friends, family, and a stable life away from the stress of criminal underworld (Snodgrass, 1982).

I presume that most people arriving at 70 discover this state of mind. The wounds of the past have healed appreciably and all animosity has been replaced by a philosophy of understanding; we all have our burdens to carry and are obliged to appreciate our blessings. At last I have learned the value of friends, family, and good books. Living definitely can be a most enjoyable experience. (Snodgrass, 1982, p.75)

Finally, Harry King's life history revealed that Harry was able to completely desist from his early criminal lifestyle through the help of pro-social people. He often stated how enjoyable life became upon completely quitting his early criminal lifestyle—freely walking in the streets, talking with the friends, and spending time with his children without the worry and concern of the police apprehension. Harry King even noted that he very much wanted to help the wayward youngsters on the streets by talking to them how awful and stressful it was to pursue a criminal career even though it might provide easy and quick gratification (Chambliss, 1984).

Today I read about two guys who got knocked over for holding up a bank. I read that articles several times and I just laughed. I can get up, go out, get a cup of coffee, and walk in the sunshine. And, what do those guys have? I am very thankful to the people that I have had to help me. That is why I want to help too now. (Chambliss, 1984, p.157)

I have sat down and thought it out very seriously, but I just had enough of it, that is all. (Chambliss, 1984, p.158)

### ***Five Key Insights***

Cumulatively, the later life histories published by Chambliss (1984), Kelly and Heymann (1978), Klockars (1974), Rettig et.al. (1977), Snodgrass (1982), Steffensmeier (1986), and Steffensmeier and Ulmer (2005) provided important insights into the criminal behavior and other

social circumstances that contributed to the onset, persistence, and desistance of the subjects. By recording an individual's experiences in the subject's own words, these works illuminate the trajectory of criminal careers by highlighting five important insights that other research methods may not access in as much detail.

First, the later life histories disclosed how family disruption combined with the poverty, school failure, and the differential associations with other criminals were the key factors for the development of criminal careers for each of the subjects. Second, they revealed the specific methods and tactics that the subjects developed and used during their fencing, hustling, and other types of criminal activities. Third, the later life histories provided information on subjects' well-established rationalization and neutralization techniques to excuse their deviant acts and criminal life-styles. Fourth, they disclosed important insights about the negative aspects of the prison and correctional facilities including the lack of rehabilitation and education, the sexual vulnerability of young inmates, furtherance of criminal skills through association with older inmates, and the cruelty of facility administrations on the inmates. Finally, the later life histories also explored the individuals' thoughts and feelings about their early criminal life-style when they get older (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

It is planned that these insights acquired from the later life histories, combined with the insights obtained from the early life histories of the Chicago school will inform the questions that will be asked in this dissertation. As a result, the answers of the terrorists to these questions will potentially provide rich insights into the cognitions and the social world of those who become terrorists. This knowledge will then have criminological implications in terms of understanding the origins of terrorism, the life-course of terrorists, and assessing theories of terrorism.

## PREVIOUS STUDIES THAT USED SIMILAR METHODS ON PKK MEMBERS

To date, no systematic academic study of a member of the PKK using the life-history method has been undertaken. Nonetheless, two people—first, the American journalist Aliza Marcus (2007) and second, the Kurdish columnist and poet Bejan Matur (2011) from Turkey—conducted studies that partially focused on the life history of individual PKK members. These works were an effort to understand PKK terrorism and to make the Kurdish problem more visible to the Turkish public.

Aliza Marcus's study titled as the *Blood and Belief: the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence* focused on the history of the PKK struggle by heavily relying on her interviews with more than a hundred PKK terrorists, most of whose real names she disclosed. Marcus provided a good general description of the PKK movement through these first-hand interviews. However, the book has taken much criticism from both academics and the Kurdish political leaders in Turkey because it was mainly limited to interviews with former PKK members, including Selim Curukkaya, Sukru Gulmus, Sait Curukkaya, Ayhan Ciftci, and Huseyin Topgider. The critics argued that these former PKK members, who are now extreme opponents of the PKK, voiced irrelevant claims about the organization. Representing their ideas and thoughts as completely unbiased and accurate, these individuals often blamed the imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan for the tactical and strategic faults of the movement (Alpay, 2007; Gunter, 2008; Usak, 2011).

Therefore, although Aliza Marcus's study—the *Blood and Belief*—explored the history of the PKK in a clear way from its establishment to 2007 by citing numerous studies, the “interview” part of the book has been subjected to harsh criticisms due to its reliance on the most marginal figures of the PKK and Kurdish politicians who were on exile in several European

countries. The commentators, mostly from the academia, noted that the *Blood and Belief* should not be applied as a primary source to understand the real dynamics of the Kurdish movement because it was not neutral and objective. It has been suggested that the book would have been more comprehensive if Aliza Marcus had included some active PKK members or sympathizers (Alpay, 2007; Gunter, 2008; Usak, 2011).

Aside from not being representative of the overall PKK population, another caveat of this study was the author's analysis of the information about PKK terrorism almost entirely from the Kurdish side. In other words, Aliza Marcus ignored the explanations on the source of the PKK terrorism from the Turkish media outlets, and of Turkish police, military, and other counterterrorism officials. Therefore, *Blood and Belief* represented a distorted perspective of the Kurdish question, because the author mainly defended the position of the excluded members of the PKK and also ignored the views and perspectives of Turkish officials (Alpay, 2007; Gunter, 2008; Usak, 2011).

In addition to Aliza Marcus's study, the Kurdish poet and journalist from Turkey, Bejan Matur (2011) authored a book titled *Looking beyond the Mountain*. Her book also partially relied on the life stories of the PKK members. Different from Aliza Marcus' study—the *Blood and Belief*—, Matur focused not only on the life histories of the former PKK members who are currently living in the European countries, but also on active PKK members who are located in the terrorist camps in Qandil Mountains (northern Iraq). This enabled her to capture more accurately the personal stories and the traumas of the PKK members currently fighting in the war (Matur, 2011).

Matur (2011) noted that the Kurdish problem in Turkey can only be solved if Turkish officials—especially those who have the power and authority to take action and make policy

changes, such as police chiefs, military commanders, bureaucrats, politicians, and judiciary officials—take necessary time and effort to empathize with the thoughts and feelings of the active PKK members. She argued that the only way to empathize with the Kurdish insurgents is to acquire first-hand accounts of information from them about why they left their families and went to the mountains, why they are willing to embrace a guerilla life due to its difficulties, and most importantly why they are willing to die for their causes. Matur also revealed information about the terrorists who left the PKK due to various reasons (Matur, 2011).

Despite the great amount of the information provided, similar to Aliza Marcus's study, Bejan Matur's work on the PKK insurgency was not written from an academic perspective. Matur was originally a poet and journalist and thus has no previous experience on the field of terrorism. On the other hand, Matur was also not objective in the sense that she often blamed the Turkish authorities' practices to legitimize the terrorist acts of the PKK. Her perspectives even suggested that the only way to sustain the peace between the Turks and the Kurds was available through destruction of the Turkish authorities (Matur, 2011; Donmez, 2012).

## **RESEARCH STRATEGY**

As discussed, scholars have used the life-history method to make important contributions to the field of criminology. From the early life histories to the later ones, these studies provided insights about the criminal underworld and its subjects that were not available through other research methods and techniques. Scholars such as Chambliss (1984), Shaw and his colleagues (1930, 1931, 1938), Snodgrass (1982), Steffensmeier (1986), and Sutherland (1937) used this methodological technique to illuminate how ecological factors, family disruption, poverty, lack



of education and rehabilitation in correctional facilities, and criminal associates affected the onset and development of wayward behaviors on the subjects.

Although the life-history method has been widely used over the course of the development of criminology as a discipline, it has been employed infrequently in counterterrorism studies to understand the phenomenon of radicalization. There is a growing recognition, however, that deeper knowledge needs to be obtained if the origins of terrorists are to be understood and prevented; capturing or killing every terrorist is not a realistic strategy. This approach means that scholars need to spend more time exploring the radicalization process—what motivates people to become extremists in the first place (Jacobson, 2010). For this purpose, many academics have argued that the use of the life-history method is a potentially promising approach because it enables researchers to capture the lived experience and perspectives of critical actors (Bjorgo & Horgan, 2009; della Porta, 2012).

In this context, this dissertation aims to advance the counterterrorism literature by employing the life-history method in the tradition of Clifford R. Shaw's *the Jack-Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*. To enhance insights on the PKK and terrorism more generally, the current project intends to use structured interviews to gain knowledge on terrorism—from its causes, triggering factors, and sustaining influences to its trajectories, and eventual consequences that are currently lacking in the literature.

Today, there are only two studies that partially employed the life history method to analyze the structure and internal workings of the PKK. As noted—these studies conducted by Marcus (2007) and Matur (2011)—were of limited values either due to methods of selection of the interviewees or for not being objective and neutral on their attitudes toward the source of the problem. Therefore, by employing a full-scale life-history approach, this dissertation aims to

advance the insights into the processes through which PKK is formed and into why people join, stay, and leave the organization.

As elaborated in the first section, a life history of a terrorist will explore the culture in which terrorists are raised, the family in which they were raised, their interactions with other people, and the social situations and structural conditions—economic, political, demographic, cultural and historical— that channel and constrain their behavior in certain directions.

Hopefully, this approach will give scholars a richer understanding of how terrorists interact with others, how decisions are made within their groups, how they deal with conflicts, and so on. A more intimate knowledge of the terrorists acquired through this method would potentially provide deeper information about why people join, stay, and leave terrorist groups.

Indeed, this knowledge has criminological implications for understanding the nature of terrorism. In the final chapter, a life-course perspective is used to organize insights into the “freedom fighter’s” onset of, persistence in, and desistance from terrorist activities inside the PKK. Further, the policy implications drawn from the terrorist’s own story will be explored. Most salient, this information suggests that a resolution of the conflict between Turkey and the PKK is unlikely to be achieved through military means. Rather, in the “freedom fighter’s” view, the pathway to peace is through authentic negotiations in which the grievances of the Kurdish people are addressed and a true multi-cultural Turkish society is embraced.

## CHAPTER 3

### DOING A LIFE HISTORY WITH A TERRORIST

The previous chapter has indicated that life histories published by prominent academics have played an invaluable role in advancing the field's understanding of the development of criminal careers, the methods offenders use to commit illegal acts, and the perspectives and experiences that shape their life in crime. Using the same method, this dissertation hopes to contribute in a comparable way to the questions of why individuals become terrorists, how they conduct their acts, and what experiences shaped their unique life courses. In particular, this dissertation proposes to conduct life histories of three PKK terrorists. To gain insight into what has motivated so many young Kurdish men and women to join PKK, a repentant PKK commander will be interviewed in depth.

Thus, by employing the life-history method, this dissertation will provide the opportunity for the reader to view the firsthand accounts of terrorists' experiences as they are embedded in violence and terror. This person, who involved in terrorism for more than 20 years, will be interviewed and his first-hand insights recorded so as to provide a detailed qualitative description of their point of view of being a terrorist. His personal accounts will then be interpreted and illuminated through a social scientific approach.

In this context, the dissertation's third chapter will present the research methodology to be employed in this study. The first section will describe the type of questions that will be asked to the interviewee in regard to his life history. Accordingly, the insights that were discovered in the early and later life histories that were conducted by Chambliss (1984), Kelly and Heymann (1978), Klockars (1974), Rettig, Torres, and Garret (1977), Shaw (1930/1966), Shaw & Moore

(1931/1976), Shaw, McKay, and McDonald (1938), Snodgrass (1982), Steffensmeier (1986), and Steffensmeier and Ulmer (2005) will be used to form the questions.

The second section will lay out what can be accomplished through a life history with a terrorist. In other words, it will explain the kind of information that would be acquired through the life-history method. In line with the Chicago school, it will be argued that, if it is done well, the life history of a terrorist will reveal insights into three important areas: (1) the point of view of the terrorist; (2) the terrorist's social world, the community background, social and physical characteristics of hometown, family, and friends; and (3) the sequence of events in the life of the terrorist that triggered the participation in a terrorist organization.

Finally, the third section will present the research procedure of this dissertation. It will discuss topics such as how the interviews will be handled, the rationale for the interview locations, how the life history will be secured, and potential findings. The protection of human subjects will be detailed. This section will also elaborate some critical issues including the reliability and validity of the findings as well as the potential caveats/limits of doing a life history with a terrorist.

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Life histories published by the academics from the field of criminology have provided important insights into the social circumstances that contribute to the onset, persistence, and desistance of criminal behavior. By recording an individual's experiences in the subject's own words, these works highlighted the importance of certain factors in the formation and stability of criminal careers. Such criminogenic factors include the loss of a loved parent at an early age, having an abusive stepparent, mistreatment in favor of step siblings, broken homes, poverty,

living in a socially disorganized neighborhood, confusion of cultural standards, economic insecurity, participation in gang groups, criminal skills and values acquired through associates in the correctional and reformatory institutions, differential association, the enjoyment of the thrill and adventures of crime, and so on (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

In this context, the insights obtained from the early and later life histories will be relied to develop the questions that will be used to interview the terrorists. Four stages of each terrorist's life history will be explored: (1) growing up; (2) becoming a terrorist, (3) being a terrorist, and (4) prison and beyond. Accordingly, the questions for the interviews will be grouped based on these four different periods of terrorists' lives. Each terrorist's life history will be presented as a separate section of the dissertation, consisting of four chapters corresponding to the four stages just described.

A structured interview will be used with each subject. Below, the questions to be used to secure information on the four stages will be presented.

### ***Growing Up***

The life-history method enabled the researchers to secure an intimate understanding of the early-life factors that conditioned the beginnings and persistence of the wayward conduct on the subjects. These stories revealed that family disruption combined with poverty, ineffective schooling, corporal punishment, neighborhood disorganization, transmission of criminal values, and differential associations with other criminals were the key factors for the initiation of the wayward behaviors on subjects during their early lives (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig et.al., 1977; Shaw and his colleagues 1930, 1931, and 1938;

Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). Based on these findings, the following questions will be asked to the subject to reveal the factors that contributed to his criminal lifestyle during his childhood;

***Parents as People.***

1. Can you tell me about when you were small what your parents were like? What sorts of personalities did they have?

***Family Relationships.***

1. How well did people in your family get along with one another? Did your parents fight a lot with each other or with you or your siblings?
2. How can you describe your feelings against your family members?

***Economic Standing of Family.***

1. How did your family compare economically to other families in your neighborhood?

***Supervision and Discipline.***

1. When you were growing up did your parents supervise you closely? What did they do when you did something wrong?
2. Do you remember talking much with your parents about your problems related to your school life, friends, and neighborhood? Did they show affection?

***General Parenting Styles.***

1. How did you get along with your parents? Did they spend a lot of time with you?

***Family Values.***

1. What would you say were the important values that your parents tried to teach you?
2. Were your parents a member of a political party?

***Family Structure.***

1. What about brothers and sisters? Did you have any? (If so, what were they like?) Can you explain your relationship to them? Please try to elaborate as much as possible.
2. What about grandparents or other family members, such as aunts or uncles, did you spend time with them?

***Peers.***

1. Can you please talk about your friends in your neighborhood and school? What individuals did you spend the most time with during this period?
2. What did you tend to do with your friends? Can you please tell me the kind of activities you liked to do with your friends in your leisure times?
3. Did you ever get into any kind of trouble while spending time with your friends?

***School Life.***

1. Can you please talk about your school life? Did you have any trouble while attending to school?
2. How would you describe the teaching and learning environment in the school?

***Religious Views.***

1. Can you please talk about the role of religion in your life? How was religion observed in your home? Did they encourage you to go to mosque?

***Neighborhood Conditions.***

1. What was it like when you grew up? What were the people like? Can you please talk about the major neighborhood characteristics?
2. Can you please describe the moral attitudes, customs, and cultural standards prevailing in this area? For example, was violence or stealing, or joining to PKK tolerable?
3. Do you think that there was a hatred and polarization passed from older generations to younger generations?

***Marital and Occupational Status.***

1. What was your first job? What did you like or not like about it?
2. Are you married? If yes, how did you meet your wife?
3. Do you have any children?

### ***Relations with the Law Enforcement.***

1. Do you remember frequently seeing military officials when you lived as a child in your neighborhood? How do you think they treated people?
2. Has any member of your family, friends, or relatives humiliated by the state practices in front of you?

### ***Becoming a Terrorist***

Previous life histories have revealed that family environment, neighborhood conditions, and the playgroups all played a role in the development of the criminal careers of the subjects. They revealed that the parents ignored and even encouraged their youngsters' wayward behaviors because they were in a dire economic need. Additionally, these studies indicated that youngsters went into crime because criminal traditions had emerged in their social surroundings and were transmitted from older siblings to younger siblings and from older residents to younger residents. In other words, delinquency was a permanent aspect of the social activity of the play groups and transmitted to younger generations through differential association. These play groups exercised a large influence and created a culture that not only tolerated, but also fostered delinquent and criminal practices (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig et.al., 1977; Shaw and his colleagues 1930, 1931, and 1938; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Based on these findings, the following questions will be asked to the subject to reveal the political, social, economic, religious, and other insecurities and grievances that contributed to the initiation of subject's career in terrorist underworld. It is hoped that these questions will reveal pre-conditions and the precipitants of why people become terrorists and support terrorists groups.



***Personal Motivations and Factors.***

1. Can you tell me when you first started thinking about political ideologies and things?
2. Can you talk about your decision-making process of joining to PKK?
3. Can you tell me how you got actually involved in PKK activities? What motivated you to join to PKK?
4. Was joining the group easy or difficult? If so, in what ways?

***Family and Friends.***

1. Do you think that your friends, family members or other authority figure in your community played a role in your participation to PKK? If so, what was their role?
2. Have you ever lost a family member or a friend in the war between Turkey and Kurds that you really liked? If yes, how did you feel upon hearing the news that they were dead?
3. Did anyone close to you joined to PKK before you joined? What do you remember of that experience?

***Being a Terrorist***

Previous life histories have provided valuable information about specific methods and tactics that the subjects developed and used during their criminal activities. Scholars discovered that each criminal profession has a body of knowledge that includes its own codes, rules, abilities, skills, and understandings. This knowledge is transmitted to the newcomers by apprenticeship method through the older criminals. The life histories indicated that if a newcomer fails to acquire these specific techniques and codes of professional theft, the person is dropped from participation in further activities. Therefore, it was mandatory for the newcomers to learn the general standards of morality, propriety, etiquette, rules, and rights of the specific criminal profession.

These stories also provided important insights on the daily routine of various criminals. They revealed how the offenders conducted their criminal business, where they obtained their stolen goods, how they distributed the material to customers through fencing business, their relationship with the law-abiding people, and how they dealt with the police and other criminal justice system agents to carry out their criminal acts (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig et.al., 1977; Shaw and his colleagues 1930, 1931, and 1938; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Based on these findings, the following questions will be asked to the subject to reveal the natural process of daily events in the subjects' lives after he fully committed to be a terrorist. It is planned that these questions will also reveal the codes and rules of the PKK, as well as the cultural standards and patterns of behavior in a terrorist organization.

***Daily Routines and Social Life.***

1. Can you describe a typical day after joining a PKK? How was it different from your daily routines in the past?
2. Were you able to follow the daily news around the world through the TV?
3. Was religion important part of the camp life? Were religious activities allowed? Did you have community prayers?

***Physical Conditions of the camps.***

1. What was the place you like sleep in? Was it a dormitory? How many people stayed in one dormitory? Can you describe the physical characteristics of it?

***Work Share in the camps.***

1. Who does the following jobs in the camp: cleaning, washing clothes, shopping, repairs, improvements?
2. Did you have any tasks or responsibilities you had to carry out regularly at the camp?

### ***Education and Training.***

1. Can you tell me what was it like when you first got to the training camp? How did your training start and how did it develop over time?
2. Were there chances for promotion in your career? By seniority, by experience, by knowledge?

### ***Rules, Codes, Ethics.***

1. Was there a series of codes that you are instructed to obey upon joining to PKK? What are these rules about?
2. Before you joined the movement, did you have any definite ideas about these rules?

### ***Gender Issues.***

1. How is the life for women in the PKK? Do you think it is different than males? If so, in what ways?
2. Do women take the same kind of training with the men?

### ***Marital Issues.***

1. What is the attitude toward marriage? Would the older members influence your attitudes towards marrying?
2. Can you have a girlfriend in the camp? If not, why?

### ***Casualties.***

1. Have you lost any members to death while you were in the camp? If so, how did their death affect you and your friends?
2. Did you have a funeral ceremony for the people you lost during the war?

### ***Explicit Terrorism Related Activities.***

1. How do they decide if you are going to be involved in actual operations (e.g. shootings, bombings) or involve in other activities such as political, organizational, and financial?

***Subject's view on use of Violence.***

1. How do you see the use of violence for achieving your goals? Can you describe your first thoughts, memories, and impressions upon joining to PKK?
2. Would you say that PKK can legitimately claim that it resorted to force only as a last resort?

***Disappointments with the Life in the PKK.***

1. What kind of disappointments with the reality of a life in the PKK did you or your friends experienced?
2. Have you felt like homesick? I mean, did you miss your family members, friends, and other significant persons in your life after you joined to PKK?
3. Have you ever had concerns about PKK's directions or goals?

***Subject's View on the Resolution of the Conflict between Kurds and Turks.***

1. How do you think that the Kurdish issue can be resolved peacefully without resorting to weapons?
2. Do you think that the Turkish state should offer PKK members a way out if they break with their terrorist past and cooperate with the authorities?

***Disengagement***

1. Can you please explain your disengagement process, starting with the time when you made the decision up until surrendering yourself to law enforcement agencies?
2. What were the motivational reasons for you to disengage?
3. When you look back, do you think that the disengagement was easy or a difficult process?
4. Why did you surrender to law enforcement agencies rather than asking for asylum in one of the European countries?

## ***Prison and Beyond***

The life histories analyzed in the second chapter revealed five key insights about the negative aspects of the penal and correctional institutions. First, they indicated that prison life strengthened rather than weakened the subjects' commitment to criminality. Through companionship with the older inmates, subjects not only involved in more serious crimes but also acquired added knowledge and sophistication with regard to criminal underworld (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig et.al., 1977; Shaw and his colleagues 1930, 1931, and 1938; Snodgrass, 1982; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Second, these studies revealed that arrests, probation, confinement in detention homes, time spent in correctional schools, and parole supervision were not effective in deterring the subjects from further criminal acts. They also revealed that inmates were not provided with education or training that might have helped them to function like normal people when they were released (Shaw, 1930/1966; Shaw & Moore, 1931/1976; Shaw, McKay, & McDonald, 1938).

Third, the subjects in the later life histories revealed that there was a high rate of sexual victimization, especially among the young inmates. Notably, the prison staff was fully aware of this victimization but did not take any precaution to prevent it (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Fourth, the life histories revealed that the guards were brutal. They would gang up on and beat the subjects for minor infractions or for complaining about prison conditions. One of the subjects even noted that each month, many inmates would die due to this harassment but nobody would investigate these deaths. Rather, the prison administration would use diverse

means to prevent formal authorities from investigating the reason for the inmates' deaths (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Finally, the life histories revealed that due to their low salaries, the guards could often be bribed in return for narcotics and other items that they were not available to inmates in the prison (Chambliss, 1984; Kelly & Heymann, 1978; Klockars, 1974; Rettig, Torres & Garret, 1977; Steffensmeier, 1986; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005).

Thus, life histories indicated that these institutions deepened rather than treated the subjects' criminality. In this context, the following questions will be asked to the subject to discover his thoughts and ideas on the prison conditions in Turkey.

***Prison Conditions.***

1. Can you please talk about the general conditions of the prison you are staying?
2. Do you think the services provided here was reasonably enough? Such as meals, bath times, beds, common areas.

***Rehabilitation.***

1. Do you have access to any kind of rehabilitation service?

***Training and Work.***

1. Have you been able to learn anything, such as an occupational skill, which will assist you economically on your release?
2. Can you tell me about those programs? How often do you go?

***Social and recreational Activities.***

1. What kind of social and recreational activities were available to prisoners?

***Prison Administration.***

1. Do you think that the guards treated you fairly? Would they employ corporal punishment for infractions?
2. Do you think that the prison guards have enough training and education in terms of your rehabilitation and stay in the facility?

***Prison Life and Routines.***

1. Can you please talk about the prison life and routines?
2. What did you think of mostly while you were there? Family, friends, life in the PKK, future plans?

***Remorse and Regret.***

1. Do you feel remorse or regret for hat you have done?

***Thoughts about Future.***

1. How well do you think you will get along after release?
2. What do you think the society and the state should do in terms of facilitation of repentant' reincorporation to society?

**THREE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE TERRORIST BEHAVIOR**

It is hoped that the use of life-history method—in depth interview with a former commander of the PKK—will enable us to see inside a terrorist organization. In this context, it is the aim of this dissertation to reveal useful information at least on three important and critical aspects of a terrorist behavior; (1) the point of view of the terrorist, (2) the terrorist's social world and the community background, (3) the sequence of events in the life of the terrorist.

***The Point of View of the Terrorist***

First of all, the subject's own story will be important for revealing their personal attitudes, feelings, and interests. This method will be a useful tool in discovering how terrorists

conceive their roles in the life and how they interpret the situation in which they currently live. It is expected that the interview questions will probe the subject to reveal his feelings of inferiority and superiority, his fear and worries, ideals and philosophy of the life, his antagonisms and mental conflicts, prejudices and rationalizations, and other thoughts and feelings regarding his past and present experiences (Shaw, 1930, p.3). In other words, as Burgess stated, “In the life history is revealed, as in no other way, the inner life of the person, his moral struggles, his successes and failures in securing his destiny in a world too often at variance with his hopes and ideals” (Burgess, cited in Shaw, 1930, p.4).

The previous experience on counterterrorism studies and reports proved that the most promising way to end a terrorist conflict is through understanding why one person becomes involved in terrorism and the others do not. In this context, the point of view of the terrorist will provide a useful framework for discovering the socialization process into terrorist organizations.

### ***The Terrorist’s Social World and the Community Background***

Second, these questions will reveal important insights regarding the social and cultural world in which the terrorists live. As Shaw (1930) indicated, the behavior of a person cannot be understood and explained apart from the cultural and social context in which it initially occurred and developed. In this context, the interview questions will enable us to discover the traditions, customs, and the moral values of the neighborhoods, families, institutions, and play groups in which the terrorists grow up. That is, scholars will have a better understanding of attitudes and influences of other persons in the making of a terrorist mindset and behavior. This information will then inform the scholars to understand the how these cultural and social factors intertwined and incorporated into the behavior of the terrorists.



### ***The Sequence of Events in the Life of the Terrorist***

Finally, by organizing the interview questions for three different segments of a life, this dissertation will reveal the life events of a terrorist—in a sequential order; 1) setting events, 2) personal factors, 3) social, political, and organizational context. The thorough analysis of personal experiences will potentially suggest how various factors in the family, school, play groups, and other social settings conditioned the personal developments of terrorists during the early childhood and adolescence. Therefore, the chronological sequence of personal experiences will eventually provide the continuous process involved in the formation and fixation of terrorism oriented behavior.

## **THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

This section will describe the research procedure of this dissertation. First, the interview procedure—the subject for the interview, the rationale for the interview locations, and the format of securing the talks—will be described. Second, the concerns and precautions regarding the protection of human subjects will be detailed. Third, this section will elaborate some critical issues including the reliability and validity of the findings as well as the potential caveats of doing a life history with a terrorist.

### ***Interview Procedure and Interview Location***

The fieldwork will constitute the foundation of this dissertation. Face to face interviews has been planned to take place in Turkey, in the city of Diyarbakir with an imprisoned terrorist. In this context, name of ten terrorists who were willing to participate in this study was determined at the suggestion of my private contacts. After an initial interview with all of them, one of them was selected to participate in this study. This person was selected to take part in this

study because he served as a high ranked commander in the PKK cadre for many years across different countries including Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. Thus, the findings in this report is based on the opinions of a former PKK member, who represents the largest Kurdish mass uprising in the history of Turkish Republic.

As the prominent scholars in the terrorism field repeatedly stated, conducting face-to-face interviews with the individuals who were the primary parties in the guerilla war and who have the authority to affect the problem of leaving the mountain will enable us to understand the grievances of these individuals and will bring us closer to the solution.

Therefore, interviewing a former PKK commander who represented the traditions of armed rebel, this dissertation aimed to convey to the government and people of Turkey the unheard voices of a PKK terrorist who was one of the primary stakeholder of the Kurdish uprising.

### ***Format of the Interviews***

The technique that will be employed to secure the terrorist's life history is that of personal interview. Securing a complete and useful document by this technique usually requires a series of interviews, which in some cases might extend over a relatively long period of time. A voice recorder was used during the interviews. The participant was explained that recordings would be optional and voluntary and he had the right to have the recordings turned off at any time during the course of the interview. Therefore, when the subject was willing and the situation favorable, the interviews were recorded. Otherwise, notes were taken during the interview sessions. In this way, the objectivity of the life histories preserved.

In writing his life history, the subject was motivated by an interest in publication of his own life and a genuine hope that this life history might be useful in bringing an end to the

problem existent between the Turkish and Kurdish community. It is assumed that, despite his enthusiasm and cooperation, a former terrorist would have to trust me before he shared the most sensitive details of his life with me. In this context, Steffensmeier and Ulmer (2005) indicated that it was not feasible in the first interview or two or three to open up their subject—Sam—about his criminal activities. The authors first needed to gain the trust of the subject before they could actually interview him about his own criminality. Consequently, the subject in this dissertation was interviewed about the least sensitive areas of his life first.

Therefore, interviews were conducted with the subject and during the first one or two interviews, the topic of the interviews focused only on his pre-terrorism years; childhood, family, school life, and marriage.

Equally important, the subject has been called as former terrorists until this point throughout the dissertation. However, he strongly considered himself as a freedom fighter or a PKK guerilla. Therefore, I refrained calling him as a terrorist because this pejorative term was not the word he preferred to be called by. Otherwise, it would be counterproductive in terms of the flow of information and also building a trustful and close relationship with me.

Additionally, the questions presented in this section guided and probe the subject to reveal as much as detail about his past and present life experiences. The questions for the interview were prepared with a simple language to ensure that the subject who participated in this dissertation understood and interpreted them easily. The questions, which were arranged in chronological order, were presented to him to be used as a guide in writing his own story. The subject was introduced to give a detailed description of each event, the situation in which it occurred, their personal reactions to the experiences and the impressions which these life events made upon him.

If some parts of study were relatively meager, the subject was urged to make further elaboration. This process of elaboration continued until the story is made as complete as possible. When the elaborations were done, the body of materials integrated to construct the foundation of the life history—short connection passages between the paragraphs were written, duplications were eliminated, and the chronological accuracy maintained. Everything that was reorganized was sent back to subject. The subject was then encouraged to read, comment, and approve the way his story was put together.

By this method, the document was secured with a minimum of guidance and control on my part, and the story necessarily followed the natural sequence of events in the life of the subject. By enabling a terrorist to tell his life story according to this natural sequence, this dissertation described more accurately the natural process involved in the development of his delinquent behavior trends and to develop a more empirical method for the study of the terrorist careers.

### ***Protection of the Subject***

One important matter doing a life history with terrorists is the problem of protecting the subject from law enforcement agencies and other interested persons who might wish to discover their identities. First of all, it should be clear that the subject involved in this study is a former terrorist who ran away from the PKK and turned himself to Turkish law enforcement agencies. He voluntarily left the PKK and its armed struggle in return for receiving reduced sentence from the state for his confessions and repentance. The subject have already provided secretive details about the PKK, its armed struggle, recruitment methods, military activities, and ideology. He has been kept in private sections of a prison, away from the other terrorists who are caught by Turkish law enforcement agencies. A potential harassment has yet occurred, neither to them nor

to their families due to their disclosing of details on PKK. Given the fact that this dissertation is not interested on acquiring secretive details on the PKK, it is highly unlikely that these individuals will be harassed by the PKK because of participating in this research.

Nevertheless, in the interest of protecting the privacy of the people—terrorist's family, friends, and their private lives—described in this dissertation, all names and some of the factual matters in their early life and underworld activities were revised in such a way as to make it impossible to identify the subject in any way, such as changing date of birth or the location where he grew up, etc. These alterations did not distort the sociological substance or significance of these events.

### ***Reliability and Validity***

The use of a life history, as well as any case study, often raises the question of whether the subject is telling the truth. This dissertation will employ several methods to cross check what the subject revealed in his story to attest the overall veracity of subject's account. First, it has been planned that the interview strategy itself will provide a check on the internal validity of the terrorist's account. By interviewing the subject multiple times about everything reported, and having the consecutive interviews separated from each other, we will be relatively certain that if the terrorist lie, he would not be able to repeat his lies exactly as he has earlier.

Second, in addition to checking the veracity of the subject's discourse, the tape recordings ensured that we have not added phrases to terrorist's life history which he did not actually say. Third, as previously mentioned, the subject was allowed and encouraged to read over the documents to further ensure that any particular phrases belong to himself.

Fourth, due to my position in the counterterrorism department of Turkish National police, I had access to documents—newspaper articles, court records, police and military reports—which corroborate to subject’s statements and testimonies.

Fifth, some extra techniques were also developed which are aimed to encourage truthfulness. Throughout the interview, the terrorist was explained that the study would be read by some very sharp people, people who know the issue of terrorism very well. He would be warned that if these experts detected exaggeration or misrepresentation in any part of the study, then the whole study would be discredited. Thus, the subject was encouraged to tell the truth if he wanted a book of his own to be published.

Finally, during the last two years, I endeavored to read the literature on the Kurdish issue from several published books and articles in English language. The knowledge and information acquired from these sources also enable me to check if the subject’s descriptions are consistent with the historical research about terrorism, which has heavily relied on criminal justice records, intelligence reports, and first hand interviews.

### ***Potential Caveats***

Life histories have been an important source of information to social scientists because they have revealed insights that are often not easily accessible through other methods of research. This tradition of obtaining firsthand accounts of experience with crime has produced outstanding works such as Clifford Shaw’s *the Natural History of a Delinquent Career* (1931) and Edwin Sutherland’s *Professional Thief* (1937). In line with this tradition, the unique feature of the current dissertation is that it analyzed the complete career of terrorists. This study elaborated the family and neighborhood conditions, early experiences of the subject with the

terrorist groups, encounters with the law enforcement, activities in training camps, and the hardships at correctional and penal institutions.

Therefore, this dissertation studied the subject's life course so as to elaborate the evolution of a career in terrorism. It provided experiences that might not be obtained by other techniques of social science.

Nonetheless, the literature on life histories often alerts the readers on two issues. First, these studies are often followed by skepticism of their authenticity because a biographical narrative is essentially a self-report of subjects' lives. Although they offer the advantage of portraying subjects' own view of the circumstances, the personal interview often raises the questions of how much the subjects distorted the events of their lives. Therefore, granted that the life history possess some advantages over other social science methods, it is not free from bias; how is it possible to check the validity and reliability of statements?

Thus, the insights that are acquired through this method depend on the honesty of participants. Psychologists have argued that participants are less likely to be honest on issues relating to sensitive information about their lives such as drug use, sexual interests, and crimes (Austin, Gibson, McGregor, & Dent, 1998; Fan, Miller, Park, Winward, Christensen, Grotevant, 2006). Additionally, Rettig, Torres, and Garret (1977) argued that interviewee's interpretation of events and personal experiences often undergoes a filtering process. During this process, subjects usually search for ways to rationalize their acts in a way that enhance their own image. That is, they tend to portray the facts in ways that increase their standing. As a result, there will be a potential distortion factor in any self-reporting of events.

However, as elaborated in the *Reliability and Validity* section, seven different techniques were employed to ensure the veracity of the discourses. Additionally, as Shaw and his

colleagues (1930, 1931, and 1938) discussed in their books on life histories; parents, teachers, and psychologists all agree that the lie is a response to a specific stimulus. He argued that the adequate stimulus for the lie response is often the punishment situation.

Physicians, psychiatrists, and sociologists, whose attitude is that of scientific research into the solution of personal problems, elicit, not falsehood, but truth. Dr. William Healy once reported that in his experience with thousands of cases of problem boys and girls he found only a negligible percentage of deception. (Shaw, 1930, p.188)

Thus, willingness and freedom which subjects enjoy in writing or in telling their own stories are two important factors for assuring the reliability of documents. In this context, the participant of this dissertation—the imprisoned PKK member, a former terrorist who served in the PKK as a commander—indicated his desire and eagerness to write his life history.

Further, Rettig, Torres, and Garret (1977) argued that other kinds of research methods used by social scientists also carry the risk of self-reporting. Data gathered through questionnaires represents the respondent's own perception of reality and events. Although it is hard to acquire the veracity of the information provided by respondents, this does not mean that these data are useless and the results acquired these methods are invalid.

Finally, as W. I. Thomas argued even the highly subjective record has a value for behavioral study because the subjects view of the situations and events may be the most important factor for understanding the source of their criminal behavior (Cited in Shaw, 1930). Therefore, although it is not possible to fully assure that the subject necessarily described his life situations objectively, statements of fabrications, prejudices, and exaggerations will also be important to reveal the subject's own personal attitudes (Shaw, 1930). Indeed, even these misleading statements present us materials by which we can interpret a former PKK member's attitudes, values, and personality.



The absolute truth about these or other points cannot be obtained by the life-history and probably cannot be obtained by any other known method. But in human affairs it is not the absolute truth about an event that concerns us but the way in which persons react to that event. (Shaw, 1930, p.189)

Second, the life-history method has also been criticized for the purposes of scientific generalization. It is because the life history of a person includes a sample number of one and the descriptions usually have a non-quantitative character. For these reasons, it can be potentially argued whether what we learned from this subject could be generalized to similarly situated persons and involvements.

The number of participant might be indeed perceived as a limitation. Nonetheless, there are many aspects of radicalization and terrorism in general that might not be susceptible to be uncovered by other research methods. The issue of terrorism cannot be considered independent of history, ideology, or culture. It is the result of a social process in which living agents constituted meanings, models and standards. Thus, scholars need a more sophisticated method to disclose the underlying process involved in the formation of violent behavior trends.

In this context, the life-history method is promising. Further, even though the insights revealed in a single life history might not be used for generalization—because they do not produce definitive results—these experiences and descriptions of events can illustrate many of the key issues discussed by the theories of radicalization and terrorism. Therefore, the issue of generalizability should not necessarily be the sole factors on judging the value of scientific investigations. At a minimum level, findings of this study will reveal at least one pathway into terrorism. Finally, the findings of this dissertation can still be considered as generalizable—with caveats—until someone else shows that a particular story doesn't generalize.

Other than these two main caveats regarding the generalizability and veracity of the life histories, there was one more minor issue to consider when employing the life history method. As, the authors of later life histories indicated, it was quite challenging to transmit what one heard and felt to written form (Kelly & Heymann, 1977; Steffensmeier & Ulmer, 2005). For example, Kelly and Heymann's (1977) statements revealed that dozens of tapes resulted from their interviews with John Allen. When the authors transcribed these tapes into text, they ended up having thousands of pages of dialogue.

In the same way, transcribing the entire interview sessions was quite challenging. The author of this dissertation had to transcribe 145 hours of voice records. Transcribing consumed more than two months and also required an enormous amount of work. Additionally, during the transcribing of the spoken words into text, many expressive components of the spoken words such as the rhythms and gestures were lost. Further, the translation of Turkish statements into English language also resulted in distortion in the meaning of what the subject was trying to convey.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE HISTORY OF THE KURDS AND THE KURDISTAN WORKERS PARTY (PKK)

As the previous chapters have indicated, this dissertation seeks to contribute to radicalization literature by conducting a life history of a PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) terrorist. However, in order to have a better grasp of Kurdish issue today in Turkey, it is necessary to analyze the historical events that gave rise to the establishment of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

The literature review of the Kurds in modern Turkey and also in the Ottoman Empire indicated that the present day situation is highly relevant to the events occurred during the last two centuries. In this context, this chapter will first present the ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic origins of the Kurdish people. Second, it will analyze the political, social, and economic factors that contributed to the Kurdish uprisings occurred in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey since 1850s. The second section will also explore how the first rebellions against the Ottoman Empire were occurred, the emergence of the sheikhs as the new political powers in Kurdistan, and finally the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the re-emergence of the Kurdish ethnic awareness among the Kurds of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

The third section will focus on the Kurds of Turkey during the War of Independence and during the early years of the Turkish Republic. It will explore how the Turkish-Kurdish unity was dissolved after Mustafa Kemal's betrayal of the Kurds by establishing a secular Turkish state and by attacking the religious institutions that historically bonded two nations together. It will then present how the Kurds were used through political patronage system starting with Democratic Party. Finally, this section will elaborate the factors—the mandatory relocation of

Kurdish children for educational purposes, economic deprivation due to mechanization of agriculture, and social injustices by the cooption of the agha system—that played a key role in the national awakening of the Kurds during the 1980s.

Finally, the fourth section will explore the emergence and the development of the Partiya Kerker Kurdistan (PKK) in Turkey. It will explain how Abdullah Ocalan (the leader) started a violent revolution against the Turks and the feudal Kurds, and how he portrayed his organization as the protector of poor peasant Kurds in Marxist line of thoughts. This section will end by arguing that the existence and the armed struggle of the PKK forcefully brought the Kurdish issue to the center of the public attention and made it impossible for the Turks to ignore the Kurdish problem in Turkey.

In achieving the aforementioned goals, the information presented in this chapter will mainly rely on scholarly articles and books published by well-known western scholars. Today, it is known that much of the research carried out by the parties of the Kurdish conflict (Turks, Iranians, Arabs, and Kurds) cannot be considered as accurate due to the racial and cultural biases involved in their analyses. Additionally, the governments of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria are known to have manipulated the facts of various events to justify their ethnic policies applied to Kurdish people living in the region.

## **KURDS AS A NATION**

Kurds are located in a marginal zone surrounded by Mesopotamian plain, Iran, and Turkey, an area that is as large as the size of France. Historically, this place has been called Kurdistan—the land of the Kurds. Scholars believe that the Seljuk Turks first used the term of Kurdistan during the twelfth century as a geographical term. Sultan Sancar created the province

of Kurdistan and made the town of Bahar as its capital (McDowall, 2000; White, 2000, p.15). Today, the region lies along the geographical area between four power centers of the Middle East: Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (Romano, 2006; White, 2000). As a result, the Kurds have been marginalized geographically, politically, and economically by these four states who wished to control the Kurdish territory (Izady, 1992; McDowall, 2000).

The origins of the Kurds are not definitely known today. Rather, there are different theories defended by scholars. The most widely accepted view is that the Kurds are known to be descended from the nomadic tribes of Medes, which was an Indo-European tribe. Historically, the Medes lived in the area located between the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea (McKiernan, 2006; White, 2000, p.14). Some scholars also argued that the Kurds were the people of Gutium who lived in the ancient Sumerian civilization (Izady, 1988, p.373; Waheed, 1958, p.43; White, 2000, p.14). On the other hand, a minority of scholars argued that the Kurds were a new ethnically distinct and separate group who were formed by the mix of ancient Turkic, Persian, Arabic, and other nations that lived in the region (Bois, 1965, p.7; White, 2000, p.14). In support of this argument, researchers who investigated the physiognomy of the Kurds (shape of head, color of eyes, hair) have found out that the most significant feature of Kurds is their similarity with neighboring non-Kurdish communities (McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958).

The Kurdish society was fundamentally tribal until to the end of the twentieth century, being composed of tribes, tribal confederations, feudal groups, and urban settlers (O'Ballance, 1996; van Bruinessen, 1978). Each tribal unit varies from at least 500 families to over 3,000 and they are tied to each other by blood, territorial loyalty, and religious orientation (McDowall, 2000; O'Ballance, 1996, p.4). These tribes are known to ally themselves to larger ones and form the federations for securing higher levels of protection (O'Ballance, 1996).

Today, the majority of the Kurds live in the large cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Tehran, Baghdad, Adana, Diyarbakir, and Izmir, although they used to reside in the mountains and plateau regions. The reason for this is that, when the international borders were drawn upon the victory of Allied Powers on Center Powers, the area called Kurdistan was divided among four different countries—Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Because the borders became less permeable (largely due to the use of wire fences, mine fields, and air surveillance) due to the international borders, it has become increasingly difficult for Kurdish people to visit their relatives spread throughout three different countries, as well as conduct their economic activities (border trade, smuggling) to take care of their families (Izady, 1992; Chailand, 1980). Therefore, large numbers of Kurds have immigrated to metropolitan cities in Turkey, Iran and many European capitals to seek employment.

Today, Kurds are the largest ethnic community in the world that does not have a state (Ahmed & Gunter, 2005; McKiernan, 2006). There are probably 35 to 38 million Kurds living in the Middle East. In addition to this number, millions of Kurds live in European capitals for political and economic reasons (McKiernan, 2006). Kurds are known to have very large families. Their reproductive rate is almost three times of Turks (McDowall, 2000). The majority of the Kurds live in eastern Turkey (de Bellaigue, 2009). The number of Kurds in Turkey roughly comprises 23 percent of the entire Turkey's population. The Kurds in Iraq number approximately 25 percent of the nation's population. In Iran, they form the 10 percent of the population (Romano, 2006, p.2).

Approximately 80 percent of the Kurds follow Sunni Islam in the form of Sunni Turks. The only difference between the Turks and Kurds arise from their mezheb (rite). Whereas most Turks accepted the Hanefi School of jurisprudence/rite, the Kurds followed the Shafi School that

had predominated in the region for a long time (Mardin, 1989; McDowall, 2000). Thus, it can be argued that the Turkish and Kurdish Muslims in Turkey are not different from each other in terms of their religious orientation. They both follow the same orthodox Sunni understanding of Islam (White, 2000, p.30). Fifteen percent of the Kurds are Shias, similar to the Iranians. Finally, the remaining 10 percent of the Kurds are Alevi, Christian, Yezidi, and Ahl-i Haqq faiths (Romano, 2006, p.3).

Kurdish is known to be an Indo-European language related to Persian. Thus, Kurdish is believed to be a part of the Iranian language group (Chailand, 1980; White, 2000). Today, there are a number of dialects and sub-dialects of Kurdish. The three major dialects of Kurdish are Kurmanji, Sorani, and Zaza. Seventy-five percent of the Kurds speak Kurmanji dialect. This dialect is mainly spoken by northern Kurds—the Kurds who live in Turkey. The remaining 25 percent speaks Sorani and Zaza. Sorani is mostly spoken by Iraqi Kurds. McDowall notified that these two dialects grammatically differ from each other as much as English and German. However, the vocabulary differences are not great. In terms of vocabulary, Sorani and Kurmanji differ from each other as Dutch and German languages differ (McDowall, 2000). On the other hand, Zaza is spoken by the Kurds who live in the central Turkish Kurdistan and it is completely different from the other dialects of the Kurdish (McDowall, 2000; White, 2000; Olson, 1996). Finally, the sub-dialects of Kurdish are Kirmanshahi, Gurani, and Leki. These sub-dialects are all spoken by Iranian Kurds (White, 2000, p.16; Romano, 2006, p.3).

Scholars have historically overused the term of Kurds to include other ethnic minorities such as the Zazas and Kizilbas. However, the distinction between these three groups is important for a better understanding of the Kurdish issue today. The Kizilbas are completely different from the Turkish Alevi sects. Although they are adherents of the Alevi sect, the origin

of Kizilbas extends to Dailamites (Iranian people inhabiting in the mountainous region of northern Iran). Similarly, many Zazas do not regard themselves as Kurd, but a branch of Kizilbas. However, different from the Kizilbas, the Zazas are mostly Sunni Muslims of the Shafi School of Islamic law (White, 2000, p.38). The Zazas are not referred as Kurds even among the Kurds mainly because the dialect of Zaza is completely different from Sorani and Kurmanji (McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958; White, 2000).

The economy of Kurdistan has depended historically on livestock breeding (particularly nomadic sheep breeding) as well as agriculture (Chailand, 1980; White, 2000). Today, agriculture is still the principal economic activity for the peasants. However, as it will be discussed in detail later, most of the local population does not have lands spacious enough to feed their families because large land holdings by some families dominated the area. Rather, sharecropping is the most common tradition for the peasants who don't have lands. Sharecroppers rent the lands of rich landlords and then give a fixed proportion of the crop as the fare (White, 2000, p.98). Van Bruinessen indicated that this proportion could vary from 10 percent to 80 percent (van Bruinessen, 1978, pp.22-23). On the other hand, the eastern Anatolia is known for its seasonal agricultural workers. As the sharecropping agreement significantly decreased with the mechanization of the agriculture, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish peasant workers were freed by their landlords. Thus, these people became seasonal agricultural workers and migrated from one city to another during the cropping seasons (White, 2000, p.98).

Today, Kurdish elites are still being referred by some traditional titles including agha, bey, sheikh, and Sayed. Bey (chief) is a title given to leaders of a Kurdish tribe. Different from the religious leaders, the chiefs' (Bey) authority had no limits—from capturing anyone's property under his rule to demanding the beatings or assassinations of his members (White,



2000, p.19). Agha is a title given to rich landowners in the eastern parts of Turkey. They control the water and land allocation, and they maintain contact with other tribes. An agha may control only one or more village depending on the size of land he has (van Bruinessen, 1978). Sheikh is the leader of a religious brotherhood (Tariq). Although being religious in nature, Sheikhs also had some political powers—particularly by marrying the daughters of village authorities or tribal leaders. The sheikhs were also known to perform many other professions, including doctor, lawyers, and psychiatrist (Olson, 1996, p.130). Finally, Sayed is a title given to people who descend from the Prophet Muhammad’s family (Romano, 2006, p.33).

Today, the Kurds are still unable to become a coherent community. Despite existing more than 3,000 years, the Kurds were identified as a distinct nation only during the early years of the twentieth century (O’Ballance, 1996, p.1). The religious, tribal, and linguistic differences prevented the Kurds to unite themselves as a single nation and create a civic culture and established literature (McDowall, 2000, p.3). Today, it remains the case that Kurds are composed of a number of different groups and tribes, each of which has different demands, culture, language, and religious orientation (Bal and Laciner, 2004; Kendal, 1993; Chailand, 1980).

According to McDowall, the largest obstacle to a politically, culturally, and linguistically unified Kurds comes from the religious school of thoughts/religious orders. As explained above, Kurds are divided as Sunni Kurds and Alevi Kurds. Both sides do not consider the other side as Muslim due to large differences in their interpreting of Islam.

Alevis follow a religious order named as Shia and they regard the Prophet’s cousin, Ali, as their prophet. Although Alevism is similar to Iranian Shia with regard to recognizing the twelve Imams of the Islamic History as legitimate, scholars believe that the Alevi Kurds are

more like an extremist split from the Shia Islam, which puts them into the sect of Ghulat. The major differences between the Shia Islam and the Ghulat arise from the fact that, the Ghulat have elements from the pre-Islamic religions such as Shamanism, Manichean Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, Yazdanism, and Shiite Islamic beliefs (Romano, 2006, p.29; White, 2000, p.42).

It should also be clarified that many different groups of Ghulats have lived between Iran, Syria, and Turkey. Since these regions have different linguistic, traditional, and cultural backgrounds, there are major differences on the Ghulat's understanding of Alevism. For example, the most extreme elements of Alevis are the Nusayris who live in Syria. For the Nusayris; "Ali is the Almighty God who takes the place of the God of the Bible and the Qur'an. Ali is superior to the Prophet Muhammad ", whom Ali created (White, 2000, p.42). Muslim scholars define the Ghulat as those Shi'ites who have exaggerated their veneration of the Imams by attributing to them qualities belonging to God (White, 2000, p.41).

On the other hand, the main difference between the Alevis and the Sunnis is that the Alevis do not regard the Koran as their holy book. Rather, they accept a book as their guide, which is prepared by the sixth imam of Islam, Cafer Sadik. This book contains unacceptable description according to Sunnis, such as the Prophet bowing to Ali and of the Prophet and Ali becoming one (McKiernan, 2006). On the other hand, the Alevis disdain four of the five main pillars of Islam; the prayer in Arabic at five specific times a day, the pilgrimage to Mecca once in a life if the economic conditions permit, the fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and the payments of the zakat (tax). Thus, the Alevis stand by only one of the main pillars of Islam; the shaded—there is no god but God and Muhammad is the Prophet of God (De Bellaigue, 2009; White, p.4.). Also, although they do not fast during the month of Ramadan, Alevis fast for 12 days (11 days for women) in the mourning for the Imam Hussein. During this fasting, they do

not drink water and eat meat. They sleep on the hard floors and do not engage in sexual acts (de Bellaigue, 2009).

Rejecting the Arabic prayer five times a day, Alevis perform a ceremony called “cern” which involves singing, dancing, and speaking prayers (de Bellaigue, 2009). Unlike the Sunni and Shia Muslims, Alevi men and women are free to participate in religious ceremonies at the same place, and the women do not have to cover their hairs (White, 2000, p.42). Additionally, Alevis pray with Koranic verses only on certain Islamic feast days and for honoring their dead. For these large differences, many Sunnis do not regard the Alevis as Muslim. In fact, due to these large differences the Sunni Kurds and the Alevi Kurds have often targeted each other. Whenever one sides revolted against the mainstream dominant culture, the other side stood aside (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.37; Romano, 2006; van Bruinessen, 1978).

### **KURDS BEFORE THE 19TH CENTURY**

Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurds were known for their submission to the central governments. During this era, the Kurds of Persian, Arab, Russian, and Ottoman Empire were voluntarily assimilated into the dominant culture rather than pursuing their own interests as Kurds (Romano, 2006; van Bruinessen, 1978). Kurdish chiefs weighed which empire was the wisest to recognize (Turks, Persians, Arabs, or Rome) by considering their maximal freedom from government interference and the state endorsement of their authority. Thus, they became locally independent, lived relatively free, and often rewarded for their services with grant of lands in return for their submission to the central governments (McDowall, 2000; McKiernan, 2006).

In the meantime, the Kurds became mercenary soldiers for the states that controlled their homeland (O'Ballance, 1996). They were recruited by central governments to fight against their enemies. For example, the Kurds provided troops to the Islamic armies (during the Turkish and Arabic rules) to fight against crusades, Byzantium, Armenia, and Persia (McDowall, 2000). During this time, the Kurds viewed their identity in the form of family ties and religion. Therefore, the Kurdish dynasties (as well as the mercenary troops) never thought their political identity as Kurdish, but as soldiers of Islam (McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958).

### ***The First Encounter between the Kurds and Turks***

The first conflict between the Turks and the Alevi Kurds occurred during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Ottoman Empire was planning to attack to the Shah of Iran. Alevi who were dispersed around the Anatolia united against the Sunni Ottoman Empire with Shah Ismail, the founder of the first Shia state in the world. Shah Ismail was able to penetrate deep into Anatolian towns and recruit many supporters against the Ottoman rule. With support from Iran, these Alevi (Kizilbas) started a large uprising just before the Ottoman offensive against the Iran. The Ottoman army lost many members to put down this Kizilbas rebellion against their authority (Izady, 1992; McDowall, 2000).

Thus, the offensive against Iran was delayed because of the Alevi Kurds' unexpected uprising. However, one year later, Sultan Selim of Ottoman Empire marched to eastern borders and first destroyed all the Kizilbas Alevi before attacking Iran. According to Alevi sources, more than 40,000 Alevi died during this offensive. After scattering the danger of the Alevi uprising, Sultan Selim attacked Iran at the Chaldiran area in 1514 (de Bellaigue, 2009, p. 38). After the sharp defeat of the Iranians by the Turks at the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, Kurdish tribes started to establish close relations and voluntarily accepted the rule of Ottoman Turks in

Kurdistan. The growing military strength of the Ottoman Empire and also the reliance of the Ottoman Sultans on local Kurdish chiefs (unlike the Iranian Shah who appointed Iranian leaders to Kurdish towns) to control Kurdistan sustained enough incentive for the Sunni Kurdish tribes to ally with the Ottoman Empire (McDowall, 2000).

Acting pragmatically, the Ottoman Empire reinstated all the Kurdish rulers that were dismissed by Shah Ismail and gave them semi or virtual independence in return for their acknowledgement of Ottoman suzerainty. In this way, Sultan Selim endured the submission of Kurdish territory. Obtaining Ottoman recognition, the Kurdish Emirates acquired a greater authority and security that they had ever enjoyed before. In return, they regularly paid the taxes and also provided military forces to serve the Ottoman Empire when needed (McDowall, 2000). Thus, a simple governing principle provided the Ottoman Empire with great advantages—Kurdish tribes were given a measure of freedom and relative independence in return for maintaining the order in the region, protecting the borders against Iran, and acknowledging the Ottoman suzerainty (McDowall, 2000).

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, neither the Ottoman Empire nor the Persian Empire penetrated into the areas where the Kurds lived largely due to its rugged terrain and remoteness. Rather, the Kurds were left to themselves. The whole Kurdistan became a lawless and neglected area during this era. Turks looked towards Europe and the Balkans whereas Iran tried to establish its authority on Afghanistan (O'Ballance, 1996, p.3). In contrast, Paul White argued that this same period was the golden age for the Kurds because they were allowed to establish their quasi-independent principalities. Although the territories were controlled and protected by the Ottomans, these Kurdish principalities had an autonomous structure in return for paying the taxes imposed by the Empire (White, 2000, p.55).

***The First Rebellions against the Ottoman Empire:  
Mir Muhammad and Bedir Khan***

Towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Kurdish chiefs began to believe that they did not need the Turkish protection anymore due to the declining military and political powers of the Ottoman Empire. This was a term where Europe and Russia was becoming dominant particularly in the field of military (McDowall, 2000). For example, in 1827, the Ottoman fleet was completely destroyed by an Anglo, Franco, and Russian fleet at the Navarino Battle. Seeing the decline of Ottoman's military power, Greece acquired its full independence after this war. In 1828, just one year after this victory, Russia attacked to empire, but this time from the eastern fronts, using the Armenians and Kurdish tribes. Due to the help of the local population, Russians were able to penetrate as far as Erzurum, a Turkish Anatolian city. This was the first time that the Muslim Sunni Kurds were used against the Ottoman Empire (McDowall, 2000).

After these battles, Russia and other European powers exploited the weakness of the Ottoman authority in the eastern regions and developed an interest in the Christian population living in the area. These powers began to send Christian missionaries under the pretext of providing a better understanding of faith. In fact, these missionaries and teachers focused on the political prospects for the Christian Armenians and Muslim Kurds—two potential group that would be used against the Ottoman Empire when needed (McDowall, 2000). Through the schools and the hospitals, the missioners established close relations with the local public, and they began to provoke the Christians against the Muslim population (de Bellaigue, 2009).

The local public should not be blamed for siding with the Christian missioners because until that time, the Ottoman rule had neglected the area and nearly all of the investments of the empire were carried on the Balkan soils. Apart from the hospital and schools, until to the end of

19<sup>th</sup> century, there was no road or railways in the area that was suitable for transportation (McDowall, 2000, p.40). That is, Kurdistan was the most neglected and impoverished part of the empire.

Kurdish tribal leaders increased the intensity of their provocation against the Ottoman rule as the son of the governor of Egypt, Ibrahim Pasha, seized the province of Syria and proceeded into Anatolia by destroying the Ottoman armies in 1831. Seeing that the Ottoman army was heavily defeated by a single pasha, Mir Muhammad (leader of a confederation of tribes) attacked the other Kurdish tribes in Kurdistan and subdued them under his authority. Mir Muhammad killed all the leaders of the Shirwan, Baradust, Surchi, Khushnaw, and Mamash tribes that resisted the uprising. He also extirpated thousands of men, women, and children who were unwilling to submit to him in Mosul during 1831 (Izady, 1992; McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958).

Seventeen years later, another Mir—Bedir Khan—declared his independence (Olson argued that Bedir Khan only desired a greater autonomy, not an independent Kurdistan) in 1849 with the tribal chiefs of Hakkari, Van, Mus, and Bitlis. Since Bedir Khan was not a religious leader, he was unable to influence most of the Kurdish tribes in Kurdistan (Chailand, 1980; Olson, 1996).

***The Emergence of the Sheikhs (Religious Leaders)  
As the New Political Powers in Kurdistan***

After the Mir Muhammad' and Bedir Khan' uprisings, the Ottoman Empire suppressed all of the emirates in the region to prevent the outbreak of new rebellions against the central government. Hereditary inheritance of the official positions in the Kurdish regions was

canceled, and all of the ruling positions were filled with people who were strictly tied to the central government in Istanbul (McDowall, 2000; van Bruinessen, 1978).

However, the suppression of the semi-independent Kurdish principalities resulted in less order and law in the region because these people—who were responsible for the bloodshed—were also the main actors in terms of providing balance of forces among the tribes and tribal sections. Being released from the control of the Mirs, local chiefs started to perceive their own benefits and a state of anarchy developed in the region (Izady, 1992; Olson, 1996). Intertribal conflicts arose all over the Kurdistan and tribes started to violate each other's pastures and agricultural lands. As McDowall informed, "a free for all occurred and everybody exploited the situation as much as they could" (McDowall, 2000, p.49). Repeated fights among the Kurdish tribes seriously damaged the economic condition of the country and also caused banditry. In the meantime, due to the massive internal problems in the western Anatolia and also in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the central government could not fill the vacuum left by the emirs (Olson, 1996; Waheed, 1958).

Therefore, although the Ottoman government tried to centralize its rule by controlling the Kurdish emirates in the region, they were not strong enough to replace the old Kurdish emirs with efficient civil administration (de Bellaigue, 2009). The power vacuum led to crisis in the settlement of disputes, too. The old emirs were able to act as mediators. But the newly appointed governors did not have the knowledge and the legitimacy of the Mirs. As a result, their authority was not welcomed in the region. In the meantime, taking advantage of this gap in authority, the power and prestige passed to men of religion—the sheikhs (White, 2000).

The suppression of the emirates provided the context for the emergence of Sheikhs as political leaders, and the Sheikhs began to be important in the role of mediating (Olson, 1996).



Thus, they were transformed into powerful political leaders, having religious authority (White, 2000). During this time, there were two major Islamic orders throughout the Kurdistan—the Nakshbandiya and the Qadiriya (O’Ballance, 1996). The predominant Tariq in Kurdistan until the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the Qadiriya, which was formed by a 13<sup>th</sup> century saint named Abd Al-Qadir al-Jilani from Bagdad (White, 2000, p.31). However, a new religious sect was formed during this time (the Nakshbandi order) and surpassed the Qadiris in Kurdistan (McDowall, 2000; White, 2000).

### ***Sheikh Ubaydallah Uprising and the Creation of Hamidiye Cavalry***

A Nakshbandi Sheikh named Sheikh Ubaydallah started a new Kurdish uprising upon consolidating his power by marrying the daughters of powerful tribal leaders (McDowall, 2000). Different from his predecessors, Sheikh Ubaydallah openly declared that he wanted to create an independent Kurdistan in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 (Olson, 1996). Being a religious leader, Ubaydallah was able to influence large areas under the rule of other Kurdish leaders that was severely affected by the devastation and famine that came with the war (White, 2000). Local people greatly admired Sheik Ubaydallah because he was known to be a descendent from Sheikh Abd Al-Qadir al-Jilani. Thus, he was able to exercise influence even in the areas that were under the control of other Kurdish chieftains (van Bruinessen, 1978; White, 2000). In 1880, Ubaydallah sent the following letter to the British consul in Van (Baskale);

The Kurdish nation is a people apart. Their religion is different (to that of others), and their laws and customs are distinct. They are known among all nations as mischievous and corrupt. The chiefs and rulers of Kurdistan, whether Turkish or Persian subjects, and the inhabitants of Kurdistan (the Christians) one and all are united and agreed that matters cannot be carried on this way, with the two governments, and necessarily something must be done so that the European governments having understood the matter shall enquire into our state. We want our affairs to be in our hands. Otherwise the whole of Kurdistan

will take the matter into their own hands, as they are unable to put up with these continued evil deeds, and the oppression, which they suffer at the hands of the two governments of impure intentions. (Olson, 1996, p.129)

Sheikh Ubaydallah's plea to Great Britain brought fruitful results. The British provided weapons and ammunition under the cover of famine relief to the Kurds at the province of Van (Bal and Laciner). Thus, Sheikh Ubaydallah was able to awaken the Kurdish national aspirations with the help provided by the Britain as well as by the local Armenians (Izady, 1992; McDowall, 2000). In response to these new developments in the region, Sultan Abdulhamid attempted to limit the powers of sheikhs to prevent the spread of the nationalist aspirations throughout Kurdistan. Thus, in 1891, he ordered the creation of an irregular mountain force—the Hamidiye Cavalry—in the areas where Kurds inhabited (de Bellaigue, 2009; Waheed, 1958). This was an auxiliary cavalry regiment in the tradition of Russian Cossacks that was used in the Caucasus. The members of this force were largely selected from the Sunni Kurdish tribes to bind the Kurdish tribes to Ottoman Empire's pan-Islamist orthodoxy (deBellaigue, 2009).

Sultan Abdulhamid II believed that the creation of the Hamidiye Cavalry would encourage the nationalist Kurds to strengthen their ties to the Ottoman Empire through the Islamic roots. By gaining the hearts of Kurds, this cavalry would then potentially provide a defensive force against the Russian and Armenian offensives in the region (Olson, 1996, p.133). In fact, beginning in 1885, armed Armenian cells had been established in eastern Anatolia supported by Russia and Iran. Both of these countries were trying to arouse an uprising using the dissident Alevi tribes in Dersim and also peasant Kurds around the town of Sasun. Thus, Sultan Abdulhamid believed that this new military positions would stiffen the loyalty of the Kurds to the empire (McDowall, 2000).

The Hamidiye regiments were placed under the control of Musit Zeki Pasha, who was married to the sister of Sultan Abdulhamid. The cavalry was composed of Kurds except that all ranks above the colonel had to be filled by a Turk (White, 2000, p.60). Each regiment had at least 512 men and at most 1,152 men. By 1895, there were 57 Hamidiye regiments in the region (Olson, 1996, p.135). These regiments were not allowed to unify except for the situation of war or the order of the Musit Zeki Pasha.

The Kurdish tribes, who were excluded or abstained from participating to Hamidiye regiments, were exposed to the penalty of sending their eligible men for conscription into the regular army. Thus, this was the first time that the Kurdish tribesmen were required to serve in the regular Ottoman army (Olson, 1996, p.135). On the other hand, the tribes who participated in this new military establishment obtained great economic and social advantages. They were exempt from paying tax and also serving in the regular Ottoman army. Additionally, the chiefs and high ranked commanders were given the privilege of being trained in a special military school in Istanbul (McDowall, 2000; Olson, 1996).

Sultan Abdulhamid's idea of protecting the eastern borders through integration with the Kurds in fact worked. This new army mobilized tens of thousands of Sunni Kurdish tribesmen and the balance of power in the eastern Anatolia was tipped away from the Armenians, and Russians in the region. Being exempt from taxation and also having their son's being educated in the Capital, Kurds were attempted to drawn more closely to the fabric of Ottoman Empire (de Bellaigue). Additionally, with the establishment of the Hamidiye Cavalry, the Kurdish Sunni tribes (particularly the ones that speak Kurmanci dialect) had the opportunity to unify their forces with the central government against the Armenian threat (White, 2000). These forces soon

started offensives against the nationalist Armenians who were planning to establish an independent Armenian state in the areas where the Kurds lived (McDowall, 2000).

Nevertheless, the Hamidiye Cavalry soon abused its extreme authority. The commander of each Hamidiye Cavalry started to act as the local civil authority in their areas of responsibility (McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958). They began to collect taxes on Armenian villagers. Around the towns of Sasun and Mus, some regiments committed serious atrocities and cruelties under the pretext of maintaining law and order against the Armenians (de Bellaigue, 2009). The Armenian peasants became highly discontent with their obligation to provide lodging and food for Kurdish Hamidiye cavalry during the winter times. Having the official title and despotic powers, the Hamidiye tribes increased their territories by invading the Armenian locations. As Armenians were expelled from their villages, the Kurdish families occupied the Armenian villages and their adjoining lands (Kendal, 1993; O'Ballance, 1996). Further, some Hamidiye regiments attacked the Kizilbas and non-Hamidiye Sunni Kurdish tribes and invaded their lands, too (White, 2000). Thus, Hamidiye Cavalry further exacerbated the inter-tribal conflicts.

If there was a serious disagreement regarding the Hamidiye regiments' behaviors, the Ottoman rule would still send somebody to investigate it, but the pasha (who was mostly undertaking the investigation) would most often side with the tribe that was associated with the Hamidiye regiment (de Bellaigue, 2009). Thus, the Turkish administrators were negligent with regard to atrocities committed against the Armenians at the hands of the Hamidiye regiments (Izady, 1992; McDowall, 2000).

During this term, Sultan Abdulhamid opened a new school (School for Nomadic Tribes) for the sons of the Arab and Kurdish tribal leaders. The Sultan's plan was to convert these illiterate youth into educated and loyal defenders of the pan-Islamic Ottoman members. Most of

these students were taught Turkish, Arabic, Persian, and French as well as geography and science (de Bellaigue, 2009). Many tribal Kurds were trained about the military technology and the capability to use it (White, 2000).

Kurdish youths became familiar with their national identity while being trained at these schools as they encountered with the nationalist Arabs (Olson, 1996). Additionally, a large concentration of Kurds, equipped with arms and weapons fought during the Balkan wars and became exposed to Turkish and Balkan nationalism. Thus, thousands of Kurds learned the idea of nationalism for the first time during the Balkan wars, and they later became nationalist insurgents (Van Bruinessen, 1978; White, 2000, p.63). In this context, the establishment of the Hamidiye Regiments was an important stage in the reemergence of Kurdish nationalism between 1891 and 1914 (Olson, 1996).

### ***Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the Re-Emergence of the Kurdish Ethnic Awareness***

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in Istanbul, a Kurdish nationalist identity arose in response to the crisis of the empire as the Greeks, Serbs, and Armenians had moved from the millet system (a system in which each ethnic group was allowed to rule itself under its own rule) to ethnic identity. The Muslim population (Turks, Arabs, and Kurds) at first remained part of the millet system regardless of whether they were Sunni or Shia (McDowall, 2000).

However, a large group of Turkish refugees that returned from Russia and Europe—highly educated and upper-class citizens named as Young Turks—reassessed the traditional ties to millet and asserted that Turkish identity had to come first (McDowall, 2000; Bal and Laciner, 2004). These nationalist ideas attracted the interests of the Turkish population across the empire. The Young Turks argued that the only way to protect the empire was to reorganize the people

around Turkish nationalism. However, the Turks assertion of their own ethnic identity also fed the nationalist ideas of the non-Turkic groups (Kurds and Arabs) within the empire (White, 2000).

In 1908, constitutional order was announced in the Ottoman Empire after the Young Turk Revolution (Olson, 1996). Imprisoning the Ottoman Sultan, the Young Turks established a system promising constitutional reform and representative participation of all peoples (regardless of their religion and ethnicity) in the governing of the Ottoman Empire (O'Ballance, 1996). The Mesrutiyet (Constitutional Monarchy) disbanded the Hamidiye regiments and the old classes of chiefs, notables, and sheikhs who controlled Kurdistan for a long time. These notable Kurdish leaders viewed the announcement of the revolution as a direct threat to their well being. A group of these people from the old regime immediately fled to Iran (McDowall, 2000). Some Kurdish leaders, on the other hand, unified their forces and occupied Damascus for the Sultan Abdulhamit II (Chailand, 1980; O'Ballance, 1996).

In response, religious sheikhs in Kurdistan started to encourage the local public for an uprising against the new regime. These sheikhs were mostly disappointed with the secular trend which was destroying the religious structure of the empire. They argued that the end of Islam was coming to empire. In this context, Hamidiye chiefs and religious sheikhs instigated simultaneous uprisings in different locations against the anti-religious activities of the Young Turks. According to them, the Young Turks were violating the religious traditions and mocking religious activities and duties (McDowall, 2000).

In the meantime, the sheikhs of various regions in Iraq and eastern Anatolia sent a petition on the name of the whole of Kurdistan to the new regime in Istanbul. This petition was asking for several changes that would contribute to increased autonomy in Kurdistan region.

The leaders were requesting the adoption of Kurdish language for official and educational purposes, the appointment of Kurdish speaking officials, the administration of law and justice according to Islamic religious rules, and finally taxation according to Islamic rules. Russia was fully aware of this situation and they soon contacted to Kurdish tribal chiefs and informed them that Russia would support the Kurdish autonomy under Russian protection. That is, the Czar was offering the Kurds a protectorate status both against the Turks and Armenians. Obtaining the support of Russia, the nationalist Kurds openly began their campaign of autonomy and resistance to Turkish rule (McDowall, 2000; Waheed, 1958).

Notably, only a small fraction of Kurds showed their willingness to Russia's offer to provide protection since Kurdish aspirations were conflicted with Armenian goals. Russia was trying to persuade both Armenians and Kurds to revolt against the Ottoman Empire. However, Russia was not permitting to Armenians and Kurds to have their independent states. Rather, Moscow wanted to control these areas itself (McDowall, 2000).

Meanwhile, an elite Kurdish group in Istanbul formed the Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan after the announcement of the Mesrutiyet (McDowall, 2000). For the first time in the history, the Kurdish groups began to organize in the cities, particularly against the forcible Turkification policies of the Young Turks (White). This organization was led by the sons of famous Kurdish emirs who obtained education in Istanbul (Olson, 1996). The Rise and Progress organization was shut down by the Young Turks in 1909. Nonetheless, the Kurdish community in Istanbul established another organization named Hev-i Kurt Cemiyeti (Kurdish Hope Society) in 1912 (Olson, 1996, p.136).

The leaders of the Kurdish Hope Society argued that it was a propitious time for a Kurdish uprising because the Ottoman Empire was experiencing a serious economic and social

crisis. More than half of the conscripted soldiers had deserted the army. The commerce in the empire was also disrupted because the inflation rate was more than 2,500 percent. The population was facing huge food shortages. More than 100,000 people had lost their lives due to famines in Syria and Lebanon (McKiernan, 2006, p.90). Nevertheless, the Kurdish Hope Society had no ties with the Kurds who lived in Kurdistan. Although the group was planning to establish an independent Kurdish state, the Kurds in the east were only asking for autonomy because they still maintained their close ties with the Empire through the religious institution of the Caliphate (White, 2000). As a result, the Kurds could not achieve unification and fight in a coordinated way against other nations. The British vice-consul in the town of Bitlis confirmed this in a mail he sent to Great Britain (McDowall, 2000).

Could the Kurds combine against the Government even in one province, the Turkish troops in their eastern part of Asia Minor would find it difficult to crush the revolt. (McDowall, 2000, p.101)

Similarly, Major Noel, the English Intelligence officer in Kurdistan indicated in his diary that; “The entire lack of any semblance of unity or common purpose between the Kurds must always tend to prevent any real national combination against the government” (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.147).

On the other hand, many religious Kurdish scholars opposed the establishment of nationalism. For example, Said Nursi became the leading figure who fought against the Kurdish national aspirations (Mardin, 1989). In 1896, he visited the Sultan Abdulhamid and presented him a proposal for Islamic reform for the Kurdish people in Kurdistan (McDowall, 2000). His plan included the deployment of as many Kurdish speaking teachers as possible to Kurdistan to educate Kurds both in religious and western secular studies. He also requested that a mix of religious and western type university had to be established in the region to provide higher



education. Nursi argued that education was the only way to turn Kurdish tribesmen into good Ottoman citizens (Mardin, 1989; McDowall, 2000).

Said Nursi also established the Society of Muhammadan to protect Islamic law and institutions in the country (White, 2000). As opposed to the Kurdish Hope Society and the Society for the Rise and Progress of Kurdistan, Said Nursi advocated regional autonomy for Kurdistan but he never became a separatist. From the beginning, he was committed to the integrity of the Ottoman Empire (Mardin, 1989; Olson, 1996).

Kurdistan belonged to the Kurds and Armenians, not to the Turks. Union is the great task of our time. Love is the innate nature of that union, that non-Muslims may be convinced that our unity is an offensive against three ills—ignorance, poverty and discord. (Mardin, 1989, p.19)

***World War I:  
Turks and Kurds Fighting Together***

With the start of the First World War, the ethnic conflicts became more common in the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks brought the Ottoman Empire in to the war siding with the Central Powers (Germany and Austria) against the Allied Powers (Britain, France, Russia). The Kurds sided with the Turks against the Christian foe; however the Armenian and Assyrian populations of the Ottoman Empire declared war against the Central power, believing that Russia would help them defeat the Turks in eastern Anatolia (O'Ballance, 1996, p.10).

Enver Pasha, the war minister of the Ottoman Empire sent thousands of Ottoman troops without necessary clothing to protect them against the winter conditions to the eastern borders. He believed that uniting the Ottoman Empire with the Turkic countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia would change the balance of power in favor of the Turks. However, in December 1914, the soldiers of the Ottoman Empire experienced a serious defeat by the Russians, losing more than 70.000 men to the cold weather conditions in the town of Sarikamis. After this

victory, Russia penetrated deep into the Anatolia (as far as Dogu Bayazid), and the Czar used the local Armenians to protect the lands they invaded (McDowall, 2000).

Armenians played a significant role in this battle. Armenians organized military units for offensives against the Kurds and Turks, thinking that Russia would give them autonomy if they defeated the Ottoman rulers in the east (de Bellaigue, 2009). The Armenian and Assyrian irregular military forces in Anatolia preceded Russian forces since they knew the region better than the Russians. In return, Russia gave control of Van, Erzurum, Bitlis, and Trabzon to the Armenians. As the Armenians took charge of these cities, the massacre against the Kurds and Turks began (McDowall, 2000).

Armenians were sweeping the countryside, massacring men, women, and children and burning their homes. Babies were shot in their mothers' arms, small children were horribly mutilated, women were stripped and beaten. (McDowall, 2000, p.106)

The figures indicated that Russian and Armenian forces slaughtered more than 600.000 Kurds between 1915 and 1918 (O'Ballance, 1996, p.10). The Bolshevik revolution succeeded in Russia, which stalled the Russian military activities in Turkey. Even so, by the time the Russian army pulled back, it was seen that "only one tenth of the largely Kurdish population had survived" (Jwaideh, 2006, p.363). The whole Kurdistan experienced death and exposure to diseases. As the Russians withdrew, they stripped the entire harvest and flocks and herds, and destroyed the crops to prevent their use by the Kurds and Turks. As a result, Russians caused a serious famine in the region (McDowall, 2000).

Dead bodies were collected in the bazaar every morning, and in some cases people were eating their dead babies. In Nihri of Shamdinan, only ten houses out of 250 were left standing, in Rawanduz only 60 out of 2.000. In the same area only three of the one hundred or so villages of the Balik tribe had not been razed. Of approximately 1,000 families of the Baradust tribe at the outset of war, only 157 had survived; of the thirty-

odd villages of its Rawanduz section, neither man, woman or child remained.  
(McDowall, 2000, p.108)

### ***Deportation of the Armenian Population***

In 1917, the Russian (the Bolshevik) Revolution occurred and the Russian troops in Turkey killed their high-ranked commanders and made their way back to Russia. Kurds and Turks collected the weapons and arms abandoned by the Russian forces (O'Ballance, 1996). As the Turkish troops retrieved these lands, most Armenians and Assyrians who helped the Russians fled behind the Russian army. Most of the Christian population was killed as retaliation to previous atrocities committed by the Russians and Armenians. Russian and Armenians also killed any Muslims as they returned to Russia (Jawideh, 2006).

The use of the Armenians by the Russians meant that they remained a potential threat to Ottoman Empire. In response, the central government in Istanbul approved a regulation in 1915 that required the deportation of all forces potentially used by the Russians during the war. In accordance with this law, Armenians and other major Christian populations from the cities of Erzurum, Bitlis, Mus, and Antep were deported to places (mainly to Syria) where Russians could not use them again against the Ottoman Empire (McDowall, 2000). Therefore, the Armenians and Assyrians who revolted against the Ottoman Empire were driven outside the country, towards the Azerbaijan territories (de Bellaigue, 2009; Lewis, 1968; van Bruinessen, 1978).

The Armenians goods, their money, all were confiscated. It was necessary to have food carried to the front, on the Caucasian frontier. As every individual Armenian was robbed of everything they ever had, these poor people soon died of hunger and cold on the way. If out of these 300 Armenians thirty or forty returned, it was a marvel; the rest were either beaten to death or died from the causes stated above. (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.78)

Many of these people died due to the severe winter conditions and famine. On the other hand, those Armenians and Assyrians who remained in the villages were subjected to retaliation

by the Turkish troops and Kurdish tribes who lost their families at the hand of them (McDowall, 2000). As a revenge for the atrocities conducted by Armenians in Dogu Bayazid and Alaskirt, local Kurds and Turks killed thousands of Armenians before they were safely relocated.

Thus, a vicious cycle of revenge started. When the Russian forces reoccupied the city of Van in 1918, Armenians took their revenge by killing thousands of Kurds again. When the Russian withdraw due to attacks by the Ottoman armies, hundreds of thousands of Christians had to follow them again to protect their lives. Angry Turks and Kurds followed the Russian army and repeatedly attacked the Armenians who had killed their relatives or family members. McDowall (2000, p.105) stated that Armenians killing Ottoman citizens under the protection of Russian forces gave excuse for future atrocities on the Christian population in the Ottoman Empire.

### ***The Mudros Armistice***

The Allied powers won the First World War, and the armistice was signed at Mudros in 1918. According to this armistice, two new states were formed from Turkey's territory in the Middle East; (1) Iraq, mandated to Britain, and (2) Syria, mandated to France. Thus, the Kurdistan region was divided into segments under the control of three states, Turkey, Britain, and France (Jawideh, 2006; O'Ballance, 1996, p.12).

### ***Treaty of Sevres and the Partition of the Ottoman Territory***

The new regime (the Bolsheviks) in Russia warned Turkey that the Allied forces were planning to divide the Ottoman Empire into several small parts to be governed by the British, French, Italian, and Greek administrations. According to Sykes-Picots, the Armenian and Kurdish areas were to be shared by British, French and Russians (unlike the previous regime in

Russia, the Bolsheviks indicated that they were not interested in occupying any territory in Turkey). Thus, both Armenians and Kurds became concerned about their future. Having three different spheres of influence would be a serious obstacle to forming independent Kurdish and Armenian states (McDowall, 2000).

The British acted quickly and established strong relations with the local Kurdish chiefs in southern Kurdistan. Although Turkish officials tried to warn the Kurds that the real purpose of Great Britain was to place the Kurds under Arab control, many Kurdish tribes in Kirkuk, Sulaymaniya, and Khirmatu decided to side with Britain against Turkish rule. It was mainly because the United States and the European countries promised to give the Kurds a homeland (McKiernan, 2006).

Major Noel, the British political officer in Sulaymaniya advised London that three separate Kurdish states had to be established in Kurdistan under British protection: southern Kurdistan (Sulaymaniya, Erbil, Kirkuk, Rawanduz and surroundings), Central Kurdistan (Mosul), and Western Kurdistan (Diyarbakir, Bitlis, van, Elazig and surroundings). Under this condition, the Kurds even accepted that a free Armenia would be established at the northern cities, including Erzurum, Trabzon, and van under the American auspices (McDowall, 2000).

However, it was difficult to convince all the Kurds to unite. For example, although Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji was the best candidate for the southern Kurdistan, the leaders of neighboring towns disowned him. On the other hand, some chiefs had lands and villages that were divided by the borders of the three separate Kurdistan. Thus, these chiefs propagated the idea of having a united Kurdistan rather than a separated one. Further, the Iranian Kurds showed their opposition to the British plan by attacking the British bases in Sinna. Finally, the majority of the Kurds in Turkey was still loyal to Ottoman Empire (McDowall, 2000, p.123). As a result,

by 1919, there were three different ideas among the Kurds, (1) pro-Turkish, (2) pro-Allied forces, and (3) the Dersim Kurds who did not side with the Turks or Allied forces. Due to these uncertainties, many Kurds were unable to decide which side to support (McDowall, 2000).

One camp led by Sheikh Abd al Qadir (and also Said Nursi) favored the autonomy of a unified Kurdish state within the Ottoman Empire, whereas the other camp led by Bedir Khan sought full independence of the Kurdish territories within the borders of Turkey (Mardin, 1989; Olson, 1996). Both Said Nursi and Sheikh Abd al Qadir expressed to the local Kurdish public that the opportunity presented by the treaty of Sevres intended only to intervene into the internal affairs of the Islamic unity of the Ottoman Empire. Sheikh Abd al Qadir delivered a speech saying that; "To desert the Turks in their hour of need and to deal them a fatal blow by proclaiming the independence of Kurdistan would be an unworthy and dishonorable act in consideration of the long friendship between the two nations" (Bal and Laciner, 2004, p.82).

In the middle of 1919, the Allied forces began to implement their plan. Greeks landed Aegean regions with thousands of troops, Italians landed to Mediterranean region; and the British occupied Istanbul and Iraq. Armenians expressed their desire to fight against the Kurds and Turks to reconstruct the great Armenia. Under this condition, the Ottoman government declared that it was ready to sacrifice Kurdistan for an Armenian state in return for saving the rest of the country. This was a shock to the Kurds. Nevertheless, hope arose for the Kurds when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk (the founder of modern Turkey) arrived in Samsun in 1919. Mustafa was normally sent by the Ottoman government to inspect the collection of all arms and weapons to be returned to Allied forces in accordance with the Mudros armistice (McKiernan, 2006).

Contrary to the armistice, Mustafa encouraged the local commanders to recruit new soldiers from the local public and to prepare for a future attack against the allied forces (Greeks,

Italians, French, and British) in various locations of the country. As a result, Mustafa was labeled as a rebel by the British administration, and he was recalled to Istanbul by the Ottoman government (Lewis, 1968).

As a counter attack, Mustafa and his friends declared a protocol that renounced the Ottoman authority in Istanbul. He argued that the administration in Istanbul was acting under the direction of the Allied forces, not in the interests of the Muslim population in the country. As a result, people divided their support between the Sultan's Ottoman Empire in Istanbul and the Mustafa Kemal's new rule in central Anatolia (Romano, 2006).

Mustafa Kemal attempted to convince the Kurds to support him. He argued that the Western powers were supporting the Christian Armenians and Greeks, so the Muslim Kurds and Turks had to fight together to save the Sultan, Caliph and the Anatolia. The Muslim Kurds living in the region (at least 70 Kurdish tribes) generally endorsed Mustafa Kemal's initiative due to the increasing Christian threat. These Kurds generally argued that thinking about nationalism would only serve to independence of Armenia during that time. They argued that the Caliphate was the real force in Kurdistan and that separation would have devastating effect for the region. Thus, autonomy under Turkish sovereignty was more preferable than the Anglo-French partition.

Thus, Mustafa started his campaign based on Turkish and Kurdish brotherhood. He never mentioned his plan to establish a Turkish nation in the future. Rather, he focused on the importance of fraternity in defeating the invaders. Kendal Nazen indicated that when Ataturk arrived in Kurdish territory, he immediately presented himself as the "savior of Kurdistan", "the champion of a Caliph", and the defender of "the Muslim lands soiled by the impious Christians"(Kendal, 1993). He appealed to "all Muslim elements," meaning the Kurds and

Turks, and called for "complete unity in the struggle to expel the invaders from the Muslim Fatherland" (McKiernan, 2006, p.90).

McDowall indicated that the Kurds in Antep and Malatya did not join Mustafa Kemal's initiative because they were mostly Alevi Kurds. The Kurds in Istanbul also declared that "We have no common cause whatever with the Anatolian movement... England is our only friend, and the Kurds have resolved to have no other protector than England" (McDowall, 2000, p.129).

Thus, the Kurds were divided on their views against Turks. An English diplomat wrote in November from Istanbul to London that; "I think it should be left principally to the Kurds themselves to work out their own salvation and to disentangle themselves from the Turks. The Kurds are like a rainbow of every shade of colour" (McDowall, 2000, p.131).

As a result, Britain came to many contrary conclusions about what to do with Kurdistan. Lord Curzon's speech at the Foreign Office in 1920 revealed how many different plans that Britain developed in a very short time period due to changing considerations. First, Britain planned to establish many autonomous Kurdish states under the control of Mosul, Iraq. Second, they planned to divide Kurdistan in two and to control one part by themselves and have the other part controlled by the French. Third, they planned to have a single Kurdish state, but they were unable to find a leader that all the Kurds would support (Olson, 1996, p.134).

Britain was also planning an independent Kurdistan just to use the Kurds against the Turks to obtain concessions, particularly along the Iraqi-Turkish border (Olson, 1996). However, there was now a new important issue for that the British to consider. The intelligence reports had indicated that Sulaymaniya, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Arbil had rich oil potential, which would be important for England's economic concerns. Thus, Edwin Montagu from British



intelligence argued that the southern part of Kurdistan should be freed immediately with the provision that the northern Kurdistan would join them in the future (McDowall, 2000).

In 1920, the Ottoman government was forced to sign the Treaty of Sevres to officially end the six centuries long Ottoman rule. The Istanbul government—prisoners of British military forces—had no choice but to sign the agreement although they disliked the humiliating terms of it (O'Balance, 1996). The southern part of Kurdistan was separated from Turkey and the northern part given autonomy under Turkish auspices. Additionally, northern Kurdistan was given the right to appeal to League of Nations (United Nations) in one year, if they asked for complete independence from Turkey (McKiernan, 2006, p.90). Thus, for the first time in their history, the Kurds were promised an independent state in their own homeland under article 64 (O'Balance, 1996).

If within one year from the coming into force of the present Treaty the Kurdish peoples within the areas defined in Article 625 shall address themselves to the council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population of these areas desires independence from Turkey, and if the council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas. If and when such renunciation takes place, no objection will be raised by the Principle Allied Powers to the voluntary adherence to such an independent Kurdish state of the Kurds inhabiting that part of Kurdistan which has been hitherto included in the Mosul Vilayet. (Romano, 2006, p.28)

Thus, if the northern Kurds could show the capacity for complete independence in one year, they had the right to be independent and also unite with the southern Kurds (McDowall, 2000). However, the aghas and sheikhs again were more concerned about keeping their own authority than with uniting each other for the independence of the Kurdish nation (O'Ballance, 1996; van Bruinessen, 1978).

Although the Treaty of Sevres promised to establish of an independent Kurdistan, it left the large parts of Kurdish territories within the borders of Iraq and Iran. Thus, the signing of Sevres indicated that the Allied forces did not actually desire a unified, large Kurdistan (Olson, 1996). Additionally, too much time had passed between the signing of Mudros and the Sevres, and there was yet no attempt on the parts of Allied forces to protect Kurds or support their independence. Even worse, the Greeks and Armenians already occupied a large position of their lands, and they were posing a serious threat to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. In the context of these developments, Kurdish leaders argued that the rise of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's initiative was the only viable option for their future (van Bruinessen, 1978)

Being Sunni Muslims and also seeing the approaching Armenian threats, they viewed the conflict as religious and joined to Mustafa Kemal's army. In less than two months, Mustafa Kemal's officers trained thousands of Kurdish troops. These troops later became essential in defeating the Russian and Armenian armies, leading a peace agreement with USSR. The very same Kurds later enlisted to Mustafa Kemal's liberation movement to save the rest of Anatolia from the Christian invasion. Thus, they form the majority of the army in fighting against the Greeks for the liberation of Anatolia (McKiernan, 2006, p.91).

### ***The Kocgiri Uprising***

Only three months of after the signing the Treaty of Sevres, some Kurdish groups living in Dersim wanted to benefit from the independence option secured by the agreement. The Society for the Rise of Kurdistan and the leaders of Kocgiri tribe started a revolt in the city of Dersim (Tunceli). The organization in Istanbul sent Nuri Dersimi (son of a powerful Dersim agha) to the region to organize a rebellion against the Kemalist regime (White, 2000). The Kocgiri Kurds were mainly Alevi, embracing Shiite Islamic beliefs. Mustafa Kemal's army was

busy with dealing the Armenian offensives that started at the same time with the Kocgiri uprising (Romano, 2006).

The rebels seized a large amount of weaponry and ammunition from the Ottoman army. They also cut off the road between Sivas and Erzincan and threatened the new government in Ankara to accept their autonomy and the withdraw of all Turkish forces from the Kocgiri region (it is the area where mostly Alevi Kurds live) (McDowall, 2000; Romano, 2006, p.28). Paul White argued that the demands of the tribal leaders were not realistic since the Sunni, Kurmanci, and Zaza speaking Kurds had not supported this rebellion (White, 2000).

Mustafa Kemal, who was fighting against the external enemies, did not want to lose some of his soldiers to a fight against the internal groups. Thus, to protect the supply route for the recruitment, he sent a commission to Alisan Bey to negotiate the terms. His aim was just to win time to strengthen the military forces in Sivas. The rebellion was prevented from spreading to other regions when Alisan Bey was given candidacy for the Ankara Assembly (Romano, 2000, p.29). However, as Ankara approached the conflict in a lenient way, the Dersim Kurds increased their demands. Again, the Ankara government refrained from rejecting these demands. But as the winter was gone, the garrisons around Kocgiri region encircled the Dersim region. Mustafa Kemal sent enough troops (as the Armenians were defeated) to the region to suppress the Kocgiri rebellion (Romano, 2000). The uprising was suppressed with an army combined of Turkish and Kurdish forces and all of the tribal chiefs were imprisoned.

Romano (2000) indicated that the League of Nations would definitely grant the Kurds an independent state if they were able to show a unified front against the Turks during the Kocgiri uprising. However, Kocgiri rebels countered by the Muslim Sunni Kurds who did not want separation from the Sunni Turks. The Kocgiri rebels were seen as traitors since they attacked to

Muslim Ottoman Empire at a time when the armies were dealing with the Armenian and Greek armies. As a result, majority Kurds supported the Kemalists because they wanted to prevent the establishment of an Armenian state and the invasion of Muslim lands by the Christians (Romano, 2000). Even many of the Dersim tribal chiefs supported the Kemalist troops, considering that they would need the Turkish state as a protector in the future against the Sunni Kurds (van Bruinessen, 1978). Thus, the religious and sectarian difference among the Kurdish tribes again became an obstacle to the formation of a unified Kurdish force (White, 2000).

### **LAUSANNE PEACE TREATY**

The rise of Turkish nationalism under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal rejected the Treaty of Sevres. Mustafa Kemal started a revolt in Anatolia appealing to the Muslim unity of the Turks and the Kurds (O'Ballance, 1996). Rebel Turkish and Kurdish bands irregularly attacked the allied forces located in Turkey. In a small amount of time, the Armenians were defeated in the eastern borders, and the army under Mustafa Kemal's control recaptured all the territories lost to Armenians during the 1877 war with Russia. In the absence of Russian support, the Armenians requested for peace by abandoning all territorial claims from Turkey (McDowall, 2000).

In the meantime, Bolshevik Russia signed the Treaty of Brotherhood in 1921, being the first foreign state formally recognizing the Ankara government. Having the support of Russia (as well as guaranteeing that Russia would not attack from the eastern fronts), Turkey started its second offensive in Western fronts, but this time against the Greeks. Like the British, the Greeks planned to use Kurds against the Mustafa Kemal's army. They talked to Kurdish nationalist tribal chiefs in Istanbul and tried to persuade them to fight against Turkey. In this context, the

Greeks first released the imprisoned Kurdish soldiers during the war and then urged the Europeans to help the Kurds to form their independent state within Turkish territories. However, these attempts were unsuccessful. Turkish forces won a victorious battle against the Greeks and were able to destroy the whole Greek army in 1921 (Olson, 1996).

With the destruction of the Armenian and Greek forces, the treat of Sevres technically became null. The Allied forces did not want to confront Mustafa Kemal's new army (Romano, 2006). The French government decided to leave its position from the Allied forces and signed the Ankara Peace Treaty with Turkey. In accordance with the treaty, French soldiers left the Turkish territories and, more importantly, France recognized the authority of Ankara (rather than the Istanbul government under British control) (Olson, 1996).

### ***British Policy towards the Use of Kurds against the Turks***

As Mustafa Kemal's army was planning to recapture southern Kurdistan (which was lost during the Treaty of Sevres), British intelligence officers were encouraging Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia to start a revolt to stop Turkey's offensives against Britain. McDowall indicated that the British intelligence agents recruited more than 40,000 Kurdish rebels to attack Mustafa Kemal's army. The new Grand National General Assembly decided to wait before sending a military mission to keep order in the area. However, things were only getting worse as the Kurdish leaders were obtaining support from British and King Faysal of Iraq. One British intelligence officer reported that: "the Kurdish chiefs are entirely dissatisfied ... and extremely antagonistic towards the Turks, and would require very small inducement (arms or money) to carry out raids." (CITE). In this context, the same intelligence officer was proposing that

delivery of machine guns, particularly to only three Kurdish tribes, would be enough to seize the major eastern cities of Turkey (McDowall, 2000).

Therefore, the Kurdish issue was the main factor driving the foreign affairs between Turkey and England during this time. Britain was a close follower of the Kurdish problem due to its imperial policies in the Middle East and also for the pursuit of Sharifian policy after the First World War. The new republic thought that Britain was trying to create a home for Kurds as they just did for the Zionist movement in Palestine between 1880 and 1918 (Olson, 1996,p.195).

In 1921, a British intelligence officer named Rawlinson prepared a detailed report for Lord Curzon and Winston Churchill about the Islamic policies of the Kemalist regime. Rawlinson argued that a confederation between all Muslims was possible from Istanbul to Baku if a counter plan was not implemented immediately. Rawlinson indicated to Churchill that this plan could be implemented by using the disaffected Kurds in the eastern parts of Turkey. Kurdish chiefs were highly dissatisfied with their current position, and they were also antagonistic to the Turkish nationalistic inspirations. Thus, Rawlinson proposed to Churchill that money and arms could induce these chiefs to attack Turks. The only potential problem was the requirement of cooperation among the Kurdish tribal leaders, which according to Rawlinson the Kurds would be incapable of achieving (Olson, 1996, p.149). Thus, if something were to go wrong with using the Kurds, Rawlinson argued that the Pontin Greeks at the Black Sea area could also be encouraged to start turmoil within Turkey.

However, another British intelligence officer, Lawrence, opposed to this option by arguing that such a policy would be very costly to Great Britain. Lawrence argued that if a potential Kurdish revolt expected to be successful, it had to be on the same scale (in terms of bases, arms, instigating staff, and money) as the Arab revolt; "The Arab Revolt, a fair parallel,

under better circumstances, occupied some eight ships, fifty British officers, and £ 5,000,000 in money, and over £ 16,000,000 in stores" (Olson, 1996, p.151). Additionally, a political officer named Bullard argued that a Kurdish armed action against the Turks would be interpreted as antagonistic to Islam for some Muslim countries under Great Britain's rule. Further, Bullard challenged Rawlinson's plan of instigating a Kurdish uprising by arguing that it would end up with the massacre of thousands of Kurds by nationalist Turks; "Is it seriously proposed that we should stir up the Kurds against the Turks and then leave them to be massacred when we have secured the political advantages we desire? Hasn't Col. Rawlinson learnt from the fate of the Armenians, who were instigated by the Russians to revolt against the Turks and, later on, abandoned?"(Olson, 1996, p.152)

Therefore, objections rose towards Rawlinson's plan of instigating a Kurdish revolt within Turkey, using the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey. Thus, in 1925, the head of Middle East Department and the director of Intelligence at the War Office concluded that (1) this instigation process would more likely cost more than the Arab revolt, (2) the terrain in the Kurdish parts of Turkey was very rugged, (3) armed action against Turkey would antagonize the Indian Muslims, (4) this instigated rebellion could not be stopped once it is started, (5) if the Kurds were abandoned after the war, they would be most likely be massacred by the Turks (Olson, 1996, p.178).

On the other hand, the Turkish suppression of the Kocgiri rebellion in 1921 and Iraqi leader King Faysal's objection to the independence of the Kurds diminished the potential of an independent Kurdistan in the region. King Faysal argued that the Shias were already larger in terms of population in Iraq. Thus, separating the Sunni Kurdish part from Iraq would place Shias in a very strong position within the National assembly of Iraq. Finally, Turkey would develop

strong relations with Soviet Union as a counterattack to the establishment of a free Kurdistan under British control. Close relations between the Turks and the Russians would severely risk the advantages obtained by Britain on the use of Straits of Istanbul. Thus, by establishing friendship with the new republic, Britain would be able to ensure its security in the Straits and also in the Arab Middle East. Therefore, Winston Churchill became less supportive of an autonomous or independent Kurdistan in the region (McDowall, 2000).

On November 1921, Churchill rejected Sir Cox's plan to "encourage Kurds to align with Greek forces, against the perceived Turkish threat to Iraq" by telling that "as other larger negotiations are already in train with a view to a general peace with Turkey" (Olson, 1996, p.154). Olson argued that Turkey promised not to use Islam (Hilafet) or give support Muslim countries (particularly India) in their fights to gain independence from Great Britain (Olson, 1996, p.194).

In another occasion, Churchill sent a letter to one of his friends about how Turkey and Mustafa Kemal could be used for the British interests; "I think we should use Mustafa Kemal and a reconciled Turkey as a barrier against the Bolsheviks and to smooth down all our affairs in the Middle East and India" (Olson, 1996, p.172). Thus, Britain's goal of keeping peace with Turkey subordinated its Kurdish policy and the Kurds were kept in play for future plans in the region (Olson, 1996, p.157).

### ***Signing of the Lausanne***

Unexpectedly, Mustafa Kemal invaded the Straits Zone (Istanbul and surroundings) in place of starting an offensive to British in southern Kurdistan. Not anticipating a fight with the Turkish army, the commander of the British forces agreed to sign an armistice. Now, the Kurdish chiefs had to consider their independence requests because the Turks were defeating the



threats to its existence one after another. The country was saved from Greeks, Armenians, French, and now British were signing the Mudanya Armistice to end the war with Turks (McDowall, 2000).

After destroying the Greek and French armies, and repelling the British, Ataturk negotiated setting up a new republic, which would replace the old Ottoman Empire. The Treaty of Lausanne was signed on 1923, allowing Turkey to establish its control on all the territories (non-Arab parts of Ottoman Turkey) lost to the Allied forces, except for one—Mosul. Therefore, Lausanne superseded the armistice of Sevres and returned the whole Anatolia back to Turks (de Bellaigue, 2009).

Unlike the Sevres Treaty, the Lausanne Treaty had no mention of the Kurds (Romano, 2006). The promises that were given to Kurds by the articles of Sevres (62, 63, and 64) were forgotten (Olson, 1996; Jawideh, 2006). Although articles 40-45 provided some rights and protection to the non-Muslim minorities, the Ankara government refused to accept the Kurds as a minority protected by the treaty. Thus, the Kurds were accepted as the equal partners with Turks. They were not allowed to benefit from the minority rights as the Armenians, Greeks, and Jews living in Turkey (Ahmed & Gunter, 2003; White, 2000; Lewis, 1968).

Instead of securing an autonomous status for the Kurds (as well as national rights), the Allied forces agreed to divide Kurdistan into five separate parts—among Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and the Soviet Union (White, 2000, p.70). The Ottoman Kurds became the citizens of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey in just an overnight (McKiernan, 2006, p.31). Thus, the Kurds in Iraq discovered that the British support for them was just to prevent the strengthening of the Turkish position on the claims of Mosul. In 1923, the Kurdish part of Iraq was completely given to the Arabs (Olson, 1996, p.170). O'Ballance (1996) argued that the appearance of the Soviet Union

was the actual cause for the dismissal of the promises that were given to Kurds in the Lausanne Treaty. Britain and France decided to keep Turkey on their side, to use later as a shield to the threat of communism.

### ***The Mosul Problem***

Turkey and Britain could not agree on a common solution for the future of Mosul since this area was important due to its rich oil beds. The British were unwilling to leave Mosul as oil was becoming more important. Turkey demanded a plebiscite to decide the future of Mosul, but it was rejected by Britain. Britain argued that the League of nation had to be the authority to decide on the future of Mosul.

The British were sure that the great powers would decide on their side (McDowall, 2000). The British even attracted the American oil companies to the region just to get the support of U.S. for the control of Mosul. Unlike Britain, for Turkey, Mosul was just a question of security (Olson, 1996).

During this time, two events reduced Turkey's credibility to obtain the Kurdish support. First, in 1924, Turkey abolished the Caliphate; *which was the only crucial link left between the Muslims in the world and Turkey* (McDowall, 2000, p.145). The Ottoman Empire was able to control diverse tribes by deriving its legitimacy from its upholding of Islamic Law. That is, state control was unified politically through the medium of Islam by the institution of hilafet (White, 2000). Nowhere in the world more than Kurdistan people had always stressed the importance of the hilafet (McDowall, 2000). The Kurds were loyal to the Turks since they had lived under the same religion and were treated equally. Thus, although many of the Kurdish nationalist intellectuals were affected by the nationalist ideas of European countries, they continued to

center around the union of Islam (Romano, 2006). Second, the country adopted more secularist and nationalist regulations that further alienated the Kurds (Olson, 1996).

Thus, as a result of the abolition of the caliphate and the secularization of the country, a large Kurdish uprising started in the eastern Anatolia. Ankara employed harsh measures to halt it. A well-known and respected Kurdish Naqshbandi, Sheikh Said, was hung, and hundreds of villages were forcefully deported (McDowall, 2000). In response to the brutal suppression of the revolt in northern Kurdistan, the League of Nations Commission argued that it would be a mistake to return the southern Kurdistan to Turkish rule. Thus, the commission decided that the territory in the south should stay under the control of Iraq (White, 2000). Turkey rejected the League of Nations report and took the case to the Permanent International World Court of Justice on 1925. However, this court also accepted the same decision with the League of Nations and Mosul was given to the Arabs (Olson, 1996, p.179; Waheed, 1958).

### ***The Betrayal of the Kurds in Iraq***

The Kurds in Iraq initially welcomed this decision, thinking that they would obtain their freedom soon. However, Britain betrayed all of its promises towards an independent southern Kurdistan as Arab nationalism spread through the Middle East. King Faysal was elected as the president of Iraq. Faysal made it clear that he would never allow the Kurds to have their independent state at the north of Iraq because the Kurds (as being Sunni) were the balancing element against a potential Shia threat in the region. Thus, the idea of having a separate southern Kurdistan was discarded by Winston Churchill so as to keep Iraq as a whole unit (Izady, 1992).

McDowall argued that the British chose to side with the Arabs for two reasons. First, the Kurds were politically inexperienced compared to the Arabs. Second, due to tribal conflicts, the communication was poor among the Kurds. Thus it was impossible to establish a united

Kurdistan. Supporting McDowall's claim, Major Hay, an experienced British intelligence officer from India commented that; "the Kurd has the mind of a schoolboy, but not without a schoolboy's innate cruelty. He requires a beating one day and a sugar plum the next. Too much severity or too much spoiling renders him unmanageable. Like a schoolboy he will always lie to save himself" (McDowall, 2000, p.163).

In 1930, Britain signed a treaty with Bagdad accepting that Iraq would be an independent state beginning on 1932 on the condition that free airbases, a portion from the oil revenues, and some other strategic privileges were provided to England. No provision was inserted into the treaty regarding the wellbeing of the Kurds. As a result, the Kurds expressed their outrage and began to send letters to the League of Nations and to the British commissioners in the region. Their letters went unanswered. Seeing the increasing threat to their mandate in Iraq, Britain ordered the Royal Air force to bomb Kurdish areas to kill tribesmen and other dissidents (McKiernan, 2006). The British Air force (RAF) destroyed 1,365 of 1,381 dwellings in the Kurdish areas. The aerial bombing of the Kurdish location and the mass civilian casualties forced the Kurds to subordinate to Arab rule. It was estimated that 9,000 lives were lost due to the chemicals used by the RAF (McKiernan, 2006, p.32).

Unfortunately, Kurdish and Arab villages were used as laboratories for the development of new chemical and other kind of weapons. The British army used napalm, mustard gas, phosphorous bombs, and delayed action bombs for the first time in Iraq against the Kurds (McKiernan, 2006, p.32). Some British soldiers were told to resign after seeing the effects of these bombs on the wounded people at Iraqi hospitals (McDowall, 2000).

## **KURDS IN TURKEY**

Nothing that Iraq's Kurds could complain of remotely compared with the oppression meted out to Turkey's Kurds. (McDowall, 2000, p.184)

It is no doubt true that the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic was the Kurd's greatest opportunity for the creation of their own state. The partition of the empire within the Allied forces, occupation of Istanbul, and invasion of Anatolia by the Greeks, Italians, British, and French armies created a propitious opportunity for the Kurds. Further, after the defeat of the Allied forces from Anatolia, the Turkish army was too weak to defeat a Kurdish uprising. However, the Kurds decided to side with the Turks against the Christian threat (Lewis, 1968; Romano, 2006).

One of the ironies of Kurdish history in Turkey is that the Turkish nationalist military and governmental challenge to the Istanbul government and to the occupying forces began in areas that Kurdistan nationalists claimed as part of the Kurdistan they wanted to establish. Instead, they aided the Turkish nationalist forces, which prevented its realization. (Olson, 1996, p.141)

In fact, several scholars indicated that without the military support of the Kurds, the Turkish nationalist movement would not have been successful (McDowall, 2000; O'Balance, 1996; Olson, 1996; Romano, 2006; White, 2000). If the Kurds had not supported the Kemalist regime, then the Turks success against the Russians, British, and Armenians in the eastern Anatolia would have been in jeopardy.

Mustafa Kemal promised and explicitly declared before the war of liberation that the new nation had to be a Muslim state composed of both Turks and Kurds (McDowall, 2000). He even delivered the National Pact in a way favoring the unity of the Turks and Kurds.

As long as there are fine people with honour and respect, Turks and Kurds will continue to live together as brothers around the institution of the khilafa, and an unshakeable iron tower will be raised against internal and external enemies. (Olson, 1996, p.3)

However, he was acting pragmatically. Mustafa Kemal was well aware of the British Intelligence agencies, (particularly major Noel's) separatist activities among the Kurds. Kurds were a potential Trojan horse for the British. In fact, only six months after this rebellion, the sign of a new rebellion had occurred in Dersim again. And this time, the Sunni Kurds, Alevi Kurds, and the nationalist Kurds from Istanbul had gathered in Dersim while the Turkish army was dealing with the Greek threat in the western parts. Thus, McDowall argued that "whether in sincerity or in deceit, Mustafa Kemal pragmatically stressed the unity of Turks and Kurds, condemning foreign (essentially British) plots to wean the Kurds away" (McDowall, 2000, p.187).

Thus, the new government in Ankara prepared a draft in 1922 proposing the autonomous administration of the Kurdish Nation according to the Kurds' national customs, language, and religion. This draft proposed autonomy for the Kurds living in Turkey. Consisting of 18 articles, the draft started by the saying that; "The Great National Assembly of Turkey undertakes to establish an autonomous administration for the Kurdish nation in harmony with their national customs" (Olson, 1996, p.216). Articles 2-8 regulated the selection of governor general for the Kurdistan as well as the establishment of the Kurdish National assembly. Article 9 described the boundaries of the Kurdistan (consisted of provinces of van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Dersim and some other villages). Articles 10, 11, 14 and 17 listed the rules about the judicial procedures as well as the tax collection duties. Article 12 and 13 commanded the discharge of all Kurdish officers and soldiers from the Turkish army and the establishment of a new Kurdish gendarmerie unit. Article 15 stipulated that the Turkish language had to be used in the Kurdish National Assembly and also in the administration of the government. However, Kurdish could be used in schools, and in the future Kurds would use the Kurdish as the official language of their assembly. Article

16 told that the primary duty of this assembly to establish a university of law and also a faculty of medicine. Finally, the last article argued that no concessions would be granted without consulting first to the National Assembly in Ankara and getting its consent (McDowall, 2000; Olson, 1996, p.216).

An English Embassy officer named Rumbold indicated that 64 out of 437 deputies opposed the draft law, thus the law was postponed to be discussed later (it never came to the Grand National assembly for discussion again). Rumbold further indicated that mainly the Kurdish deputies (there were 74 Kurdish deputies) opposed to the law since the law did not guarantee the degree of autonomy they were actually seeking (Olson, 1996, p.216). As a result, there was no more talk of a joint Muslim republic. Ankara took advantage of Kurds inability to identify a national leader. That is, the separated Kurdish community was unable to take a unified action against the Turks (McDowall, 2000).

Later in January 1923, Mustafa Kemal talked more than six hours when a question was directed to him in the city of Izmit about the Kurdish issue in Turkey. He argued that rather than separating the eastern part, local autonomies for the Kurds could be established in various locations of Turkey since the Kurds were scattered throughout the Anatolia into different locations (Olson, 1996).

The Kurdish Question cannot be discussed just as an interest of the Turks. As you know, there are so many Kurds settled within our national borders and at some places on the border they are very concentrated and have mixed with Turks. Such a border has been created that if we wish to establish a border in the name of Kurdishness, it is necessary to destroy Turkishness and Turkey. For example, it is necessary to go as far as Erzurum, Erzincan or Sivas to establish a boundary. In fact, it is necessary not to rule out the Kurdish tribes in the deserts around Konya. Therefore, rather than think of the Kurds as an independent unit, and according to our constitution, certainly a kind of regional autonomy is possible. In that case, in whatever province there are Kurds, they can administer themselves autonomously. Moreover, when the people of Turkey are a

subject of discussion, the Kurds must be included. If we do not include the Kurds, the Kurdish Question will always be present. Presently, the Grand National Assembly, has both Turkish and Kurdish representative' and the interests and destinies of these two peoples are united. That is to say, they [the Turks and Kurds] know this is a partnership. It is not right to establish a separate border. (McDowall, 2000, p.190; see also Olson, 1996, pp.214-215)

Thus, there are two important documents in the history of the Turkish republic that discussed the possibility of Kurdish autonomy within Turkey. Olson argued that the real purpose behind this draft law and the speech in Izmit was to gain time when the Turkish Nationalist forces were dealing with the Kocgiri and the Cerkes Ethem rebellion (Olson, 1996, p.220).

### ***Dissolution of Turkish-Kurdish Unity***

Mustafa Kemal did not reveal the type of state he wanted to establish until to the end of the defeat of Allies. Rather, he made the Kurds believe that they were fighting to save the Ottoman Empire and that would be a new state based on Turkish and Kurdish brotherhood in the end. Thus, the Kurds and Turks would be equal as Muslims under this new state. As a result, thousands of Kurds unaware of Mustafa Kemal's secular and nationalist goals joined to War of Independence against the Greeks, Armenians, and Allied powers (Romano, 2006).

In 1923, Mustafa Kemal declared in the national assembly that the new state was an indivisible Turkish state (McKiernan, 2006). That is, the Kemalist regime argued that only viable way to establish the nation state was to make it homogeneous under the dominant Turkish race (Romano, 2006). Mustafa Kemal himself even declared that the military has both the right and the responsibility to intervene in affairs of state when necessary to guarantee the system's continuance (White, 2000, p.130). Mustafa Kemal was described as the backstabber because he betrayed the Kurds by not recognizing the existence of the Kurds within Turkey at the Treaty of Lausanne (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.57).



The first administration of the new republic emphasized that the Turkishness and the secularism were the two main pillars of the new state (de Bellaigue, 2009). The principle of secularism aggravated the 90 percent of the Muslim population of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal outlawed the Islamic courts and rules, closed down all of the religious schools, forced the use of Latin alphabet in place of the Arabic script used for a long time. He banned the use of Arabic script even in the editions of Koran, which was unacceptable to the Turks (Lewis, 1968; McKiernan, 2006, p.92). Further, he banned the use of headscarves in public institutions, including the educational ones (de Bellaigue, 2009). The Sheikhs were highly discontent with the secular policies enacted by Mustafa Kemal. Thus, they instigated the Kurdish people to revolt against him since Mustafa was acting like Dajjal—a satanic figure in Islam who precedes Mahdi—due to his secularist reforms (van Bruinessen, 1992, p.330).

Contrary to that view, Christopher de Bellaigue argued that it was Mustafa Kemal's secular principles and order that prevented the Turkey from becoming one of its benighted neighboring countries, such as Iran, which had a great transformation after the Islamic Revolution. According to him, thanks to the establishment of a secular and nationalist state, Turkey was able to protect its Turkish identity and territorial unity (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.3).

Looking at the facts, there could be three reasons behind Mustafa Kemal's plans on Kurds in Turkey. First, the Kurdish rebellions occurred in and before 1922 and the cooperation of most Kurdish chiefs with the rebels forced Mustafa Kemal to reassess the promises given to Kurds during the war of liberation—regional autonomy (McDowall, 2000). Second, being influenced by Ziya Gokalp's socio-philosophical writings (particularly the Principles of Turkism), Mustafa decided to establish a country in the tradition of European countries (Romano, 2006, p.117). However, he viewed the political traditions of Kurdistan as an

obstacle—chiefs and aghas still controlling the local population. Third, Mustafa Kemal deceived the Kurds from the very beginning to use their military force against the allied forces.

Thus, the assimilation against the Kurdish identity started in the new republic. According to Kurdish views, Mustafa Kemal selected all the Kurdish candidates for the Grand National Assembly in 1923. Thus, rather than defending the rights of Kurdish people, the member parliaments worked for Mustafa Kemal. Second, many governmental positions in Kurdistan were filled by Turks. Third, Ankara started a campaign to delete everything referring to the Kurdish language. In this context, Kurdish place names were all replaced by Turkish names. Fourth, in 1924, the use of the Kurdish language was prohibited, and it was decided that only Turkish language could be used in the courts and schools (Lewis, 1968; McDowall, 2000).

In the same year, Mustafa Kemal also ordered the closure of all Kurdish schools and social and political organizations; he also banned the publications in Kurdish (McKiernan, 2006, p.92). Despite being Kurdish, the second president of Turkey, Ismet Inonu was also influenced by Ziya Gokalp's writings. Thus, he made it very clear that the new republic would not leave its nationalist structure; "Only the Turkish nation is entitled to claim ethnic and national rights in this country. No other element has any such right" (Romano, 2006, p.118).

Until to the end of 1991, the subsequent Turkish governments pursued the policy of forced assimilation on Kurds. McKiernan argued that this forced assimilation was highly similar to the U.S. efforts applied to mainstream Native Americans in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the mission schools. He informed that the Native Americans were also forbidden to speak their languages and practice their native religions (McKiernan, 2006, p.28).

All these changes were radical (and also racist) considering the promises that were given to Kurds in 1922. Due to the mandatory use of Turkish language, thousands of Kurds had to

leave schools teaching in Turkish. Thus, although the local population had to pay the education tax, their children could not benefit from the education service. The implementations of these policies caused a great resentment among the Kurds (Olson, 1996).

### ***Abolition of the Caliphate***

The abolition of the caliphate by Mustafa Kemal in 1924 was the last straw for the Kurds. Caliphate, as an institution, was the last tie between the Turks and the Kurds. The abolition had devastating effects on Kurds because the institutions that belonged to caliphate (the religious schools and madrasas) were the only source of education available for the Kurds as they did not know Turkish (McDowall, 2000; van Bruinessen, 1978). Additionally, the Kurds were not tied to Turks through culture or language. What bonded them to the Turks was religion and religious fraternity. They have never seen themselves as Turkish nationalists, neither during the Ottoman rule nor during the war of liberation. Rather they regarded themselves as the patriots of Islam (McKiernan, 2006).

Although majority of the people in Turkey opposed this decision, the Ankara government was able to silence them through the establishment of the Tribunals of Independence, which were given extensive powers. The judges serving at these courts had the power to execute people who discussed or favored the institution of caliphate or any other religious goal (Lewis, 1968; McDowall, 2000).

### ***Sheik Said Rebellion***

The abolition of the caliphate, the previously implemented assimilation policies, and Mustafa Kemal's dictatorial behaviors seriously tensioned the relations between the Kurds (the religious sheikhs and Hamidiye aghas) and Ankara (McDowall, 2000). The existence of the non-

Turkish Muslims was denied in the country and all Kurdish schools, associations, publications, and madrasahs (Islamic religious schools) closed down (Romano, 2006). Additionally, the first constitution (1924) of the republic forbade the use of Kurdish in public places. Further, the law number 1505 allowed the state officials the expropriation of the Kurdish areas by the state and then the redistribution of these lands to Turkish speaking population (White, 2000, p.72).

Thus, the Kurds, who originally thought that they were fighting for the protection of the Islamic legacy, became shocked as the new state started assimilation against them. They became highly alienated, but again internal divisions became an obstacle for a unified Kurdish resistance. As was the case in the previous Kurdish uprisings, when some of the tribal leaders started a revolt, the leaders of the competing tribes would most likely not participate or even assist the government forces in suppressing the revolt. The Kurds were unable to unify around a common goal because most of the Kurdish leaders during that time were not educated elites. Rather, they were exclusively tribal leaders, sheikhs, or landowners (Romano, 2006, p.33).

In response to assimilation policies, the Kurds reorganized around a new clandestine group named as Azadi (Freedom) in 1923. The Azadi's first rebellion attempt was unsuccessful due to the lack of discipline and coordination among the Kurds (McDowall, 2000). To overcome the tribal divisions, the leaders of Azadi appointed the charismatic Kurdish religious leader, Sheikh Sait, a Naqshbandi Agha of the town of Piran, as the leader of the second revolt (O'Ballance, 1996). In fact, Sheikh Sait was a well-known leader, and he had resolved many conflicts among the Kurdish tribes in the region. On the other hand, it was known that he had religious grievances with Ankara due to the abolition of the caliphate. Azadi leaders thought that a charismatic sheikh who had religious grievances with nationalistic ideas would appeal a broad support from the Kurdish tribes (Romano, 2006). Therefore, although the Azadi movement had

nationalistic goals in their mind, they gave a religious appearance to their upcoming revolt to take advantage of a broad support through a widely accepted sheikh in the region. It is because religion was a much stronger driving force for many of the foot soldiers than the nationalism (White, 2000).

After several discussions with existing Kurdish organizations, Sheikh Sait distributed a religious command to the Kurdish people to revolt against the Ankara regime for banning the religion in the country (White, 2000). Initially, Sheikh Sait was able to capture and control a few Kurdish locations. The troops sent by the central government were not able to control the crowds who were demanding the full autonomy of Kurdistan and also the restoration of the caliphate. Sheikh Sait even announced the last Sultan of Ottoman Empire, Abdulhamid's son, as the king of Kurdistan to show that their primary goal was the protection of the caliphate in the name of Islam rather than Kurdish nationalism (Izady, 1992).

Although Sheikh Sait was successful in controlling the area (he was able to capture Mardin, Ergani, and the surroundings of Diyarbakir) and defeating the troops sent by the central government, he was only partially successful in bringing together the competing tribes (Romano, 2006). First of all, the Alevi tribes refused to join this uprising on the name of restoring the Khalifa (McDowall, 2000). Alevi Kurds made it clear that they would never follow a Naqshbandi Kurdish Sheikh, even for the autonomy of Kurdistan. A secular Turkey would be much better than a Sunni Kurdistan in which there was no place for the Alevis (White, 2000). Thus, being a Sunni Naqshbandi Sheikh, he lost the support of Alevi tribes (Romano, 2006). The Alevi Kurdish tribes even helped the Turkish forces in the fight against him. By the help of the Alevi tribes, the spread of the rebellion to other Kurdish cities were prevented and also Ankara managed to mobilize the troops from the western parts of Turkey to eastern parts

(Romano, 2006). Thus, as it was the case before, the religious differences and tribalism significantly limited the extent of the rebellion (White, 2000).

It is important to mention that the Ankara government did not use the military forces located in the eastern region to suppress the Sheikh Sait rebellion since these forces had large numbers of Kurdish originated soldiers and commanders (notably, Kazim Karabekir, a highly disappointed commander with Mustafa Kemal's religious policies) (Romano, 2006). Thus, Alevi tribes were in fact prevented a widespread Sunni Kurdish uprising, which had a high potential ending up in a free Kurdistan.

Second, Sheikh Sait was unable to attract the leaders of the urban Kurds that did not speak the Zaza language. His armies even laid to siege to and then penetrated the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, Diyarbakir (Romano, 2006). However, the wealthy urban Kurdish notables did not want to jeopardize their privileged lifestyle in Diyarbakir, so they did not support the rebellion. Rather, they officially declared that they would stay loyal to the Turkish government (White, 2000, p.75).

As the intensity of the fight increased, Ankara decided to implement martial law in all over the Kurdistan and sent troops. Turkish forces, along with the Alevi Kurdish tribes outnumbered the military capacity of Sheikh Said. Additionally, France allowed to Turkish government to use its railway in Syria (the Bagdad Railway) that went directly to Kurdistan (McDowall, 2000; Romano, 2006). Thus, the military force and the weapons were easily and quickly transported to the area of conflict.

After the rebellion was suppressed, a brutal campaign of repression started against the Kurds in the region. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, and thousands of innocent women, men, and children were killed (Romano, 2006, p.35). Prime Minister Ismet Inonu gave complete

free hand to the military and also established a Tribunal of Independence in the Kurdistan under the law of Restoration of Order. The judges of this court were again empowered with the authority of capital punishment. The law was implemented for two years (McDowall, 2000, p.195).

With the help of a Kurdish Jibran chief, the Turkish forces caught Sheikh Said. He and his command cadre (47 Kurds) were all executed in Diyarbakir in 1925 (McKiernan, 2006, p.91; Romano, 2006, p.35). In the meantime, the court of Tribunals of independence moved from one city to another, executing approximately 700 Kurds (McDowall, 2000, p.196). In contrast to the figures provided by McDowall, Romano (2006, p.35) indicated that thousands of less influential Kurds were slaughtered without trials. To prevent the potential new rebellions by the hand of the religious sheikhs, a new law was enacted ordering the closure of all religious orders, tombs, and other places of pilgrimage in December 1925 (Romano, 2006, p.36).

Although the rebellion was completely stopped, Prime Minister Inonu decided that more had to be done to prevent potential future Kurdish rebellions. Thus, all of the local Kurdish leaders—Sheikhs, aghas, and chiefs—were forcefully relocated to the western parts of the country. The settlement law was enacted that designated the Kurdistan as an area closed for civilian settlement. The areas without the native language of Turkish were all evacuated, and the residents were distributed among the Turkish-speaking residents of western towns (McKiernan, 2006, p.93). Hundreds of villages suspected of helping the rebels were burned down, and thousands of villagers were forcefully deported to western districts. Later, the Law of Maintenance of Order provided the law enforcement agencies in the region to suppress any form of perceived opposition. The word Kurdistan was removed from all publications and the area was called as Eastern Anatolia from then on (McKiernan, 2006, p.94). In the meantime, the

Independence Tribunals gave death warrants for Kurdish teachers, authors, organizers and other intellectuals (Lewis, 1968; McKiernan, 2006).

It was indicated that the army was very brutal during the relocations; “Whole villages were burnt or razed to the ground, and men, women and children killed”(McDowall, 2000, p.196). Particularly, the people of Sheikh Said’s tribe, the Zaza speaking Kurds, were massacred. Hundreds of innocents were killed brutally. The remaining people were left without food since the Turkish army had seized their livestock. In total, 7,000 Kurds were arrested in the Kurdish towns and some of them executed at later dates (McDowall, 2000, p.197).

Again, the Kurds lost the war against the Turks due to their lack of unity caused by their differences in terms language, religion, and socio-economic factors (McDowall, 2000). Turkish forces would have been defeated if the Sirnak tribes and the Dersim Alevi (the ones that launched the Dersim rebellion five years ago) had helped the Sheikh Sait and his army. As a revenge, when the last Kurdish rebellion in the history of Turkish Republic (Dersim) occurred 12 years after Sheikh Sait’s rebellion, Kurdish Sunni and Zaza tribes did not help to Alevi when Turkish forces crushed them (Romano, 2006, p.107).

In the end, the Turkish army established control in Kurdistan but lost the hearts and mind of the people. An authoritarian regime developed in Turkey. Journalists were arrested. They were also not allowed to write on certain topics. The number of restrictive regulations came to a point in which it was impossible to discuss anything about the government in public. For example, in a highly racist manner, the foreign minister of Turkey, Tevfik Rustu (Saracoglu), delivered the following speech to the cabinet in 1926;

In their [Kurdish] case, their cultural level is so low, their mentality so backward, that they cannot be simply in the general Turkish body politic ... They will die out, economically unfitted for the struggle for life in competition with the more advanced and



cultured Turks ... as many as can will emigrate into Persia and Iraq, while the rest will simply undergo the elimination of the unfit. (McDowall, 2000, p.200)

In another speech Tevfik Rustu went further and expressed to the British diplomat Sir George Clark that the Kurds and the American Indians are the same, they must be suppressed and assimilated until they disappear (Romano, 2006, p.38). Thus, it became difficult for the Kurds to live within the borders of Turkey under the humiliations of the security forces. One of the intelligence reports sent to London in 1926 showed how the gendarmerie was executing people in the area.

A gendarmerie major on short leave from Diyarbakir told a friend that he was disgusted with the work he had had to do and that he wanted to be transferred. He had been in the eastern provinces all through the period of tranquillization and was tired of slaughtering men, women and children. (Olson, 1996, p.178)

Interestingly, the intelligence reports kept by the Public Records Office of Great Britain indicated that some British analysts were thinking that the Sheikh Sait rebellion was actually planned by Turkey. These analysts argued that by instigating a successful rising in Turkey, the Kurds in Iraq could also rise against Britain and they might throw away the British rule in their country. On the other hand, the rises of the Turkish Kurds would provide an excellent pretext for placing thousands of Turkish troops on the Iraqi border who might then occupy Iraqi Kurdistan while pursuing the Kurdish rebels flying through Iraqi border (Olson, 1996, p.179).

In 1928, Ibrahim Tali was appointed as the governor general of the Kurdistan. When he arrived to the region, Tali saw that it would take years for a full recovery due to the extensive damage occurred during the military offensives. As a first attempt, Tali argued that an amnesty was required to win the support of the local people. Thus, he urged the local government to implement a full amnesty for the people who engaged in the rebellions before. The second problem was that the region needed hundreds of doctors, teachers, and other officials for a

speedy recovery. However, Tali's attempt to employ peoples in the region was unsuccessful. Thus, he focused on different aspects of the development. A road-building program was started to reach to every single village and town in which the Kurds lived. He also attempted to divide the territories of aghas and tribal leaders among the Kurdish peasants. Still, the trade and economic activity in the region remained low because many villages were empty and the region was still dealing with the construction of the ruined areas because of the Russian and Armenian wars. On the other hand, it was not profitable for companies to invest on Kurdistan because the transportation costs were too high. Thus, the banks did not provide financial assistance in the eastern cities. As a result the only option for the Kurds was to immigrate to the western cities (Jawideh, 2006; McDowall, 2000).

In the meantime, the Kurdish exiles in Europe and the Middle East (Paris, Cairo, Tabriz, Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus) met in Lebanon and established a new party—Khoybun (Independence). Looking at their past mistakes, these people decided to form a trained Kurdish military force in Aleppo, instead of relying on the forces formed from peasant Kurds. Additionally, the organization obtained significant support from the Shah of Iran who wanted to prevent Turkey from emerging as a powerful actor in the region (O'Ballance, 1996).

### ***The Ararat Rising (the Khoybun Revolt)***

Immediately after the Sheikh Sait rebellion, another revolt broke out by the local aghas and sheikhs in the area close to Mount Ararat (O'Ballance). The Ararat rebellion differed from the other Kurdish uprisings. Unlike the previous insurgencies, the Ararat rebellion involved the Kurds from Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. As a result, the relations among the three countries (as well as Britain; the mandatory power in Iraq) were damaged (Olson, 1996, p.142).

Khoybun was an aristocratic organization, which united nearly all Kurdish organizations—Kurt Teskilat-i Cemiyeti, Kurt Millet Firkasi, Kurt Taali Cemiyeti and others—under its roof. Unlike the previous Kurdish organizations, Khoybun presented itself as an Armenian-Kurdish organization and cooperated with Armenian Dashnak Party against the Turks (White, 2000).

The Khoybun leaders were aware of that the area that the Kurdish Celali tribe settled—Mount Ararat—was out of reach of the Ankara government. The Kurdish fighters who did not benefit from the general amnesty that was granted after the Sheikh Sait rebellion were hiding around the Mount Ararat. Thus, the new Kurdish military resistance had to be started from there. The Kurdish aghas united around the old Hamidiye commander Ibrahim Nuri Pasha and then declared their independence (White, 2000). In 1927, they started their offensive against the Turkish forces in the region, and they became successful in defeating them. Substantial military equipment that was acquired from the defeated Turkish forces enabled Khoybun to increase its offensives in many different locations in Kurdistan (McDowall, 2000).

The Ankara government sought conciliatory policies at first. A general amnesty was declared, all the deportations were stopped, the Kurdish nationalists were freed from the prisons, and the deportees were allowed to return to their homes in 1928 (White, 2000, p.78). However, the majority of the Kurds (including the Alevis) declined the peace negotiations and preferred to join the Khoybun forces. Even the Kurdish tribes, who previously helped the suppression of the Sheikh Said rebellion, decided to fight against the Turkish forces.

Unlike Sheikh Sait rebellion, Ankara used fewer troops. It had then a large airpower, which was more effective than using traditional troops on the ground (Olson, 2000, p.142). In 1929, Turkey entered into Iran to cut the material support from Iran to Kurdish and Armenian

military units. Towards the end of the year, Turkish forces were able to capture most of the Kurds and Armenians who started the offensive. In an effort to take revenge for the Turks who were killed and mutilated by the Kurds and Armenians, the Turkish forces exterminated thousands of rebels that were captured. At the same time, a campaign of arrest was initiated to prosecute sympathizers in Erzurum, Diyarbakir, Siirt, Hakkari, and many other Kurdish villages. Approximately 3,000 non-combatants were also killed and their villages were burnt down (McDowall, 2000, p.206). In May 1932, a new law was enacted by the Ankara government, which ordered the immediate evacuation of the Kurdistan for sanitary, military, cultural, and strategic reasons (White, 2000, p.79). The records indicate that approximately one million Kurds were displaced until 1938 (O'Ballance, 1996, p.16). Therefore, the Kurds were held subjected to a massive depopulation program.

The rebellion of Ararat was completely controlled by the end of 1932. McDowall argued that similar to Sheikh Said rebellion, the lack of homogeneity and the coordinated action among the Kurds decreased their fighting capabilities against the Turks. However, Ararat rebellion was one of the longest rebellions in the history of Kurds and Turks, because it took place in a geographically advantageous place—the intersection of boundaries of three national states (Olson, 1996).

### ***Dersim Rebellion***

In 1934, a new law (No. 2510) was implemented requiring the mandatory relocation of the non-Turkish communities for assimilation into Turkish dominated areas (Lewis, 1968).

Law No. 2510 divided Turkey into three zones: (i) localities to be reserved for the habitation in compact form of persons possessing Turkish culture; (ii) regions to which populations of non-Turkish culture for assimilation into Turkish language and culture

were to be moved; (iii) regions to be completely evacuated. 64- 65. (Romano, 2006, pp.119-120)

With same law, the Turkish state also abandoned all the previously recognized titles that were given to sheikhs, aghas, chiefs, and tribal leaders. Further, the associations among the non-Turkish speaking groups were forbidden. Thus, the Kurdish population was going to be dispersed to remote areas to extinguish their language and Kurdish identity. According to McDowall, Turkey was copying social engineering programs that were being planned by many European intellectuals for their own minorities. However, the government was unable to enact this law because it was impossible to relocate 3 million Kurds from Kurdistan to different parts of Anatolia (McDowall, 2000).

Noticing the impracticability of this law, the Ankara government decided to focus on the Kurdish tribes that would be a potential threat in the future. Among them, the Dersim Kurds were known to be defiant since 1876 (McDowall, 2000). Even the Ottoman Empire had difficulties controlling the area inhabited by the Kizilbas population of Dersim. The people of Dersim did not pay the taxes and did not recognize the Ankara government. In 1926, the bureaucrats in Ankara prepared a report calling for harsh military measures to convince the Dersim region to pay taxes.

Dersim is an abscess on the Turkish Republic and it must be removed, for the sake of the country's well-being. It is useless to try and win the allegiance of Dersimlis by building hospitals, factories and so forth in Dersim. Only stern measures would suffice. (White, 2000, p.79)

In 1936, ten years after this report was prepared, Ataturk delivered a speech at the opening of the Turkish Parliament, stressing the importance of the Dersim problem; “Our most important interior problem is the Dersim problem. No matter what cost, we have to remove this

abscess at its roots. To deal with this problem, we will give wider powers to the government” (White, 2000, p.79).

Thus, a new law (usually known as Tunceli law) was drafted and soon accepted by the Turkish Parliament. In this context, the name of Dersim was changed to a Turkish name—Tunceli. Then troops were sent to the region to build roads, which would be necessary for the offensive against the Dersim Kurds. In the same year (1936), Turkish troops completely surrounded the region. The people of Dersim, led by the chief of Abbasusagi tribe, a Kizilbas elite named Seyit Riza made it clear that they would never accept the authority of Turks in their area (White, 2000). The fight started and the Turkish military forces evacuated the Kurds from their villages and forced them to move to summer pastures in the mountains. The villages were destroyed to make sure that the crowd would not return back there. McDowall indicated that the Turks had lost a significant number of troops during this evacuation due to carefully placed Alevi snipers.

Seyit Riza appealed for the help of Great Britain by sending a letter to Britain’s foreign secretary, but no assistance was forthcoming. Seyit Riza was a seventy-five years old Kurdish cleric and cultural leader of the Dersim Alevis. He asked the British Foreign Ministry to implement an international intervention in their areas given that the Turkish government was applying assimilation by forbidding the use of their language and also forcing them to relocate to other parts of Turkey.

The government had tried to assimilate the Kurdish people for years, oppressing them, banning publications in Kurdish, persecuting those who spoke Kurdish, and forcibly deporting people from fertile parts of Kurdistan for uncultivated areas of Anatolia where many had perished. The prisons were full of non-combatants; intellectuals were shot, hanged or exiled to remote places. Three million Kurds live in their country and ask only to live in peace and freedom, while keeping their race, language, traditions, culture, and

civilization. Please let the Kurdish people benefit from the high moral influence of [your] government and to bring an end to this cruel injustice. (McKiernan, 2006, p.94; see also McDowall, 2000, pp.208)

Seyit Riza, his two sons, and ten of his command cadre were captured and executed in 1937 (McKiernan, 2006; White, 2000, p.83). Before he was executed he delivered the following speech:

I am 75 years old, I am becoming a martyr, I am joining the Kurdistan martyrs. Kurdish youth will get revenge. Down with oppressors! Down with the fickle and liars! (Dersimi 1987, p.229)

Meanwhile, the local population ran into the caves, pastures, and mountainous areas to protect themselves from the Turkish military forces. As the rebels refused to surrender, the intensity of the offensive increased. During the spring of 1938, the Ankara government started aerial bombings. Fighter planes equipped with poison gasses and heavy artillery were used against the civilians (Dersimi, 1992; McKiernan, 2006, p.94; White, 2000, p.82). These brutal mass killing techniques targeted the local public, including the children and women. An Alevi villager who survived the attack reported that after the aerial bombings, peasants ran out of the villages. They were then all killed by the Turkish soldiers who surrounded the villages (Dersimi, 1987, p.287). It was also reported by the survivors that the Turkish soldiers threw dynamite into the caves where villagers were hiding. Approximately 220 peasants were estimated to have been killed by dynamite explosion (White, 2000, p.83).

The Dersim rebellion lasted more than a year and had catastrophic effects. The homes were destroyed, villages were burned down and depopulated, and the civilians who hid in the caves and animal barns were killed by poisonous gas and artillery. The Alevi Kurds committed collective suicides to escape from the brutality of the Turkish soldiers (Dersimi, 1992). It was

found out that 40,000 Dersim Kurds died during the military offensives (McDowall, 2000, p.93; White, 2000, p.83,).

Dersim became last tribal rebellion against Ankara (McDowall, 2000). The Kurdish opposition to Ankara was forcefully ended by exiling and killing Kurdish elites or deporting them with their tribes to Western cities. The remaining sheikhs and aghas were co-opted by the state. Nationalist Kurds began to think that resistance to the state was pointless since the retaliation was always heavy (Romano, 2006). By the defeat of this rebellion, the Kurdish national inspirations were also silenced for the next three decades in Turkey (White, 2000, p.83).

In 1948, a Turkish journalist informed that there was no school or hospital (not even mentioning the recreational areas) in Dersim, but a large mountain brigade. The area remained under military control until to the end of the 1950s (McKiernan, 2006, p.94). The Turkish government spent its time and energy installing only gendarmerie posts and tax collectors into Dersim (Dersimi, 1992; Romano, 2006, p.39).

#### **NEW HOPES FOR THE KURDISH NATIONAL REVIVAL: A MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM IN TURKEY**

As Turkey was trying to achieve the economic modernization, Ankara pursued closer ties with the Western countries. The contacts of Turkish bureaucrats and deputies with their western colleagues prepared the impetus to move to a multi-party system at the Turkish National Assembly (Romano, 2006, p.39). In the midst of 1945, some Republican Party members began to criticize the authoritarian structure of the single-party system. The single-party system was established by Mustafa Kemal to protect the new republic. In fact, this system had been successful in preventing potential Kurdish uprisings until 1946 (McKiernan, 2006).



By 1946, these people who criticized the single-party system created the Democratic Party. Thus, political pluralism started in Turkey. Various groups of people who were repressed under the previous authoritarian regime rushed to join the Democratic Party (DP) to avenge the longstanding injustices committed against them. For example, although Mustafa Kemal is known as a great leader for many (for saving the country, converting the Islamic Ottoman culture into a European one, enhancing the rights of women, and so on), he has been known in the collective memory of millions of Kurds and religious people for his terror and cultural repression (McKiernan, 2006, p.95). Thus, the DP became the defender of greater civic freedom, ranging from individual rights to religious freedoms that were harshly suppressed during the Kemalist regime.

### ***The Start of Political Clientelism***

As the Democratic Party announced that they would allow people to practice their religious beliefs freely, religious people believed that it offered a great chance for the revival of Islam (McDowall, 2000). Thus, patronage started in Turkish political history. The agents of DP promised to increase religious freedoms and also offered state employment to many young men. In return, these people were asked to give their votes to the Democratic Party. That is, a new form of tribalism—neo-tribalism—started in Turkey (Ahmed and Gunter, 2005). Clearly, the DP employed the religious sentiments in the country just to secure the votes needed to bring them success in the elections. In fact, the DP's policy worked. Nearly all of the sheikhs joined the DP and they ordered their followers to vote for the DP to regain their religious freedoms. In return, the sheikhs were entitled to use government resources (particularly the police) to increase their political powers (van Bruinessen, 1978; White, 2000, p.33).

Seeing the Democratic Party was exploiting the public's feelings by promising increased religious freedom, the Republican People's Party implemented a law allowing religious education in public schools as well as the establishment of Islamic schools throughout the country. The RPP further abolished its ban on labor unions to increase its base support (Romano, 2006, p.39). However, none of these concessions were enough to persuade the people to support the RPP. Looking at the past, Kurds and Turks only saw that it was the RPP who dismantled the Sunni state and abolished all the religious institutions leaving people bereft of Islam (McDowall, 2000).

In 1950, the new center-right Democratic Party won the election, taking the large majority of the rural votes in the country (most of the Kurds supported the DP) (Romano, 2006, p.40). Celal Bayar became the new president and Adnan Menderes became the Prime Minister (de Bellaigue, 2009). Initially, the DP followed a policy of balance between the Kemalist regime principles (which were mainly supported and protected by the military) and the degree of freedom (longed by the people of Turkey). Slowly, the party enacted policies to bring Islam back into the hearts of the community. As a first step, Menderes passed a law that allowed the muezzin to recite the call for prayer in Arabic, which was forbidden by Mustafa Kemal by Article number 526 (McDowall, 2000).

Within the same year, Islamic education in the schools was made compulsory, and by the beginning of 1960s, the state financed the construction of more than 5,000 mosques. Religious schools were established for teaching mosque imams. The DP also allowed the reorganization of seminaries that were run by sheiks. The sheikhs were also financially assisted by the government to ease their religious revival and establish their authority in the region.

Everywhere, people were cheerfully arguing that the DP was reviving the country's historical and religious roots (McDowall, 2000).

McDowall argued that Kurdistan enjoyed and welcomed these enactments more happily than any region in Turkey. As mentioned before, Kurdistan (except for Dersim where Alevi Kurds live) was historically the stronghold of Islam and often an enemy to the secular and leftist ideas. Democrats exploited the grievances of the aghas whose powers were taken and suffered so heavily during the Kemalist regime. The new regime argued that the aghas have an intermediary role between the villagers and the local authorities, and that they were more effective than the local law enforcement agencies in mediating the individual disputes among the local population. Thus, the new regime also co-opted the agha system after the 1950 election. That is, the aghas, beys, and religious sheiks were included in the party administration, and they were given financial resources to share with their peasants (McDowall, 2000).

By enacting these changes, the DP aimed to gain votes from the Kurdish tribes because peasants in the region were still loyal to their respective aghas and tribal leaders. For example, the city of Diyarbakir had twenty large landlords, and these aghas had enough power on their constituency to select whomever they wished. Coopting the agha system, the DP was able win 34 of 40 seats allocated for the Kurdistan in the 1954 elections (Romano, 2006, p.40).

### ***Agricultural Reforms and the Explosion of Kurdish Nationalism***

The DP made agricultural reforms the cornerstone of their economic revival program. Obtaining the U.S. Marshall Aid, Ankara was able to import thousands of tractors into the country (Lewis, 1968). In 1948, there were only 1,750 tractors throughout Turkey. By the end of 1954, the number of tractors was more than 40,000 (McDowall, 2000, p.401). Nevertheless,

in 1951, the International Bank warned Ankara that this sudden increase in the number of tractors would be detrimental to the socio-economic structure of the region. They warned that mechanization would force the small farmers to relocate to other places because they would be unable to profit as much as the big farmers who would benefit from the mechanization of the agriculture.

As estimated by the International Bank, thousands of surplus Kurdish workers migrated to western parts of Turkey as the numbers of tractors increased. Van Bruinessen indicated that each tractor forced 10 to 50 peasants to migrate to cities and towns (van Bruinessen, 1978, p.23). Small farmers who were unable to own a tractor had to give some portion of their crops to local large owners in return for hiring their tractors. Sharing some of its crop with the government (who provided the land) and the aghas (who provided the tractor), small farmers came to point where they were earning no profit. Thus, they sold their lands to tractor-owning aghas and left the region.

The modernization, the mass migration of Kurdish peasants to western cities, and the increased educational opportunities reduced the influences of the sheikhs in the region. As people had great economic and social opportunities in the large cities, they came to see the sheikhs and aghas as exploiters (van Bruinessen, 1978; White, 2000, p.35). Thus, the introduction of the tractors provided the socio-economic groundwork for the explosion of Kurdish nationalism in the 1980s through the emergence of non-traditional Kurdish nationalist elites (McDowall, 2000; Romano, 2006).

### ***Menderes and the Military Coup***

The economic crisis of 1955 caused the DP to lose some of its constituents to other political parties. Similar to DP, the rivals exploited the aghas and sheikhs by promising that they

would construct roads, schools, and mosques and would provide them with more tractors and electrified towns. The tension and the rivalries among the political parties also affected the people's attitude towards each other. The party competition had a divisive effect. If one group supported the Democrats, its rival supported the Republicans or the other parties (McDowall, 2000).

Through the ends of 1950s, Prime Minister Menderes increased his autocratic control by introducing legislation restricting basic human rights, including the freedom of the press, public meetings, and establishing opposition political parties (Romano, 2006, p.41). In response to the increasing debt of the country and the authoritarian control of the Menderes government, the military toppled the government in May 1961 (de Bellaigue, 2009). The National Union Committee (NUC) executed Menderes and two of his ministers.

After the military intervention, the NUC closed down all the local party branches to prevent the further polarization between the people. A new constitution was drafted, which increased the protection of democracy and individual rights and freedoms. Seeing how authoritarian the Menderes government was, new rules were put into the constitution that would check the powers of the civilian politicians from then on (Romano, 2006).

Ragip Gumuspala, the chief of the general staff during the military coup, argued that the tribal and religious leaders posed a threat to the spread of literacy in the Kurdish areas. These local leaders wanted to keep their peasants under their control for economic and political reasons. He also argued that the aghas had acquired large lands due to the mechanization of agriculture and that the peasants became poor as they sold their lands to the aghas. Thus, Gumuspala argued that the exile of the Kurdish tribal and religious leaders and the distribution of the land to peasants would revive agriculture and livestock breeding in the region. As a result,

the NUC prepared a draft to destroy the title of aghas and to distribute their lands to poor peasants to reestablish the rural economy of Kurdistan. However, this reform was not fully applied since the Turkish bureaucrats and the politicians often found it easier to deal with the aghast than to deal with illiterate peasants (de Bellaigue, 2009).

### ***Cooption of the Agha System***

Thus, shortly after the military elites (NUC) handed the authority to civil administration, the aghas were allowed to return back to Kurdistan and take their lands back from the peasants. In return for this favor, the aghas were going to instruct their followers to vote for a specific party. McDowall indicated that this close mutual interdependence among the aghas and the political elite in the capital resulted in the Turkification of the Kurdish aghas. During that time, the aghast kept their close relationship with the peasants but not in a manner similar to old days. Earlier, the aghast had protected their peasantry for the autonomy of their territories. Later, this relationship still continued, but this time the aghast started to protect their peasants just to be close to the ruling Turkish political parties so as to secure their privileges (van Bruinessen, 1978).

Considering only their wealth, aghast ignored the education and the economic development of their subservient peasants. This resulted in Kurdistan having the lowest rates of literacy and per capital income throughout Turkey. For example, after a disastrous earthquake in the eastern Anatolia (approximately 3,000 people lost late lives) in 1966, a peasant harshly criticized Demirel, who gave a visit to the region; “You only come around here when there's a disaster. Not a quarter of what's done in western Turkey gets done here. We are the forgotten people, abandoned to our fate!” (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.166).

As the economic opportunities decreased, the local population began to live around rich families. People began to earn even less than what they were earning before the cooption of the agha system. The aghas left the peasants into the hands of people appointed by them and they enjoyed a modern life in the capital and in Istanbul (McDowall, 2000, p.402).

As a result of the economic injustices applied by the landlords and aghas, thousands of Kurds decided to abandon their villages and moved to big cities beginning in the 1950s. They resettled to major industrial cities, including Diyarbakir, Malatya, Adana, Sivas, and Kayseri, the cities close to Kurdistan. Later, the Kurds also moved to Istanbul and other western cities to seek better employment opportunities (McDowall, 2000, p.403). However, the social services (housing, employment, education, health) provided in these cities were crippled, as the cities' populations doubled and tripled (McKiernan, 2006, p.26). For example, the population of Diyarbakir jumped from 20,000 to 400,000 between 1930 and 1988 (McDowall, 2000, p.403).

### **THE KURDISH NATIONAL REVIVAL**

The mandatory relocation of Kurdish children for educational purposes, economic deprivation due to mechanization of agriculture, social injustice by the cooption of the agha system, and the resulting dislocation were the factors that played a key role in the national awakening of the Kurds during the 1980s. However, the democratic rights secured with the 1961 constitution provided the foundations for the emergence of a new Kurdish national aspiration, but this time in the urban areas (Jawideh, 2006; Romano, 2006).

#### ***Mandatory Boarding Schools for Kurds***

First, in 1961, a law was implemented that aimed to assimilate the Kurdish children into good Turks through mandatory education in regional boarding schools. However, the Kurdish

children who were sent to boarding schools in Western parts of Turkey to be transformed into good Turkish citizens found out about their identity through the mockery of the Turkish students (McDowall, 2000). These children were sent to distant boarding schools to learn literacy and other social sciences, and also to internalize the values of the Turkish Republic (de Bellaigue, 2009). However, they found out about their national identity during their education. For example, Mahmut Altunakara, a former Kurdish deputy in Ankara revealed his experiences at his school in McDowall's study;

Until I arrived in Kutahya I did not know I was Kurdish. We used to throw stones at those calling us Kurds in Diyarbakir. We came to Kutahya and they called us Kurds. They baited us with 'Where is your tail?' Going to school was an ordeal. Then we understood our villagers were right, we were Kurds. (McDowall, 2000, p.405)

Similarly, the leader of PKK, Abdullah Ocalan was also an admirer of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and viewed himself as a Turk until he began to study political science in Ankara. He later told that he rediscovered his Kurdish identity when he joined to leftist movements during his university years (Romano, 2006, p.112).

These Kurdish youths were hosted in special housings, which were formed only from the Kurds from east. Thus, they were making contact with each other and talking about how the Turks made fun of them. As time passed, these Kurdish children became intellectual university graduates. They were listening to Kurdish radio broadcasts from Yerevan since the use of Kurdish was banned in Turkey. Many of these Kurdish students who attended to boarding schools went to universities and then obtained professional jobs in western Turkey. These Kurds also invited their siblings and other relatives to follow their road to success. Soon, there occurred a well-educated and hardworking Kurdish class in the major cities of Turkey (de Bellaigue, 2009).



### *Emergence of a Bourgeoisie Class from Migrated Peasants*

In the meantime, due to migration (as well as forceful deportations) from the east to western parts of the country, the children of peasant Kurds also began to have a modern bourgeoisie class as they acquired increased level of education. They began to obtain high-level occupations such as mechanics, lawyers, engineers, doctors, and journalists. Those young Kurds participated in social, economic, political, and cultural life styles of the modern cities and gathered with their friends to discuss the future of the Kurdish identity (Romano, 2006, p.112).

The university education exposed the poor Kurdish youths to the ideas of nationalism, socialism, and the struggles against the tyranny of their aghas and the state. The strength of tribal affiliations significantly decreased. As the number of educated Kurds increased, so the wealth and possibilities around them also increased. Soon, these Kurds embraced leftist (Marxist) ideas and joined various leftist groups. They organized mass protests both in western and eastern major cities, calling for increased rights for the repressed Kurds and also for the empowerment of democracy. These demonstrations were the first major threat to Ankara since the Dersim rebellion (Romano, 2006, p.42).

Later, these highly educated Kurds returned to their home cities to fill the vacant teaching positions in various educational settings. A majority of them embraced leftist ideas that were popular during that time. Although the state knew that they were communist, there was not much done to stop this. Thus, these leftist Kurds taught the young generation of Kurds with Stalin's speeches, and Fidel Castro's instructions rather than the curriculum set by the Turkish Ministry of Education (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.183).

### ***Decline of the Agha Class and the Destruction of Kurdish identity***

Meanwhile, the massacre of Turkoman by the Kurds in Arbil (Iraq) during 1959 changed the atmosphere in Turkey. Some Turkish people called for retaliation by killing as many Kurds as possible within Turkey. As a response to this call, educated Kurds organized demonstrations in major cities. Forty-nine Kurds were arrested and the government prosecuted them with execution. However, the potential adverse international pressure prevented the execution of these Kurds (McDowall, 2000, p.405). This incident became a milestone in the rebirth of the national awareness among the Kurds (Jawideh, 2006).

Even this new class of agha class was not able to control this new generation of nationalist Kurds. Thus, the military control after the abolition of Menderes government adopted some new measures that were aimed at erasing the Kurdish identity. President Gursel openly indicated that the Turkish army would not hesitate to destroy the villages and towns if the Kurds in Turkey let the Kurdish rebels from Iraq hide in their houses (McDowall, 2000, p.17). The Kurds in Iraq were very close to independence, which was exciting to the Kurds in Turkey. To erase this new Kurdish national aspiration, bureaucrats substituted Turkish names for thousands of Kurdish place names (de Bellaigue, 2009). The young Kurdish boys who were enrolled to army were instructed that there was no such thing as a Kurd and they were actually mountain Turks.

Despite the fact that the Kurds were the first to populate the area and also they had a distinct language and ethnic identity, the Turkish government designated the Kurds as the Mountain Turks (McKiernan, 2006) (According to David Romano's research, the Kurds were first referred as "mountain Turks" in 1938, Romano, 2006, p.38). Soon, Ankara spread the

propaganda among the Kurdish people that the Kurds were actually mountain Turks who have forgotten their own language (O'Ballance, 1996).

Meanwhile, the TRT (Turkish Radio and Television Agency) established more than six radio stations in Kurdish areas during this era that broadcasted only in Turkish. All of these radio channels prepared programs that made the propaganda of the Turkish nationalism and the indivisible unity of the nation. The TRT even paid large sums of money to Kurdish singers (such as Ibrahim Tatlisises who was immensely popular throughout the Turkey) to sing in Turkish. These artists translated their Kurdish songs and performed them in Turkish (de Bellaigue, 2009).

Further, President Gursel—who was also a Kurd—wrote a foreword to an academic publication indicating that the Kurdish nation were in fact originated from Turks. As a Kurd, the President declared that there was no nation like a Kurd, and the Turks and the Kurds were brothers and compatriots (McDowall, 2000). However, the denial of Kurdish identity by the president caused large demonstrations by Kurds in major Kurdish cities. Kurds used the slogans of “we are not Turk, we are Kurd” during the demonstrations. Approximately 320 demonstrators were shot by the Turkish military, and around 750 were wounded (McDowall, 2000, p.406). The towns were raided by the gendarmerie units. All guns were confiscated from the Kurds, and some Kurds were stripped in front of their women and abused by them (de Bellaigue, 2009).

### ***1961 Constitution and The Turkish Worker's Party***

Nineteen days after this incident, in May 1961, NUC (the military rulers) implemented the *most liberal* constitution of Turkey, which was prepared by a group of intellectuals, academics, and the military junta. This liberal constitution provided religious and press freedom and also allowed the establishment of labor unions (de Bellaigue, 2009). Soon after, all of the

imprisoned Kurds were freed. These intellectual Kurds soon started to publish new magazines both in Kurdish and Turkish. Even though the new constitution gave them significant freedoms, the publication of these Kurdish magazines was soon stopped and some of the authors were arrested. All these editors and authors were charged with separatism propaganda and communism (Jawideh, 2006).

In the meantime, most Kurds and Alevis joined to Turkish Worker's Party (a socialist party)—a pro-Kremlin Communist party—to better raise their opinions as the number of racist Turkish publications increased. Kurds argued that only within this party that they were treated equally with the Turks. Additionally, the TWP was against the things such as the agha class, land ownership by monopolies, and racist prejudices. Thus, this socialist party became effective in the awakening of a large number of Kurdish youth in Ankara and Istanbul. In 1965, however, the Kurds established their own party, the Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan, to better raise their voices against the Turkish government. This political party became the first Kurdish nationalist organization after the defeat of Dersim rebellion during the 1930s (White, 2000, p.133).

### ***Otuken Articles and Kurdish Uprisings***

In 1967, two articles published on a racist Turkish magazine caused a huge Kurdish unrest all over Turkey. The content of these articles was unacceptable as the Kurdish journals were being closed one by one on the ground of Kurdish nationalism.

'Kurds do not have the faces of human beings; they should be migrated to Africa to join the half-human half-animals who lived there. We need a solution [to the Kurdish question] as sharp as a sword. Bring the Cossacks or Kirghiz immigrants with their weapons. This will solve the problem once and for all. (McDowall, 2000, p.408)

Let the Kurds go away from Turkey! But to where? To wherever they like! Let them go to Iran, to Pakistan, to India, to Barzani. Let them ask at the United Nations to find them a home in Africa. Let them go away before the Turkish nation gets angry. The Turkish race is very patient, but when we get angry we are like lions. Let the Kurds ask the Armenians about us! You are only working for Kurdish nationalism. You will ask us to recognize your language, to have independent schools, a broadcasting program, and a press distinct from ours. You will continue secret meetings, where you speak of Barzani as your national hero, you will convey him arms through Turkey; you will read Kurdish poems to your children, and those of you who have attained the level of professorship will make contact with the Kurdish organizations in Europe. But the day when you will rise up to cut Turkey into pieces, you will see to what a hell we shall send you. (Romano, 2006, p.110; see also White, 2000, p.133)

After the publication of these two articles, hundreds of thousands of Kurds started demonstrations in different parts of the country, demanding that the government punish the authors and ban the magazine from further publications (White, 2000). The government did not take any step to find the authors. As a result, the largest Kurdish unrest in the history of the republic after the Dersim rebellion occurred in Turkey. The authors of both articles were never declared. The state, which was quick to close down the Kurdish magazines, did not take any action against Otuken after publishing these racist thoughts (Romano, 2006, p.111). Rather, a special commando unit was sent to the region, and a clearing operation was started. Tens of Kurds were killed, and thousands of them were tortured and severely beaten. The founder of Democratic Party of Turkish Kurdistan, Faik Bucak, was assassinated (White, 2000, p.133).

The Turkish Worker's Party and other leftist organizations—including the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers Unions (DISK), leftist clubs and societies at universities, and the Federation of Revolutionary Youth (Dev-Genc)—organized mass meetings and protested the Turkish state for the oppression of Kurdish identity and basic rights. Knowing the importance of literature to national formation, these groups disseminated materials in Kurdish and tried to protect the Kurdish literature from extinction. However, in 1967, Ankara enacted a law

forbidding the publication, taping, and recording of any kind of materials in Kurdish. Despite this law, many Kurdish scholars continued to publish school textbooks in Kurdish. They were all arrested and charged for separatism (Izady, 1992).

In 1970, during the party's fourth congress, Turkish Worker's Party formally accepted the following statement; "there are a Kurdish people in the East of Turkey. The fascist authorities representing the ruling classes have subjected the Kurdish people to a policy of assimilation and intimidation which has often become a bloody repression" (Kendal, 1993, p.97; Romano, 2006, p.43). This statement troubled the military officials, and the TWP was declared as an illegal organization (Romano, 2006).

During 1968 and 1970, there was turmoil in the country. The universities were all closed down because of student boycotts and illegal activities. Leftists and rightist students and paramilitary units had frequent clashes that usually ended up with killings of each other (Lewis, 1968). Newspaper editorials argued that the government was the major beneficiary of these violent outbreaks since these outbreaks were a tactic applied by the government to divert people's attention from the economic troubles (Olson, 1996, p.229).

Despite this growing intellectual urban unrest of Kurds, these educated people were seen as small and unrepresentative members of the Kurds in the Eastern Anatolia. Bureaucrats argued that the local population was still tied to Turkey with religious ties and disregarded the young Kurds' uprisings in the metropolitans. In fact, a Turkish sociologist, Nur Yalman, argued that religious affiliations between the Turks and Kurds were still more important than linguistic affiliations during that time. She indicated that if the religious affiliation were weakened, then the Turkish-Kurdish opposition would have a more divisive structure (McDowall, 2000, p.410).

### ***Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths***

A deep unrest started in Turkey as the leftist Turks and the nationalists Kurds returned to Turkey from Lebanon supported el-Fatah military camps. The nationalist Kurds soon started a nationalist campaign in Kurdistan and Ankara and Istanbul through the culture clubs named Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (DDKO). These Kurds tried to increase the national awareness and stood for the civil liberties of Kurds. They also prepared a social program to educate the peasants and the women in the neglected Kurdish areas (McDowall, 2000).

Learning about their separatist acts, Ankara sent troops to the region to search for materials and also to arrest people who were trained in Lebanon. However, the troops, which were sent to stabilize the region, started to conduct arbitrary arrests and torture. As it was experienced four decades ago, the Kurdish people again were brutally suppressed at the hand of Turkish military (McDowall, 2000). The statement of one of the soldiers showed how brutal the tactics were that were employed against the Kurds.

Since the end of January special military units have undertaken a land war in the regions of Diyarbakir, Mardin, Siirt, and Hakkari under the guise of hunting bandits. Every village is surrounded at a certain hour, its inhabitants rounded up. Troops assemble men and women separately, and demand the men to surrender their weapons. They beat those who deny possessing any or make other villagers jump on them. They strip men and women naked and violate the latter. Many have died in these operations, some have committed suicide. Naked men and women have cold water thrown over them, and they are whipped. Sometimes women are forced to tie a rope around the penis of their husbands and then to lead him around the village. Women are likewise made to parade naked around the village. Troops demand villagers to provide women for their pleasure and the entire village is beaten if the request is met with refusal. (McDowall, 2000, p.33)

### ***1970 military Coup and The Extinction of the Freedoms***

On March 1971, the military coup occurred as the country became highly polarized between the left and right wing groups. The government in Ankara had lost control of the country and there was chaos everywhere. The institutions, schools, hospitals, universities, even the law enforcement agencies were not functioning. University professors were being killed, American targets were being bombed, and workers were striking (Romano, 2006, p.44).

Thus, the chief of the general staff seized the government and forced the civilian government (Suleyman Demirel was the prime minister) to step down. The military elite established a technocratic government to end the widespread turmoil throughout the country. The army imposed a martial law, and the demonstrators, particularly the radical leftists, were jailed (de Bellaigue, 2009). The new Interior Minister Ismail Aren argued that the coup occurred as a direct result of the: (1) existence of extreme leftists and urban guerillas, (2) the extreme rightists, (3) those who wanted dictatorship, and (4) the illegal activities of the pro-Kurdish organizations in the eastern parts (Olson, 1996, p.232).

Many of the freedoms that were given by the 1961 constitution were restricted, including freedom of press, the right to establish unions, and the autonomy of the universities. Most of the dissidents were caught and imprisoned. The military rule also strengthened the position of the National Security Council (which is composed of top generals, the prime minister, and the president). From then on, the NSC became the highest authority in the country, and it began to give suggestions to the civilian governments (Romano, 2006, p.45).

The first major consequence of the coup was the suppression of the Leftists organizations in the country. Second, as the political groups were destroyed, Kurdish organizations went



underground. As a result, the Kurdish people again left without a political voice, which actually encouraged them to join paramilitary establishments to seek their goals (Olson, 1996).

After the military coup, the RPP won the elections and the control of the country again was left to a civilian administration. Bulent Ecevit was able to win nearly all of the votes from the eastern parts because his main rival Demirel had delivered a speech that antagonized the Kurds. He stated: “Anybody who does not feel Turkish, or who feels unhappy in Turkey, is free to go elsewhere “(Kendal, 1993, p.93). Ecevit, enacted an amnesty, which freed thousands of Kurds and leftist Turks arrested during the military intervention (Romano, 2006, p.46).

### ***The Ideological Fight Between the Idealists and the Leftists***

In the meantime, a new social condition began to provide leftist organizations a fertile ground to recruit young idealists into their associations. By 1977, the number of candidates for the university education was more than 360,000. However, the capacity of the universities was allowing only 60,000 students to pursue their careers. Thus, there were two options available to the ones who were not able to pursue a university degree: (1) working in poorly paid jobs, or (2) joining to the leftist revolutionary groups (McDowall, 2000, p.412).

Most of the Kurdish youths and the leftist Turks who were disappointed by the inequalities joined to leftist groups to raise their voices. On the other hand, a substantial number of nationalist Turk also joined to far right groups such as Idealists (Ulkuculer) and Grey Wolves (Bozkurtlar). The far right groups were highly hostile to the Kurds and to leftist Turkish organizations. They had participants from both Kemalist secular tradition and from religious state schools. Additionally, since the far right groups were against communism and the Kurds’ nationalist aspirations, they could be used by Ankara against the Kurds and communist groups

(Jawideh, 2006; McDowall, 2000, p.413). In fact, the security forces turned a blind eye to the atrocities committed by the right groups against the leftists in the subsequent years.

The politicization of many groups—including the bureaucracy, trade unions, and professional associations—reached to its highest level since the 1971 coup. Polarization was also existent even in the police force and the teachers (Romano, 2006). Thus, the ideological fight began, and the right and left groups began to clash with each other at the university campuses. Between 1973 and 1977, more than 500 students lost their lives during those fights.

Aside from the universities, the fights between the rightists and the leftists also occurred in the regions where the Kurds and Turks were living together, such as the shanties of the Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir and cities such as Erzurum, Maras, Malatya, and Sivas where the population was half-Turkish and half Kurdish. To prevent the spread of conflict, the security forces applied harsh measures, particularly in Kurdistan. Between 1977 and 1978, it was reported that approximately 30 people were killed daily in Kurdistan. Serious outbreaks occurred also in Maras and Malatya. The official report indicated that only in 1978, 109 people were killed, 176 people were seriously wounded, and more than 500 shops and houses of the Kurds were destroyed by the religious and nationalists Grey Wolves. The victims were the Alevi Kurds, people who were mostly the economic migrants that were competing with the Turkish citizens in Maras (McDowall, 2000, p.414).

Although a martial law was implemented in later 1978, the disorders did not halt. A bomb exploded near a Sunni mosque soon after the Friday praying and killed tens. The public held the Alevis responsible for it, and 18 Alevis were killed in the same night. Not trusting the state, people began to form their own security guards in Kurdish and Alevi neighborhoods. In

the meantime, a large religious group openly attacked to Kemalist principles of secularism and westernization in the city of Konya (McDowall, 2000, p.415).

The situation became worse over the course of 1979 and 1980. Shops were empty, there were no electricity in most places of the country, and the inflation rate was close to 100 percent. The death toll was high—approximately 600 a month. Further, parallel administrations were set up between the Leftist and Rightists members of the state institutions. The police force, for example, was divided, as the left and the right wing and the members of each group clashed with each other (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.193).

### ***1980 Military Coup***

Chaos reigned throughout the country. Approximately 4,000 people had lost their lives between 1978 and 1980 (McDowall, 2000, p.415). The army again intervened and suspended the civilian authority in the country. In 1980, General Kenan Evren sent the following note to the leaders and suspended the civilian powers on the country: “The confrontational stance adopted by the political parties, and their sympathetic or actively supportive attitude towards extremists, have boosted anarchy, terrorism and separatism and brought our country to the point of disintegration” (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.197). The army applied strict measures to end the chaos in the country. They stated: “All political parties were outlawed, and their leaders arrested; demonstrations banned; universities were prohibited from political activities; students associations, workers groups and intellectual communities were forced to close for their alleged Marxist functions; and Islamic political affiliations were banned and their leaders tried” (Romano, 2006, p.79).

Media censorship was applied throughout the country (O’Ballance, 1996). During this period, 60,000 leftist and rightist people were arrested (54 percent leftists, 14 percent rightist,

and 7 percent Kurdish separatist) (McDowall, 2000, p.415). For over three years, the army applied extreme measures to restore the economic and political stability of the country and also expel the extremists from the bureaucracy. Approximately 180,000 people (including Turks and Kurds) were detained and 42,000 convicted (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.198).

Two-thirds of the whole Turkish army was deployed to Kurdistan to suppress the Kurdish national aspirations (McDowall, 2000). In 1983, the military junta officially outlawed the use of Kurdish language in Turkey by the law number 2392. The law stated: “The native language of Turkish citizens is Turkish. It is forbidden to use as a native language a language other than Turkish and to participate in any activity aiming to diffuse these languages” (Romano, 2006, p.119).

Before giving the authority to civilian control, the junta prepared a new constitution which stripped away most of the liberties provided by the previous one (de Bellaigue, 2009). It placed harsh restrictions on the individual freedom and it also made the prosecution of subversive activities easy (Romano, 2006). In 1986, a report prepared by the main opposition party in Turkey indicated that; “all of eastern Turkey had become a sort of concentration camp where every citizen is being treated as a suspect and where oppression, torture and insult by the military are the rule rather than the exception” (Romano, 2006, p.79).

According to de Bellaigue, the 1980 military coup was a rescue operation by the West to keep Turkey alive when Iran and Afghanistan had already been lost to radical Islamic regimes. The Afghanistan was invaded by Soviet Russia, and a religious revolution occurred in Iran. These two unexpected development increased Turkey’s military and strategic importance for the western democracies (O’Ballance, 1996, p.152). But the price was high—a whole young

generation was tortured, killed, entrenched into an ethnic conflict, and imprisoned (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.196).

Turgut Ozal became the new prime minister after the military control. He was a technocrat who was appointed by the military rulers to control the economy during the coup. As a first duty; Ozal changed the militaristic approach that was applied to end the Kurdish conflict. Ozal believed that a solution to this problem was only achievable through dialogue with PKK. Thus, he tried to integrate PKK to the Turkish political life by granting autonomy (Gurbey & Ferhad, 2000). First, he allowed the use of Kurdish language in music and books. Later, he formed close relations with the Kurds of northern Iraq. Some bureaucrats, who were close to Ozal, even argued that Ozal had a plan in his mind converting the Turkish Republic into a federalist structure and allowing the Kurds govern themselves autonomously (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.224).

### **PARTIYA KORKERA KURDISTAN (PKK)**

In 1974, Apocular (Followers of Abdullah Ocalan) was established as a Marxist Leninist organization by thirteen Kurdish nationalists in Ankara, at the suburb of Tuzlucayir (White, 2000, p.135). Being independent from the previous Kurdish and Turkish leftist organizations, the group's goal was to start a violent revolution against the Turks and the feudal Kurds (O'Ballance, 2009, p.106).

Abdullah Ocalan, who is widely known as Apo, was elected as the leader of the group (White). Apo is from Hilvan-Siverek, a province of the city of Urfa. He has three sisters and two brothers (Bal and Laciner informed that Ocalan had six siblings). Similar to many Kurdish

children in the region, Abdullah speaks Turkish better than Kurdish (Romano). He left his home at a very early age after having a dispute with his father (McKiernan, 2006).

Abdullah is best known for his ruthless control over the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK). Many dissidents of the PKK that had survived his death order revealed that he killed several PKK commanders. He was even blamed for sending thousands of young Kurds between the ages of 15 and 16 to death just to advance the objectives of Kurdish uprising (McKiernan, 2006, p.67). PKK informants also revealed that Abdullah had a huge ego. The walls in the camps, safe houses, and training facilities were filled with Abdullah's photos. Abdullah, repeatedly declared that his own personality is the most ideal Kurdish personality type, and thus that if all the Kurds imitate him in Turkey, they would acquire freedom soon (White, 2000, p.138).

In 1970s, Abdullah began to study political science at Ankara University (McKiernan, 2006). He became active in various leftists groups including the Turkish Revolutionary Youth (Devrimci Genc) and the Ankara Higher Education association. Thus, different from the previous Kurdish nationalist organizations, the leader of Apocular emerged from a highly educated university student (Jawideh, 2006; McDowall, 2000). The group later changed its name to National Liberation Army (Ulusal Kurtulus Ordusu) to indicate that it would start armed struggle to free the Turkish Kurdistan (White, 2000, p.135). In 1978, the founders of the National Liberation army renamed the organization as a political party in the city of Diyarbakir (in the village of Fis) as the PKK (Partiya Karkari Kurdistan/Parte Krikaranc Kordesian /the Kurdistan Workers' Party) (White, 2000, p.135).

Mahir Cayan (an important leftist figure) became Abdullah's inspiration for establishing a Kurdish national movement based on Marxism and Leninism. Similar to many other Kurdish students in urban areas, Abdullah was arrested after the 1970 military coup. He benefited from

the general amnesty and was released to the public in 1974. Based on his prison experiences, Abdullah argued that uniting under Turkish Left groups and political parties would not be effective in terms of protecting Kurdish rights. Thus, he and his close friends severed their relations with the Turkish leftist groups and started a campaign to unite all Kurds under their party.

With the emergence of the PKK, a new hope arose for the national aspirations of the Kurds. Until the mid-1970s, the predominant approach for the Kurds was seeking wider participation in the Turkish political, economic, and social life through democratic means. However, starting with PKK, the Kurds were given a new path—rejecting all ties with the state agents and seeking armed struggle for the liberation of the Kurds (Bal and Laciner, 2004).

Abdullah started his national liberation campaign in the cities where Kurds formed the majority. In 1975, he and six of his friends visited the Kurdish cities (Urfa, Elazig, Tunceli, Gaziantep, and Maras) and recruited as many as people (particularly the proletariat) who disliked the agha system (Romano, 2006, p.70). They initially preached to their parents, friends, and relatives. Later, Apo and his friends focused Kurdish youth who were frustrated with the status quo of the agha system in those cities. Thus, the initial recruits of the PKK came from the poor Kurdish people who lived in the villages (Romano, 2006). During that time, the PKK became attractive to many young proletariats because it offered to poor Kurds a way out of feudal submission. At that time, 8 percent of the farming families owned more than 50 percent of the lands in Kurdistan and 80 percent of the Kurdish families had land less than 5 hectares or no land at all (Romano, 2006, p.73).

By 1990, most of the PKK members were between the ages of 18 and 25, were economically poor, had no educational background, and were mostly previous farmers, shepherds and manual laborers (Romano, 2006, p.89).

...the most marginal sections of Kurdish society: the ones who feel excluded from the country's social and economic development, victims of the rural transformation with frustrated expectations. The PKK offered them a simple and appropriate theory, and lots of opportunities for action, heroism and martyrdom (Romano, 2006, p.130)

Portraying itself as the protector of poor peasant Kurds (in the Marxist Leninist line), the PKK has not even permitted the tribal chieftains or aghas to have leadership positions in its command cadre (White, 2000). Instead, the PKK started to destroy the traditional systems of authority including the landlords, aghas, even the kinship factors such as loyalty to parents and senior males, and forged a new Kurdish identity seeking to build an independent Kurdistan (White, 2000, p.142). This made the PKK different from the previous nationalist Kurdish organizations. During 1920s and 1930s, sheikhs, aghas, and tribal leaders led the Kurdish nationalist movements. These movements were conservative and largely depended on religion. Since the Kurdish peasants had enough conflicts with the aghas due to the economic concerns, the PKK was able to mobilize thousands by gaining the sympathy and support of the local Kurdish groups (Romano, 2006, p.117).

Until 1984, the PKK followed this recruiting strategy, which was very similar to the ones implemented, by the Chinese and Vietnamese Communists. The new recruits educated by the writings of the Mao Tse-tung and other revolutionary leaders in China and Vietnam (O'Ballance, 1996, p.106). Then, they were sent to their hometowns to spread the message and the goal of PKK (McDowall). Meanwhile, the PKK abstained from engaging fights with the state forces. Rather, they spent all of the group's energy on recruiting and indoctrinating new members who



would alter recruit the next level of the PKK members (Romano, 2006, p.130). Due to the large family structure of the Kurds, the PKK was able to grow in number in a very short period of time. As Romano indicated, a young Kurdish boy would have a kin network of at least thirty people. Thus, the PKK was able to grow in numbers as it recruited only one member from each family (Romano, 2006, p.95).

### ***Fighting Against the Traditional Powers***

In 1978, Abdullah and his friends officially founded the PKK after getting a large degree of support from Kurdish masses (Romano, 2006, p.49). As mentioned above, the PKK first targeted the aghas, tribal chiefs, and the sheikhs and started a war between different classes of the Kurds (McDowall, 2000). Abdullah argued that fighting against the traditional Kurdish authorities was the only way to recreate the Kurdish identity of the peasant Kurds. It was because the Kurds had lost their national identity as their leaders were bought by the Turkish state.

Kurdish peasants and youths accepted Abdullah's call because Abdullah was promising to change their well-known incapability and negative self-image. He told to Kurdish masses that religion was the biggest obstacle in front of their national development. Thus, the minds of the Kurds had to be freed from religion and the Turkish state (McKiernan, 2006, p.149).

Nevertheless, Abdullah soon figured out that the highly religious structure of the Kurdish community would not allow him to recruit as many as people into his communist organization. The PKK faced major problems in disseminating their Marxist Leninist propaganda to the people in the region (Romano). Abdullah later admitted that; "Up to now, one of the major mistakes has been not paying enough respect to the religious values of the region. Even more costly as to actually attack those values" (Bal & Laciner, 2004).

In addition to religion, Abdullah and his friends also had to deal with dialectic differences among the various Kurdish tribes. It was hard to convince the Sunni Muslim Kurmanci speaking Kurds and the Alevi Dimili speaking to join the PKK because these two groups were no even accepting that they were Kurds. Thus, these tribes resisted joining to PKK because they did not even know that they were Kurds; “we are Kirmanc. You are saying we are Kurdish. We are not Kurdish” (Romano, 2006, p.102).

Abdullah was smart. He did not want the PKK to attack to aghas altogether. Rather, he exploited the blood feuds or the other conflicts among the Kurdish aghas in the region. He attracted local attention and the sympathy of the Kurdish peasants by initially attacking the Kurdish aghas and landowners who were disliked by the Kurdish peasants (Romano, 2006, p.75). Additionally, Abdullah believed that he had to be the only authority in the region to easily control the people. To achieve this goal, all other groups and organization had to be either destroyed, join to PKK, or expelled from the region (McDowall, 2000). Thus, the PKK also targeted many of its leftist Kurdish and other revolutionary competitors in the region (Romano, 2006, p.84).

The PKK conducted its first offensive against the Kurdish feudal landlord, the Bucak family, in 1979. Mehmet Celal Bucak, the leader of the family was a deputy for the Justice Party and he owned tens of villages and the whole town of Siverek (Romano, 2006, p.74). Although the assassination attempt against the Mehmet Bucak was unsuccessful, the PKK was able to recruit many peasants who worked under Bucak through manipulation and murderous provocations. One PKK militant who participated in the failed assassination attempt, indicated that the PKK killed one important member of the peasants from the Bucak tribe and depicted it as he was murdered by Mehmet Bucak (Romano, p.75). Due to these provocations, the town of

Siverek was divided between two groups; the Kurds who supported the Bucak's and the people liked the initiative of the PKK (McDowall, 2000, p.421).

The public deference and obedience to the aghas significantly diminished as PKK brutally assassinated them. Soon, the PKK became a viable authority to the state and the tribal leaders by acting as mediators in local and tribal disputes. Seeing this, many of Kurdish poor youths joined to organization to better take advantage of its resources (McDowall, 2000). On the other hand, some Kurdish women willingly joined to PKK to escape from the strict patriarchal control that was common among the Kurdish families. As many of these Kurdish women saw the PKK as an opportunity to escape their community, nearly one-third of the PKK's ranks became composed of women towards the end of 1980s (Romano, 2006, p.78).

### ***1980 Military Coup and Relocation to Damascus***

As Demirel took the office in 1979, he applied harsh measures against the PKK since the organization was targeting Democrat Party's main constituencies in the region. Soon after the 1980 coup, approximately 1,800 PKK members were imprisoned (McDowall, 2000, p.422; Romano, 2006, p.79). The PKK survived from the military coup because Abdullah and the other senior members were able to escape to Syria before the coup.

In the meantime, the military control targeted the people who simply sympathized or even opposed to PKK and other illegal groups. Martial law was enacted and thousands of people, including Kurds and Turks were arrested, subjected to torture and extra judicial killings (Romano, 2006, p.79). When the legal and illegal competitors of the PKK were eliminated by the military control, the PKK stayed as the only organization open to Kurds. As the Kurds, who were not sympathizers or part of a subversive activity, were targeted by the state and labeled as the enemy, they reasoned that they had to support the last remaining Kurdish movement if they

were going to face the repression in any case. Thus, many repressed and tortured people later joined the PKK, and other groups who opposed to the regime in Turkey (Romano, 2006, p.85).

Obtaining refugee status in Syria and Lebanon, Abdullah began to control the PKK from Damascus whereas PKK members were housed and trained in the camps located in Lebanon, Bekaa Valley (O'Ballance, 1996; Romano, 2006). Throughout the military rule (1980-1983), the PKK did not conduct any major offensive in Turkey. Rather, the administrators focused on what to do in the future. In their first Congress (1981), the PKK took important decisions. It was decided that the organization had to take the necessary conciliatory steps with the other Kurdish groups. In this context, Abdullah argued that maintaining good relations with the Iraqi Kurds was important to obtain safe bases and training camps in northern Iraq. Northern Iraq was also important for the future offensives of the PKK because crossing the Turkish border was much easier through northern Iraqi area compared to Syria. Due to the precipitous mountain located in the area, it was hard for Turkey to protect the northern Iraqi borders (McDowall, 2000).

In 1983, as Turkey and Iraq signed an agreement against the Kurds' terrorism-related activities; Barzani (the leader of the northern Iraqi Kurds) also signed a protocol with the PKK, allowing the organization to use the northern Iraqi territory against Turkey. Therefore, the PKK obtained a large area, including the borders of Syria, Iraq, and Iran to conduct its offensives.

Thus, the foreign support that Abdullah obtained from Syria, Libya, northern Iraq, and the Palestinian Liberation organization in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon saved the PKK from being destroyed completely after the military coup (De Bellaigue, 2009). Syrian leaders thought that protecting Ocalan would alter help them as a leverage in their relations with Turkey (Romano, 2006). Syria and other bordering countries (Greece, Armenia, Iraq, and Iran) also

increased their support for the PKK since they were obtaining important intelligence such as the Turkish troop deployments and dispositions (Romano, 2006, p.53).

Due to the large foreign support that the PKK enjoyed, many Turkish intellectuals and the politicians often stated that the Kurdish problem arose from the influences of the foreign powers. However, claiming that the PKK insurgency stemmed from the outside forces implies that the domestic situation in Turkey or the racist state policies implemented against the Kurds had no part for the emergence of Kurdish insurgency in Turkey (Romano, 2006, p.125).

### ***Returning to Turkey***

In its second congress (1982), the PKK decided to return to Turkey to start guerilla activity aimed at achieving the complete removal of the Turkish forces from Kurdistan. Abdullah planned to avoid direct confrontation with the security forces. However, he commanded his soldiers to conduct sudden and unexpected ambushes on important targets (McDowall, 2000).

First, on July 18 1984, a small PKK forces ambushed and killed eighteen policemen in the town of Semdinli. This incident is known as the launch of PKK's revolution (McKiernan, 2006, p.132). Today, the PKK still celebrates the date of its first armed struggle as the Army Day (White, 2000, p.143). On 15 August 1984, PKK attacked the special unit members who were responsible for the security of the President Evren in the city of Hakkari. The whole country was shocked (de Bellaigue, 2009). Then, the PKK occupied the town of Semdinli with 80 recruits (O'Ballance, 1996, p.154). The fighters stayed in the town for hours and released all peasant prisoners, executed all state collaborators, and warned people against building cooperation with the Turkish state. Again in 1984, the PKK attacked Prime Minister Ozal's military escort and killed eight soldiers.

As a response to these incidents, Ankara launched operation Sun. With the consent of the Iraqi government, Turkish military forces entered Iraq and created a buffer zone, which was about fifteen km wide. Approximately 805 PKK members were arrested and brought to Turkey for trial (O'Ballance, 1996, p.105). Politicians and bureaucrats insisted that the PKK be viewed as a small group of bandits, bereft of popular support, aiming at socio-economic goals rather than nationalist aspirations (Romano, 2006).

However, Abdullah's strategy worked. By staging guerilla offensives on state security forces, the PKK proved that the Turkish state was limited in its force to control the area. Despite having an enormous army equipped with advanced weapons, the security forces had to take a defensive approach towards the PKK's guerrilla war. Each offensive against the Turkish targets increased the PKK's credibility as the Turkish state was showed to be impotent. As the state was unable to protect its supporters against the PKK, more people began to orient towards it.

### ***Kurdistan Popular Liberation Front***

In 1985, the PKK established the Kurdistan Popular Liberation Front (ERNK). The ERNK was responsible for organizing the civil networks for supply routes, urban intelligence, and the radicalization of more Kurdish youth who lived in urban areas. Local Kurds, who were impoverished and experienced state oppression, welcomed the preachers of the ERNK and increased their support to the PKK considering that, the PKK was an organization fighting for the Kurdish people (McDowall, 2000).

Thus, between 1984 and 1986, the PKK focused on finding and training new recruits, as well as informing the peasants about the PKK's aims and methods. The PKK preachers clandestinely traveled from one town to others, teaching the local population that they were Kurds and that the PKK would help them to regain their identity that was stolen by the Turks.

Apo was the leader who would take revenge on the Turkish state by attacking police and military stations and humiliating them. By seriously causing damage to the Turkish military forces, the PKK quickly won prestige and attention among the local public. Many Kurds showed their willingness to provide logistics, funds, and recruits for the guerilla fight. The PKK soon organized units even in the high schools. Many angry adolescent youth joined the organization and trained each other by using the photocopies provided by the organization (de Bellaigue, 2009; Jawideh, 2006).

The racist policies enacted by the state after the military coup of 1980 (prohibition of the Kurdish language by the law of 2932 and the mandatory requirement that even the folk songs had to be sing only in Turkish to prevent the separatist propaganda) had already upset thousands of Kurds living in the region. The Turkish state went further with the law number 1587, prohibited naming Kurdish children with Kurdish names. McDowall indicated that many Kurds experienced difficulties for naming their children with traditional names, and they had to rename them to avoid punishment. Finally, in 1986 Ankara renamed 2,842 villages out of 3,524 in major Kurdish cities by Turkish names to erase the Kurdish identity in the region.

Thus, Kurds were already more fearful of the racist policies of Ankara than the terror of the PKK. The PKK was at least offering hope to the Kurds. As a result, many of them decided to join the PKK (McDowall, 2000, p.426). Additionally, the closed nature of the Turkish political system also encouraged many Kurds to join the PKK. As the divisions developed after the multi-party system closed with the military interventions, the Kurdish people began to support the PKK to protect their identity (Romano, 2006).

Between 1987 and 1990, the PKK increased the severity of its assaults and killed entire families of aghas, not making any distinction between men, women, and children. As the media

published these violent and barbaric incidents, an atmosphere of terror occurred immediately. The constant media reports of the PKK's cruelty increased the PKK's image among the Kurds as a stable power to be sided with. Thus, popular support for the PKK increased (Romano, 2006, p.86). The PKK proved to the Kurds that it was an organization more powerful and also more dangerous than the Turkish state. It also demonstrated the vulnerability of the state forces in front of the PKK's guerilla army. It gave the message that the PKK was absolutely more effective than the Turkish government troops. In short, it was simply in the peoples' best interest to give their support to this organization rather than to Turkey (Romano, 2006, p.87).

Although the state made powerful propaganda by showing the pictures of brutally killed children and elderly people, and announced that the PKK was a vicious organization killing even its own kind of civilians, many Kurds objected to these allegations. In the eyes of Kurdish people, the PKK was still a better option than the Turkish state because PKK was targeting only the pro-state Kurds. That is, it was discerning targets (Romano, 2006, p.88).

As far as the local Kurds were concerned, they knew that PKK attacks were directed not at ordinary people but villagers with state connections, who agreed to collaborate against the Kurds although they themselves were Kurds. All of those killed, including Kurdish infants and women, were related only to the village guards. The message was that any family who dealt with the state would be destroyed. (Romano, 2006, p.86)

Before the PKK, the Kurdish peasants who were discontent with the racist policies of the Turkish state often stated that they were poor and had nothing to fight against Ankara. Although their cause was just, a fight in such circumstances was not logical (Romano, 2006). However, "the guerrilla movement has initiated the process of destruction of this moral outlook and psychology of impotence" (Romano, 2006, p.139). The PKK was pledging the Kurds a new Kurdish state in which they did not have to learn the Turkish culture and language, in which they could freely develop their own identity, culture, and language (Romano, 2006). Stating with



almost with no economic and social resources, the PKK turned into a largely supported mass organization, an important challenge to the establishment of the Turkish state.

Although the Turkish military was successful in killing or capturing some of the PKK members who conducted the attacks, the occasional killings of soldiers and the aghast that supported the state had a serious psychological effect in the region. A climate of fear formed within the people. Towards to end of 1980s, the PKK began to kidnap hundreds of village youth in eastern Anatolia between the ages of 16 and 20. It was a tactic by the PKK administration to increase the supply of food and monetary aid for the group. Peasants who had sons or daughters in the PKK had a higher interest of helping the organization for the welfare of their kids. By kidnapping these kids, the PKK were also aiming to prevent them to be a conscript for the Turkish army at the age of 18. Although they were kidnapped forcefully, these youths were being socialized over time and then motivated to be guerilla fighters for the PKK (Romano, 2006, p.77). Also in 1989, the PKK announced its compulsory military service law. All Kurds, who were close to age of 18 and who had not been recruited into the Turkish army, were required to enroll to the PKK's armed wing (White, 2000, p.197).

### ***Village Protection Guards***

In 1985, Ankara enacted the Village Protection Law, allowing the peasants to form their own military units to protect themselves. The peasants who had conflict with the PKK or the clans that benefit from the PKK, and also the clans that supported right and far right political parties readily accepted to provide manpower for this new semi military unit. The introduction of the village guard system changed the nature of the conflict in the region by providing significant incentives for the Kurds (Romano, 2006, p.82).

Thousands of loyal Kurdish peasants were armed and paid to fight against the PKK threat (de Bellaigue, 2009). The state gave those clans advanced weapons and a regular salary, and named them as temporary village guards. It could be argued that the village guards were similar to the Hamidiye units in the Ottoman Empire, Saddam Hussein's modern villages that he established to control the Kurds of Iraq, or Peru's anti-guerrilla strategy against the Shining Path guerrillas (McDowall, 2000; McKiernan, 2006; Romano, 2006).

By 1993, there were approximately 35,000 Kurds from various clans enrolled to serve as temporary village guards, largely due to economic incentives provided by Ankara. Considering high unemployment rates in the region, the salary promised by the village guard system (\$230, a month for a man) provided a great incentive (McDowall, 2000, p.424). For example, the chief of Alan Tribe in the city of Van was being paid \$115,000 monthly for his 500 men who were working for the village guard system (McDowall, 2000). The money offered by the government for per person (230 dollars each month) was highly attractive since the annual per income capita was only \$400 in the region (Romano, 2006, p.83). Additionally, enrolling into this system, the local Kurdish tribes also protected themselves from the systematic harassment of the security forces. Today, the Turkish state still pays 70,000 village guards (Romano, 2006, p.83).

The establishment of village guards strengthened the hands of the Turkish state in a significant way, in terms of cultural framing. Turkish authorities, including the politicians and the bureaucrats, often stated that the willingness of the tribal leaders to join the village guard system was the proof that most Kurds were different from the PKK members; "You see, the PKK is not representative of Kurds in Turkey – here are ordinary Kurds arming themselves to defend their communities from the terrorists" (Romano, 2006, p.129). When most of these village guards and their families were killed by the PKK for being pro-state (PKK killed more

Kurds than the Turkish state actors), Turkish authorities claimed that the PKK was a terrorist organization destroying its own kind rather than fighting for the Kurdish nationalism. “These terrorists are not fighting for Kurdish rights! Most of their victims are their own kind” (Romano, 2006, p.129).

Despite these attractive economic advantages, some Kurdish tribes did not want to serve as village guards for the state. Ankara suspected that these tribes were in active collaboration with the PKK and that they had pro-PKK supporters. Thus, a harsh military and police offensive started against these peasants who did not join to village guard system (White, 2000). In the summer and autumn of 1991, more than 50 extrajudicial killings occurred in the region. The witnesses indicated that peasants who were suspected of being in contact with the PKK or the ones who were in the legal political opposition to the government were singled out and then taken rural areas. None of them returned to their homes. They were suspected of being killed by the death squads formed by the Ankara government (Romano, 2006, p.84).

The tribes that did not want to join the village guard system were expelled from their lands, and military forces destroyed their houses (McDowall, 2000, p.425). Villages that supported the PKK were burnt, and the peasants were arrested and subjected to torture (de Bellaigue, 2009). In the meantime, several tribes who did not want to side with either with the state or with the PKK immigrated to other parts of Turkey to escape from the pressure. More than three million Kurds left the region during the last twenty years due to the fight between the PKK and the Turkish state (Romano, 2006, pp.93-94).

Since this system was a serious obstacle to their development in the region, the PKK began to strike the peasants who were enrolled as village guards. The system was posing a serious threat by blocking the PKK routes and supply routes. Beginning on 1987, the PKK

started to raze the villages (particularly in Mardin, Hakkari, and Siirt) that provided recruits for the village guard system. The agha families, peasants, men, women, children or elderly did not make any difference to the PKK. Everybody was killed if they helped or were suspected of helping the state. Particularly in 1991 and 1992, the village guards and their whole families were brutally killed (McKiernan, 2006, p.159). Some village guards shared a percentage of their income with the PKK to protect themselves from PKK ambushes (McDowall, 2000). Romano also indicated that, although it was impossible to show the extent of that behavior, it was known that some of the village guards were in contact with the PKK members and provided them the weapons and the arms given to them by the state (Romano, 2006, p.95). The sharp decline in the enrolment rates of the village guards (dropped from 35,000 to 6,000 by the end of 1987) indicated that the PKK's ruthless campaign against the pro-state clans was effective (McDowall, 2000, p.425).

### ***Establishing Parallel Institutions for Kurds***

Beginning in the 1990s, the PKK began to gain control in some areas of the eastern Anatolia. It began to establish its own state institutions, parallel to the ones established by the Turkish state.

The PKK, which was already strengthening, had then also the opportunity to establish local authority in various areas, filling the gap of state authority. Secret Kurdish schools started functioning in the darkness of the night. The number of court cases heard at Turkish civil courts declined rapidly as so-called PKK peoples' tribunals came to being. In several provinces the PKK even set up its local police and intelligence units. (Romano, 2006, p.89)

Thus, the authority of Ankara was seriously challenged and weakened. Kurds, often not fluent in Turkish and unfamiliar with the mechanisms of Turkish courts, police, and other state

institutions, preferred to visit the parallel institutions that served in their own language (Romano, 2006).

However, two mistakes by the PKK challenged its authority in the region. First, Barzani, the Kurdish leader of the northern Iraq, cancelled the agreement he signed with the PKK regarding use of northern Iraqi region as a military base because the PKK brutally killed Kurdish citizens in Turkey. Second, the PKK assassinated a famous clan's (Tahir Adiyaman) envoy that visited them for amnesty. Seeing that the PKK was not a group that could be trusted, many clans who originally planned to ask amnesty from the PKK turned back to the state. Even though the PKK understood its mistake and offered a general amnesty in 1991, only a few clans trusted it. The majority of the clans remained loyal to the state (McDowall, 2000). Especially after 1994, the PKK began to lose support among the local Kurdish public due to atrocities committed by the organization (Romano, 2006).

Towards the end of 1993, the PKK decided that its action and the driving ideology were not in line with the ideologies of the superpowers in the world. Further, by attacking Turkish targets in Europe and touristic sites in Turkey, the PKK was reinforcing its image as a terrorist organization among the developed countries. Thus, to attract the support of European countries and the United States (particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union), the PKK gave up on its Marxist Leninist ideology. In 1995, the hammer and the sickle pictures were removed from the official flag of the PKK. Additionally, it stopped attacking the religion and even incorporated Islamic discourse to its propaganda since the organization's offensives against Islamic institutions often had the opposite effect, with more Kurds taking side with the Turkish state (Romano, 2006, p.142).

***Mistakes Done By  
Ankara and the Turkish Security Forces***

Unable to control the Kurdish nationalist uprisings through the PKK, the central government appointed a governor general to eight Kurdish cities in 1987 to better coordinate relations between the police, gendarmerie, military, intelligence agencies, and the village guards. This governor was given extensive powers including mandating the evacuation of villages and towns when it was necessary (McDowall, 2000).

These governors applied military measures to the civilian population. The villages and pastures, which did not directly show their support to the central government or supported the PKK activities, were subjected to arbitrary arrest, severe beatings, and humiliations. For example, a village (Badan) was blamed for providing new recruits for the PKK, and thus the entire population of the village (children, women, elderly people) was held for a day under the burning heat of the sun in the garrison compound (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.228).

However, the state's suppression on the peasants actually increased the number of recruits for the PKK. Many peasants joined the PKK just to avoid from the trauma of frequent and harsh security operations. Those who were detained by law enforcement agencies later indicated that the detention centers were inhumane. They were often subjected to electric shocks and beatings. They were not allowed to sleep or to eat enough food to survive. The purpose was to destroy them mentally and physically. One peasant informed that; 'I was ready to confess that I had killed one hundred men, because they brought my wife and sister, stripped and threatened to rape them right there (McDowall, 2000, p.427). Reports published in Turkey at later dates even revealed that there were a couple mass graves where unaccounted detainees who died under the army and police brutality were buried (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.214).

As a result, the state repression actually supported the growth of the PKK and its credibility; “The same repression has also contributed much to strengthening the PKK at the expense of more moderate and more "open" organizations. The latter crumbled, while the large PKK trials lent this party the reputation of being the only serious opposition force” (van Bruinessen, 1978, p.45; White, 2000, p.149). Many Kurds willingly joined the PKK as the moderate ways for the struggle was closed (McKiernan, 2006, p.147).

Unfortunately, the Turkish authorities noticed none of these significant transformations within the Kurdish groups until 1990. Rather, the central government still insisted that the military measures were most effective in destroying the PKK insurgency. The local public, disappointed with the state, started to demand their corpses from the state authorities and arranged public funerals, which often ended in mass protests against the state. In March 1990, more than 10,000 Kurds participated in a demonstration heavily criticizing the security methods applied by the Turks. Again, tens of civilians were shot dead during the protests by the security forces. As the PKK realized how effective these mass protests were, it stopped to attack civilian Kurdish population who sided with the state and announced that it was quitting all of its offensives that were directed against the civilian populations (Romano, 2006, p.143). This action left the Turkish state as the only actor committing serious human rights violations (McDowall, 2000, p.427).

These events indicated that the PKK was then commanding a significant portion of Kurds. As one of the Turkish journalist indicated, the village youth (even children) for the first time were throwing stones to the security forces, similar to the children at Palestinian intifada. Thousands of children, covering their faces with headscarves (similar to the Palestinian youth) were roaming the streets, forcefully shutting down the shops, schools, hospitals, offices, and

other state institutions to protest the brutal measures applied by the Turkish state (White, 2000, p.164). Thus, the local public was becoming more sympathetic to PKK's nationalist inspirations.

The Kurdish towns (Diyarbakir and Buhtan) that were subjected to military suppression were transformed into the solid supporters of the PKK. Despite this, the popular view among the Turkish public was the continued application of tougher military actions. However, it was clear that in towns where the army was less repressive or not repressive at all (Van and Agri), there was no widespread support for the PKK (McDowall, 2000, pp.428, 431).

In 1990, SHP published another report that contained recommendations about what to do in the Kurdish areas to ease the situation. Many Kurds welcomed it because a Kurdish viewpoint was finally beginning to find a voice within the political arena. The Turkish population, especially the ones from the far right, was unhappy about the open discussion of the Kurdish rights and freedoms in the media. In the meantime, the Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz declared that Kurdish had to be the second official language of Turkey whereas President Ozal supported an autonomous Kurdish region within Iraq (White, 2000).

Meanwhile (in 1991), Abdullah declared, "There is no question of separating from Turkey. My people need Turkey. We can't split for at least 40 years" (McDowall, 2000, p.431; White, 2000, p.163). With this declaration, Ocalan showed his interest in moving from military action to political negotiation with the Turkish state (McDowall, 2000). However, Paul White argued that there were several other factors that contributed to this peace process. The most important was the increasing realignment between Turkey and Syria. Syria was the protector of the PKK and it was providing training bases for the recruits. Losing the support of the Syrian government, the PKK would not be successful in its fight against Turkey. In fact, in 1992, the PKK was forced to empty all the camps located in Bekaa Valley (White, 2000, p.168).



Neither the political leaders nor the bureaucrats dared to respond to Ocalan's peace call due to heightened tension between the military and the PKK. Accepting Ocalan's statements would definitely end a politician's career. Thus, President Ozal was stuck between the military view of defeating the PKK on the ground through harsh measures and reconciling radicalized young populations who joined the PKK (Jawideh, 2006; McDowall, 2000).

Nevertheless, Ozal, broke many of the Kemalist taboos in Turkey and became the first statesmen who started the possibility for a dialogue between Ankara and the PKK and other Kurdish nationalists. He argued that fundamental changes had to be undertaken to end the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. In 1992, Ozal proposed a draft that offered an amnesty for the PKK members and the recognition of the PKK as a member of Turkey's political system. The opposition party led by Suleyman Demirel opposed this after arguing that it was unconstitutional to make these concessions to the PKK (Romano, 2006, p.55).

Despite the rejection of his draft, Ozal enacted two laws allowing the use of Kurdish language among the Kurdish people and the publication of Kurdish newspapers in Turkey. Thus, the speaking of Kurdish was finally legalized within Turkey, and the Kurds could then read the news in their own language. Ozal also freed many political prisoners by approving a limited amnesty. In the same year, despite strong opposition even from his own party (ANAP), Ozal also stated that he would offer a general amnesty to all Kurdish and Turkish guerillas on the condition that the PKK completely ceased its fight against Ankara (White, 2000, p.162).

Despite these freedoms, the Kurdish publications were regularly harassed and their owners were charged with separatism by the police. Further, although the Kurds were allowed to use their language freely on the streets, the merchants were still not allowed to advertise their goods in Kurdish on their shops (McKiernan, 2006). Additionally, the region (11 provinces)

continued to be kept under the military emergency rule. The police and the military units were allowed to apply a special terror law according to which they could detain anybody for 45 days without any charge. Further, the punishment for crimes were double compared to other areas of the country since was a war of zone (McKiernan, 2006, p.28). According to a report published in 1992, the number of journalists that were killed in the region was the highest in the world (McKiernan, 2006, p.105). The police were unable to solve these crimes and referred to them as “perpetrators unknown”.

Finally, none of the parties within the Turkish National Assembly displayed their willingness to talk or enter into a dialogue with the Kurdish deputies of HEP. They were viewing HEP as the agent of the PKK within the Turkish Government. For example, in 1991, a Kurdish deputy took her oath in Kurdish saying, “we will protect the Turko-Kurdish brotherhood” (McDowall, 2000, p.433). Many of the right and far right deputies were outraged that a Kurdish deputy spoke Kurdish in the heart of the republic.

In 1991, Abdullah made another statement that the PKK would definitely accept federalist solutions based on negotiated compromise within the borders of Turkey. He was basically asking for the release of all PKK prisoners, halt of the army offensives, and free political activity for the Kurds (McDowall, 2000). In 1994, the PKK administration asked again for a solution through dialogue, particularly indicating that these wishes were not due to any weaknesses of the organization. However, similar to previous offers, Ankara did not respond to this peace call, either (O’Ballance, 1996).

### ***Religious Dimension of the Kurdish Issue***

Towards the beginnings of 1990s, the PKK faced a new threat against its goal of Kurdish national revival—the reestablishment of the religious constituency in Kurdistan and in the other

parts of Turkey. As indicated before, at the beginning, the PKK attacked all religious institutions because religion was seen as a veil of conservatism and ignorance in the Marxist doctrine.

Abdullah had thought that by attacking to Islam, he would help the Kurds save themselves from backwardness and oppressed conditions (Romano, 2006, p.134). The destruction of the traditional ties of religion between the Turks and Kurds was necessary to create the new Kurdish mentality. For example, during 1970s, a typical Kurd from Kurdistan opposed to Kurdish national rights by indicating that; “Sir, we are all Muslims. We are brothers. It is not important to speak Kurdish either” (Romano, 2006, p.139).

Beginning with the start of 1990, Sunni Kurds again fell into the orbit of the right and Islamic oriented political parties (ANAP and DYP), which significantly reduced support for PKK activities. During this term, Ankara increased the funds (with the money mainly provided by the Saudi and Iranian governments) for the religious activities throughout the Turkey. For example, the number of religious institutions (mosques and student hostels) increased from 200 to approximately 1200 in just a couple years (McDowall, 2000).

In the meantime, an anti-ethnic Islamic movement, Hezbollah Yumruki (the Fist of God) began to grow in numbers in Kurdish areas. The leaders and preachers of Hezbollah (which should not be confused with the worldwide-known Lebanon Shia group) were trained in Iran according to Shia traditions. Although the Turkish Hezbollah did not directly attack the secular Turkish state, they executed many Kurds and also some secular people in a short period of time (McDowall, 2000, p.434).

The city of Batman became headquarter of Hezbollah units. It became common, on any given day during the 1990s for Hezbollah to kill a PKK member or a sympathizer in broad daylight (McKiernan, 2006). The police were unable to solve these assassinations committed

against the Kurdish nationalists and the secular journalists. Until to the end of 1993, no suspects were arrested for the commission of these crimes, and these large numbers of deaths created a climate of fear throughout the country. Thus, the secular leftists and the Kurdish nationalists claimed that the Turkish government was assisting the Hezbollah by turning a blind eye to these atrocities and by arming Hezbollah recruits to conduct their jihad against the PKK (McDowall, 2000). Unable to fight against this new contra-guerilla group, the PKK fired bullets at the local mosques located in Kurdistan as retaliation. Thus, once again, it was the Kurds that were killing other Kurds (McKiernan, 2006, p.104).

Due to the emergence of Hezbollah Yumruki, the PKK changed its attitude against Islam. The PKK cadre soon realized that Islam could be used as a potential social force for their goal (White, 2000). Thus, they soon created an image that the religion of Islam and Kurdish national revival were not mutually exclusive and formed Islamic associations named as the Partiya Islami Kurdistan (PIK), and as the Islamic Movement (IH) in the region (White, 2000, p.49).

Later, the PKK established a liaison office in Iran and trained its recruits with Shia tradition as a counterattack to Turkish Hezbollah's acts. In return, Iran allowed the PKK to have twenty military bases in Iranian territory that could be used for the PKK offensives against Turkey (McDowall, 2000). Further, Ocalan ordered a special group of PKK members to study the Koran and the science of hadith to find supporting arguments that could be used for its national struggle against the Turks. Using Islamic arguments, Ocalan planned to inspire the religious Kurds and increase their support for PKK activities (Bal and Laciner, 2004).

### ***The Battle of Sirnak***

After 1991, the Kurdish mass movement in Turkey intensified due to the unexpected consequence of the allied protection of Iraqi Kurds in northern Iraq. The PKK entered into

northern Iraq and captured large amounts of weapons and arms (the ones abandoned by the Iraqi army) before the coalition forces left the country. Additionally, since the Iraqi army left the north, there occurred a power vacuum occurred in the north, where the Iraqi Kurds formed the majority. Thus, the PKK was able to establish safe havens in the areas close to Turkey's border by taking advantage of the power vacuum. Soon, the PKK administration began to smuggle recruits from Europe to its training bases in northern Iraq. Thousands of recruits were trained here and directly sent to the Turkish front. Having border with Turkey, the bases in northern Iraq was much helpful for the PKK than the bases located in Bekaa Valley in Lebanon (McKiernan, 2006).

However, under pressure from Turkey and the United states, the Iraqi Kurds were pressured to attack the PKK members located in their region. Although the coalition established in northern Iraq was international, the safety of the soldiers who were employed in the operation Provide Comfort largely depended on the United States air force based in Incirlik, Turkey. Thus, not encouraging the Iraqi Kurds to fight against the PKK would cause the U.S. to lose its privilege to use a Turkish air base in Turkey. Without this base, Saddam would kill the coalition soldiers through its air forces (McKiernan, 2006, p.65).

As a result, the U.S. forced the Iraqi Kurds to gather intelligence on PKK rebels to help Turkey suppress the Kurdish rebellion. Additionally, the U.S. AWACS radar planes gathered information about the movements of PKK rebels in Iraq and downloaded all of the intelligence to a Turkish tracking center. On the other hand, Ankara threatened the Iraqi Kurds that if they did not cooperate with them against the PKK, food and medical supplies to Iraqi Kurds would be delayed and Ankara would stop buying oil, which would deprive the Iraqi Kurds from the cash money. Iraqi Kurds were desperate because if they did not obey Turkey's terms, they would lose

their last chance to establish an autonomous region within Iraq (McKiernan, 2006, p.67). Thus, a common practice, which was applied by the U.S. cavalry to local Indian tribes during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was applied to the Turkish Kurds; the Turkish Kurds and Iraqi Kurds fought against each other.

Additionally, the special contra-guerrilla forces trained within the Turkish National police became highly effective in the region especially after 1995. After the mid-1990s, the PKK no longer enjoyed the freedom of control in the area (Romano, 2006, p.57). Nevertheless, in 1992, the PKK invaded a town called Sirnak. All the state buildings were captured and the authority of Turkish state was destroyed. In response to this attack, the security forces started a massive offensive to the town of Sirnak. Most of the buildings were destroyed and close to 2000 local Kurds lost their lives (McDowall, 2000, p.435).

Half of the city was destroyed. The Turkish government had argued that the PKK had invaded the city to liberate it. However, in the morning of the destruction, the local people were saying that there was no PKK force in the town at all. Thus, there was no battle between the two sides. Rather, it was punishment applied by the Turkish army to the local population in Sirnak (De Bellaigue, 2009, p.228).

The Battle of Sirnak had not been a battle but a drawn-out punitive spasm, a two-day spree by vandals wearing the colors of the Turkish state and trashing anything they saw. (De Bellaigue, 2009, p.228)

After the so-called recapture of Sirnak, Turkish troops also entered into northern Iraq (with the permission of the Kurdish regional Government) and hundreds of PKK fighters were killed (McDowall, 2000, p.436). Some of the PKK troops fled into Iran. After this battle, serious critics were directed against Abdullah's strategy of directly confronting the Turkish army in northern Iraq. Following the defeat of PKK in Bahdinan in 1992, Ocalan declared that the

PKK was ready to abandon the armed struggle in favor of a negotiated solution. He even accepted that the Kurdish deputies would conduct the negotiations with the Turkish government instead of PKK administrators (Romano, 2006, p.56).

Abdullah indicated, “There is no reason why we should not extend our ceasefire... I personally would like to be able to return unarmed to the south east in order to engage in political activity” (McDowall, 2000, p.437). Abdullah also commanded to Kurdish people to celebrate the Newruz in peaceful manners and avoid any confrontations with the security forces. Additionally, Abdullah and Kemal Burkay presented a joint peace settlement to Ankara. However, the Turkish government turned it down. The ceasefire was extended indefinitely later, but the Turkish side avoided giving a response to it (White, 2000, p.169). Rather, Ankara accelerated the intensity of the fight (White, 2000, p.173).

Although they did not mention anything regarding the self-determination of Kurds, Abdullah and Kemal’s peace request has not been taken as serious. Many politicians and leaders of civil communities commented that Abdullah was scared to fight again after the Bahdinan defeat. Accordingly, he was trying to be successful in the political arena. Contrary to this view, McDowall argued that the PKK wanted to negotiate with the Turkish state since it was then supported by majority of the Kurds (McDowall, 2000, p.440).

President Ozal thought that Abdullah’s peace request was a great opportunity to end the further alienation of the Kurdish population in the region and PKK’s growing authority in the region. Thus, he planned a limited amnesty for PKK members. However, only one day after Ocalan’s peace request, Ozal suddenly died of a heart attack (McDowall, 2000; De Bellaigue, 2009). Unfortunately, his last words were not taken seriously, and the new governing regime continued to seek a military solution rather than a political one. McDowall indicated that the

history between the Turks and Kurds would be much different than today if Ozal survived his heart attack; “Turkey and Ocalan had lost the only statesman who had proved capable of imaginative if modest gestures towards the Kurds” (McDowall, 2000, p.438).

His follower, Demirel had taken no steps to resolve the Kurdish question through political means. Similar to a common belief by the public, Demirel took Abdullah Ocalan’s request for peace as a sign of weakness. Although the new Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller, was in line with Turgut Ozal, her policies were not approved by the parliamentary. Ciller argued that an autonomous Kurdish government had to be established in the region similar the one that was established in the Basque region of Spain. A large majority, even within her party, opposed her ideas.

Thus, to prevent the loss of support for her government, Tansu Ciller soon became an advocate of a military solution. A new military offensive started, but this time within Turkey. Hundreds of thousand so troops were deployed into the region, supported by assault helicopters and fighter jets (McDowall, 2000). In less than a week, approximately 100 PKK members and civilians were killed and houses were demolished that provided shelter to PKK (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.224). Several pro-PKK deputies were jailed, and the process of village relocations was accelerated. A judicial inquiry, which occurred during the 2010s, later found that an execution squad was formed during Tansu Ciller’s government that was responsible for the death of more than 5,000 Kurds between 1993 and 1996 (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.224).

The military measures lasted until to the end of 1999. By 1999, it was reported that more than 3,500 villages and pastures were forcefully relocated to destroy the potential safe havens for PKK fighters. The witnesses of these relocations indicated that they were subjected to inhumane actions including; degrading behavior, arbitrary arrest, violence, torture, extra-judicial killings,



sexual victimization, and the destruction of their livestock and food stocks (McDowall, 2000, p.440).

The bureaucrats in Ankara made a serious mistake by not negotiating with Ocalan in a position where the PKK gave up on autonomy, self-determination, and separation (Romano, 2006, p.56). Many scholars argued that reacting positively to the PKK's offer in a positive manner would have ended the Kurdish problem in Turkey (Romano, 2006; McDowall, 2000; White, 2000; Olson, 1996). If the Turkish state had stopped its military activity and accepted the solution, the majority of the Kurds would even have sided with the state and the influence of the PKK would have seriously declined. On the contrary, the new Prime Minister Tansu Ciller banned the only Kurdish political party, the HEP, from the political arena. Although the members of HEP formed a new party under the name of DEP (Democratic Labor Party), the state Constitutional Court decided that the members of the DEP would be stripped of their parliamentary immunity (McDowall, 2000, p.438). As a response, the PKK declared that it would return to armed activities and would kill as many people as possible in the new conflict (White, 2000).

By the end of 1993, it was reported that the PKK was the only organization that was standing for the Kurdish national revival. There were no other competitors for the Kurdish national struggle. They had thousands of active supporters. Further, there were hundreds of thousands Kurds who had a family member, a friend, or a relative supporting the PKK. Thus, the armed rebel of the PKK had actually achieved to create a coherent national movement that was unlikely to disappear (McDowall, 2000, p.440).

In March 1994, the DEP deputies formally withdrew from participating in next elections because some of the party members were assassinated. In the same year, six of the DEP deputies

were arrested after the PKK killed six army cadets in Istanbul. Two of these deputies were sentenced to fifteen years in jail, whereas the remaining four fled to Europe before the court decisions. In 1994, DEP was closed down. Former members of the DEP established the HADEP (People's Democratic Party). The HADEP was able to get more than 1.2 million votes even though there was a widespread intimidation among its candidates and supporters. Only in two years, six HADEP officials killed and thirty-two of them were arrested.

In 1995, the government closed down a moderate Kurdish party called Democratic Mass Party (DKP). Unlike the PKK or the HADEP, the DKP was only seeking cultural, political, and civil rights without making separatist propaganda. It was shocking for the party members because they never advocated the use of violence or separatism. White argued that these court orders created an atmosphere in which being Kurdish was enough to invite repression—thus confirming the PKK's propaganda (White, 2000, p.171). Although the number of PKK insurgencies significantly declined between 1993 and 1998, the nationalist Kurds and sympathizers were further driven into the PKK's arms due to heavy military measures discriminative political actions and applied by Ankara (White, 2000, p.173).

### ***Hopes for Reconciliation***

In 1996, Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the coalition government started to meet with Ismail Nacar to find a solution for a peaceful settlement in the war between the Turkish military and the PKK. Ismail Nacar, being a well-known Islamist writer, was chosen as a mediator by the pro-PKK political party HADEP. Although the meetings were held secretly, the media soon found about and made them public. Tansu Ciller, the second leader of the coalition government condemned Erbakan's approach saying that; "I have a very clear approach; the state does not talk to bandits" (White, 2000, p.40). Additionally, it was later found out that two senior military

officials visited Erbakan just two days after these peace talks were made public. After this meeting, Erbakan publicly announced that; “We will not sit down at the table with terrorists. We will not give one inch in our struggle with terrorism. We will not surrender our insistence on a United States” (White, 2000, p.40).

In 1998, Abdullah announced a new peace plan to Turkish government. He asked to Ankara to accept his seven conditions;

1. The end of (Turkish) military operations against Kurdish villages;
2. The return of forcibly displaced Kurdish refugees to their villages;
3. The abolition of the “village guard system”;
4. Autonomy for the Kurdish region within Turkey’s existing borders;
5. The granting to the Kurdish people of all democratic rights enjoyed by Turks;
6. Official recognition of Kurdish identity, language and culture; and
7. Freedom of religion and pluralism. (Romano, 2006, p.145)

### ***The Capture of Abdullah***

By 1999, the number of Turkish and Kurdish people who lost their lives during the fights reached to 35,000(White, 2000, p.180). The PKK was struggling since the evacuations of the villages and the pastures cut their access to food and shelter. Further, its fight against the state was failing. Exploiting this opportunity, Turkey moved more than 10,000 troops to Syrian’s border in 1998 and asked the Syrian government to expel the PKK and hand over Abdullah Ocalan to Turkish Authorities (White, 2000, p.180). Syria, which was vulnerable to air attacks both from Turkey and Israel, immediately stopped the PKK’s activity within its territory and placed Abdullah Ocalan on a plane to Russia (McDowall, 2000).

A couple months later, Ocalan came to Rome seeking asylum, but the Italian authorities immediately arrested him. He was placed in a military hospital near Rome (White, 2000). Thousands of Kurds from around the world gathered in front of the hospital in which Ocalan was held. In the meantime, twenty-seven Kurds who were held in Turkish prisons immolated themselves as a gesture of solidarity to Ocalan (White, 2000, p.182). The Rome Court of Appeal ruled that Ocalan be placed under house arrest in Rome and should be free to move about only in Rome. In an effort to leave behind his terrorist identity hiding in Syria, Ocalan ordered the cessation of armed fight against the Turkish targets.

Later, the Italian government expelled Ocalan on January 16, 1999. Because Germany had an international warrant for Abdullah Ocalan, Italian government tried to give him to Germany. However, Berlin refused to accept him, fear domestic retaliation by its half million Kurdish citizens. In the meantime, Italy refused to hand Abdullah Ocalan to Turkey. So, he was sent to Russia again. Under pressure from Turkey, Ocalan was sent to Netherlands, but the Dutch authorities refused to accept him at the airport (McDowall, 2000; White, 2000). Greek intelligence officers escorted Abdullah during these trips in Europe (White). It was then clear that Europe had no inclination of confronting both the U.S. and Turkey by giving asylum to Abdullah Ocalan.

So, he was sent to Greece. Greece conducted a high-risk intelligence operation and sent Abdullah Ocalan first to Crete and then to its Embassy at Nairobi. The plan was to hide Ocalan and until he could be transferred to a safe location. However, CIA operatives abducted Abdullah Ocalan from the Greeks and handed him to Turkish Special forces on February 15 1999, waiting at the airport in Nairobi (McDowall, 2000). Thus most serious damage to the PKK occurred in 1999, when Ocalan was brought to Turkey (Romano, 2006). Millions of Turks were happy

whereas the Kurds were shocked and angry. Protests soon started in the Kurdish cities of Turkey and in major European capitals (de Bellaigue, 2009; White, 2000, p.186).

Abdullah soon realized that he was wrong in his decision to flee to Europe by trusting to so-called friends of the Kurds (White, 2000). He was placed in a prison located in the Imrali Island in the sea of Marmora, which is only twenty miles from Istanbul. On June 29, 1999, Ocalan was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. For three years, the Turkish authorities refrained from executing Ocalan (Romano, 2000, p.58). In 2002, the Turkish parliament outlawed capital punishment, and Abdullah Ocalan was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Today, millions of Kurds still adore him as their leader (de Bellaigue, 2009). However, after imprisonment, Abdullah has been blamed for disavowing the principles he set before for recruiting thousands of Kurds. He argued that the future of the Kurds lied within Turkish national entity (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.236). He immediately ordered to the PKK to withdraw from Turkey and locate in a safe zone within northern Iraq. Abdullah also ordered PKK members to put down their arms and come back to the cities to seek change within the system for democratic ways in their fight for Kurdish national inspirations (Romano, 2006).

Mehmet Can Yuce (he was imprisoned by Turkish authorities before Abdullah was captured) harshly criticized Abdullah for his demand of a ceasefire between the PKK and Turkey; “He dropped to his knees before the enemy ... He surrendered in the full sense of the word, he committed his betrayal and gradually established the paramount of surrender, betrayal and the practice of elimination in the party; in this way he brought about a defeat unparalleled in our history” (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.236).

Throughout his imprisonment, Abdullah enabled his control on the PKK by sending his directives to the PKK through his communication with his lawyers. Additionally, rather than appointing a person who would replace the charisma and authority of Abdullah, the remaining PKK leaders formed a ruling council consisting of the top three commanders of the PKK—Cemil Bayik (the most senior at ARGK cadre), Osman Ocalan (Abdullah's brother), Murat Karayilan (senior ARGK commander) (White, 2000).

In line with Abdullah's orders, the PKK replaced its name with that of the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and argued that the PKK was then a legal pro-western political party seeking to establish at least federalism within Turkey (Romano, 2006). In 2003, the party's name changed to Kongra-Gel (People's Democracy Congress). The adoption of new names and the decreasing of original goal of independent Kurdistan to just that of a multi-cultural Turkish state that guarantees Kurdish rights was a clear indication that the PKK was trying to change its previous terrorist image to a new one that defends the human rights and pro-democracy movements (Romano, 2006, p.144). Therefore, the Congra-Gel (PKK) actions came to be focused on more peaceful protests demanding Kurdish cultural rights after 2003.

### ***Justice and Development Party***

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been more successful than the previous political parties in terms of fighting against the Kurdish conflict. The AKP became successful in securing votes of Kurds by attracting mass support. Kurds knew that the torture and the extrajudicial applications had seriously declined during this term and that poverty was also reduced by economic measures applied in the region. In 2004, the AKP legalized the use of Kurdish in private teaching environments. For the first time since the 1980s, the Kurds are also allowed to give their children Kurdish names (McKiernan, 2006, p.306). Further, different from

the previous repentance laws, the AKP enacted a new law (Social Rehabilitation Act) to allow a large number of PKK members to surrender themselves without being subject to any kind of punishment (on the condition that they were not involved in fighting against law enforcement officials) (Gurbey & Ferhad, 2000, p.142; Ahmed & Gunter, 2005).

Finally, unlike his predecessors, Erdogan promoted the idea of the unity of Kurds and Turks and the religion of Islam. For example, De Bellaigue notes that Abdulbari Han, a Kurdish nationalist, who provided dozens of recruits to the PKK, was now advocating for Erdogan's conciliatory policies (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.247).

In 1990s, Kurdish town demonstrations would be encircled by police (including the Special teams ready to kill tens) and often ended with killings and torture (de Bellaigue, 2009). If any demonstrator would produce the colors of the PKK (red, yellow, and green), the police were free to shoot. Even, a grocer in the region told McKiernan that he had hard times because he had used Turkish words to his store windows with the colors used by the PKK. Police officers told him that using those three colors was prohibited because it suggested the PKK. The police chief of the city of Batman had the same paranoia and ordered the replacement of all green lights on the traffic signals with the blue ones (McKiernan, 2006, p.102).

Now, thousands of Kurds could gather freely and chant for illegal separatist slogans and only a single armored police car supported with ten or twenty police officers was present. "After the speeches there will be a concert, with songs sung in Zaza and Kurmanji. And after that, everyone will go home. No arrests; no torture; no killings. Eastern Anatolia has changed for the better..." (de Bellaigue, 2009,p.252).

However, the PKK viewed the AKP's economic policies as a threat to its establishment. Thus, the leading pro-PKK politicians started a campaign to prevent the public from voting for

the AKP. For example, Sirri Sakik said to the Kurdish voters that: “No true Kurd, should pay attention to the blandishments of the Justice and Development Party” (de Bellaigue, 2009, p.252).

Some scholars argue that the AKP was under pressure from the European Union when implementing new rights for the Kurds (Jawideh, 2006; Romano, 2006). In order to meet the Copenhagen criteria, which are required for full accession to the European Union, the Turkish government had to make adjustments to the existing laws concerning human rights as well as other codes (Ahmed & Gunter, 2005). As a result of this pressure, AKP enacted laws that give greater freedoms to the Kurds (Romano, 2006).

Romano argued that in the absence of EU demands and possible rewards, the shift in Turkish policies towards the Kurds would not be so easy. Turkish society still lacks the full understanding of the origin of the problem between the Turks and Kurds. Being subjected to state propaganda for more than thirty years, the people in Turkey view the PKK as a terrorist organization. Thus, the main obstacle in front of a resolution requires informing the Turkish public of the fundamental problems of Kurdish alienation in the country (Romano, 2006). The Turkish masses should be told that a solution to the Kurdish issue does not necessarily require the secession of the Kurdish regions from Turkey.

### ***PKK: The Defender of the Kurds***

Today, most intellectuals accept the fact that the existence and the activities of the PKK made it impossible for the Turkish governments to ignore the Kurdish problem in Turkey, although the state used any means to deny the existence of Kurds until 1991 (Romano, 2006, p.121). The PKK succeeded in bringing the Kurdish issue to the public agenda after the destruction of the Kurdish Uprising in Dersim, in 1930. Using its armed struggle, the PKK



forcefully brought the issue to the center of the public attention. In this way, Abdullah and his collaborators were able to negate the long established Kurdish psychology of impotence (Romano, 2006, p.160). Further, western scholars and independent writers concede that it was the PKK that forced the government to repeal the official ban on the use of Kurdish language, and it was again the PKK that convinced the Turkish state to address Turkey's Kurds as Kurds for the first time in its history (White, 2000, p.156; Romano, 2006, p.160).

Thus, not the Turkish political leaders, but the PKK has been credited for the recent removal of bans, the enacting of new rights for the Kurds, and the bringing of international attention to the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. Being the leader of this fight, Ocalan became the symbol of Kurdishness around the world. In fact, the Kurds in Iraq and Iran also attached themselves to Ocalan as a leader of all Kurds. Great demonstrations erupted in Europe, Iran, and Iraq, which were all organized by the non-Turkey Kurds when Ocalan was caught in Nairobi (Jawideh, 2006; Romano, 2006, p.163). Thus, whether the Turks like it or not, many Kurds today believe that it was Abdullah and the PKK who taught them that they were Kurd, not mountain Turks (McKiernan, 2009, p.157).

## **PART II. THE FREEDOM FIGHTER'S OWN STORY**

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the life history are Deniz's and may or may not be accurate. The goal is not to provide a historical document per se, but to provide insight into one terrorist's understanding of his life.

\*\*\* To assist the readers, there is an appendix on page 985 that lists the names of the major individuals and the abbreviations in the life story.

## **PART II.1 BECOMING A TERRORIST**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE EARLY YEARS**

My childhood was spent in a village connected to the city of Silvan. We were a family of seven boys and three girls, and I was the third child of the family. There is an average of two years between each of us, and the eldest of us is now 46. My parents are still living. They both learned to speak Turkish later in life. My mother was a housewife, and my father would help with livestock and agriculture. Until I was 15 years old, I raised animals in the pastures of our village. My father enjoyed living in nature and so would frequently go hunting for game.

Although our harvest was usually sufficient to provide for us, some years we wouldn't be able to make enough to support our large family. Those years, my father would go down to the town and seek odd jobs to provide what we were lacking. The town was also where we would buy some of our necessities, such as tea and sugar, and we often carried home several sacks of flour. Items like shoes, clothing and gas oil were also purchased in town. Because we were raising pasture animals, we could meet much of our need for meat and milk directly from them. We re-used almost everything. The clothes that were originally bought for elder siblings would become those of the younger ones later. For most of my life, I wore the castoff clothes that my elder brothers had once worn. I don't really recall having had any new clothes bought especially for me over my whole childhood.

### **VILLAGE LIFE**

Since raising animals and agriculture were the main source of living for us villagers, it was very important for a family to have a son. When a woman was giving birth, only other women were allowed in her house. The men and children would wait in another house. After the birth, one woman from the birth house would go to the father to tell him whether it was a boy

or a girl. If this woman announced it was a son, she would be given a tip, but if she announced it was a girl, the father would say, “What kind of announcement is this?” and would often beat her.

Unlike my other siblings, my parents gave me a lot of extra attention. It wasn't until later that I discovered the reason for this. I had been born when my mother was only six months along. Neighbors, relatives, and even my parents did not give me much chance of surviving. My parents were so concerned about me that I received extra good care.

Watermelon, tobacco, grapes, wheat, and almost everything else would grow in our village. However, neighboring villages had fruits like pomegranates and pears that we did not have. At harvest time, the people of the other village would load the vegetables and fruit they had collected onto their mules and bring them to us. We would trade them our vegetables, grains, and fruit that didn't grow in their village. Wheat was the most sought after product. Money was never the question. We just bartered. We might receive a bowl of pears for a bowl of wheat.

There was a large river in the village where all the villagers went fishing. We sometimes fished with dynamite; sometimes with a fishing pole, and sometimes with just a bucket. We could scoop up a lot of fish simply by dipping a bucket into the water. My elder brothers had taught me how to fish, and it was something I enjoyed very much. There was a tradition in the village that whichever family went fishing, they would share the fish they caught with the rest of the families. So, whenever any family went fishing, everyone would eat fish.

We also used this river to wash ourselves. Because there were no bathrooms in any of the houses, all the villagers would gather together at the water, once a week. The women and the children would wash themselves in a place away from the men, and the men also had their own area. However, I do remember my mother washing us in a bucket inside our home, especially in

the winter. She would pour hot water on my head and my eyes would burn because of the soap. I didn't like this, but if I complained or cried, she would hit my head with the water dipper.

Our religious lifestyle depended on our living conditions at that time. We were not a wealthy village, but with only a dilapidated mosque and no imam in it. Later on, as a village, we built a mosque together. We pooled our money and bought an imam from another village, but he left us six months later. After that, we didn't have an imam for years, which meant we could only pray on Fridays, with no one to lead the other weekly prayers. But, as secular villagers, we weren't very good at applying religious discipline to ourselves, so it wasn't long before we even gave up on Friday prayers.

But my parents, and the other elders of the family, continued to pray five times a day; they just didn't go to the mosque. We children were never required to do anything we did not want to do. My father would say, "My family can pray whenever they want." and yet my parents were very strict when it came to family values and compassion, and would tell us to always ask for what we needed and to never steal anything.

I didn't understand the reason, but my family was very sensitive about lies and theft. Of course, since we were very young, we didn't know what stealing even was. It happened that an elderly man in the village had a fig orchard. When I was five or six, we would gather with other children and eat figs from this orchard. This neighbor, Bisar, would notice us, but he wouldn't be able to do anything since he was old and couldn't chase us. Despite all the times he stood there just watching us consume his harvest, he never complained about us to our families. If our parents had learned our fig-stealing habit, I guess they would have beaten us. But we were so young, we considered it a game. We liked it: free figs! But in the following years, our families taught us how bad it was to steal something that belonged to somebody else.

We called our wise, elderly people “the dignitaries of the village,” and we respected their experience and opinion. For instance, if there were a dispute between two families, they would listen to both sides and punish the wrongdoers. The punishment would always be monetary. Their word was law. If they said, “The family of the victim will be compensated with four goats and one cow!” the other side had to fulfill it. The criminal sentence was binding. Such an institution was a very good tradition for our village to have, I think. The fact that the police station was far away from our village, and that there were hardly any cars in the village, meant we relied on the dignitaries of the village for making peace between the families and preventing acrimonious incidents from getting worse.

Our family didn't practice polygamy although it is very common in the Eastern Anatolia region (i.e., Kurdistan). My mother is my father's cousin, but their marriage was not political: it was for love. Until the 90's, our family hadn't had any brides from any other family but our own, nor did we give any brides to any other families. Our marriages had mostly been between our own family members. This changed after we moved to the city in 1990.

there we had a two-story house, and we kept animals downstairs. There were all kinds of animals: goats, sheep, cows... We would stay upstairs with the uncles' families. Our house had six bedrooms, a living room, and two entrances. There was no electricity, TV, fridge, or even a driveway. There was also no gender discrimination in our family. We were all allowed to eat together.

As relatives, we made sure to live very close to each other. That's why the relationships between us were so good. My mother and my aunts would all do the housework, cook and take care of the children together.

On the other hand, while making a decision in our family, tradition dictated that there had to be a consensus. My mother, uncles, and my uncles' wives would come together and set up a family council. No one, especially no man, could make a decision on their own. For example, my mother must pre-approve anything that my father planned to do.

When I was a child, each household had a radio, and everything we learned about Turkey and the world, we heard through that radio. There was a channel called "The Voice of Erivan," which featured a Kurdish broadcast, and since it was forbidden to speak Kurdish in Turkey, they would broadcast from Armenia. We listened to this channel religiously. Many families also had tape players. We had one, and could listen to Kurdish tapes brought in from Armenia and Iraq. Şirvan Perwer was very famous Kurdish singer at that time.

My cousin used to live in the city, and he would bring the tapes to give me and my elder brothers so that we could learn about Kurdish culture. He educated us on how to treat them: "Listen to them. Hide them well. Don't ever let the soldiers see them, or they will set your house on fire." Since I was young, I couldn't understand very well what it all meant. The only concept which I think I understood, was that the Turkish soldiers didn't like anything Kurdish.

I would ask my cousin why it was forbidden to listen to these tapes, and he told me that Kurdish geography was divided into four sections because of outside forces, and had been kept repressed. I was young and the truth was new for me, so I was very curious about what I was learning. That's why we were very careful to hide the tapes. When the soldiers performed raids, they would sometimes find these tapes, and then beat everyone in the entire household, breaking all the tapes.

Our village was quite small; only 35 to 40 households in total, and our populace was extremely illiterate. When I was young, someone from the village went into the city, without



telling the villagers, and took over all the land on which the village was built. We only discovered this when a water dam was planning to be built, and my grandfather learned that his land was registered to someone else. Therefore, we could get no payment from the allowance which had been put aside for the construction of the dam on our lands. Since we had no official paper deed proving our lands were actually our own, we couldn't even seek justice. No matter how hard we fought the injustice, the government gave the money to the family who had swindled us through legalities.

The closest police station was an hour and a half away from the village, and after the military coup, the soldiers brought a radio for the mayor of the village. In order to provide good reception for the area, they also put a tall antenna on the roof of his house. Thereafter, whenever an incident happened in the village, or there was an electricity shut-off, the mayor would inform the authorities via the radio.

### **SCHOOL AND KURDISH LANGUAGE**

My parents registered my eldest brother in a school that was far away from our village, and he had to walk there. But after a while, he dropped out, because of all the things he suffered while attending. Of course, he did this without letting our parents know. He would still leave the house in the morning, saying, "I'm going to school." However, he would then hide around the farms and gardens or just wander around until the school was finished for the day. When my parents received his school report, they saw that he hadn't attended the school at all, after the first three weeks.

This made my father furious. When he asked my brother why he had done this, my brother complained that he didn't understand the language spoken there, saying, "I don't

understand any Turkish. I speak Kurdish at home, at work, and in the marketplace through the evenings. I understand nothing in that school." But then, he also told me how strict his teacher had been. "They beat the children in the school. They make us stand on one foot for minutes at a time, and they rap us on our knuckles until I can't even feel my fingers." Because of all of those bad experiences, my elder brother didn't even finish primary school.

I never went to school. I never liked school. It had no charm for me, and I had been affected by my brothers' experiences as well. The language they spoke in the school wasn't the same language we spoke at home or in the village. That language was only spoken by soldiers or teachers, who treated people badly. Both groups were cruel. Thankfully, my parents didn't force me to go to school. My father never approved of us going to school because of the treatment my brothers had received, and naturally, they weren't successful at school. Our community was handicapped in their minds because of the understanding that, "We were Kurdish, and would never be rewarded by the unyielding state, no matter how hard we might study in school." In the following years, as we moved to the city of Batman, some of my siblings studied only until middle school and a few until high school. But no one in my family had a chance to study at university level...

### **MY CHILDHOOD AND PARENTS**

My family was very attached to their children, especially to me. More than all my other siblings, they valued me a great deal. As I mentioned, this was because I was born prematurely.

Another reason that they valued me so much was that my family didn't hear from me for 18 years after I joined the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK.) My father got so depressed during

that period that he had two heart attacks because of it, followed later by tuberculosis. He couldn't endure my absence, even though he had nine other children.

My father struggled a lot in his life. The poor man was always restless, because of my absence or because of all the incidents which happened in the village. That's why I feel much closer to my father than my mother. He has always been so sensitive. He never physically abused any of his children, through his entire life.

In the culture of our family, children should never be beaten; neither girls or boys. Discipline in the family was maintained through discussion. Our elders would always caution us, saying "Do this like that, or don't do that. That's bad, or, don't let anyone talk poorly about us. Don't tarnish the name of the family!" At one time my younger brother started gambling in secret. He racked up a debt of 400,000 Liras. When my family heard about this, they did nothing to hurt his feelings. The elders in the family gathered together and warned him not to do it again, because it was a bad pastime and a horrible example.

I used to love my maternal grandparents and would always visit them often. My grandmother (God bless her) lived to be more than a hundred years old.

I used to hang out with my uncle's son, although, in my opinion, he was totally clumsy. He was always getting in trouble for no good reason and getting himself beaten up. It was as if he never knew how to act, under any circumstances. We would wander around together, day and night. We would either play soccer or play marbles, when we weren't taking the animals to pasture. I loved soccer. I've been a Beşiktaş team supporter since my childhood. When I was a kid, there was no field in our village where we could play soccer, so we would play it in flat pastures.

I would leave home, taking the animals with me, around 4:00 to 5:00 o'clock every morning, and come back before sunset. My elder brothers would take the goats and sheep to pasture, and I would take out the kids and lambs. I was always exhausted when I returned home, so I would go to bed immediately after dinner. I was never a calm kid, however, I kept true to the values my parents had taught us. I never caused any neighbors to talk badly about me – in any of the places we lived. I never had a fight with my siblings, or with the neighbors' children. I always kept myself away from such problematic situations. When someone swore at me or humiliated me, I would never retaliate at that time. I would leave the scene and look for something to occupy my mind, and although I was furious, I would hold my tongue, bottle my anger and try to keep command of myself. I would make peace, leaving no ill-will behind.

Contrary to my brothers, I would comprehend incidents and learn quickly from prior experience. Although I had never attended any school, I learned reading and writing before my elder brothers, which caused my father to get angry with them. He would say, "Sons, you've been attending school for many years now, but you neither know how to read nor write. "This kid," pointing to me, "knows how, though he's never been to school."

While I was growing up, I had the reputation of being mature and responsible. Throughout my childhood, I had never lied. I had always been honest. Even if I made a mistake, I always confessed it.

For example, there was an incident from when I was young: there were many wild pigs in our town. Therefore, every night, one of our big families would always stay in our vineyards, keeping guard with a gun. One afternoon, when a member of our relatives went to keep guard, he forgot to take his gun with him. In the evening my mother gave me a gun and told me, "Take this to him, as thieves or the pigs might hurt him without it."

Well, I started to play with the gun on the way. I loaded it by mistake and pulled the trigger, and the gun fired. When our relative received the gun, he said, “This has recently been used. I smell the gunpowder!” I told him what had happened, even though I could have lied if I had wanted. Although I knew my mother would chew me out, I also told her the whole truth. My mother said, “Son, if you were curious about the gun, why did not you tell me? Just let me know if you’re interested, and I will show you how to use it.” My mother was expert with a gun, and was a tradition in our neighborhood back then. There were, without any exceptions, two Mauser rifles and a few guns in every house.

Since I never lied, I could not stand hearing others telling lies. Once, when my elder brother was telling a huge lie, I was so upset by it that I told my father everything that had really happened. My elder brother had filled our rifle with too much gun powder, and consequently, when he fired the rifle, the barrel split in half. My father had often warned us not to fill the rifle with too much powder. My elder brother thought our father would get angry with him, and did not tell him the truth. So, when I heard him lying, I couldn’t endure it and I said, “Dad, my brother put two or three extra grains of powder into the rifle, so that it would fire more powerfully.” My father turned to my brother and asked, “Is your little brother telling the truth?” When my brother said, “Yes,” my father got angry. “Son, why didn’t you tell the truth? Why this lying? Haven’t I told you many times that you shouldn’t tell lies?” My brother was punished verbally, but not physically.

### **MEETING SOLDIERS**

I had never seen a Turkish soldier until the coup of September 12, 1980. When I was a child, my father and my uncles used to tell us of their memories from their military service, but I

still didn't know what the presence of Turkish soldiers meant to us Kurds, but the military coup gave us our first chance to see and know them.

The soldiers set up a big camp with many tents, right at the entrance to our village. They remained there for about two months. Absolutely no one would dare to get close to their camp. Every two days, those soldiers would gather up all the males in the village, into the village square, except for the very young boys. We had no idea what they were planning. Even as children, the one thing we understood clearly, was that whenever soldiers arrived, they brought beatings along with them. First, they would force all the men they had gathered into the square, to lie down on the ground. Then they would beat them with rifle butts or their boots, smashing their heads until they lost consciousness. The women and the children weren't subjected to such treatment, but they were forced to watch this cruelty, screaming out at what they witnessed. No matter what happened, no one was allowed to leave the scene until the Turkish military commander allowed them to leave.

The raids of the village would always take place in the middle of the night, while we were asleep. A few soldiers would climb onto the roof of each house, while the rest would take all of us outside in groups, while they searched inside the houses, and surveyed the surroundings to ensure their own safety. While "searching" inside our houses, they would trash everything, and inventory all of our private belongings. However, to be fair, it is necessary to state as well that no Turkish soldiers ever took anything from us by force. There was never any seizure by violence.

Since the soldiers' arrival was always unpredictable, and usually at night while everyone was asleep, the men in the village had no time to hide. Eventually, the male elders became so fed up with beatings that they would sleep in the barns, hidden inside the straw, to avoid the

assaults. It was a confusing situation in the village, and although our people hadn't done anything wrong, we hid to avoid these attacks, which lasted about two months.

When the soldiers' raids of our village became routine, the villagers began to develop some evasive tactics. For example, when soldiers set off for a certain village, we devised various ways for the neighboring villages to inform the target village. Those who saw the military convoy would climb the nearby hill and inform the other village, and then they, in turn, would do the same for us.

"Wolves" was our code names for these soldiers. When soldiers approached a village, people would shout, "The wolves are here!" At that warning, all the men who could would run out of the village. Although they hadn't committed any crime, they ran away simply to avoid getting beaten. Their wives and children got left behind.

Ironically, we first heard of a group known as "Apo Sympathizers" as a result of these raids. When Turkish soldiers arrived in the village, they would ask, "Have you seen the 'Apo Sympathizers? Have you fed any of those men? Have they passed by the village?" At that time, we didn't know what the term even meant. We first learned of the existence of Apo, and his group of Kurdish Freedom Fighters, from the Turkish soldiers trying to eradicate them.

During this time, there was one other detail that struck me as odd. When soldiers arrived, the commander would already have a list of suspects. One by one, he would call out the names of the people on the list. It was not a discovery, but rather like an inspection. The list would consist of the names of all the male villagers. If one of the names were absent, they would ask his family and relatives where he was. If they had no good answer, each relative would be beaten. However, by this point, even beatings wouldn't scare anyone into breaking their silence. Neither the women nor the elderly would ever give away the hiding place of the men, no matter

how violently they were punished for not answering. The curious thing is that, at that time, our village didn't have a census or any other official state registration of our inhabitants, so how had the soldiers come to form such accurate lists? We had no idea.

It is important to note that the Turkish soldiers didn't kill anyone during these raids. But the beatings were extreme. True beatings! No soldier knew how to speak Kurdish. The commander generally communicated with the village through translations by the Kurdish villagers who knew Turkish. Another interesting fact, I noted during these inspections, was that soldiers never hurt the headman of the village or his family. All the regular villagers were routinely beaten, but the headman and his family was never abused.

The headman was an honest man, but, many times, we watched him lie to try and save us. For instance, when people in the square spoke with one another, the commander would demand to know about what they were talking. The headman would never tell the truth. One day, my mother warned our relatives to stay silent about where her brother was hidden. The commander heard her speaking and asked the headman, "What is this woman saying?" The headman pacified him by lying straight to his face. However, we never truly knew if he did this because he was forced to, or because he wanted to protect us.

Meanwhile, there was the economic toll on the village of the sudden appearance of a military camp on our doorstep. Sometimes a village animal disappeared during grazing time. As a herding village, this is something we were used to discovering. When the flock came back to the village, it was common to find that a few of them had accidentally been left behind in the mountain pastures. The shepherd only notices the lack once he returns to the village. Normally, the shepherd and a few other people would return to the mountain and take recovery of the missing animals. But, when the soldiers came to the village, they declared a night-time curfew,



causing the shepherds not to be able leave and look for their missing animals. Any money, meat, or milk the animal was worth, was simply lost along with the animal.

These were really bad days. Being forced to watch my father, my elder brothers, and the other respected men of the village getting severely beaten, broke my heart as well as the hearts of all the other boys in the village. But, being just a few, and young, there was nothing we could do. We could only stay silent, or weep in despair. If there were a hundred people in the village, there were two thousand soldiers. We were helpless. And that helpless suffering planted the seeds of hatred in our hearts. We had begun to learn to hate. We hated not only the soldiers, but our hate grew to include the Turkish people, and even the Turkish language.

By that time, I had not personally been beaten by the Turkish soldiers. But the soldiers' treatment of the other members of our village was more than enough to spark my desire for revenge, and this spark grew rapidly. Remember, we had no concept of a Kurdistan, or even that we were Kurdish, and certainly no idea about any "Apo Sympathizers," until the soldiers came to our village and told us. So by beating all the men in the village over and over, simply on the suspicion of sympathizing with this "Apo," the Turkish soldiers, themselves, educated us about this group that stood in defense of villagers like ourselves. It was obvious that the Turkish military felt threatened by them.

So, all of us got very clear on one point. We were going to get revenge for what the soldiers had done. And we were going to get it by joining with these Apo sympathizers who were such a threat that the Turkish soldiers felt compelled to hunt them down everywhere. In other words, because of their inhumane and unjustified attacks, the Turkish military had spontaneously caused neutral villagers, such as ourselves, to actively seek to find and join this group of rebels, whose name we had never heard, except from Turkish soldiers.

## THE FEUD

The oppression and the torture from the soldiers wasn't the only problem we had at that time. Our family had been in a lot of trouble long before this. Due to a feud, my family had been forced to flee our village in the early 1980s. I don't remember why it started, because I was only six years old. But, originally, the other side attacked my family and killed three people. Then we attacked, and killed seven of them. Every day, the fighting was ferocious, and gunfire was so loud and frequent, that we couldn't even leave the house.

During one battle, a wounded neighbor was carried into our place. A group of women gathered and began to clean his wound. When they extracted a bullet from his chest, they realized he had been shot in the back, and so must have been running away. The women instantly stopped taking care of him. One of them even said, "This coward has sold out his friends, he was shot while leaving them, let's just let him die." I remember this very, very well.

Over time, my personality began to be altered by the repetition of incidents such as this. Although I did not yet participate in the violence myself, the beatings, blood, and gun battles had become an ordinary part of my environment. Gunshots no longer caused me panic. Everyone in the village used guns. It became so common, that it no longer seemed to be a crime, but just a fact of life. So, then, even if a gunshot were heard right in the center of the town square, nobody would investigate. In addition to this important lesson on the power of apathy, I also learned the value of courage. The fact that the women in the village had refused to treat our wounded neighbor, once they decided he was a coward, inspired me to act bravely.

As a result of this feud, many people from the opposing families were killed. Therefore, on the night of the incident, we fled the village. We left behind every animal, and all of our

belongings. We ran to a different village, very far away, and settled there for our safety. The people in this new village protected us for six years.

Raising livestock and a little farming was still our livelihood. So, though we arrived in our new village as empty-handed guests, we soon resurrected our family trade. We struggled a lot in the first three years. For one thing, my father was off living in the mountains as a fugitive, and although he sometimes came home to see us in the evenings, he would leave before sunrise. My father couldn't stand with us when we needed him the most. My mother and elder brother earned the bread for our home. Thankfully, the villagers and some distant relatives, also helped us.

So that feud forced 20 people, including my father, to live as fugitives from 1980 to 1983. They hid in the mountains, generally thirty or forty kilometers from the village, and trusted shepherds were their messengers. For instance, they would say, "Tell our households that we are here and they should send us food." As excited as we would be to hear from our father, and sometimes get to see him, we always did our best to not get him caught. The coup had forever impressed upon us what would happen to outlaws who were discovered. So, I always worried that my father might be caught and brutalized.

Nonetheless, I would occasionally take the chance of bringing food to my father. A group of us would set off in the early morning, when it was still dark outside, so as not to tip off the villagers. I would set off first, and 15 to 20 minutes later my cousin would follow. Then, either my brother or another cousin would leave another 15 to 20 minutes after that. Since we worked as shepherds, leaving home early raised no suspicions. Still, we would never leave the village all at one time. Instead, we would meet at a certain predetermined abandoned place, three or four kilometers from the village, and then walk the rest of the way together. Our regular

shepherd lunch bags would have been filled with food before we left home, and so, if someone asked us why our food bags were full, we would reply, “We are shepherds!”

Every time I got to see my father, I always wanted to stay with him, and each time I would ask to live in the mountains with him. But he never let me. After only a few hours into any visit, he would force me to go back to the village. I was always shocked and amazed at the weapons I saw on him during those short visits! The fugitives sometimes had weapons that we didn't even have in the village. I loved weapons, and I envied the people who used them. In my father's absence, my uncle had taught me how to use an AK-47. I had learned everything about it; how it worked, how many bullets could be loaded into it, and how it was cleaned. Everything.

### **FEUD TRIAL**

Eventually the legal trial for the feud began, and 17 people from our family were arrested. I was around seven or eight years old by then. Two of these 17 people were sentenced. Justice was meted out in a strange way at that time. Although the whole group committed the crime, only one or two people would receive the punishment, depending on the size of the group. The rest would be set free. My mother's uncle and another relative of hers bore this punishment. If I remember rightly, they stayed behind bars for 16 years, and were only set free during the period of amnesty that took place in Turkish Prime Minister Özal's era.

### **SETTLING TO THE CITY OF BATMAN AND MEETINGS**

Due to these trying circumstances, my mother took on all the responsibility of doing the housework and taking care of us when we were young. This greatly increased my father's respect for her. Although the community is mostly male-dominant in our hometown, as far as I remember my father never raised his hand against my mother. So, though my father was very

emotional, he never resorted to brute force against her. I suppose this was also because my uncles lived close by. As I have mentioned before, my mother is my father's cousin. My mother's family was also much better off financially than my father's. During this time, my uncles had cars and tractors. My mother's father was very wealthy, and owned eight or nine buffalos, dozens of cows, and hundreds of other small livestock. He used to help us monetarily from time to time. I remember quite well how my grandmother would make a show of giving at least two lambs to each of her grandchildren every year. So, in terms of finances, my mother's family simply dominated my father, and in this way, they maintained authority over him.

But before the feud, our family was also very well off financially. We always got quite a good amount of money whenever we sold off our animals. From these same animals, in the meantime, we could also meet our needs for food. In addition, we owned some medium-sized fields for farming, where we would plant wheat and tobacco. This also brought in a good amount of money. In addition to all these sources of income, my father was also responsible for providing security for the official meteorology institution, located right beside the village. So, in addition to the revenue from our family business, he also had this side income. When the feud forced us to flee our village, we, of course, were severed from all these sources of support. We left everything we owned; everything we earned, all to prevent the loss of any more blood. Once we re-settled, all our family members pooled their money and bought 50 to 60 new goats and three new cows; once again beginning our livestock herd. We stayed in this second village from 1980 to 1987, and then we had to move to the city of Batman. Because, even though the people of this new village had welcomed us, it wasn't our village. We didn't have a field of our own. So, while the people protected our lives, they could not provide sufficient livelihood, and so we weren't able to remain there very long. Therefore, when I was 13 or 14, my family divided and

relocated again. Some of us moved to Silvan, some of us to Diyarbakır, and the rest—including my immediate family—moved to the city of Batman.

It was a huge struggle to adapt to the city. It was such a totally different life. One of the most difficult cultural changes was realizing that people in the city didn't help each other. No one there cared about each other. Everyone's struggle was personally their own. If your house collapsed; if you were starving to death; if you ran out of money, nobody cared. It was as if no one had ever heard of asking after a friend's well-being, or visiting one another. In contrast, when a family in the village had suffered a crisis—perhaps their livestock had perished—all the other villagers would gather together immediately and give the family more animals than they'd had previously. They would give gifts of money until the financial loss was covered. But in the city, there was nothing like that. There was no community feeling at all.

So, at first, we hawked a lot, in the city of Batman. We began by selling produce to meet our needs. My family would purchase fruits and vegetables from the marketplace, then walk from one neighborhood to another, selling them from a pushcart. But it was soon evident that we couldn't earn enough money from this alone, so I and my elder brothers started to work in a brickmaking factory. We three siblings from the same family worked in this factory for a long time.

After we moved to the city, my father couldn't work, because of serious health issues, so we lived in a rental house for some time. The working conditions in the factory were terrible, and my father initially tried to endure the heavy work of the briquette factory alongside my brothers and me, but he simply could not manage it. Therefore, we elder children took financial responsibility for our family.

So, we men of the family would go to work in the early morning, and return home late at night. Our social life was nonexistent. Even family members had no time to visit each other, since it was such tiresome work. We would hit the pillow as soon as we had finished dinner. Then, the next morning, we would arise early, have a quick breakfast, and set off back to work.

Certainly, the city had its benefits. Undoubtedly, the hospitals, health services and such-like were better there. All the same, I just couldn't get used to the city. First of all, nothing here had anything to do with nature. It was crowded and noisy, and people didn't even greet one another. I was continually perturbed. Batman disquieted my soul. Nearly every family member had the same complaints. Because we all shared the same dream, at every opportunity we would go to the green fields, far away from the city, and drink tea together.

I remember, in those city days, the demonstrations held before the 1991 elections. Big Kurdish names, such as Leyla Zana and Nizamettin Tonguç, would gather the masses and deliver powerfully influential speeches. People from every neighborhood and district would join these demonstrations and listen very carefully to what was being said. We came to understand from the speeches that there was an ethnic minority population in Turkey called the Kurdish, and that we, ourselves, were members of this population. We learned that this minority population had been consistently oppressed. Only Turks had had the right to speak on the record at the highest levels of Turkish Parliament. These speeches declared that we Kurds also needed access to the parliament, and from now on, we wanted to be there, to be heard, and to be given the right to affect decisions that influenced our own region.

So, while I spent most of my time those days working long hours in the factory, I was also being influenced by the content of these speeches. The incidents we'd had back in the village seemed to prove what had been said during the demonstrations. The way the teacher had

beaten up my elder brothers because they didn't speak Turkish; the oppression and torture against our male villagers, after the military coup, and even in the present day. Although we were in a major city like Batman, because of the language barrier, we couldn't communicate when we went to the hospital, or couldn't even express ourselves when we went to court. Consider what that is like! We speak Kurdish at home and throughout our villages, but we can't communicate with any part of the state, because no one with whom we need to speak, in any official capacity, understands what we are saying. Every individual who gave us beatings, who oppressed us, who tortured us—from police officers to teachers to soldiers—all spoke Turkish. Suddenly, we clearly understood the differences between us. Turks were not Kurdish, and they did not like us. A kind of “isolating” emerged. We, as the Kurdish populace, had been alienated, and I began to absorb the meaning of my identity as a Kurd. During this time, we began to gather into groups and listen for hours to Kurdish-language tapes. But all of this had to be in secret, because speaking Kurdish or even listening to something in Kurdish was forbidden.

Soon, I was going to the demonstrations whenever I had an opportunity. I was very young, so I was easily influenced by what was said. But, because I was young, no police officers or soldiers ever bothered with me. Although tea houses were forbidden for anyone under 18 at that time, we still would go there to gamble or to watch a movie, and always to listen to the others. Of course, there were police raids from time to time, but the police officers would just send us kids home, after slapping each of us in the face a few times.

I soon developed a very close circle of friends in Batman; about six or seven people, and we were spending most of our time together. We were all smoking back then, but never used alcohol or drugs, and never committed even petty crimes, like theft. As I said before, such misbehavior was very frowned upon in our Kurdish culture.



The only thing I liked about the urban period was that, as my awareness of this group who protected us Kurds grew, living in the city gave me opportunities to meet some sympathizers of this group in person. Thanks to demonstrations held in the city, and the television and radio programs broadcasting the speeches given in the teahouses, I had the chance to be better acquainted with the PKK.

Meanwhile, a new phenomenon had begun. The neighborhood friends with whom we always met and played suddenly started to disappear, and we never saw them again. Gradually we understood that they had all joined the PKK. So, we then came to see the disappearance of our youth as ordinary. For most families, it became a point of pride in the fact that their children had joined PKK. Sometimes a single person, or at times, a few people would disappear all at once. This impressed us a great deal, as we grew older.

We started talking about these issues within our circle of friends, and began thinking and discussing together what we could do for the cause of helping secure the freedom of our Kurdish people. We knew that PKK participation was high in the regions of Silvan and Hasankeyf. We began exploring these regions, in our time off from work, in order to get more information about the PKK. We talked to people there, and tried to understand why they left daily life in favor of heading up into the mountains.

My family didn't know that my friends and I discussed such topics. I would never say the first word to them about it. My family always kept themselves strictly, and deliberately distant, from politics. But, when the youth started disappearing more frequently, my mother's warnings to us also increased in tempo. She would say to us, "Now this family's son or daughter has gone missing. They have probably gone up into the mountains. I agree that there must be a separate Kurdish state, a new Kurdistan, and the oppression should decrease against us Kurds.

But, rather than joining a rebellion, it is more important that we should stay together as a family. So, my sons, please do not ever go up to the mountains. Don't ever join the organization." So no one else from my family joined the organization, though all my family members felt Kurdish nationalism.

My mother's constant warnings did not work on me. Within our friends' circle, we had already decided to go up to the mountains and join the organization. In preparation, we decided not to participate in any more illegal activities until we reached the countryside. Our goal was to no longer attract any attention from the police. We were successful. Never again did we join in a demonstration or a protest. Still, police officers would sometimes stop us and check our IDs, when we were out in the evenings. But they would have to set us free, since we had no criminal history. And because we hadn't joined in any of the recent demonstrations or protests of that period, the police began to believe we had become disinterested. Meanwhile, to cover our fact-finding journeys, we always travelled to tourist sights. We often visited places such as Silvan and Hasankeyf to get information. Although there were checkpoints all along the way, due to our frequent sightseeing trips, the police already knew us. They always believed that we were just on another trip, and our frequent conversations, as well, helped us overcome our fear of the police.

## CHAPTER 6

### JOINING THE PKK

Our passion to better understand the PKK, and fight as one of their guerillas, was not only due to the oppression and torture in Turkey; the issue was much larger than any one country. For example, consider the Halepçe Massacre, which took place in 1988 in Iraq. The impact of that massacre lasted for years. Kurdish television channels, transmitting from abroad, were constantly showing the massacred victims—the women and children, and elderly Kurds in Iraq who had been tortured. Many had been killed by chemical weapons. Though this was a war in Iraq, still the Kurdish people were the ones suffering the most horrific casualties, and this affected us deeply.

My male cousin also played a large part in encouraging us to join the organization. He had grown up amidst all these things, since a child. He was smart. He had graduated from a university. In those years, to study at a university was a great success for a Kurd. Therefore, I gave great weight to his opinions. I was also quite impressed by all he had endured while at the university.

He was once thrown into jail because he joined a demonstration. He was placed in Diyarbakır Penitentiary and was constantly tortured while there. All his teeth were removed with a pair of pliers! He didn't have a single tooth left inside his mouth. Yet no amount of torture had made him change his beliefs. One day he gave my friends and me a very effective speech: "We are Kurdish, and we own our Kurdish lands, so why don't we have someone from our people representing us in the decision making levels of state affairs? Why can't those officials who are obliged to serve us Kurds actually speak any Kurdish themselves? Why do

they always treat us so poorly? Why can five or six soldiers gather all our villagers and beat up all the men in front of their wives and children?”

Hearing of all these injustices, as well as experiencing them personally, hurt us deeply. When we looked around, we realized that those who were oppressed, beaten, and killed were always Kurdish. Kurds were the ones killed with chemical gases by Saddam in Iraq. Kurds were the ones tortured by soldiers in Turkey. Kurds were the ones who were suppressed by the regime in Iran. Kurds were the minority who lived in Syria, but did not even have their own ID cards—their own ethnic identity. These brutal regimes were also conducting a systematic anti-Kurd slandering campaign in the press and through broadcasting. On Turkish television news, they created the perception that, “This many Kurdish terrorists were killed in this place, while in that place this many Kurds were taken into custody.” So, the general public started to consider all Kurds to be terrorists. If a few of our people disappeared in a neighborhood, it would hit the news with a deliberate spin against us. “Those who have gone up to the mountains are either the Armenians’ unacknowledged children or bandits. They are irredeemable. They are traitors.” Such messages of slander were all over the written and visual press (TRT 1, 2 and 3 back then.) Can you imagine it! Those who went up to the mountains were labeled as being Armenian Christians and scorned. And, sure, perhaps some people with Armenian roots joined the resistance, but most of them were Kurdish Muslim youth. And, even if they were of Armenian descent, they had been raised in this region. They, too, had been subject to the same injustice, and all the doors must have been closed in their faces. Why else would they have turned to this path of resistance?

Contrary to the propaganda promoted by the Turkish state, no one offered us money or women to join the organization. We decided upon this path of our own free will. The

indifference of the state towards the people of our region; our torture; the oppression and torture in the neighboring countries against Kurds—collectively created our natural desire for revenge. In the neighborhood, and especially in the tea houses, we had learned that the PKK's purpose was to save Kurds from exactly this oppression and torture. Their purpose was to establish an independent and free state for Kurds, where we could live peacefully. We agreed, saying, "Since the Turkish Government does not recognize our national identity, and since it either ignores us or oppresses us, then why shouldn't we join this organization which fights for us?"

### **THE TURKISH HEZBOLLAH**

During that time, there was also the issue of Hezbollah. This organization appeared and began making religious propaganda. Since the PKK was a leftist-based organization, many battles occurred between the liberal PKK and conservative religious Hezbollah. Many PKK members and sympathizers were killed by Hezbollah during this time. Soon, we realized the technique behind their success: Hezbollah was killing Kurds with the support of the Turkish police. The police were using Hezbollah to get the PKK under control.

It was one of the armed attacks against a PKK's anti-police mission during that time that made us realize how the police were cooperating with Hezbollah. There were few, distinct makes of cars used by the police in the 1990s, including the Renault Toros or Şahin. Either white or red. One day, the PKK attacked a police car fitting this description. Both people in the car lost their lives. In the local news, it was reported that one of those who died had been a police officer, and the other was a member of Hezbollah. In other words, the police officers were touring around with Hezbollah. This really affected us. Throughout this period, Hezbollah had killed many of our friends. They practiced many kinds of nastiness then, from unidentified

murders and kidnapping to literal back-stabbing. The fact that Hezbollah committed those murders with the support of the state was yet another factor that pushed us into the arms of the PKK. We had started to think that we could cope with these horrors, only if we joined the PKK.

Soon, the Turkish state made its position crystal clear. They visited every kind of oppression on us in the Yurtsever Gençler (“Patriotic Youth,” that is, PKK members). For example, say you were carrying a knife. They would “measure it” between your fingers. If the knife blade was longer than the height between two fingers, you would be brutally beaten. Yet, while the Patriotic Youth were subject to such oppression and torture, the members of Hezbollah could go around freely carrying anything they liked—knives, cleavers, or guns. The police did nothing to Hezbollah members, even if they were found with these weapons. I witnessed in person how the police would never intervene with Hezbollah. Why? Because Hezbollah was a religious group. They were fighting in the name of Islam, and were convenient for the Turkish government to use against the left-based PKK.

The Hezbollah group actually had nothing to do with true religion. They would regularly make religious propaganda, of course, but they would not practice what they preached. Instead, they would swear at people and bully them. We knew some of the Hezbollah members well. They would commit evil, then turn and talk loudly about religion. I never had anything to do with Hezbollah, but completely kept my distance from them, because the state clearly supported them. They simply wouldn’t have been able to control us without the state’s support. The police, strongly backed up Hezbollah, who got its intelligence and information about PKK directly from the police. No matter what type of incident in which Hezbollah was involved, the police never started an official inquiry against them. Many Hezbollah members that we killed

were found to be carrying the same makes and models of guns and weapons that the police and soldiers used.

In fact, Hezbollah was the main factor that turned me from religion. I don't remember exactly what age I was, but in my adolescence my father had told me, "Son, look how old you are now! You must begin praying five times a day, and you must fast." I answered him by saying, "Dad, if this religion in which we believe; of which we are part, is exemplified by the members of Hezbollah and their actions, then I will have no part of this religion."

I mean, can you even imagine! The members of this organization called Hezbollah would behead people. When killing us, they would always approach from behind and shoot the members of Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement in the back of the neck. They would never approach directly and attack us like men. During this period, there were so many "unsolved" murders that everyone knew it was Hezbollah, if the manner of death were a cleaver or a beheading.

In all, there were two kinds of people who joined Hezbollah. The first group consisted of people who devoted themselves to the religion, but who were misled. The second group were fugitives and criminals, and the police would use this second group to do their dirty work. There was a mutual agreement of, "You cover my dirty work, and I will handle yours." This is how the faithful people got mixed up with the criminal element of this one "Hezbollah" group. Unfortunately, Hezbollah participation was very high, especially in the city of Batman.

### **GOING UP TO THE MOUNTAINS**

The date was January 7, 1992. Our group of friends talked among ourselves for hours, and finally decided that it was high time to go up to the mountains. We all strongly believed that

we had to do something for our oppressed people. We were all the right age, each between 17 and 19 years old. It all happened very quickly. We made our decision during the day, and by evening we were gone. Though we didn't have a leader, I knew better than my friends what was involved. Not only did I know the intermediaries who would take us to the mountains, but also I had once lived in the villages. Since I had been a shepherd from when I was little, I knew the conditions in the mountains very well. The other members of the group had all grown up in the city, and had always enjoyed a comfortable environment. They knew nothing about roughing it, or had no idea where to take shelter; what to eat, or where to find clean water in the mountains. The fact that I was experienced gave my friends confidence.

Not one of us told our parents that we were going up to the mountains. According to the plan we had made, only four of us were going to set off at first. I was in that first group. If we managed to safely reach members of the organization in the countryside, then the other three friends would come to join us.

Once our decision was made, I got in touch with the people who were going to take us to the mountains. I knew someone from another neighborhood who made these sorts of arrangements. I informed him, "We are seven people and we all want to join you voluntarily. Just tell us whatever we have to do to join the organization." I later learned that the father of this guy had been killed by Hezbollah. He was reliable, and we weren't afraid.

As an aside, there is an issue I would like to clarify. For years, Turkey had disseminated state propaganda making the claims that Kurdish young people were deceived, and that they were promised money and women. They were then double-crossed, and taken away to the mountains. This is a lie! You could never force someone to stay in the mountains. In some camps, there were hundreds of PKK members; in some of them, thousands. There were a great



many chores and a lot of work to be shared. Now tell me, how would you force people to stay in a working camp like that? Would you follow them 24/7? It is impossible. What was true was that it wasn't easy for anyone in Turkey to earn money during that time. Our economic situation was bad. Our family was leading a poor life, but no one came to us to make any promises. We weren't offered money or authority in return for joining the organization. This is what I want the state and then the Turkish people to understand. What do they think someone would prefer; to leave the compassion of their parents and family, and all the comforts of home, in favor of a challenging life in difficult conditions? For people to choose this kind of life voluntarily, there must definitely be a strong reason behind it. I still don't understand how the people living in the other regions in Turkey could not grasp this.

I still remember the day of my leaving quite well. My friends and I had been out since morning. I came home in the evening, and had something to eat, trying to act completely normal, as if there were nothing out of the ordinary. After dinner, I told my mother that I was going to the teahouse. I remember my mother asking me, "Will you come home early, son?" I replied, "Yes, I will, mom." I left my ID at home on purpose. If we got caught on the way, I didn't want the police to learn who I was. But while I was leaving the house, my mother said, "You've forgotten your ID! If you are going to the teahouse, take it with you, so that you won't get into trouble with the police." So I had to take it. At 8:00 PM., I met my friends at the place in which we had agreed earlier. It was the next street over from the teahouse. Everyone was there, as planned.

Half an hour later, the intermediary joined us. We got into a small Ford Transit. They took us to a neighborhood where we had never been before. The intermediary met someone else there. While we waited in the car, they were talking about something outside. The intermediary

came back to the car after 10 or 15 minutes, and said, “You will continue your journey with this person from now on.” When we learned that our first contact wasn’t coming with us, we, of course, became a bit nervous. We said to the intermediary, “We know you. We trust you. You are the one we sought out, and you are the one who has brought us this far. Why are you passing us off to someone else? We don’t like this change.” He answered, “This man is completely reliable. You can trust him just as much as you trust me. There’s no reason to worry. The place you’re going is his home area. He knows it better than I do.” So, we had no choice but to trust him.

As we had planned, there were four of us in that initial group. The rest returned back to their homes, and would join us a few days later. Actually, it made everything easier, since the three remaining friends returned home as normal. If we all had disappeared at the same time, our parents might have worried and called the police. But these three friends told our parents that the four of us, who were going up to the mountains, had simply gone to the market, and that we were going to come back home late. Because of this, none of the families, including mine, went to the police to report that we were missing.

The new intermediary took us to the city of Siirt. If I am not mistaken, it was about 3:00 a.m. that we settled into a hotel. The behavior of the hotel owner led me to believe that he understood we were going up to the mountains. He welcomed us as if he were welcoming heroes. He didn’t ask for money as we left. We learned later that those going up to the mountains always stayed at this hotel first, and without payment. We had breakfast in the early morning. Before leaving the hotel, the intermediary had us get in touch with someone else and said, “You will continue with these people now.”

So, having left the hotel, we went to a house in the city center. We stayed there for one night. We were now seven volunteers, as three new ones had joined us. The next day, we set off by minivan for the countryside. The intermediary took us as far as vehicles could possibly go. When we reached the end of the road, we got out, and the guides told us then that we were going to continue the rest of the way on foot.

So, it was after an exhausting journey in the countryside that we reached the militants. Now, you might call up a negative image when you hear the word “militant,” but I would like to point out that for us the term “militant” stood for the leaders of the public. A small group of seven militants welcomed us. We were so overjoyed to see them! These were the first guerillas we had met. Figuring we must be hungry and tired by now, they had brought us some food, and all of us sat down to eat together. They spoke with us a bit, mostly asking questions like “Where is your hometown?” and “From where have you just come?” Then, they asked us whether or not we knew Turkish. This whole time the entire experience was barely sinking in. We were so overjoyed. None of it felt real, in the exact way that time flies away quickly, when you are truly happy.

After our meal and a few hours’ rest, we were taken to a valley where another militia force, much more crowded, was located. When we arrived there, we saw female guerillas in the militia force. They were all armed. We asked ourselves why had we waited for so long to join, as there were even armed females already serving the organization.

There was a total of 35 to 40 people in that valley, and at least eight or nine of them were women. Soon, the leader of the group gathered us together and gave a short speech. He caught our attention from his very first question. “Comrades, is there anyone among you who wants to go home? You see the conditions here in the mountains. Don’t say tomorrow that you can’t

cope with it. If you want to go, go now! You don't yet have a criminal record. Neither the police nor the soldiers know you yet. You still have a chance to lead an ordinary life. You can go back home."

None of us wanted to go back home, so then he gathered information from us, by asking each of us some questions that enabled him to get to know us better. "Where are you from? What does your family do? Why have you joined us?" When it was my turn, I answered, "I have heard the name of this organization in the city and have searched for you. The reason I have joined is the same as yours." The commander of the camp smiled at me. I continued, feeling more relaxed. "If you have any doubt about me, you can conduct your own search. You have militants in the city, and they can provide you with information about us."

Turning to the entire group, the commander inquired, "Whom do you know? Through whom have you come here?" My friends and I gave the name of the intermediary in the neighborhood. The commander didn't recognize his name. Then, we gave the name of the second intermediary. This one he did recognize. We figured that everyone probably had a nickname, and maybe not everyone knew all the nicknames.

Turning back to the group, the commander asked, "Where do you want to stay?" We all said, "If possible, we want to stay in this camp!" He answered that we could not stay there now. We first had to join the camps in Iraq and get military and political trainings. But then he amended that with we could stay there for a few days, in order to have a rest. Following us, new arrivals were joining the camp regularly. So, the commander decided to wait for a week to send everyone to Iraq together, instead of sending us in smaller groups. With the additions, we were now a total of 40 new volunteers. The goal was for our group was to reach the Gabar Mountain.

Against the potential dangers, about 10 experienced militants were assigned to protect the group, which included me and the new arrivals,

We proceeded on foot. It was an exhausting journey, but at least we had no problems with the food. There were all kinds of bread, rice, beans, and cheese. In addition to this, we would drop by the neighboring villages on our way. Generally, we had our dinners in these villages. We were newbies back then, and didn't understand why the villagers prepared food for us, as if they were throwing us a feast. Then, we figured out that in advance of our arrival in the villages, four or five people from the group would visit them and inform them of our coming. "Be ready. There is a new group of 45 people arriving." And, of course, there was no coercion in play.

When we arrived in the villages, we would be sent to different houses in groups of five. Since the villagers knew that we were new in the organization, they would offer whatever they had. Because there was no transportation out this far, or simply because the state neglected these villages in the mountainy areas, soldiers generally wouldn't stop by these villages. They only came and provided general discipline, once every three months. Therefore, the organization pretty much had control there.

### **MOUNTAIN OF GABAR**

After each dinner, we would get up and leave immediately, moving as much as possible under cover of darkness so as to avoid getting caught. During our travel, our seniors in the organization informed us about the region through which we were passing. "Those lights over there are a police station, so watch out." "Over here is a sympathetic place, where you can find food and rest." "This landmark indicates one depot where we cache our weapons."

During a break in our travel, before we had made it to Gabar Mountain, our group leader turned to us and asked us loudly, “Who here knows how to use weapons? Raise your hands!” About twenty people raised their hands. He asked them, one by one, which weapons they knew how to use. I knew how to use almost every weapon he listed. The experienced militants gave Kalashnikov weapons (AK-47’s) to those who knew how to use them. But, they warned everyone, “No one will use them without an order, and if there is an incident, you will be put under the jurisdiction of the older militants.” Then we continued our journey.

We walked for days. We newcomers were being delivered to other groups. Following a long and exhausting journey, we arrived in Gabar. At the end of the journey, we who had started as seven people, were now 60. The camps at Gabar was very crowded. Besides us, there were about 120 Guerrillas. The very first thing they did was to assign an older and experienced militant to every 10 people. Then, they sent us to the ward tents, telling us that we were going to be wakened at 4:30 a.m.

It was our first day in Gabar, when the senior militants first taught us to call each other “heval” (Comrade.) We were going to call everyone “comrade,” no matter what authority or rank they had, out of respect. Then they informed us about the specific rules. For instance, when we had a problem, we were to inform the person whom they appointed as the squad leader. If he wasn’t available, we were told whom next to contact. Also, while travelling during the day, or waiting in place, we were to leave nothing behind that might sparkle or capture attention, such as a mirror, food cups, or brightly colored fabric. We were all given military camouflage tents, and advised to hide our possessions in them. Also, when we saw a helicopter or a plane in the air, we were to remain still and not move. If we were to leave our group and join another one, we were to inform the leader of the group. Meals were to be eaten at specific hours. If we

smoked, we were to be careful with the lighters in the evening. We were to light cigarettes inside the tents and we were not to leave there until we had finished smoking. However, we were also only to smoke when it was allowed.

In short, we were all to obey what we were told, word for word. But I want to add this that there wasn't such strict discipline without our understanding. If something was forbidden, we were told why it was forbidden. In other words, rules and orders were given in clear language.

They were also always helping us in many ways. There was a powerful atmosphere of friendship and brotherhood. Some of the newcomers frequently got tired and lost their motivation, but no one would yell at them. On the contrary, they would be approached in a friendly manner, and asked, "What's the matter? Is this too much of a load for you to carry? Are you ill? If you want, we can give your burden to someone else."

There was one overweight comrade. He had come from the city, and didn't realize at all what life in the mountains was like. He knew no Kurdish whatsoever, and his eyesight was so bad that he couldn't walk at night. We newcomers were criticizing him—questioning why he was even here. But the older ones weren't like that. They were very patient and did their best to make sure this guy reached the camp.

Weapons training started the first day. We were so excited. Some of the students in that first class immediately wanted to learn how to use bombs. The leaders rejected this idea saying, "Bombs are dangerous. We can't teach you that here, but you will learn about that in Iraq."

A huge noise woke us up on the second day. Of course, we didn't yet understand everything, since we were new, but, we were terrified. The experienced ones warned us, "Fighter jets! Air attack!" After the sorties of the [Turkish] planes were over, the helicopters

started to blow up the camp field. Although the Cobras (deadly attack helicopters) burned down their target, we were already in the shelters beneath. The experienced ones were so relaxed and were telling us that we shouldn't have panicked. The shelters were really durable and safe. By this time, everywhere was covered in snow. Therefore, there was a large visual splash at the impact site of the bombs. Soon the older ones started to answer the Cobras with anti-aircraft weapons. We had lost two people, and we had eight injured. At around 7:00 a.m., the helicopters withdrew.

We thought this meant the attack was over and that we could pack up. But just then, the watchmen informed us that they had seen some soldiers get off the helicopters about one kilometer away. So, we were about to be attacked by land, to follow up their air attack. At around 1:00 p.m. The battle started. We were new, so initially we weren't allowed to participate in the fighting. The senior guerillas weren't very worried about this ground battle, because they estimated there were more than enough guerrillas in our camp to defeat the Turkish soldiers. They figured it would be a head to head battle. On the other hand, the militants knew the details of the area better than did the soldiers. That turned out to make the difference. The soldiers just showed off, but couldn't even get any closer to the camp.

The following day, we held a guerilla funeral ceremony for our two comrades who had died. Once we had buried them, the camp leaders told us that 15 experienced guerrillas were going to be assigned to guard our newbie group. Our new recruit group still consisted of 60 people, including myself, and now we were going to be sent to Besler camp, which was on the border of the city of Şırnak. It had become very risky for us newcomers to stay in the mountain of Gabar. The Turkish military could start a second attack at any time, so we were relocated to Cudi, over at Besler, and from there to Iraq.



The fighter aircraft hit our camp field again that morning, before we left the camp. There were eight aircraft this time. Being taken by surprise, it cost us 12 comrades' lives, and I myself took shrapnel in both legs. The doctors in the camp immediately treated them. Back then, I was so surprised to be attended to so quickly, outside of a hospital, right there on the ground. But I soon found out that there were at least three surgeons in each camp.

Right after the attack, we were sent off for Besler camp. We rested in two villages on our way. The villagers took very good care of us, since some of their members had joined us in the resistance. They not only gave us food but also helped us pass specific points of danger on the way. When we reached the first village, the villagers told us there was a Turkish military outpost located very close to the village. It had been hit by an avalanche, and around 40 Turkish soldiers had been buried and killed. The villagers suggested that if we could make it there, we could collect all their weapons and ammunition. The experienced ones among us criticized this offer harshly. "A natural disaster happened, and it would be against the morals of the organization to profit from the spoils in such a situation."

In the second village, which was in the foothills of Cudi Mountain, we stayed for two days, due to the severity of the blizzards. All the roads were covered in snow. Visibility was zero. The villagers here gave us 15 pairs of snowshoes, so we wouldn't sink down into the snow when we walked. The 15 Guerrillas, to whom we outfitted with these snowshoes, were going to clear the path for us, and we would follow. On the fourth day, the villagers—those who survived on smuggling—took us from Cudi Mountain to Iraq.

## THE CAMP OF HAFTANIN

By the end of February, we reached the Haftanin region, in Iraq. Haftanin is an area under Kurdish control, in the north of Iraq. There are 250 to 300 militants in each camp. Our troop consisted of 260 people.

In this region, there were a total of four camps. The trainings in three of these camps were held in Turkish, and the fourth camp in Kurdish. The Kurdish-language camp was mostly for the Kurds who came from Syria and Iraq. The other three camps were for Turkish Kurds who came from Turkey and Europe.

The general commander of the camps in Iraq, and of the all four Kurdistan states, was Cemil Bayik. Bayik controlled the PKK activities in Turkey, and he also directed actions by the organization in Syria, Iraq and Iran.

But Bayik wasn't there once we got to Haftanin. We were told that he was in Iraq, visiting all the camps to give political and ideological lectures. If I have the timeline right, one week later he visited our camp. He gave us two different trainings. The first one was the historical development of the organization. He lectured us on how, where, and when the organization was established; what kind of incidents it went through during its founding; and gave us details and dates. The other training was about President Apo, and his beliefs.

Cemil Bayik's oratory was very influential. Some people just truly impress you when they speak, and he was one of them. I made it no secret throughout the organization that I was more committed to Cemil Bayik than to President Apo. Bayik has a power that charms people, draws all their attention, and channels it into a specific direction. I will talk more about this once we begin discussing the later years. After Apo was caught, there was only one reason the

organization wasn't disbanded: Cemil Bayık's persuasiveness and impressive tone. His nickname in the organization was Cuma.

Apo also loved Comrade Cuma. He was the right hand of Apo, in terms of executing strategy. In other words, Apo would determine the political strategy, and Cemil Bayık would make this strategy applicable for daily use, determining which political and military tactics were to be applied, according to this strategy.

Of course, surrounding Cemil Bayık, there were other effective and experienced names. Bayık would take these people with him to the camps in Turkey and Iraq to provide motivation and moral support to the militants in these camps.

After the lesson on "The History of the Organization," we had a training called "The Truth about Apo." The topics of this lecture were all about Apo and the inception of the organization, such as from where Apo came, how the skeleton crew of the organization was formed, and how Apo gathered this team. Each training lasted approximately 10 days. The 11th day was a "question and answer" session. Any student could ask any question at all, so long as it related to the training, and we could ask anyone, even Cemil Bayık himself. We had at least 300 people in that class, so the question and answer session went on for hours, but Cemil Bayık answered every single question without ever getting frustrated or showing weariness. Moreover, he would continue explaining one answer and responding to all the follow-up questions until the student he was answering was completely satisfied. If, despite all of this, the questioner still wasn't satisfied, Cemil Bayık would send for him after the lesson and clarify any remaining details.

Bayık stayed with us from March to mid-May, during which period I got several chances to address him in person. Each time, I asked him, "How had the organization expanded so fast in

such a short period of time?” The answers he gave were all surprising to me. Bayık told me many times that the organization owed its current condition to the Turkish militants. “This movement reached this level, thanks to the Turks. Almost everyone who established this organization with our President Apo—Hakkı Karar, Duran Kalkan, and Kemal Bir—were all influenced by the old Turkish revolutionaries: Deniz Gezmiş, Mahir Cayan and Hüseyin İnan, who were called the “Three Saplings,” and had become the idols of the founders of PKK. Cemil Bayık once said, “This revolution is not only the Kurds’ revolution. It will also be the Turks’ revolution.”

Other lessons we received included, “The History of the PKK,” “Leadership Philosophy,” “Modern Turkish and Global Politics,” and “Our Leadership’s Goals for the PKK.” Each guerilla who completed his training in Haftanin camp left having read every book written by Apo. As I stated before, the trainings didn’t impose anything on anyone by force. If a subject was lectured about for two hours, the next two hours were spent answering guerillas’ questions, so that they didn’t have any doubts. The doubts in the minds were dismissed by the detailed explanations of the training Commission.

### **POLITICAL TRAININGS**

Political trainings were very significant in shaping our thoughts. At first, many of us had joined the organization out of passion and emotion alone. Most militants were acting purely from the bloodlust of “When do we get our weapons? When do I get my revenge?” But, our trainings weren’t on military tactics alone. The experienced leadership knew they had to first convince us to understand the aim and purpose of the organization. Only in this way, would all of our actions align with the organization’s goal.

In 1992, the year I joined the organization, the main purpose of the PKK was to establish an independent Kurdish state. In other words, it was to set free the areas in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The guerilla was always motivated by this purpose. But, despite the strength of our mission to establish an independent Kurdish state, the senior PKK executives were always emphasizing that we had no problems with Turkish people. Even if we succeeded in becoming physically separated from Turkey and declared our independence, we would never remain enemies with the Turks. The reason for our fight with Turkey was just the current fascist system. In other words, no matter what, we were going to stay friends with Turkish people forever.

This is why no hostility or hatred towards Turks themselves, or the Turkish ethnic identity, was ever incorporated or tolerated in any of our political or ideological trainings. The problem for the organization was the system, not the people. In other words, the PKK's only issue was with the political authorities who didn't recognize the democratic rights of the Kurdish people. So, our trainings included absolutely nothing about seeing Turks as enemies. However, some individuals among us would act emotionally from time to time. In the period during which I joined the organization, most Kurdish patriots were joining because they had been subject to violence at the hands of the Turkish police or soldiers. We all had friends with the view that "Turkish soldiers tortured my innocent family, and my relatives. Why shouldn't I take my revenge on the innocent Turks?" These people were objecting to the doctrine that we must stay friends with Turks, as we were being told in the trainings. But the organization was strictly against such anti-Turk sentiments and would prevent them as much as possible. The senior executives were always calming down our friends who joined the organization for revenge. They told them, "We can't solve the problem by acting from the desire for revenge and killing innocent people. On the contrary, if we used such a method, we would lose the validity of our

own struggle. So, although it is right that we fight for our own people, we should never include innocent people in this war. We must respect others.”

The reason for this was pretty clear. Turks and Kurds weren't separated like the other nations in Europe. We had intermarried with one another so that the Turkish and Kurdish identities were mixed. The national identities were combined through affinity, and it was now very difficult to change that. Also, in every major city, the Kurds and Turks were living side by side. Our trainers knew this and framed their political and ideological trainings within this reality. Even in the military trainings, the instructors were sometimes emphasizing that we were to be merciful to the enemy. For example, during a battle, if we were eye to eye with an enemy, we were told that we could kill him if he was going to kill us. However, it was impressed upon us that an injured enemy would never be hurt no further, but rather be taken captive and be treated.

The purpose of taking them as captives was to swap them in the future with the PKK members who fell into the hands of the Turkish Government. Were we ever successful in this? No. Turkey had such a political and bureaucratic structure that they would never sit at a negotiation table with us, even if we took all the police officers in the city of Hakkari as captives, and then asked them to set free at least 10 imprisoned guerillas. Their own government considered their police and soldiers to be worthless to them. Look at Israel—that as a country, the Turks were always criticizing. Those men who you deride for being Jewish swapped hundreds of Palestinians to save one or two Israeli soldiers on many occasions. It happened again in 2011. In return for one Israeli soldier, thousands of captives were set free.

The other purpose of taking captives was to use their release as propaganda later. It made us look very good if we released our prisoners even if the Turkish Government did not accede at

all to our demands to negotiate. In the 1990s, when the Prime Minister was Mr. Erbakan, Haşimi, came from his cabinet to the PKK camp field in Iraq, and brought back to their families the soldiers who had been taken as captives by the PKK. The Turkish families were grateful for this act by the PKK. Erbakan had sent a letter to Apo after this incident and indicated that he wanted to solve the Turkish-Kurdish problem through political means, without shedding any blood. I remember it quite well. The letter had this sentence: “Let the weapons be silent, and let’s solve this through democratic methods.”

With such firm steps taken towards peace, the leadership of the PKK had impressed upon us that our dispute with the Turkish Government could, ultimately, only be resolved through negotiation. Our violent missions were only justified because that’s what it took to bring the state to the negotiation table. The hints of success appeared in the spring of 1993. Stopping this fight, and solving the problem through political means or through dialogues, was now inevitable.

One of our trainers in the camp had told us that the guerilla fights all over the world had three stages: Active defense, fight for equality, and attack. Most of these fights were solved before the last stage. PKK entered into the fight for equality with the Turkish Armed forces in 1992. Although the military didn’t completely withdraw from East Anatolia, in those years it had largely lost its dominance in the countryside. They had gathered their power in specific stations and headquarters, and they weren’t able to leave these places. The organization, by and large, dominated. Besides the countryside, the PKK even had the power to besiege some cities! The military stations in these cities were being kept under siege sometimes for days and sometimes for weeks. In the spring of 1992, the military stations of Nerwe and Rubarok were blockaded by the organization. At that time, all the soldiers in the Nerwe Station were killed.

The President at the time, Süleyman Demirel, had even paid a visit to the station after this incident.

Then the military finally understood that we guerillas had the power to even capture their bases. That's why the bases in the unsafe regions were abandoned, one by one, and the military force was gathered in specific central locations. At the start of 1993, the organization and the government declared a mutual ceasefire. During this ceasefire, the organization made a big change in its main purpose and goals.

According to the leadership of PKK, the conditions in the world had changed. The real socialism was dispersed at the beginning of the 1990s, and there was no longer any alliance of power among militant organizations, as there had been. In other words, it no longer made sense to create an independent Kurdish state, as had been the case in the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, the leading figures in the organization started to impose upon the guerillas that PKK's main purpose wasn't to establish an independent Kurdistan anymore, but was to live together with the Turks under a democratic roof. There was no objection raised to this re-purposing from the lowest level to the upper authorities within the organization. Every militant in the organization had adjusted themselves to this new policy. So, I don't know what happened behind the scenes, but in 1993, both the organization and the Turkish Government mutually destroyed this peace process.



## CHAPTER 7

### MISSION TRAININGS

The camp life was physically exhausting. We would wake up at 4:30 a.m. each morning, with a muster at 5:00 a.m. After the muster, physical training, and then we would have breakfast at around 7:30 a.m. Between 8:00 and 11: a.m., we would receive three hours of political training. Break time came at 11:15 a.m. and we would then have lunch. After lunch, we would have a short rest period of 45 minutes. At 1:00 p.m. we would start the military training.

Both men and women enjoyed the military training. We could never understand how time flew by so quickly, and it would be 5:00 p.m. before we knew it. First, we received weapons training, which included how to properly hold, aim, fire, and reload. Then, we learned how to clean and care for our weapons. These trainings were given on many different kinds of weapons, such as the Kanas assault rifle, the bazooka, the heavy machine howitzer, anti-air craft weapons, and many kinds of guns, including Kalashnikov (AK-47), BKC, and heavy automatic anti-air craft weapons.

This basic weapons training was given to everyone, no matter how young or old they were, and included both men and women. In addition to the weapons training, we also received extended practical trainings on guerilla war tactics (assault, ambush, raid, infiltration, attack, extended siege, forestallment, and mining.) These trainings were given mostly by people with practical experience—those who had been playing an active role in the organization for years, and had proven themselves in the field of military battle.

## ASSASSINATION MISSIONS

The sniper assassination missions were individual actions made against specific people. The target could be a relatively high-ranking military commander or a politician. Someone with enough individual authority, who could make trouble for us. These characteristics of the target are what made the difficulty of staging an assassination mission worth the risk. One wouldn't go through all this effort to take out any ordinary civilian, or foot soldier. How would that be worthwhile to the organization?

This action could be carried out either with weapons or explosives. For instance, you could carry out an attack by placing a bomb inside of a package. Our assassin team consisted mostly of professionals, since it took such a large investment of both time and money to fully train each sniper. They would never be risked on the front lines during battle. They would be situated at some distant place, sometimes sneaking into enemy lines and targeting those who were coordinating the operation on the side of the enemy. The targets were usually high-ranking people, for the simple reason that, if you leave a military force without a commander, you can easily disable the soldiers.

I witnessed this quite a lot in the ensuing years. Once a commander, at the head of a military force (squadron leader, lieutenant colonel, corps commander) was assassinated, the guerilla's mission was not finished. You might ask, how do you determine who the high-ranking officials are during an operation? We learned, by experience that the fighting soldier and the commander never stayed at the same spot. The commander was always located somewhere strategic from where he directed his soldiers. This strategic area would generally be on a high hill. There would always be four or five guards near the commander. In this way, the location of the commander could be detected and then disabled by the assassins. The high-rankings officers

would sometimes remove their rank insignias and pretend to be a soldier, in order to make it more difficult to be discovered. Then, we needed to try and detect who they really were from their behavior.

## **AMBUSH**

We would carry out the ambush tactic to narrow the movement area of the soldiers. We would bottleneck the movement area, which panicked the enemy. The ambush was normally executed in the travel area between two travel routes. For instance, the ambush could be on the way between the military base and the town to which it was connected, or the road between two military bases.

Ambush is a short-duration action. It takes 15 minutes at most. If you remained in the area of an ambush any longer, it would turn into a battle. A battle meant losses for us, because the [Turkish] soldiers were greater in number and had support from both air and land.

But, despite taking so little time, an ambush is a very effective guerilla tactic, if you plan it well. It doesn't even take a very large group. You can create an effective ambush with only five guerrillas. One of the significant elements of ambush is that the proper conditions and sufficient time for withdrawal must be set, and the retreat route must be pre-determined. You can't use the ambush tactic in the morning, and so it is usually carried out in the evening. After the action, you retreat and disappear into the pitch darkness. We used Kalashnikovs, bixi, anti-tank weapons, mines, and bazookas while carrying out ambushes.

## **INFILTRATION**

Meanwhile, infiltration tactics are made to shock the enemy unexpectedly by penetrating their territory. The number of guerrillas involved in the infiltration missions would vary,

according to the nature of the target, but the maximum was six people, because as the size of the group increases, so does the risk of being noticed. But, if your plan is to stage a raid to destroy an entire enemy encampment, the night after an infiltration mission, it would make more sense to include a larger number of guerrillas in the initial infiltration, so that more of them would be familiarized with the enemy's layout, by the second mission.

Any guerrilla who participated in an infiltration, must be small, alert, and calm. First of all, it is preferable that they have a tiny body structure. Next, excellent judgment and awareness, and lastly, there needed to be a calmness, because being calm in these types of missions was most important. Someone who cannot control their fear might panic ahead of the infiltration and make the enemy team aware of our presence. Another important factor regarding infiltrations was that the people who participated in these kinds of actions set off for the mission only after saying goodbye to all of their family and friends. The likelihood of being martyred in such a mission was very high, so one does not volunteer for these missions expecting to survive. You volunteer as the ultimate proof that you hold the ideals of the organization, and the freedom of your comrades, to be of greater importance to you than your own life.

No one was forced. There was never any pressure to join an infiltration action. In fact, it was essential to have the participants be volunteers. Guerrillas who wanted to participate in such an action would make the offer. The senior executives would then evaluate the offers and allow the individuals they considered to be appropriate to become part of the mission team. Not just anyone who wished could participate in an infiltration action. You couldn't join if you had never been on any other missions, and you needed to have experience living and patrolling the countryside. You also had to have participated in the surveillance of that particular target. Rank

wasn't the basis of selection in such missions. Sometimes, two high-ranking officers or two regular guerillas could carry out an infiltration mission at the same time.

We had many missions that resulted in the death of the whole infiltrating team. Thus, the guerillas who were going to participate in such missions would be carefully chosen and become completely focused on the action. Each detail was important. There was nothing like having surveillance in the morning and infiltration in the evening. The surveillance on the target would last for days and absolutely everything would be noted, including when the change of guards took place, how many soldiers were on the sites, what the precise distance was between two military posts, what kind of weapons they were using, whether they had night vision, whether there were any night patrols, and whether there was an exit or entrance to the target area. Every detail was noted.

I joined infiltration missions many times in the following years. On such missions, dogs and the wind were two risky factors that could not be in your favor. We learned, in time, that you definitely need to factor them into your plans. If you failed to notice that you're upwind of the target, the breeze could bring your scent to the dogs, ensuring that your target would be alerted to your presence entirely too soon.

## **RAIDS**

The raid mission tactic was our most frequently used tactic in the guerilla war, performed with a large force and heavy weapons, and the chance of a raid turning into a battle was very high. A raid can sometimes take 15 to 20 minutes and sometimes an hour or more, depending on the target. Likewise, the raid mission could be performed with a force of 50 people, or it could be performed with 500 to 1,000 people.

All the preparations for the raid mission took place at night. The armory that was to be used during the raid was taken close to the target at night, and surveillance took place for days before the raid. During these surveillance missions, both technical and physical information is gathered. If the raid is performed with a large group, intelligence is not gathered by one particular group during a surveillance. In other words, the area subject to the raid is watched with binoculars and camera by at least three or four surveillance groups over different times. Then, through militants pretending to be villagers, the force strength in the region is studied from both close and hidden sites. Factors tallied were how much power the target had, the capacity of their weapons, and the point where their closest backup force could reach. Everything, including whether the backup force would come from the air or by land, was taken into account.

Since the backup/reserve forces couldn't easily reach the Turkish military bases situated in rocky sites, and the arrival of help would take time, we would generally make raids at such points. In a raid mission, the attacking groups were placed in three or four flanks. The support group was placed behind the attacking group. Behind the support group, the medical group was placed, which had a few doctors, nurses, and first-aid kits. Finally, at a dominant spot where the target could clearly be seen, the coordinating group is placed. It consists of three or five high-ranking commanders. A ready team would be waiting near this coordinating group, ready to move forward to provide reinforcements.

In the raid mission, combat experience and voluntarism are essential. More experienced, active militants join these attack and support groups. Those with less experience join the defense and other groups. There were definitely two commanders at the head of each group. If something happens to one, the other commander takes over the duty. Every group, participating in the mission carries small radios with channels pre-set to our intelligence wavelengths. Our

coordinating team was always in touch with every guerrilla involved. As I mentioned before, the coordinating group consisted of four or five people. Those people shared the duties, and each of them took charge of two or three groups. For instance, one commander might take charge of the ambush and defense groups; one commander take charge of the reinforcements and defense groups' and the remaining one would take charge of the health and replacement groups.

In the raid missions, our attack group would usually use Kalashnikovs, bombs, grenades, and bazookas. Deep within the valleys, the defense groups would have hidden heavy machine guns, Dochkas, howitzers, and missiles. The size of the arsenal depended upon the size of the target. Mines and ambushes were laid the night before the planned raid. These were to destroy land-based reinforcements. Then, reinforcements can only come by air, reducing the soldiers to only two remaining methods of harm. They could either try to bring Skorsky helicopters close enough to us to land more foot soldiers, in which case we start firing on those helicopters, long before they reach us, or their second option was to attack us with combat aircraft, shooting and bombing us directly from fighter jets and attack helicopters. Then, their problem was that the weapons employed by these combat aircraft were intensely powerful but not very precise. So, while the probability of eliminating us this way would be high, so would their probability of murdering their own forces. Even though these aircraft-based weapons were completely capable of shooting at us from their own safe distance, long before the aircraft themselves were within range of our weapons, they were blocked by their own ground troops from being very effective.

Also, in mountainous and rural areas, Turkish fighter aircraft cannot easily hit a target. There were a few reasons for this. First of all, our groups were scattered and situated far away from each other. In addition, in mountainous areas, the planes cannot get an accurate reading from their laser sights. For a fighter plane to shoot the target without missing it, there must be a

laser fix on the ground or in the air, and these planes cannot achieve that in mountainous areas. Therefore, if we attacked military bases in these mountainous areas, we are generally successful.

Having a spare armory in a raid is mandatory. The reinforcement group carries the spare armory of the attack group. In addition, the general coordinating group also has a large armory, in order to supply ammo to any groups that are in need. On these missions, the schedule of which precise action will take place and at which time was determined in advance. Everyone knew the start and end times of the mission before it began. Even the routes through which the enemy would withdraw were determined beforehand. Our groups gathered at the predetermined points and moved towards the last determined point. The basic rule of guerilla warfare was to attack and retreat. No guerilla group, except in exceptional cases, remained where it was and continued to fight.

If we had any losses in any missions, the survivors brought back as many of the remains of our fallen as was possible. If the circumstances were unfavorable, we had to leave the corpses of our friends on the battlefield. Medical teams brought mules for the purpose of transporting the dead and the injured. In such missions, the commanding officers would already have estimated how many losses there might be, according to the scope of the mission, even before starting the action. For a very large mission, ten guerillas seemed to be a possible loss.

If the mission was successful, the amount of losses wasn't as devastating to us, (unless, of course, you lost a close friend whom you had known for years.) Because we were always aware that we were in a war, we never lost sight of the fact that we could lose a friend at any moment, as well as our own life.

Another issue that was very important, but easy to overlook by the guerillas participating in any raid or other tactics, was to never carry any information on them concerning the



organization: no documents, no CDs, or no USBs. The reality was that these documents could get into the hands of the enemy at any time.

After each mission, every guerilla, whether ranked or not, would gather, and we would evaluate the mission together. Had we performed the mission as planned? Did anything unfavorable happen? Had the groups moved in the ways in which we had needed? Everything was evaluated. If a group hadn't followed the plan, they would be punished. I frequently witnessed this firsthand. One time a commander with 20 years' experience was dismissed from duty and his rank was lowered to that of a regular guerilla, because he had led a failed mission. It was possible for a top commander to be reduced to a foot soldier, after just one mission. War cannot accept mistakes. Therefore, we could not accept mistakes on the part of our commanders, without sanction. It could set a precedent which allowed others to be neglectful, and that would allow a crack in the very values system which formed the foundation of our organization. This could diminish the philosophical structure in the minds of the guerillas.

## **BASIC TRAINING**

From time to time, instructors of war tactics from foreign states would come and give us some training about combat, such as when we established a new organization to fight Iran, (PJAK,) between the years 2003 and 2004. Interestingly, the American authorities contacted us in Iraq and said, "We want to train PJAK." The organization didn't accept their first proposal, but when they requested the second time, we agreed to a trial. I wish we hadn't. American soldiers came and began training us as if we were their regular army. What they taught us was so basic, we quickly realized our training program was harder and more professional than theirs. Granted, Americans know a lot more than we do, technically, and their weapons are much better,

but our training is guerilla training. If we exchanged our tough, environment-adapted training in favor of the Americans' standardized military training, we would only lose. When we realized we had nothing to learn from them, we thanked them and sent them home.

What Americans taught was all based on technology and scientific weapons. Our fighting is not like that, but is directed towards improving one's fighting ability by increasing one's self-control. You saw the efficacy of our style, in the battles for Kobane. ISIS had all kinds of advanced weaponry: tanks, cannons, and rifles—all with the very latest technology. Yet, the PKK would save Kobane from ISIS, without any such weapons, because ISIS members were not motivated by a righteous goal; only money interested them. The Peshmerga of Barzani also had weapons of the latest technology but were unable to fight ISIS. They simply ran away. So, the main motive was the development of self-control and courage, as well as the passion of fighting for a cause. Without this personal development and conviction, soldiers were unable to gain victories no matter how good their technology.

At heart, the guerilla training must have a spirit and a will. That's why we didn't often need the training of others, except on how to use special weapons. Then, specific trainings were received from Russia, Armenia, Greece, and some European countries.

Our basic training lasted for a few months. We practiced with weapons over and over. We were taught the theoretical underpinnings, and then drilled on the practical. For instance, the people who were trained as assassins had to shoot their sniper rifles in training at least 1,000 times. And after this three- to four-month basic training, each militant was appointed to the general branches, according to their skills and capacity. There were two main groups: saboteurs and operations.

The saboteur group was divided into three sections: the miners, the assassins, and those using heavy weapons. Women comprised the majority of this group (approximately 60 percent.) Sabotage, in assassin work, takes great patience. In assassination, expertise with your weapons is extremely important, with self-discipline the only trait being more important. You need to utilize the weapon flawlessly. Most of the men in the organization fail at assassination for one reason: because they smoke. The most significant thing in an assassination, is to control one's breathing and finger sensitivity. Smokers can't breathe, so they can't get into that zone and can't squeeze the trigger space precisely. Female guerillas are more patient and calm. Men were always in an impatient rush. A man won't wait 3 hours at the same spot to shoot a target, but a woman will. Therefore, female snipers were preferred.

The other group is the operation team, which constitutes the attacking teams battling with the Turkish military. Their tasks included raids, attacks, and ambushes. The assassins also participate in battles but remain behind. Their aim is to protect the operation team by disabling distant enemy teams. They never get within the enemy's weapon sights. The military in Turkey mostly use G-3 rifles. An assassin takes the sight range of the enemy's weapons into account when choosing their location. The range is longer, so the assassin sets up their sniper nest outside of the range of the enemies' weapons, because no one can easily shoot under fire.

Military training ended around 5:00 p.m. every day. So, after the day's final military muster, everyone was set free about 5:30 p.m. You were then allowed to go to bed or participate in other social activities. You could even leave camp, with permission, but you had to be back in the camp by the end of the rest period. In general, I used to spend my free time reading books. I was mostly reading Turkish books, because there were almost no books written in Kurdish.

Many memories, both good and bad, were made during those trainings. For example, the day that grenades were the topic of the lecture, when we were in the Haftanin Training camp, everyone in our group of 25 was going to throw a grenade. We had all gathered at a large rock formation, and now we were pulling the pins of grenades and throwing them over to the opposite side. I will never forget when one of the comrades pulled the pin, throwing it to the other side, but it bounced right back next to him. Thank God, the trainer was professional and grabbed it immediately, and threw it to the other side. We all had a good laugh at this comrade. It was so natural. I had no nerves around weapons, since I was no stranger to them since childhood.

### **DIVISION OF LABOR AT THE CAMP**

Until I saw them with my own eyes, I had never thought that women would want to join the fight. Yet, almost one third of the camp consisted of female guerrillas. We asked our more experienced friends why there was such a high percentage of participation of Kurdish women in the organization. The most obvious reason, which they stated unanimously, was that the PKK had taken steps towards the social liberation of women. In Kurdish society, the dominant, patriarchal culture repressed women, as a way of life, but this was certainly not the case for the PKK. The organization, with no room for argument, stated that no one was allowed to treat a woman with anything but respect. Manners towards women were very important in the PKK and rules were strict. You would certainly catch criticism, if you used bad language towards a male guerilla, but if you used the same language toward a woman guerilla, you would get penalties such as no-smoking or extra watch keeping. These penalties were meted out according to the severity of your behavior. Meanwhile, despite the positive attitude and approach regarding

discrimination against women guerrillas, the division of labor recognized no gender. So, the women were required to do all the same tasks as the men.

There was a huge division of labor at the camp. There were squads just for kitchen and bakery duty. If one unit of 10 people were insufficient, they would enlist a second unit. Those guerrillas would be responsible for cooking and baking for the day. Our camps cooked a wide variety of food. Washing-up and cleaning were also their responsibility.

We had three meals a day, but that could be flexible. For example, if we got hungry at night, we could get a midnight snack. It was up to the supply officer of the camp to decide about the menu every day. The dietician and the supply officer would make a monthly meal list, and the appointed group would then cook the meals on this list. The food was generally good, with legumes and meat products, which were available at all times, though there were instances when fruits and vegetables were in short supply.

Newcomers weren't allowed on kitchen duty for the first two months, because they needed to learn, alongside the former guerrillas, how the food was cooked and how the kitchen works were managed. After they reached a certain level of skill, they could start helping. Meanwhile, everyone, ranked or not, had to enter the rotation for the kitchen labor. No one could say, "I'm a commander, so I shouldn't be cooking meals!" Rank earned you no privileges. So it was no surprise to see a commander washing up the dishes. At the end of the day, the squad on duty would carry the kitchen to the logisticians, after all the tasks were completed. Then, the supply officer checked all the materials, the cleanliness, and other things and assumed responsibility for the kitchen. The next day, he would pass the duty and the kitchen to a new squad.

Everything was based on the commune system in the organization. No one was salaried. Let's say there were 50 people in a battalion. For this battalion, there would be one comrade in charge of logistics. This comrade was then tasked with the managing of all income and expenses. This logistician calculated everything, from how many cartons of cigarettes were needed to what type of food supplies the kitchen required.

This supply officer also visited every guerilla and asked whether they needed anything special. He noted down everybody's needs, from shoes, clothes, and underwear to socks. The camp supply officer then delivered this list to the master supplier of the region, who was in charge of purchasing. Each region had a very efficient purchase unit. All needs reach the requesting region in a maximum of two days, so there was no shortage of money. No one but the commander carries money on him. In other words, the leader of a team doesn't even have one Turkish Lira. For possible supply emergencies, the battalion commander had 3,000 to 4,000. That's all!

The safety of the camp must also be ensured. The security group responsible for its protection was called "Hillers." They were so named because they were generally located on a high hill. There were two kinds of hillers. One group was fixed in place, while the second group was changed every day. The fixed group stayed at a permanent observation area and consisted of 15 professional guerrillas. This group was responsible for the heavy, emplaced weapons, such as rockets and mortars. For the duration of their two to three-month assignment, they would never leave that post; not even to come down to the camp for food. All their needs were brought to them. On the other hand, the other type of group was rotated daily. This type of hillers would go to the fixed group and receive training from them. The stable, professional group and the rotating trainee group encampments were always located at least 500 meters from one another.

## **TYPES OF PENALTIES IN THE GUERRILLA LIFE**

The camp had a strange custom, which I originally found quite odd. Each night we were all asked to give an oral statement, evaluating the content of our daily life. All the members of the squads were gathered together and would give an oral report on their opinion of the chairmanship of their individual squad commander. At first, we could not understand any possible purpose for this meeting, since you could say anything here related to the camp about the daily life or the people. If your friend had a quirk that you didn't like, you could criticize them in front of everyone. At the beginning, I found this weird, because it felt like whistleblowing. Then, we understood that it was not that way. The aim was for everybody to help each other's personal development by highlighting mistakes. That oral report was made to correct the mistakes by stating the person's shortcomings. We could criticize anyone for the same mistake three times. If he continued doing the same thing, despite repeated criticism by various people, he would be penalized.

The penalty was decided by a majority vote of the group. In this town-hall-style meeting, we could even criticize the commander of the squad and even impose penalties on him. For example, three times, a friend had forgotten his equipment in his barracks on the way to the training. Besides, he hadn't woken up for the muster, and it appeared he simply could not adapt to camp life. So, we communally gave him the penalty of cleaning all the squad's weapons.

All the rules and their penalties were clearly predefined, and we were continually being updated about them. Fleeing and/or abandoning an injured comrade during a battle had serious penalties. This type of behavior could result in a penalty of up to a 3- or 6-year suspension from the organization. Suspension of membership from the organization was the most severe sanction for a guerrilla. A member with a suspension could not participate in our meetings; could not

speaking in any of our parliaments; lost his right to vote; could not criticize others, and could not ask anything from anyone until his penalty was over. In other words, though he was allowed to stay among us, he was ostracized, and considered to “not exist”. If he repeated the same offense for a second time, he would be dismissed. The theory was, "If you do not improve; if you don't spruce up your behavior, then just leave before your bad behavior starts rubbing off and damaging the other members of this organization.”

The expulsion decision was only made at the end of a long process. Before making such a decision about a person, a commission of 3 would be formed. The commission would consist of one battalion commander and two guerrillas. Their judgment was rendered publicly, and the guerrillas, in general, had their opportunity give an opinion about the person under discussion. The battalion commander would make a brief disclosure, stating this person had committed such and such a crime. Then, that person was given the right to speak to defend himself. If the person directly admitted his guilt, his crime would be somewhat mitigated. But, if he did not plead guilty, the commission of inquiry would investigate the incident in every minute detail, listen to all the witnesses present, and then create a report. This report would be read in front of the entire battalion, and then, if found guilty, his penalty would be announced.

Now, you may be asking yourself: “Wouldn't a person, who got fired so publicly, run straight to the Turkish security forces to reveal their location, as revenge? Wouldn't you worry about him giving out intelligence about you?” I can tell you, we never worried. The security forces in Iraq already knew exactly where we were. Almost every day, journalists, politicians, guests, and other civilians from foreign states were coming to the camp area. Therefore, if a consistent screw-up didn't make a dedicated effort to change himself, he could be easily dismissed.



There were some behaviors that were actually punishable by death. For example, if someone caused the death of another comrade, unless it was an innocent mistake, he could get the death penalty. (In 1994, the death penalty within the organization was removed during the 5th Congress by orders of Apo.) I witnessed the execution of such a death sentence. The commander of a group had acted completely irresponsibly. He constantly forced his militants to march in water and snow. The militants warned him many times. "Look, if we keep marching like this, our feet might get frostbitten. We had better take some rest and dry our feet," they requested, but the commander did not listen to them. As a result, two guerillas had their feet amputated below the ankle, because of this walk. When that group came back to the camp, the commander went under investigation and was sentenced to death. First, three guerrillas dug his grave, and then the commander was brought into the excavated pit and one of the guerillas shot him in the head. After this incident, we understood that there were certain rules which are essential for the proper functioning of the organization, and that if we didn't comply with these rules, the sanctions that were invoked, might cost us our lives.

Apart from killing comrades for a specific infringement, the death penalty was generally reserved for those in romantic relationships. The organization was founded on equal companionship between everybody. Gender did not matter. Everyone considered one another a friend. And yet the heart does what it wants. So, it was understood that you might become fond of a woman, or a woman of a man. It was not forbidden to love, but only on the condition that this love was not to interfere with your labor in the organization. By no means would anyone have a sexual relationship. A possible scenario might be: "I'm in love with a female militant, but after a certain time in Iraq my orders sent me to Iran. In such a case, I can't ask the organization to send the woman I love with me. I do not have the right." When you had a duty, you couldn't

fulfill it properly, while spending half of your time in love, and half of it for the task in front of you. That's why they would always warn us: "You can love one another, but ensure it will not be an obstacle to your work for us."

### **LAST DAYS IN THE CAMP OF HAFTANIN**

The day after Newroz Day, in 1992, a Turkish soldier came to our area loaded with weapons, which was not normal at all. He told us that during the Newroz celebrations in the town of Cizre, in Turkey, his commander had given the order for his soldiers to fire into the public crowd. Following this stern order, he and his friends had obediently opened fire on the Kurdish public. He used an Mg-3. About 60 Kurdish civilians were killed that day, and this soldier couldn't handle the guilt of what he had done. He fled from his barracks and went straight to the villagers, who loaned him a guide that brought him to us. He told us his story in great detail. Our anger exploded against the Turkish military upon hearing this! We just didn't understand it! Why would an armed group want to kill a group of unarmed civilians? Moreover, their own citizens! This soldier stayed in our camp for a few days and was then sent to Apo in Damascus, Syria. I do not know what happened after that. I never heard from him again.

The PKK administration wanted to send me to Damascus, around that same time, for advanced ideological training. I refused. I was new in the organization, and I wanted a little more military experience before I left there. After four months, we were asked to say where we would like to go and have a proposal drafted. We had come to the end of our training and would now be sent to our new duty locations, based on our proposals. We were to write on a piece of paper the name of the region to where we preferred going, and give the reason why we wanted to be transferred there. Then, we also wrote down what kind of job we could do there. In general,

most everyone selected the regions from where they had come. When the new guerillas offered their reports, they listed the benefits they'd bring to their new camp, which included the fact that they knew both the region and the people well and could contribute to the organization by sharing this knowledge with senior officers. The senior officers generally would send the militants to the regions they requested. At the end of the three-day evaluation period, we finally found out where we were to be sent.

The obligation of constantly writing reports was one of the issues I had to force myself to get used to in the PKK. After the end of basic training, we were asked for a report on the training we'd had before we could be transferred to new regions. So, every militant was obliged to write, in detail, all their criticism and opinions about the training they had received. Reports were then sent to Damascus and were stored electronically in the main archive repository of the organization. Even though I knew how to read, I was not very good at writing. I was too slow. Back then, Sakine Cansız, who was killed in Paris in 2013, was a member of the leadership in our camp. She was someone who valued the new young comrades and was constantly trying to help them. In particular, she would handle comrades plagued by psychological distresses and would try to solve their problems by talking with them. She had already told me that she would write the report for me. I gave her just a few main points. She was able to write a report which was about four pages in length, just using my brief information. When she finished the report, she read it to me from beginning to end. "If there is anything in here that you don't want to say, tell me what it is, so that I can remove it," she said. "Leave it just as it is. It's good," I said.

Before being shipped to the new regions, we were faced with a stunning fact. Not everyone could become a guerilla, even if they strongly wished it. The physical characteristics of some organization members and the status of their health did not allow them to fight as

guerrillas. A group of people with such handicaps, would instead, be sent to a group called ERNK (Kurdistan National Liberation Front.) The goal for everyone under that roof was to have good political experience. Therefore, ERNK included not only handicapped militant-wannabes but also people with sound political knowledge.

Unlike other units, ERNK had no hierarchical structure among its members. ERNK group members staged political activities in major cities in European countries and in Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Currently, there are ERNK members in almost every country around the world, from the Arab states to Europe and America.

Many countries were in a close relationship with PKK, though officially they labeled us as a terrorist group, so as not to jeopardize their current political and economic interests with Turkey. Today, the PKK can easily get any kind of support, in any form, from left and socialist organizations in any state in Europe. Especially, diplomatic jobs in Europe are decided via the ERNK. Some of these countries tried keeping PKK under control from time to time. In Syria, during his reign, Hafez al-Assad had thought he would control the PKK. The Syrians didn't realize that the PKK was able to handle all of their military and political attacks easily, thanks to the opportunities Syria, itself, had provided us.

PKK also had direct contacts with some organizations which did not represent countries. In terms of this kind of networking, the ERNK members used to lead the way. Palestinian leftist organizations were already in constant contact with the PKK. In 1982, in league with Palestinian organizations, the PKK fought against the tyranny of Israel, and 18 of our members were martyred. Kurds fighting on behalf of Palestinian Arabs aroused a terrific sympathy within the Palestinian people. In fact, this sympathy had spread so much in the 2000s that not only Arabs, but also many sympathizers from Germany, Russia, and other countries around the world had

come to Iraq to fight for the PKK. These people were able to participate in PKK-supported activities under the aegis of ERNK. Also, they had the freedom of traveling from town to town to provide supplies for us militia fighters.

Regardless, towards the middle of that May 1992, everyone received their orders regarding to where they would be transferred. Although the city of Diyarbakir had been my first choice, the organization had found me proficient in military training, so they sent me to the town of Garzan. This actually was a point of pride. I knew nothing about the region, but I knew that only people with great skills would get sent to Garzan. Therefore, I didn't complain. Yet, I had met a female comrade called Sevin during the training in Haftanin camp. For a few months, we stayed at the same camp. Over time, we fell in love. Fortunately for us, we were both sent to Garzan.

### **ON THE WAY TO THE TOWN OF GARZAN**

Our Garzan journey was full of disasters. We found ourselves in the middle of a minefield, just as we passed the Iraqi border into Turkey. We had a large amount of 120 people in that group, and we had already known there was a minefield at the border. We figured we would be safe because we had taken the necessary precautions in advance. Specifically, we told the villagers, so, ahead of our arrival they swept the area with detectors and cleared it of mines. We planned to safely proceed into Turkey through this corridor they had cleared.

But, as we set off in the dark, our guide missed the marker for the safe area by a good 20 meters. Three mines exploded as soon as the front group passed the border. Nine people were seriously wounded, including the battalion commander. Someone barked, "Everyone stay in

place! Don't move!" The commander in the back of the group marched to the front to help the injured and stepped on a mine before he got to them.

We were new, and we had no idea what was happening. I thought there was a Howitzer mowing down everyone. But when the deputy commander of the battalion stepped on the mine and blew up himself, we were suddenly instantly clear on the precarious situation we were in. The senior officers began strategizing how to get us out of there. They decided we would retreat carefully, with a few of us carrying the wounded. Advancing to reach the wounded, another mine exploded. This was the most devastating one yet, because it had exploded where 4 guerillas were gathered, waiting to lead out the wounded. The casualties were heavy. The mine completely severed the feet from the nearest three people. Two more of our comrades lost their eyes from the shrapnel, and five people sustained serious wounds in various parts of their bodies.

We removed the wounded by stretcher, and dragged ourselves back to the camping area. On the way, we encountered the other group, the Amed (Diyarbakir) group, which had been trailing behind us for their own safety. We warned them about what had happened. The next day, we were appointed another battalion commander. Our first battalion commander had had a sincere and gentle personality. He had been Kurdish, of Syrian origin. Apo himself had appointed him. Therefore, his death really took a toll on our morale.

Meanwhile, those with the amputated feet were sent to Apo, in Damascus, to serve the organization from the background.

Of course, the minefield disaster had alerted our enemies as to our intended location for passing into Turkey. So our new battalion commander radioed our comrades in the Cudi region and instructed them to hold the strategic locations, before the enemy could reach them. The next day we passed to Cudi over Hezil Stream by cable car. For two days, we rested in Cudi. Finally,

we reached Herekol Mountain, in the region of Besler. The Turkish security forces had about 2,000 soldiers holding this region, whereas we were 250 people in total. Our battle with them began around 3:00 a.m. It lasted until 12:00 p.m. The soldiers never left the region. They had surrounded the area, figuring that nobody could escape the mountain, and if anyone had tried, the soldiers intended to destroy them.

But they had not taken into account that guerrillas were more versatile than conventional soldiers, for a few reasons. First of all, the difference between our mentality and the soldiers' was our greatest advantage in battle. Mentally, the soldiers were family men. They wouldn't take any risks. They spent their downtime counting the days to return home. Even during a battle, they were inevitably thinking of their homes, families, and their children. We were exactly the opposite. We had left our families in order to fight. Any militant who joined the organization, had already abandoned all hope that he would ever go back home. That's why we were brave. We had already given up everything. This was a big disadvantage for the military and a great advantage for the organization.

Being accustomed to the terrain was also a plus for us. There was a big difference between a city-raised, briefly trained Turkish Soldier and the village-born guerilla, who had survived off the land and its harsh conditions for many years.

The Turkish soldier was also obligated to carry so much more gear, like his rucksack, materials, and equipment. At the end of the day, they had been burdened with so much weight, that they had no strength to fight. Consider their ridiculous invention called "the helmet." It was very heavy, but had zero practical benefit. Maybe it would protect you against a rock, but it couldn't protect you against weapons. A bullet hitting a helmet would kill a soldier by

concussion, as surely as if it had passed through his skull. So, we had absolutely no idea why our enemies bothered using helmets.

Finally, we were much more nimble. Our ability to move was much greater than conventional soldiers. This was the entire point of our fighting style. To thwart a blockade, for example, we divided ourselves into small contingents of just 15 to 20 people. This dramatically increased our ability to maneuver and attack. Had we attacked in a large group, it would have been impossible to go unnoticed. But, in small units, and in the darkness of night, we could all pass undetected through a narrow corridor. We had brought experienced friends with us who knew the details of the terrain very well. They calculated the best route for us; where we could outmaneuver the enemy and get an ambush.

While we used our expertise to our advantage, the regular Turkish soldiers were acting like rank beginners. They were continuously attacking only the main point of the siege. This left some very quiet areas on the margins of the battle. Naturally, one would expect us to go towards these quiet areas, but we already knew their tactics. They were inviting us into an ambush. So, we acted contrary to their plans, and we never once headed to these quiet points. To the experienced among us, it was all just a game. In small groups, we advanced directly on the area where they were firing. So, while a small part of our force was drawing their attention from the quiet places where they expected us to be, the actual main body of our force was silently leaving the siege and sneaking directly down their line of fire. Then, once we were clear of the siege, those units which had stayed behind and bought us time, hid themselves somewhere safe.

So, from our force which was 250 strong at the outset, we took a total of four losses in this Battle of Herekol Mountain, and we acquired eight weapons from the opposite side. The



total of our weapons didn't imply that we had caused that many enemy losses, because any soldier might have become frightened and retreated, or his friend could have gotten wounded, and he may have dropped his gun to leave the field to go help him.

“Acceptable losses,” according to the rules of guerrilla war, equal one loss for every ten deaths inflicted. If we killed ten soldiers and lost three guerrillas, this would be an unacceptable loss for us. In which case, the guerrilla commander in charge of such a fiasco would be dismissed.

We sustained these losses and still managed to enter the territory of Turkey. Before making it to Garzan, we waited in the countryside to the east of the city of Siirt. But the security forces expected us to cross to Siirt from the countryside. We were going to have to find an alternate route. The Turkish soldiers held almost all the passes in the countryside. Therefore, our commander said that we were going to have to go through the city. He believed the city was the strongest and most reliable option left.

So, according to the new plan, we came to a spot near the city at night, where 16 trucks were awaiting us. We boarded these trucks in groups, and were taken through the city. Without further incident, we passed through Siirt, headed straight to Bitlis. I found it interesting that all the trucks that came to pick us up were official vehicles of the city. So, thanks to the help of the city itself, we were transported in three or four hours—the same distance that would have taken us two or three days on foot. No explosions, no further casualties, and we didn't get caught.

The organization had harsh penalties for traveling by vehicle and normally this was strictly forbidden. But considering the minefield experience, and the lack of other options, our battalion commander made the call. He accepted full responsibility.

## **PART II.2 BEING A TERRORIST**

## CHAPTER 8

### RANGERS AND MY FIRST MISSION

When we reached the area of Bitlis, at the beginning of the summer, we found out that the commander of Garzan province had made a new arrangement for us. The body of our force, who had arrived safely, were now to be distributed into four different regions. My group was to be sent to the Shirvan District of Siirt. Our new task area was enormous, and our area of responsibility would include the central province of Bitlis, the city of Siirt, the region of Shirvan, Baykan district of Siirt, and Bitlis. Our entire force would be only two platoons of 49 men and eight women in total.

There existed at that time a ranger program called the village protection system. Through this system, certain Kurdish villagers would be armed and trained by the Turkish state to seek out and destroy the PKK members. These village protection guards had already been armed by the state in order to more effectively fight against us in rural areas like this. In these regions we had been assigned to control, the villagers had been officially registered in the state's bounty hunting system for tracking and killing PKK members. But the official policy of the organization at that time was that there would be no action taken against the rangers. It wasn't our mission. The sole purpose for our presence in that region was to act against the police and military stations there, which we believed was a critical area in order to shake the authority of the state. Therefore, every guerrilla serving there had been especially selected.

As a troop, we couldn't take any action until the autumn. There were so many rangers in the region that it was almost impossible to pass through them and reach the security forces. There was no way to do our job without somehow disabling all these rangers. At first, we started

gently, by trying conversations and dialogue. For three months, we repeatedly had talks with the leaders of the rangers in the villages. Despite all this, we were unable to get them to agree to a cease-fire. Moreover, these rangers, even while we were trying to negotiate, were still patrolling the mountainsides for any trace of us to report to the Turkish security forces, so they could collect their reward money. Consequently, our troop of militants couldn't stay in one place for two days in a row. Our entire troop was physically exhausted from constantly being on the move.

Yet, we engaged in a total of five battles during this three-month period. Of course, the rangers helped the security forces during these battles. Actually, the rangers antagonized us the most, because the security forces acted with the logic of a regular army; collectively, and dependent on orders from the hierarchy. This made them very slow. Because, in a regular army no individual has the right to act based on their own initiative. All movements are connected to, and hindered by, the chain of command.

So, all we had to do with a conventional army was to take our precautions until some soldier made a decision in the chain of command. But, the rangers were not like that. They were more like us. They would move on their own initiative and shoot at us at every opportunity. Most damaging, they were very aware of our policy towards them in our organization. They knew we would not take any action against them no matter what they did to us. So they were continuously engaging us, harassing us, and generally abusing our party policy of doing them no harm.

I did not know the terrain of Shirvan, as I did the lands around my own village or the training camp. I was new in the organization, so I didn't know where it was safe; where the Turkish troops hid; which paths through the mountains were reliable, and so much more. This

lack of knowledge made us very vulnerable. When we were staying at a point near the region of Tatvan, a bizarre snow began. It was December, and we carried no gear for winter camping. We had not known to prepare for this. There were nearly one and a half meters of snow. We had to leave our hiding place and go out straight into the storm and fog. The visibility was less than five meters, and the weather was so bone-chilling cold. We were prevented from leaving the area but wouldn't have known where to go if we could.

We feared we had gotten too close to a road, because we thought we heard the sound of a car. It was the absolute worst thing to not know where we were, but we rather figured we were probably on the Silk Road. As soon as we approached the road, we realized it led to a village very close by. There was a military post right at the village entrance, meaning we had probably just stumbled straight into a village full of rangers. What choice did we have? The soldiers didn't notice us as we entered the area from above. In two groups, we entered the first two houses. We arrested the people in these houses, and we didn't let them out. We asked them, "Is this a village of rangers? Answer honestly!" With considerable courage, considering the rebels they faced in their own homes, the men admitted, "Comrade, yes, we are rangers." The name of the village was Qesrè in Kurdish and NarlıDere in Turkish.

We explained our situation to those people. It was something like three o'clock in the afternoon. We would meet our needs until it got dark and set off again. The rangers said, "Comrade, you can stay, but we need to inform one of the leading figures of the village." The head ranger came over and greeted us very pleasantly. There were about 80 rangers in the village. We were around 55 to 60 guerillas. "You are our guests," he said. "You can stay here as long as you want. Just let us know when you want to leave. We will help you escape the village."

I was new and absolutely could not understand why these men who had fought us alongside the Turkish soldiers were now treating us so well. Our region commander asked, "How will you get us out of here without the military station finding out?" The head ranger said, "I will take care of it, comrade. Without my consent, no one can talk to the soldiers here in this village."

And that is how we enjoyed three nights of rest in the village of Narlıdere. The rangers actively protected us. Not only had they placed three guards at three fixed points overlooking the town, but they also kept tabs on the soldiers' patrols. If the soldiers come close to the houses where we were hiding, our new ranger friends would notify us immediately.

We began preparations to leave the village on the third night. As I have said, there was a military station right at the entrance of the village. To leave the village, we had to cross the bridge close by the station. To cross over the Bitlis River, we had to use that bridge. We considered trying to pass through the water, but the weather was very cold, with a high chance that all our feet might freeze after coming out of the water.

But the head ranger said, "Do not worry, you will pass safely over the bridge. We will handle it." Then, he went straight to the military station and told them, "A group of us, rangers has some business in the opposite village. We will use the bridge to get over there, just to let you know." We passed within 50 meters of the soldiers in their station that night. They thought we were rangers. There we were, with 58 members of the enemy, and only 15 to 20 rangers with us. Initially, the rangers weren't going to accompany us, but as it was snowing, we were aware our footsteps would become visible as soon as the sun rose. We didn't want to give the commander of the military station the chance to wonder about the number of the footprints. That's why the ranger group accompanied us.

But, when we did reach the opposite village, the rangers were in a rush to return. Later, we learned that one of the villagers had ratted us out to the security forces. The station commander decided not to call the villagers to account until spring. I mean, of course the soldiers pretended like nothing had happened. But when it got to be spring, 80 rangers in the village were detained. The security forces were really bent out of shape that the government had given them all those weapons, all that salary, and then the rangers went and hosted the terrorists and didn't even tell the state. In their pique, they took back the weapons of 40 rangers.

So, this incident caused the rangers of Narlıdere to lose all their credibility in the eyes of the security forces. So, when all the security forces ostracized them, where did they turn? They joined the PKK, the Patriotic Front. They even told the local leader of the PKK, "We have always wanted to take part in the birth of the state of Kurdistan from the beginning, but we had no choice. We were told by the security forces that we could either accept weapons and become rangers for them, or we would be ousted from our own village and forced to relocate to the West. Inspired, we sent two comrades, as messengers, to other nearby villages in June, in hopes of persuading these other village rangers to lay down arms. The rangers killed them without letting them speak. This news rocked our whole troop. We were in such a lather that nearly all of us wanted to mutiny against the company commander.

Instead, we held a sober meeting to evaluate our activities over this three-month period. Normally, our status meetings were held monthly, but these had been hampered due to the difficult conditions, since we first came to this region. So, this time, for about five or six hours, we talked about the village rangers. After our meeting, our troop commander was going to take our findings directly to the meeting of the PKK Provincial Government. Chaired by the provincial commander, the provincial government meeting was the gathering of the commanders

of each of the four regions of Garzan for a situation report on the region as a whole. We wanted the company commander to convey our “request” to the regional commander: Either give us permission to attack the rangers in this region or watch us abandon the region.

After assessing the case, the company commander gave us leave to undertake one single mission against one single ranger village. We were even left the choice of which village to attack. There was only one village for us; the one to which we had reached out for a cease-fire. The one which had killed our messengers of peace. That was the village we chose to destroy. It was 1992, a clear Autumn day, around two o'clock, when we laid our siege on the village. We did give them a chance, though. We first tried again sending peace messengers. Three comrades went. They were going to warn the villagers not to fight. All the village had to do was give us the weapons the state had given to them, and we would leave the village without killing anyone. But if they didn't obey, we were going to kill all the men of the village and anyone we found holding weapons. The rangers' bullets struck our messengers before our friends even entered the village. One of them was shot in the head and instantly martyred. The other two were heavily wounded. And yet our commander still tried diplomacy and spoke with the head ranger by radio. He tried to convince him to lay down the weapons. The head ranger could not be convinced. A Turkish military outpost, of 60 to 70 soldiers strong, was about an hour and a half from this village. I guess that's why these villagers could act so macho. They had put their faith in the military outpost. They thought those Turkish soldiers would save them.

This was my first opportunity to lead a mission. Since I was good at weapons, I was given a Bazooka. I was comfortable with it, should the battle escalate. And here was the villager's head ranger on the radio, refusing to negotiate. Our squadron commander gave the order to attack. As I have said, we had a grudge against this village. No, actually, it was a



hatred! They had treacherously killed two of our friends. Then another. Then wounded two more. They had fueled a very strong hatred in us, but this mission would release all of that hatred. We had no desire for restraint, so we decided to destroy the whole village; men, women, children, the elderly. It didn't matter. Everyone.

We started by firing at the rangers. Some of the them took positions near their homes, while some shot at us from the doors and windows of their very houses. The conflict lasted for nearly four hours. The villagers, themselves, prolonged the conflict, trying to buy themselves time. They still believed that reinforcements from the nearby Turkish soldier station would come and save them. How could they know our comrades had already executed an ambush on the road from which the help would come, and 13 Turkish reinforcement soldiers already lay dead. After this ambush, no help could reach the village. It was now to our advantage to prolong the fight. Leisurely, we worked our way through the village until the entire village was destroyed.

The completed action was now a horror for the other ranger villages to suffer. Now, the fate of whoever defied us would be the same. We had never taken any action against rangers until that time. We had never disproven the popular theory that the guerilla would never kill their own people. Now, everyone knew we would execute missions against soldiers and rangers, if we so chose.

Around 6:00 p.m., we finished the mission. A total of 23 weapons were seized from the village. We also seized around a half-dozen weapons from the reinforcement troops. We killed everyone except those who had hidden successfully, or those inhabitants who hadn't been in the village that day. Then we shouldered the bodies of our dead comrades, and withdrew to a safe area. As usual, we had scouted out this location long beforehand. We had already determined

that it would be easy to defend, in case a counteraction had been taken against us. But neither rangers nor soldiers came after us. This was our first mission in the region. They were all in shock at what we were capable of doing.

Then, after the mission, we started to be a bit concerned. What if the senior party management didn't like what we had done? Such devastating missions were generally considered only appropriate as a counter-action or a disavowed action. At first, the party leadership said nothing. Then, they learned that we had killed the women, children and elderly. Immediately they sent a written order to the region. Such a mission was never to happen again, no matter what. It was a very long directive, but, in brief, it said that these kinds of actions could damage the image of our movement and turn both domestic and foreign public opinion against us. The Turkish media was broadcasting images of the deceased, which was as good as ready-made propaganda against us. They said all the necessary damning things against us.

But this mission had skyrocketed our troop morale, besides securing our revenge. Leveling that village provided extra benefit beyond our original purpose. All the village rangers in the area fled to the cities, leaving behind virtually all their belongings, even their livestock. Every abandoned village increased our freedom of movement. We did not need to struggle as before. Sometimes, we could even stay in the same spot for five or six days.

## **WINTER CAMP**

Now it was time to slowly start preparations for the winter. We hadn't known that, in winter, we remain in the same camp for at least four months. Winter camp was the time for spiritual renovation and rest for the guerrilla. This is the time for political and ideological education to resume. This was also the time for us to self-assess the incidents which had taken

place during the combat summer season. If mistakes had been made, we were to discuss what could be done the following year to prevent the recurrence of such mistakes. Thus, the self-improvement we invested in during the winter ensured that we would enter the following season better prepared and better equipped.

The winter camping areas were determined in autumn. Geographic conditions were considered. Winter camps were usually set in steep and wooded areas. But you cannot just camp anywhere. It is very important to take into account how much snow falls on the area, before you plan to set up camp there. It was beneficial to choose an area where there was no risk of avalanches in winter.

There was one other important safety detail. While determining the campground, you must keep in mind that you were at the same time selecting suitable ground for a battlefield. You must be somewhere that is defensible, if the military found you. Our first winter camp was at a very steep and high place—somewhere the terrain and winter weather deterred the military from reaching us.

Once we were all ensconced in camp, we all knew that, short of an emergency, nobody could leave. Thus, we had to accurately predict all our needs and lay in the correct supplies, during the season before. Enough food, clothes, fuel, ammo, training materials, weapons, and all other materials had to be cached in the place where we were going to stay. Our suppliers in the cities were able to procure all these essentials for us at the beginning of each cold season, and then it was up to us to transport them to our winter camp. This meant buying everything we needed all at one time from our militias in the urban centers, and then finding a way to cart all of it back to our campsite.

We lived underground in squads in the winter campground. Each squad consisted of 10 people. Each squad was responsible for digging their own temporary quarters. An underground bunker of around 15 square meters, on average, was needed for 10 people. There were also some winter camps in the caves, though not in every region. In addition to that, cairns of stones were also built—and in public areas too. Camouflage was essential in such cases, and the camouflage must be so good that it is also disguised the cairn from the air.

Every aspect of camp life followed these strict precautions. Each squad had heating stoves. For warmth, we could light the stoves both day and night, but only when it was rainy and foggy. To avoid detection in clear weather, we could only light them at night. Otherwise they would make excellent beacons for the enemy to discover our location. The worry back then was the visible smoke from the stoves, and nighttime or fog was sufficient to obscure it. Please remember, technology in the nineties was very rudimentary. There were no such things yet as portable thermal cameras, night vision systems, or unmanned aerial vehicles. So, as long as we accounted for physical and visual giveaways, we could move with relative comfort. Back then, the game was completely different. As soon as we noticed the surveillance aircraft, we had to freeze in place. I remember having to stay completely motionless for 15 minutes at a time.

And yet, even in these circumstances, our education continued. Every morning after breakfast, we would convene with the other squads to receive political and ideological training. The courses lasted until 11:00 a.m. Then lunchtime and rest between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. After lunch, the political and ideological education resumed from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. In these trainings, we would read and discuss the founding documents of the organization. Militants were assigned different courses and topics in turn, and each expert commission was

giving training to many groups. That was how trainings would proceed, either in a lecture format or a discussion.

Obviously, there was not sufficient space underground to conduct physical training, so winter camp was heavy on more theoretical education—for instance, strategy. They taught us everything about guerrilla warfare styles but also gave us expertise in regular army tactics, so we might better know our enemy. But, most often, we were studying the strategies and tactics of other guerrilla warriors from around the world. We analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of different resistance movements from different eras and regions, and adapting those lessons to our conditions. Our reading list included the autobiographies of important figures such as Mao Tse-Tung, who led the Chinese Revolution; legendary Vietnamese commanders, and the undefeatable leader of Cuba, Che Guevara.

Several times, we had wanted to examine currently active revolutionary organizations, such as the ETA and the IRA in Europe, but further review made us nix this idea. The rural warfare tactics of these organizations were too weak. They were inexperienced compared to us. So, we abandoned the idea of incorporating their operational styles into our strategies. In fact, a decade later, their senior officials would come to our camp to receive wilderness guerilla training from us! But, there was no question that these organizations were better in urban warfare and suicide bombings than were we. So, part of our education was the close study of the training materials prepared by these organizations in order to gain their expertise on these tactics. In addition to these studies, each member of the organization was comprehensively trained in Russian revolutionary war tactics. We all had to read the true story, “Volokolamsk Highway” by Aleksandr Aleksandrovic Bek, regarding Russian guerillas’ successful repulsion of advancing German soldiers. The book, "The Art of War" by the famous Chinese commander, Sun Tzu, was

also required reading. As our own comrades became experienced and specialized in guerilla warfare, we benefitted from their expertise as well. No matter what we read, we were already well versed in the golden rule of guerilla warfare: time and place. No mission could succeed unless time and place had been researched and correctly predetermined.

Once more, I would like to underscore how different the style of regular armies was from our own. Conventional soldiers act in a systematic and coordinated manner. Also, technology matters a great deal in a regular army. They use all kinds of advanced weapons. But personal resilience and strength of character are diminished. We knew this, and used it to our advantage. How else could we have ever engaged a regular army brigade of 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers in battle with just one platoon of about 50 to 60 guerrillas? However, we could defend ourselves against such a large force without any loss of efficacy, because guerrilla warfare is “irregular warfare,” according to the philosophy of the regular army. We are able to move in small groups; are highly maneuverable, and each squad commander is empowered to use his own initiative.

The regular army behaves nothing like this. No company commander or battalion commander can act on their own initiative. In fact, they cannot act at all, without the approval of their superiors. This strategic bottleneck was a big advantage for us. The bureaucratic delay induced by the enemy’s hierarchy, often postponed their utilization of long-range artillery or airstrikes, because they needed to get permission for everything. Their hierarchy was that strict. So, their unwieldy decision chain frequently spared us casualties, since we were able to flee conflicts during the intervals while standard soldiers were awaiting the order to attack.

Then there was our practice of publicly assessing each individual at the finale of every winter training, before leaving the guerrilla camp to start the battle cycle anew with the approaching spring. A stage would be built. One by one, each comrade would put themselves

on display and recite for all of us an accounting of their deficiencies, mistakes, and negative aspects. After this disclosure, everyone in the compound would respond with their own rendition of all his mistakes and failings. The purpose of this wasn't to discourage people. On the contrary, it was for their own good. One's comrades showed him his deficiencies in order to help him overcome them.

After he has heard all the critiques from his comrades, the recipient is given the right to speak again. In this final rebuttal, that person would tell each critic which judgment he accepted; the ones he did not, and why not. Whether he rejected one criticism or many, there was no such thing as forcing him to agree with his comrades' assessment of him.

All the officers and commanders were assessed during these platforms, as well. If the organization, by consensus, didn't like the personality, war tactics, or skills of a commander, it could elect to dismiss that commander. This is how simple it was to change the roster of team and squad commanders. The company commanders were exempt from assessment at this level. But, if the personality, approach, or skills of a company commander were not appreciated, an infraction report was written to the party leadership calling for his dismissal. The senior management would review this report, and if the accusations turned out to be factual, the commander would be dismissed.

So, when someone made a written complaint about the provincial management, we were obliged to report it to headquarters. There were pre-existing criteria for the dismissal and appointment of higher-ranking officials, which have been established in advance by the organization. These are the measures and criteria by which the performance and rank of senior-level officers were systematically evaluated. These served as regulations in every command. Interestingly, these regulations contained articles regarding the acceptance and embodiment of

party ideology. So, while appointing someone, the regulations dictate an investigation of how much that person has embraced the mission and the ideals of the party, how experienced he was, and how committed he was to his people...

Esprit de corps was a very important issue—and not just between members of one unit or between guerillas and their commander. There must be rapport between each and every comrade. An individual doesn't have the luxury of saying, "I like that commander, but I do not like the other one." For the organization to function, it was required for you to be close to everyone and never "on the out" with anyone. Because the advent of personal discrimination in the organization begins the dissolution of the sense of brotherhood, which leads to loss of confidence—then to loss of effectiveness, and then to failure. That's why the commander must exemplify the noblest qualities. A commander should also be expert in guerrilla warfare tactics.

If a person was assigned as a commander and later couldn't fulfill all the regulations, he would be dismissed and someone else appointed in his place. But it wasn't important whether the appointee was an experienced combatant or a new recruit. The main criterion was how closely aligned that person's life was with the party line. We sometimes witnessed a newbie being appointed as a commander over those who had been in the organization for fifteen years.

But to return to our timeline. It was the middle of March, and we were just preparing to leave the camp when we were attacked by an airstrike. The campground was hit every half hour by six alternating attack aircraft. After the heavy sorties were over, we came under fire by Cobra style helicopters. Despite the horrific bombardment, we didn't have any casualties. Our bunkers and caves held fast against the attacks of aircraft and Cobras. The air attacks stopped in the evening, but we were compelled to postpone our departure. Thankfully, our supplies and ammunition weren't harmed, but the camp was physically destroyed. We would not be using it



again. We salvaged our gear and supplies, and then two nights later we abandoned our winter home under darkness.

In these circumstances, it was really difficult to go on living. Going up to the mountains and rebelling against the state may seem the only logical response to tyranny, or seem to some like a romantic adventure. But, it's nowhere near that simple. It takes incredible willpower to devote oneself to this cause. If you are not committed to your purpose and your target and don't have an iron will, you can't take it for very long. How do you think you could survive -20 Celsius degrees in the middle of the Winter? Sometimes, water would leak into the bunker. We were getting soaked and constantly shivering. Yet, we couldn't make a fire because the Turkish military could detect us if we did. One simply cannot survive the difficulties of this lifestyle, if you can't devote yourself to the cause—with all your heart!

I have said it before, that you can't force someone to stay in those conditions. Combat aside, sometimes people just couldn't handle the difficulty of our daily life and returned back home. Whomever wanted to leave, would just depart. We would never chase those who left us. It would do us no good to arrest them. As I have said before, the conditions were terrible, and the resources simply did not exist to monitor and force an unwilling militant to perform as an acquiescent comrade. Even if you forced him to stay, he could potentially harm you and the organization, even more than if you had just permitted him the freedom that he sought to leave.

### **A HOPE FOR PEACE**

The Spring of 1993 was a crucible for the organization—because the autumn of 1992 had begun the largest-scale, military operation ever fought against our party. Suddenly, our enemy was not only the Turkish police and security forces, but local forces in the region lent Turkey

their strength, namely, in Iraq: the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, headed by Jalal Talabani) and the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Mesud Barzani) had actively joined the fight against us. Even NATO supported this attack, albeit in secret. The joint offensive against the organization was conducted over a very extensive area from southeastern Turkey to the north of Iraq. An attack of this size was staged for one reason only: in order to attempt to eliminate the entire PKK. We were so effective that we were forcing our enemy's hand. We knew very well that if Turkey didn't eliminate the organization, it would have had to sit at the negotiation table with us, and eventually forge a solution with us through dialogue. But apparently we were very hard to eliminate. Our precautions, our tough lifestyle, our skill at adaptation, all worked for us. We weren't destroyed in a military sense, but we suffered heavy losses. During their operation, they managed to kill about 1,500 of us.

We also fell victim to psychological warfare. During these operations, Osman Ocalan, second in command of the entire organization, was contacted by some senior officials from PUK, under the presidency of Talabani. Back then, Osman Ocalan was working in Haxkurkê camp in the north of Iraq. As I mentioned, the sole purpose of this operation against us was the complete liquidation of the PKK movement. Moreover, this goal was supported by international operations, so the PUK got to Osman Ocalan and told him that it was over for Apo. They convinced him that the combined international forces would liquidate Apo, and that Osman Ocalan (and his followers) should take this opportunity to leave the sinking ship and accept shelter in a zone controlled by the PUK. They lured Osman Ocalan with the promise to appoint him as the head of a new party, which they assured they would establish. "As the PUK, we will publicly support you. We have countries friendly to you, whom you can trust," they told him. "They also want you to take the lead."

It was all a game to deceive Osman, and it worked. Osman fled with his guards to “shelter” with PUK, instead of coordinating the PKK force against the enemy in Haxkurkê camp.

Barzani's KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) and Talabani's PUK (the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) were the first Kurd-supporting organizations founded in Iraq. These two Kurdish parties have often sided with Turkey against the PKK. Frankly, they were jealous of us. The PKK was a newcomer organization to them. Those two organizations founded in the 1940s did not understand how the PKK, an organization founded in the late 1970s, had surpassed them to capture the sympathy of the Kurdish people. What was so hard to understand? The KDP and PUK's management style was based on feudalism and a family-style authority. But we had foremost a social democratic and socialist policy. This more egalitarian form of management enticed thousands of socialists, formerly in the KDP and the PUK, to join the PKK. Barzani and Talabani could not accept the reality that so many people from their base of support chose to move on and join the PKK. In their jealousy, they wanted to eliminate the PKK as soon as possible. But neither of these two parties had the strength to fight against us. They joined in the joint operation after making an agreement with Turkey. Both Barzani and Talabani planned to destroy the sovereignty of PKK in Iraq by consolidating their power with Turkey.

Right after this operation started, they began arresting the members of our party across all the European countries. Almost all the senior executives in Germany were arrested. Some of the Western countries openly supported this operation against us, and some did it secretly. The United States especially didn't want an organization like the PKK to get stronger and upset the balance of power in the Middle East. Because the stronger the PKK got, the greater risk we became for Barzani and Talabani, who were allies of the USA. The USA could easily manipulate Barzani and Talabani. However, it knew the PKK wasn't such a pushover

organization. I mean the United states wouldn't be able to use PKK for its own purposes and goals. Therefore, the Americans supported this operation against us, both by providing weapons and by allowing Turkish soldiers to enter Iraq.

So, the fall of 1992 was a big struggle for us. When Turkey didn't get the military results that it wanted from this operation, it started to look for a political solution. The President of Turkey during that period, Turgut Özal, sent Apo a letter which said, "All of your demands can be discussed, including self-determination and an autonomous Kurdish state, as long as there is no more warfare..." Upon receipt of this letter, our party declared a ceasefire. Until this ceasefire, the aim of the PKK had been to establish an independent Kurdish state. However, during the peace granted by the ceasefire, our party made a change in our organizational strategy. We now demanded a democratic Kurdistan, united with the Turkish public and institutions, instead of an independent Kurdish government. Although this was a radical change for us guerillas, neither the commanders nor the guerillas, themselves, objected to this change in our strategy.

There were exceptions among us, though only a few. The PKK management wanted us to prepare ourselves for the two most likely scenarios. If the ceasefire process succeeded, we were going to put down our weapons and continue our struggle in a peaceful, diplomatic way. But if the peace process was spoiled, we were going to redouble our combat and fight as hard as possible. Our commanders were constantly indoctrinating us. "If the government takes sincere and serious steps, we will give the necessary response." Because, during that period, the now-deceased Özal, had even opened discussion on the issue of amnesty. We were also aware that there was a rooted, hidden power structure that took advantage of this continuing war. No matter

how sincere Özal was, he would be unable to manage the peace process before demolishing these shadowy interests.

Also in the Spring of 1993, mirroring Ozal's friendly and sincere behavior, Apo organized a press conference in Beqaa Valley [Syria] to announce to the Turkish public that the PKK was going to remain faithful to the cease-fire. Talabani, the president of the PUK, was the mediator during these talks. It was negotiated that ceasefire would extend for a certain period of time. During this time, some political steps in good faith would have to be taken by the state. The release of political PKK prisoners; the cancellation of the state of emergency in the eastern Anatolia region, and the dissolution of the rangers' village protection system were requirements that the PKK demanded be adopted as soon as possible, as our pre-condition for a cease-fire. Once these preliminary steps were taken, the organization sought to ensure education for Kurds in their mother tongue, and the national recognition of the Kurdish ethnic identity status as distinct from Turkish. These latter issues could be discussed in future years, so long as the preconditions were met, but the Turkish government told the PKK that none of these steps could be taken within the given timeframe. Ozal's government wanted a little more time to convince the more entrenched levels of Turkish nationalists in the country.

The organization extended the ceasefire period upon Ozal's request, although he took none of the steps we had requested. And that was when those bizarre, shadowy disruptions began occurring, specifically to derail the peace process. First, General Esref Bitlis was killed. He was one of the names most famous for his support of the peace process and also well-known for his close stance to Ozal. In February, 1993, the plane he was on crashed for some mysterious reason. The elimination of Esref Bitlis was spooky, because here he was, a Turkish army General who supported Ozal's government, in pursuit of the peace process. So, we knew it was

not the government who had killed him. His death was a huge blow. Esref Bitlis's support had been very important for us. To have had someone from a military background supporting the peace process was so valuable. It had meant so much to us to have this leader of the military stand for our side in seeking out peace. Next to die were other high-ranking soldiers, such as Ridvan Ozden and Bahtiyar Aydın, who were both known to be very close to General Esref Bitlis. They were also killed in a “peaceable” manner. And that was how, during our hard-won cease-fire period, peace-loving Turkish bureaucrats were eliminated, one by one.

Not only the soldiers died mysteriously, but some journalists close to Turgut Ozal were also eliminated. All friends of Ozal—all friends of peace—were killed in turn. This led up to the crowning murder; that of President Turgut Ozal himself. Two months after the death of Esref Bitlis, President Turgut Ozal suddenly died of a “heart attack,” according to the press. A police investigation conducted in 2015 revealed that Ozal was killed by poisoning. He had been just on the cusp of granting amnesty for the political PKK prisoners. These murders were simply “good business.” The local and foreign forces, which took financial advantage of this war economically, had eliminated, one by one, the people who tried to take steps for peace. Ozal was assassinated because these forces realized that he had made up his mind that Turkey had resolved at the executive level to bring itself to peace with the Kurds, by any means necessary. And so the enemies of peace elected to prevent this stability, by any means necessary.

The result was predictable. The negotiation process obviously had been sabotaged, and conflicts had to be restarted. In the Turkish government, the vacuum left by the loss of the most vocal proponents of peace now left room for the rise of hawks within the military forces to corrupt the truce from their side. Under normal circumstances, there would be no chance of military operations occurring during a truce. Of course, the toppling of the opposition’s leaders

for peace made way for rot to set into the foundation built towards peace, in the dark part of the PKK. Although it was contrary to the rules of guerrillas, we broke our own code when PKK forces, under Şemdin Sakık's command, killed 33 Turkish soldiers. These soldiers were unarmed and defenseless, just being transferred by bus, from one place to another. Apo had no foreknowledge of this event. We do not know from whom Semdin received the order, or what he thought his purpose was, but we are sure that he acted on his own initiative. As shadowy as Ozal's assassination, this incident is the only one in the organization that cannot be illuminated. We ourselves have no understanding of why it happened. How coincidental, that this same mysterious event was the one single action which ended the peace process.

Although this killing of nearly three dozen soldiers was a completely individual action on Şemdin's part, Apo first took it upon himself to not disavow his officer. Even then, Jalal Talabani intervened. "Don't shoulder official responsibility for this action. This action was performed by a renegade provincial commander. At least don't sully the reputation of the PKK by taking ownership of this act on behalf of the organization. Don't let this incident harm the trust between the government and the organization." Apo replied, "No, I won't sacrifice my commander. If he committed this action on behalf of the organization, I will take the full responsibility." And he did. Thus was the ceasefire ended.

But Apo had been deceived. He took responsibility for this action because he had been given incorrect information. Şemdin had told him, "Everywhere, military operations have been started against us. They are coming down on us for our destruction. We are undertaking this mission for the purpose of retaliation." It only became clear after the fact that this wasn't the actual case. These soldiers weren't being transferred for an operation. This case was investigated a great deal by the organization. Many commissions were established. But the

sequence of events simply could not be brought to light. Şemdin undertook this cruel act against a defenseless bus. We know that. But who was it who leaked the information to Şemdin that 33 soldiers would set off unarmed at exactly that time? Although it has been 22 years since the incident, the truth is no clearer. At least, not to the PKK.

Şemdin Sakık was dismissed for his action and sent to Damascus. But the damage was already done. The peace process was now corrupted. With President Ozal's death, the government had already realigned in both the political and military spheres. The leadership vacuum had been filled with minds of less refinement; hawks opposed to peace had taken over the administration. Renewed operations were vigorously launched against us, more comprehensive and extensive than before. Those operations sparked a hot war again, and the conflagration spread throughout the region. The breakdown of stability followed a helplessly predictable pattern after that. Because even if, philosophically, the organization was still committed to this strategy of peace through political means and diplomatic negotiation, in action our hand was forced. We had had to protect ourselves against military operations now actively attacking us. Defensive action led to offensive ones. Just like that, the war was back on. What was our option? With whom were we to negotiate? What proponents of peace were left alive?

So, to put it mildly, we anticipated that the year 1993 would be a very difficult year, and yet our ranks and influence grew. The more the security forces used brutality throughout the countryside, the more we took dominion over rural areas. Thanks to their own heavy handedness towards the end of 1993, the government had almost lost all its dominance in rural areas. It could maintain order only in certain city centers and towns. "Order" meant that they were staying in their castles until evening and could go out in armored vehicles only when absolutely necessary.



Meanwhile, the public's support for the PKK had nearly doubled. The participation rate was higher than ever. The more the soldiers forced people to fight against the PKK, the more the people adopted the ideology of the PKK. In each region our strength had almost doubled. For example, in 1992, in Garzan province, we had 300 Guerrillas. By 1993, we had nearly a thousand. Because we had gained control of the countryside and the participation of their family members in our ranks had grown so pervasive, the country folk were kindly disposed towards us. Despite all the governmental pressure on them, and on us, the support of the public became even greater. Because, at the end of the day, we guerrillas, living in the mountains, were the sons and daughters of these people, and we were fighting for their rights. In turn, the populace rose to support us—even when it cost them their lives.

### **NOWRUZ IN 1993**

Our leadership issued a general order in May 1993, just after the killing of Ozal. That is, the instructions were for each state, each region, and each area to launch a counter-attack in its own right. And this time we had no shortage of weapons and ammunition, such as had plagued us in the past. Now, our support by the Kurdish Administration in Iraq meant we could buy whatever weapons we needed. Weapons were plentiful from south Kurdistan, since Americans were providing PUK and KDP with armaments and ammunition to be used against Saddam. The Americans did not know that we also had become their customers, purchasing their supplies through middlemen to use against Turkey. On the other hand, the events of the past year had clued in both the KDP and the PUK to the fact that the PKK could no longer be easily eliminated. In their newly enlightened self-interest, they had started to support us from the shadows. On the surface, they remained sincere with Turkey, and all the while secretly signed

contracts with us for weapons sales. The new weapons they unofficially provided to us were so powerful that we now had the strength to destroy an entire military outpost.

But we continued with softer means of persuasion as well. To wit: in the same period (March 1993), four people, including myself, went down from the mountains and into the villages in our region. The huge international celebration of the Spring Equinox was approaching, namely Nowruz, our “New Year.” We were holding meetings with the Kurdish people in the villages in preparation for the Nowruz celebrations. In the urban centers as well, there were three militants working and making preparations for the large-scale Newroz celebration.

In the countryside, the four of us had instituted committees in each of the villages. Each committee consisted of five to six people. Each committee had, as its area of responsibility, the village in which it was located. (This system was implemented in the city as well.) We had created such committees in almost every neighborhood, in every city in the Eastern parts of Turkey. The task of these committees was to recruit people for the organization. Constituents of these committees were taken from the countryside and educated specifically. Their education was exclusively political and ideological. These people weren't given any military training. They were, however, brought into the camps to gain firsthand understanding of the rigors of our training and living conditions, as well as a greater awareness of the purpose and dedication of the organization, by seeing it in action. They then were sent back to be used in cities and villages. Men, women, clerics, people from all sections of the community were our confederates in these committees.

We wanted a demonstration of our influence—a clear message to our enemies of how pervasive our control had become, and clear proof to our people that we were keeping our

promises to bring them safety and freedom. We wanted to celebrate the festival of Newroz with a crowd right in the center of the Kurdish city of Siirt. Hence, our incessant meetings with members of our committees, both in cities and villages. The job of the committee members in the villages was to redirect all the villagers to the area of the Newroz celebration. Our job was to ensure the safety of people during these celebrations. And if the military attacked the people as they had done in 1992, we were going to respond as a guerrilla force. The year before, Turkish troops had opened fire in volleys on their own people in Şırnak and Cizre, and almost 100 Kurdish people had lost their lives. It was a massacre. Now we were taking exacting precautions, so as to avoid such a horror again. Fifteen guerrillas were going to intermingle with the public in the plains of Siirt, and if a soldier started to fire, the PKK agents would annihilate him. In all the cities the same measures were taken. And in all the Newroz celebrations that year, nothing untoward happened. Nothing but freedom and joy!

As soon as the celebrations were over, we began preparations to return to the countryside. I recall that five comrades were chosen to stay behind. That was when we relative newcomers learned that a guerrilla force of five or six people always stayed in cities and villages as a permanent fixture. They were “sleepers,” awaiting possible crises or missions. Each force had built a hidden, underground bunker, so that in case of chaos, our militants had safe places to hide.

We were to absolutely never do battle with the security forces in any village nearby to organization outposts. The organization was constantly warning us on this issue, because if we did so, the military would retaliate on those villagers.

We would visit the nearby villages to ensure the safety of their residents. The people were always very glad to see us. We were heroes in their eyes. If soldiers came while we were

in their village, they would sacrifice whatever they owned to protect us. The same was true for our friends.

In the winter of 1992, our comrades and some Turkish soldiers got into a battle in a village near to Kurtalan province. Before any gunfire started, the three PKK members shouted to the Turkish soldiers, “the villagers are innocent! If you promise not to shoot them, all three of us will surrender to you instead!” Their goal was to get all the villagers to safety. That was achieved, but as soon as the innocents had been relocated, all three of our comrades were martyred in the ensuing fight. The surviving villagers gained a lot of respect for the PKK that day. As the story of that incident spread, our stature grew in the eyes of the surrounding villages as well.

The public had realized that the PKK was no longer a danger to them. In fact, we members of the PKK would even sacrifice ourselves to protect them. Over time, we saw that they would also do anything for the PKK. Now, every single village had participants in the PKK. Their uncles, brothers, and sisters were serving the organization for the patriotic Kurdish people.

The security forces heavily punished the public in the town of Lice in Diyarbakir while we were making preparations to return. “Punished” would be the wrong word, because this was clearly a coldblooded massacre! All the entrances and exits in the district had been blocked. According to the Turkish press and military sources, they had done nothing. “It was the PKK who had besieged the town of Lice, seized all the buildings and vehicles owned by the government, and jailed all the officials. It was our organization which then committed all those murders.” But in reality, in those days there were never any more than five people from the guerrilla forces stationed in Lice. As proud as I am of our militants, even I must admit that a

force of only five of us lacks the power to surround an entire district. So, the government story was pure propaganda. Its purpose was only to justify the state's inexplicable action against the citizens of Lice. But there was no way to prove this to the public. They had destroyed both residential and business areas in the district with their armored tanks and heavy weapons, and they had killed 16 people from the civilian population.

The Turkish General named Bahtiyar Aydın was assassinated in front of the city gendarmerie headquarters on the same day. Of course, the media tried to blame the organization for this, but as with the President and his administration, Bahtiyar Aydın was killed because he was on the side of peace. Specifically, he was aligned with Esref Bitlis's group which supported diplomacy. Whatever you wanted to call it: the state within the shadow government, those protecting their economic interests, or foreign forces—I didn't know. What I did know was that Bahtiyar Aydın wasn't killed by the organization. He was simply a victim of the trend. Everyone in the government or the military who had wanted to stop war and start political negotiations to cure Turkey's unrest had suffered systematic assassination, one by one. In this way, the shadow state could hit two birds with one stone. They were both getting rid of the moderate officials preventing their war, while also making propaganda to pin that war on the organization.

But we, as the organization, were continuously gathering intelligence and information about the security forces. Who stayed where? With whom did they stay when they left? Where did they eat when they hung out? Were they married or single? How many children did they have? The militants stationed in the cities provided us with this intel whenever we needed it. For instance, when our regional commander ordered us to retaliate for the massacre which had taken place in Lice, we contacted the militants in Diyarbakir and asked them if they had a

mission plan ready. They told us that they did have one available and agreed that we could use it. They gave us an intelligence and information report on a high-ranking soldier living in the city center. As the surveillance was already completed, the only thing left to do was to get to the city and carry out the mission.

So, I went. The head militant in the city took me to the neighborhood where the building was located. For hours, I snuck around the alleyways and the building where this officer stayed. Over two days, I ascertained on which floor this high-ranking soldier and his family stayed, and in which rooms they usually spent their time. I decided to complete my mission on the night of the third day. This would be my first assassination. For this mission, I had asked the comrades in the city to provide me with one Russian made Snayperskaya Vintovka Dragunova brand rifle. But, since I was already in the city, I had no chance to adjust the scope, and no practice shots. The proper way to set up a new rifle is to test-fire the weapon while looking through the scope, again and again. Each time a bullet hits a practice target, you adjust the focus of the scope a little closer. Bit by bit, the cross-hairs of the scope come to accurately indicate the precise point at which the bullet will hit. A millimeter difference in the focusing of the scope of the weapon can cause a miss of the target in delicate missions like this. But I had had neither enough time, nor ammo, nor a practice range on which to ensure such accuracy. That's why I had asked the weapon-bearer not once but twice whether the rifle's scope was properly adjusted. He told me that they were adjusted professionally—that there certainly would be no inaccuracy in the shooting.

So, a comrade and I drove to the destination in the darkness of the evening. The target was living on the fourth floor of the seven-story building where the officers stayed. Right across the street from it, there was a building under construction about 100 meters away. We made our

sniper nest in that construction zone. We stayed there about two hours, waiting for the target to come home. Around half past ten, the officer came home with a civilian friend in tow. The fact he had left the curtains of the house open made everything easier.

I told the comrade to quietly wait for me somewhere far away. Simply because the slightest touch or sound on missions this delicate may destroy your focus completely. The officer and his friend were watching television in the living room. Just next to the couch were sitting his wife and his daughter. The officer and his friend sat side by side. Patiently, I looked down the scope at my target. I took aim. I fired at the officer. When I checked with the binoculars I saw that his friend was shot, not the officer, which meant my sighting scope was one or two millimeters deviant in the horizontal shaft alignment, relative to the weapon and I had not been not aware of it. I had made one shot. To prepare a second shot would take time and cover we did not have. We had already surrendered the element of surprise. It would have been pointless risk. So, we grabbed the empty bullet casing and instantly left the building. We got into the car that had brought us there and got out of the city immediately.

I was so ashamed of myself. Our squadron commander had put a lot of faith in me, to entrust me with such a delicate mission. I felt raw about this failure—even though it had technically been the failure of the scope or, more precisely, of the person who had been tasked with adjusting the scope. In normal circumstances, the assassin himself is to use the assassination weapon several times before the mission. You would perform the mission only after you have adjusted the scope yourself and are positive about the accuracy of the weapon. But I had had no opportunity to test the weapon given to me. So, this entire mission was a failure because one rifle scope had been miss-calibrated by one millimeter.

## AMBUSH

I met with the comrades waiting for me outside the city, and we set off for the countryside without wasting time. I don't remember the name of the village, but as we approached, we fell into an ambush trap. One of our comrades lost his life there, and I was shot on the left of my chest. The ambush was severe and lasted for some time. The other two comrades finally found themselves in a stable location and better able to protect themselves. But one of them had seen that I'd been shot and thought I was dead. As soon as they overcame the ambush, they retreated. The next day, when they arrived at the camp, they notified the commander that two comrades had been lost during the ambush.

I was seriously injured but had not died. Crawling for about 200-300 meters, in the darkness of the night, I was able to escape. My wounds were severe, and I was not able to stand and walk. I was losing a lot of blood and had fallen unconscious from time to time. In the early morning, I saw two villagers out grazing their animals, and I asked them to help me. They took me to a nearby village, and the people there gave me some first aid; stopping the bleeding. I asked a militant in the village to go into the town and find a reliable doctor. Although the bleeding had been stopped, I was in severe pain. The bullets needed to be removed. Two militants brought a doctor from the city, who re-opened the wound

"You are heavily wounded," he said, "and I cannot do anything in these conditions. You need to be taken to a hospital immediately." It was a very risky undertaking to get to the hospital, but the doctor said it could be arranged. Two villagers, the doctor, and I got into a car and drove to the hospital. It seems incredible, but I stayed in this hospital for 25 days. During this time, only the doctor and the head physician knew I was a guerrilla. No one was allowed to



see me. I was in a room alone. My treatment was personally done by the head physician and the doctor. During two operations, they removed two bullets from my body.

As time passed, I gained back my strength and was able to stand. I was ready to leave the hospital, and I was at risk of being recognized at any moment. On the evening of the 25th day, I left the hospital and went into the countryside near my comrades. When I reached there, I saw that the province managements had gathered together in our region. The operational planning of 1993 was going to be made. The meeting lasted 12 days. During that time, I had the rank of squad commander, so I participated personally in the meetings. Some regions would exhibit more activity in the military aspect. In other areas, they would carry out both military and political works. The “political works” is ensuring there are sufficient warriors, and establishing committees in the cities. These committees would reach the Kurds living in metropolitan areas and encourage those who wanted to join the PKK.

### **FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

The committees, which were decided upon to be established in the province meeting, were going to collect financial support for the PKK in both villages and cities. Through these committee members, the PKK was not a problem, in a financial sense. The financial support of the people was more than substantial. The Kurds in Turkey, as well as in Europe and many other places in the world, including America, help the organization financially. Fundraising was on a voluntary basis.

But it was occasionally reported in the Turkish media that the organization forcibly confiscated the property of innocent villagers and held them for ransom. This is nothing but a lie. For example, in the winter of 1994, we needed a heater for our winter camp. We found such

a stove in one of the summerhouses, and we left twice as much money as was the value of the stove. We never had an attitude to usurp the property of the people, although I cannot vouch for everyone in this regard; because not every human being is as scrupulous. Some got what they needed from villagers and paid no money in return. But I am telling you, the overall perspective of the organization was one of honesty and fairness. If the organization heads heard something like that, you would get direct criticism or punishment, and you would be accused of being a thief. For example, if you were walking along during the day, or entered into a field at night, and saw tomatoes, watermelons or other things and took them without the owner's consent, the organization would directly accuse you of theft. Everyone knew that no one except the guerrillas travel around in the countryside, so it's enough for that family to send news to the organization. An investigation would be ordered, and some compensation paid to the family.

The organization is very sensitive of the public's property, because people have a negative response when such issues occur. Villagers would ask, "What kind of men are you? You say you are here for the public's good, but you usurp our property!"

Rangers were subject to an exception in this case. From 1995 until 1999, we confiscated animals, and we used the meat from these animals in the winter camps. Sometimes we even arrested the shepherds of those animals, because the organization knew that some shepherds were simply in the countryside to provide information to the security forces. rangers had only ranging as their source of livelihood, and of course, the ranging salary wasn't sufficient. They received around 500 liras then. Now it must be something around 600 to 700. So, the salary of head rangers isn't something like 3,000 to 4,000 liras as has been reported.

Apart from collecting voluntary money in businesses, the organization also had many factories and similar production facilities, through Kurds who hadn't been involved in any illicit

works, even though they couldn't legally establish any business or factories in Turkey or in Europe. The income from such businesses pretty much met the financial needs of the organization. We also had income from taxing. We received our annual tax from many kinds of manufacture and industrial facilities: thermal power plants, dams, quarry factories, and food factories located in eastern Anatolia. For example, if there were going to be a dam built in the region, we had dominance over it. The company would pay us a tax; otherwise they wouldn't be allowed to start a business there. (the tax is generally 10 percent of the cost of the work to be done.)

In addition, on the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, there is excessive smuggling done by civilians. We have our own customs units in all of these borders. No smuggler can do smuggling without paying taxes to the organization. If they didn't, they would be exposed to severe sanctions. Taxes are regularly received from these smugglers.

Although donations were done voluntarily, companies or smugglers had to pay their taxes regularly. The person who resisted would have to pay more taxes. So, for instance, if you wanted 500,000 liras tax from a company (which happened from time to time), and the owner of the company not only doesn't pay but also behaves arrogantly, you would make him pay one million liras as punishment. Taxation was essential for us, because the annual expenses of the organization were very high. When I say expenses, I don't only mean the necessary expenses for the guerilla to stay in the mountains, but, in addition to this, there are a lot of TV and radio channels, and newspapers. None of these media bodies have advertising revenue, so our taxation method is needed in order to keep them afloat.

We would never keep a large amount of money in rural areas. There were no more than 10 million Turkish Liras in total distributed throughout the camping areas. I do not know where

the organization keeps the rest of the money, but when money was needed, it came from somewhere. Every unit in the organization had a financier. They were the only ones authorized to do any spending. The rest of us would just make a list of whatever we needed and give it to the financier; he would arrange for the appropriate amount of money.

Twice each year, especially during wintertime, each battalion declared their balance sheet (the cost report) to the administration. All units had to clearly declare in these reports how much they had spent—and for what? Each battalion usually received money twice a year. When the spring came, \$150,000 to \$200,000 dollars was received per battalion. The same amount of money was then also sent for the winter camp preparations. The central headquarters commander was in charge of recording who spent how much.

The organization specifically used Dollars or Euros. We had no reason to use Turkish Lira. Although the Turkish Lira was able to be used in Turkey, we couldn't purchase anything with it in Iran or in Iraq. On the other hand, the Dollar or Euro could be used throughout Turkey, Iraq, and even in Syria.

Whatever a guerilla needed, from shoes, to a radio to a new watch, it is bought with this money. Apart from the financiers, the only guerrillas with money were each unit commander or company commander, and only for emergencies. An ordinary guerilla had no money, nor did he require any. Every one of his needs was met by the collective.

You might not expect it, but the collected taxes, donations, and fines were reported to senior management through receipts. When we requested taxes, we had to give a receipt to the person for the amount of the tax received. You always kept a carbon copy of this receipt. We freedom fighters would dole out official receipts from the organization. On each receipt was printed the organization's emblem and seal. As a second level of protection, to keep comrades

honest, no one would be sent alone to collect taxes. The organization would always send at least three people to prevent rumors, or the act, of stealing money. Such thefts had occurred several times in the organization. Sometimes, the PKK border customs agents would run away with the smuggling taxes they'd collected. The organization invested an amount of effort in their pursuit, proportional to the amount of missing money.

Here is a funny story. When I was first appointed to the region of Bitlis, the organization taxed a Kurdish man for 100,000 Marks. The man was very rich. He had gas stations, supermarkets, and other incomes. He was from the tribe known as Bitlis Serekanoğulları. He sent our tax bill back to us via peasants. When we received it, we saw he had written on the back, "Do you think you can take taxes from me just because a few looters like you went up to the mountains?"

When the note was read in front of the group, of course everyone became angry. Some said we should execute that man; some said we should bomb his gas stations; and some said we should take him as a captive. Of these options, the regional commander thought taking him as a captive was the best idea. So, two of us dressed up in civilian clothes, went to the city, and showed up at the man's office. His secretary first told the comrades that the man wasn't there and that they would have to come back some other time. But the comrades heard the man saying, "Send them away, I can't deal with them right now." So, they went on inside with guns and found him. They bound the hands of the secretary and left her in the office. They took the man and his driver as captives and brought them to the countryside by car.

Let me tell you, this man was grossly obese; so much so that it pained him even to walk. Our friends contacted us via radio and asked us to send them two mules, because they couldn't proceed any farther with him in that condition. So, we brought the huge man to the camp area on

mules. We didn't even put him in jail, because the man would never be able to run away anyway. He was out of breath as soon as he took six steps. We brought him in front of the leaders and made him read his note. We asked him to confirm whether he wrote it. He assented, and started to weep, saying, "I did something bad, but please don't hurt me." So our regional commander replied, "OK, we will forgive you, but your penalty has doubled. You must now pay 200,000 DM. [Deutsche Mark], and you will now also meet our needs for food and clothes for an additional of 150,000 DM." The man accepted each penalty without any objections.

Of course, we kept the man with us until we received the money and the supplies, even though that required that he stay with us for a month and a half. The military knew we had the man, but it was summer, and they couldn't come up to the camp area. This man lost so much weight in 45 days that he became a new person.

Finally, we received all the money and supplies. Everything was in order. As we were about to set him free, he surprised us by saying that he didn't want to leave. "Believe me, to have lost as much weight as I have lost here with you, I would have spent twice as much money as I gave you. Let me stay here for a while and get even thinner." The commander wouldn't let him. Then he asked, "At least tell me how I can see you when I want to?" So, we told him just to approach the peasants, and they would take him to us. After this incident, we developed such a good relationship with the man that he was now visiting us once a month. And every year, since then, he always brings us his taxes long before we ask him!

## **POLITICS AND THE PUBLIC**

In addition to the aforementioned duties, the members of our city committees were also responsible for all urban reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. In some cases, it was

difficult for guerillas to go down to the city and carry out a mission. Those were the situations for which we relied on our implanted urban guerillas. Unlike regular PKK guerrilla units, our urban units couldn't act on their own initiative. The only exception was that sometimes, if they deemed it necessary, they could bomb the security forces but no one else. The organization leadership had very firm standing orders prohibiting missions against anyone but the security forces. This forbade acts against people such as bureaucrats, civilians, public officials, or deputies.

The organization's belief was that acts against such people could trigger a civil war. Therefore, senior officials strictly ordered us to avoid such acts. Never, as the official PKK or as any self-directed branches of the guerilla force, had we ever planned such an act against such noncombatants. There were, of course, some exceptions. But those individual guerillas, who had chosen to perform such acts, never went without punishment.

We never retaliated against Turkish civilians, despite the fact that state troops had repeatedly murdered Kurdish innocents, in massacres such as those in cities of Sirnak and Cizre. Although, up through 1993 we consistently wanted to establish an independent Kurdistan, our people were too intermingled throughout Turkey. Now, we only wanted to live in peace with the Turkish people, with rights equal to theirs. Therefore, we didn't want to incite violence in our neighbors by attacking civilians. Believe me, we had every opportunity to do so. However, we never did. In Kurdistan towns, 70 percent of the employees who worked in state institutions were Turks (apart from the security forces). Although, many of these cities and towns were completely under our control, we never attacked these people, but their acts against our people in the city of Şirnak, and towns of Cizre and Lice, had created in us a lust for revenge. We guerillas wanted to take our revenge, not only on the security forces but also on the rangers

cooperating with them, even though the rangers consisted almost entirely of Kurdish villagers. This was because with native mountainfolk as rangers, the government could reach the regions they were not able to with security forces alone. This effective strategy severely restricted the PKK's freedom of movement.

Kurdish villagers were registering for the ranger system for many reasons. The state of emergency and war in the countryside had an incredible impact on the peasants' ability to graze their animals and to farm. No one could easily feed their animals or go to the highlands to tend their fields, and without livestock, agriculture, or factories in the region, there was no other livelihood left available for these people. How would they survive? They were forced to register for the village protection system to earn their living. We had this conversation with almost each of the ranger villages. All of them admitted to this fact.

By 1993, the government had already started to apply its new strategy of evacuating all the villages of PKK sympathizers. They had come to their own conclusion that the public and the guerillas are like fish and water. A fish has no chance of survival outside the water; it dies. Likewise, they had heard that if you tear the guerilla from the public, the guerilla can't survive. Their strategies worked. By gathering the villagers into the cities, the state prevented them from supporting us and prevented us from contacting them. The government had evacuated most of the villages in the rural areas by the end of 1993. Their plan was to isolate us guerillas. Many rangers had their profits from this. The government simply did not touch the villages of the rangers who were very aggressive against the PKK.

A very cruel policy was applied to empty the villages, and people were terrified. They were left no other choice but to leave their villages. That was the only option the Turkish government gave them. The state told them that if they were not for them, then they were



against them. So, they could either move to the cities and live, or they could be killed as enemies of Turkey. They had no other choice.

When Tansu Ciller and Dogan Gures became Prime Minister and Chief of General Staff respectively, the villager's plight worsened even further. Villagers who had not abandoned their villages were now directly targeted by soldiers. This was terrible enough, but the pressures on the Kurdish public weren't limited to this. Prominent businessmen such Behçet Cantürk and Savas Buldan; sympathetic politicians such as Vedat Aydın and Musa Anter, became the victims of unsolved murders, one by one. The government was employing its own terror tactics to divide the public from the organization, by fear.

While the towns of Cizre, Şırnak and Lice incidents were taking place, the security forces had killed a family in a village called Altınova in Turkish and Vartinis in Kurdish, which was connected to Muş. They burned this family alive. The soldiers on patrol, who found them still squatting in their own village, told them that they should have abandoned their home already, and to do so immediately or otherwise they would kill them all. The family refused. So, the soldiers locked them in that family home they loved so well and set the house on fire. Again and again they did this, in village after village. The same incidents happened in all Eastern provinces. Eleven people were killed in the province of Kulp in Diyarbakır, for refusing to leave their homes. Then, the soldiers threw someone from a helicopter somewhere to scare the public, though I don't have all the details. His body was smashed into pieces. It worked. The public became terrified. The state simply abandoned the rules of war. Tactics that had nothing to do with the Geneva Convention or humane policy were shamelessly implemented by the Turkish Government during that period. There were thousands of individual "unsolved murders."

People were disappearing. Now, people had a new, legitimate worry; if the soldiers or police took someone away, would anyone ever hear from them again?

Of course, the organization was performing its own unsolved murders during this time. It is still widely believed that all the unsolved murders in the region were committed by the government, but that is not fully accurate. The organization was very professional in this regard. Some of our incidents were so masterful that they were attributed to the government. In recent years, there was a mine explosion; four people were killed, and seven to eight people were injured. History records this incident as having been performed by the government. Well, at least the peasants thought this, but it was one of our guerrillas who laid mines on a busy street, which was the route of a regular shuttle taking soldiers from one point to another. That guerrilla actually wanted to explode the shuttle, but, by coincidence, a van of the same color and brand passed by. The passengers were peasants. It was only after the explosion that the comrades saw that all the passengers had been civilians. And many of them had been closely tied to the organization. As most of the populace knew how loyal those people were to the PKK, it wasn't difficult for the organization to throw the blame on the government.

Actually, since the government already treated the Kurdish people so terribly, it was not so difficult for the organization to convince the public that the government was to blame for every unsolved murder. Some years ago, in Yuksekova, the police were unabashedly swearing obscenities at Kurdish civilians from an armored state vehicle, even as they were on official duty. This was covered by Turkish television. Now, how are the people there supposed to trust the government after hearing its representatives degrade them? Another incident happened in the city of Van. The police used their police van to intentionally drag a minibus filled with Kurds straight into a fire. Certainly, these were individual acts, perhaps committed by renegades, but

the government reputation was the one tarnished. People suffering such abuse do not care whether these were isolated incidents were caused by the ignorance of individuals, rogue gendarmeries or police forces. People victimized like this, react against the entity of the government.

There were also psychologically powerful incidents, which were deliberately planned by the Turkish government to cause resentment and hatred for the organization. Killings at the hands of the government were committed in such a way as to frame the PKK for them. Unfortunately, for us, such incidents happened frequently. A non-commissioned officer was gunned down in 2014, in the city of Diyarbakir. He had been shopping with his wife in the farmers' market place. If the government were honest, it would have copped to this murder, but it didn't, because people would then see their government for what it was. This is similar to the incident, which happened in the city of Bingöl, in 2014. The chief of police was shot. Officially, no one knows who shot him. The investigation was closed without a resolution. media coverage of the police investigation was banned. The verdict of the investigation committee was sealed. But all of this succeeded in causing more hatred in the Turkish people against the Kurds.

I hated this kind of underhanded influencing, whether it came from the government or the organization. It's disgusting to fuel public sentiment with lies. As I have said, the organization is certainly responsible for its share of incidents, but it has been almost 15 years since we used this kind of underhanded tactic. But Turkey's government utilizes it to this day, even by murdering its own police and soldiers.

There are also explicit murders the Turkish Government performed against the Kurds. One of them occurred in 2015 between the sixth and eighth of October. In total, 51 Kurdish

civilians were murdered. Yet, somehow only four murderers were found. Coincidentally, those four people were the ones who killed the Hezbollah sympathizers. Yasin Boru, a Hezbollah sympathizer, was killed by the PKK sympathizers and was mentioned on the media channels every day. But where are the perpetrators of these remaining 47 murders? Why does no one ask about them? The society is manipulated by the media. Everything is done to dissolve rather than unite the people. Society has become so surreal that nobody has anything to say about 47 murdered people, while weeping loudly for those Hezbollah supporters who were killed. Turks who live in the West do not know anything. They believe whatever the media tells them. But the Kurdish society in Turkey is different. They are much more aware of reality. Regardless of the official message broadcast by the media, they communicate the actual facts to each other and are savvy to the true tactics of the government. Here in Turkey, we Kurds are highly politicized. We are much wiser regarding politics than the Turks living in the other parts of Turkey. Nevertheless, that's pretty blatant—that you only find the perpetrators of the four supporters of your cause, but do not seek for the perpetrators of the 47 other people who were not important to you. The Kurdish people are not stupid. They know very well that those 47 people were killed by the security forces.

As long as such injustices continue, the Kurdish people feel more and more alienated from the Turkish governance and any Turkish identity. They no longer feel loyal to Turkey. The bond is not yet completely severed. At the moment, we still have the chance fix the rift and to live together as brothers, but this situation is getting worse. If this problem is not solved quickly, we will reach a point of no return, as did Iraq. If the Prime Minister were to come out and say, "We ask forgiveness for all the mistakes we have made in public or private. I apologize on behalf of all the security forces. Never again will we commit actions outside the rules of

law,” the Kurdish population would rededicate themselves to Turkey with all their hearts and souls. But if you refuse to do this—if you insist that you are always in the right—the public will drift further apart from you every day. Before you know it, they might develop loyalty to the leadership of another country.

Since 1993, the government’s purpose for the repression and killing of the Kurdish people was to divide the public from the organization and gain popular support for themselves. But, the opposite has happened. Although the Kurds were scared, they also developed a desire for revenge against the government. Their answer was ready-made. They could take their revenge by joining the organization. That’s why our participation rate doubled in those years. The populace was joining the organization in groups of 10, 20, and even 30 people at a time. In other words, the government wasn’t successful, despite its policy of intimidation, because each of the Kurdish families had at least one family member who was serving up in the mountains. So, the public didn’t give up on their own children in the organization. Risking everything, they protected the organization and, in doing so, protected themselves. They even sent their children from home to join the PKK camps in Iraq.

The brutal, unlawful violence perpetrated by the government during this period forced the organization to be brutal in return. Now, we had to contend with both the rangers and the security forces. Although we had not carried out a large-scale mission until 1993, from this point forward our missions needed to be of grander scale and greater effect.

We forced the rangers to abandon their villages and migrate to big cities. We also committed some brutal missions against these rangers in some of the towns and villages. Women, children, the elderly; it made no matter. Everyone was killed in these missions. The

villagers we murdered were Kurdish like us, but they did nothing for the Kurds, and they were serving the Turks. Therefore, we had no sympathy while killing them.

The more brutal the war became, the more power the PKK gained as a party. Every Kurd forced to leave his village by the government joined with us to fight against the government. Participation grew so rapidly that suddenly the cities of Şırnak and Hakkari, alone, boasted nearly 5,000 guerrillas. And the more the government attacked the people, the more the people wanted our protection. In those same two cities of Şırnak and Hakkari, 15,000 civilians abandoned their homes in order to travel to southern Kurdistan (Iraq) and join our camps there. Thousands upon thousands of displaced Kurdish villagers wanted to join the PKK. But the organization wouldn't accept them all. Our leadership wanted the majority of these sympathizers to stay and defend the Kurds in the general population.

This was crucial, because the government of this era knew no limits on the level of tactics it would employ against its own people. So, urban Kurds began to display their anger at this cruelty by organizing. Rallies, meetings, and peaceful demonstrations became more and more common. The public refused to surrender. They were no longer afraid of their government. Why should they be? Death had become an everyday occurrence for the people in this region. What more could the government do to them? Kill them? It was doing that anyway. So, the people lost nothing by demonstrating their rage at this treatment. Meanwhile, the fact that our own Kurdish people were organizing these kinds of revolutionary activities in the city centers, and finding their courage to stand up against the cruel acts of the security forces, was a great morale booster for us guerrillas in the field.

In fact, we were so moved that we were discussing among ourselves how this public deserves our very best. Even death can't dissuade the people any longer. As guerillas, we never

dreamed of living a long life. We could be martyred any time, and we were very aware of this. Sometimes you would lose a friend who had stood by your side night and day. Therefore, death had become common for us. This outlook motivated us to do anything to fulfill our duties.

Around the fall of 1993, we secured full dominance of the countryside. We already knew very well where the security forces were located. But, in areas where we had only had 55 or 60 guerrillas, we were now 200 strong. Also, our ability to meet our needs was diminishing, as more and more villages were abandoned. It began with simple shortages. For days, we'd be unable to drink tea, simply because we didn't have any. We would finally get tea, only to run out of sugar for it. Tea and sugar would finally present themselves in sufficient quantities, and that's when we'd run out of flour to make bread. But we survived all that. Things got hard, but we all did our best to meet every challenge with fortitude.

After all, we had been well aware before even joining the PKK that life in the organization was not going to be easy. While those who could endure all of these privations became guerillas, those who couldn't bear them worked instead to support our activities behind the scenes in the European countries and in southern Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. We, in the mountains, on the other hand, knew that we were suffering such conditions because of the soldiers, and therefore, we were fueled with strong feelings of hatred and of revenge, and were reflected in our actions.

This was the atmosphere in which we planned to perform a mission against a military station located in the countryside between the cities of Bitlis and Siirt. This outpost was also located inside a ranger village. So, we had to disable these rangers in order to reach the station. We used the radio to guarantee to the rangers in the village that if they let us pass, unimpeded through the village to our target, we wouldn't touch anyone; we wouldn't even shoot a single

bullet. The rangers agreed, promising they wouldn't stop us from attacking the station as long as we left them alone.

As we had expected, the leader of the rangers even offered us the use of his arsenal and personnel if we needed them. But we knew that these heavy weapons had been lent to them by the Turkish Government. We also knew the Turkish Government would return and kill every villager there, if it found out they had given us government weapons to use against the government's own security forces. They would have no excuse to offer when the military asked them why they didn't fight the PKK. That's why we told the villagers to pretend to shoot at us when we entered the village.

At 11:00 p.m., we raided the station. We killed nine of the security forces and sustained no losses. We withdrew from the battlefield at about one in the morning. Our mission had been to disable the station, not to kill every last soldier.

We left an exit open. We knew the soldiers were going to see it and leave the area without making any further stand against us. The soldiers in the station knew very well that they wouldn't receive any reinforcements at this time of night. Because everyone understood we would have set an ambush on every possible route, the reinforcements couldn't take the risk of entering an ambush and would be obliged to wait for the morning.

We had wanted to give the military the message that we had changed. We were serious now. We could completely destroy any one of their stations anytime we wanted. So, our mission was simply to destroy the military station building itself. As long as that was accomplished, and our message was delivered, it didn't matter how many soldiers inside of it lived or died.



Sometimes, we would get the news that our comrades had besieged military stations closer to the national borders, and that they had been able to completely destroy the station buildings and kill everyone inside. This was because of the heavy weapons the border units could smuggle in from neighboring countries. These included Dochka brand bazookas; up to a hundred howitzers; even surface-to-air missiles made in Russia, called SAM7s. It was just impossible for those of us stationed in the interior parts of Turkey to transport such heavy weapons with us all the time. Normally, the most we carried were bixis and bazookas. However, after occupying a station we had overtaken, we would acquire more effective weapons than we had ourselves.

The morning after we performed this mission, the military in the region started a large-scale operation against us. They were furious and wanted revenge. They heavily wounded four of our comrades and martyred three more. With these heavy losses on both sides, both the soldiers and the guerrillas were eager for battle. But with our newly increased numbers, we weren't capable of moving in small groups any longer. Therefore, whenever we moved, the military would detect us, and a battle would ensue.

## CHAPTER 9

### TURKISH OPPRESSION TOWARDS KURDISH VILLAGERS

The uptick in incidents was indicating that 1994 would be even more difficult on us than 1993. The village evacuations were fully under way. During this exodus, the civilians were frequently harmed; many little children lost their lives. The evacuations were particularly focused at the villages on the borders of Turkey-Iran, Turkey-Iraq, and Turkey-Syria. Villagers there were being forced to immigrate wholesale into city centers. Some resisted. Most of the villagers on the Turkey-Iraq border, for instance, settled in places in the countryside close to PKK camps, instead of obediently moving to the metropolises.

This was possible because there were PKK camps near almost all the cities in northern Iraq. The Kurds who passed into northern Iraq came under the jurisdiction of our guerilla camp located in Haftanin. After being hosted there for a month, the commanders sent them to the villages and cities inside Iraq for their own security. Air assaults still targeted our training camps from time to time. Although we guerillas knew how to protect ourselves from such attacks, the ordinary public, such as these villagers, had no idea how to even begin to protect themselves. To be frank, the camp management faced great difficulties trying to meet the needs of these villagers. The refugee villagers had not been able to take anything with them while running away from the soldiers, so they came to us with no resources of their own. They had left their animals and all valuable possessions behind. We in the PKK were well aware of how brutal the military was against us, but we had never imagined they would torture the noncombatant civilians that badly—so extremely that the villagers would flee for their lives and abandon literally everything they owned.

Fortunately, the regional Kurdish Management in northern Iraq was able to assist the refugees with their basic needs. Otherwise, it would have been a very difficult task for us to support them unaided. The same thing had happened to the hundreds of Kurds in northern Iraq, who ran away from the torture of Saddam between the years of 1988 to 1991. The Kurds in Turkey had helped them. This time, Barzani, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, had first established a big camp in northern Iraq, in Ninova province. The displaced families were settled there. Their basic needs, such as food and clothes, were met for the length of their stay, which was for a very long time.

It was advantageous for us, in a way, that so many villagers moved to the cities. Through them, we guerillas could easily infiltrate this crowd and conduct missions in the cities. Just as the public protected the guerillas in the countryside, they also assisted them financially and spiritually in the cities. The children of these uneducated refugees were going to be registered in schools there. We hoped they would then become the representatives of the organization, after starting their education in the big cities. In all its years, the organization hadn't been successful at this strategy, even though we had urgently wanted this to happen. So, although the government harmed the organization in the short run by moving the villagers who supported us, and then forcing us to provide for their needs, in the long run, the government helped us a lot, by concentrating our young future members together and forcing them to receive free high-quality education.

Our ranks swelled so much during this period that that our camps were thronged. This was now a great disadvantage for us. We were then acting like a regular army, instead of like a guerilla one. The size of our units of active guerillas was now so great that we couldn't implement the foundational rules of secrecy and covert missions by which the guerilla survives.

Naturally, we had become an explicit target. We simply couldn't hide ourselves as well as we once had. As a natural result, as the number of explicit targets we presented increased, the number of air operations against us increased as well.

The enemy's force also increased. The operations, which used to be conducted with two or four aircraft, were now being conducted with 15 to 20 aircraft. Indeed, at the end of 1993, we were subject to the biggest air operation of our organization's history. A great bombardment of 56 Turkish combat aircraft attacked the Zele camp at the intersection of the Iran, Iraq, and Turkish borders.

The security forces attacked our camps because they knew very well that no matter how many guerillas they could kill in Turkey, the organization would have the ability to continue its missions so long as our camps were in service. Wherever we took a loss, these camps would furnish reinforcements to that region.

The other reason for the military to target the Zele camp, instead of our more accessible camps in Iraq, was that Cemil Bayık and other senior officials were staying at the Zele camp at that time. During this airstrike, Cemil Bayık and some senior managers were in Iraq on diplomatic missions. Just as they were finishing their meetings and preparing to return to the Zele camp, they were notified about the airstrike. When they were told not to go to the camp because of the danger, Bayık and the others didn't leave Iraq. They immediately contacted the commanders in the Zele camp by radio and told them to prepare for the Turkish airstrike.

And so, although the air operation was massive, we didn't take too many losses. The first reason was the advance warning and the precautions that resulted. The second reason was the heavy anti-aircraft weapons we had in the camp. The Zele camp was surrounded with automatic

anti-aircraft weapons, preventing the Turkish aircrafts from hitting the targets they wanted. We only had 34 losses from a 54 aircraft mission.

Jalal Talabani, who was the head of PUK back then, was appointed as the intermediary between the PKK and Turkey. As I mentioned before, Talabani had made various promises to Osman Öcalan, and Osman Öcalan had been seduced by them. So, before the peace negotiations started with Turkey, Osman Öcalan was sentenced to death. The decision was approved by Apo immediately. Apo wanted Osman Öcalan (his own brother) to be caught and executed as soon as possible. As soon as Osman Öcalan heard that he was sentenced to death, he fled from the PUK and took shelter in Iran. Osman knew that the PUK's military force wasn't strong enough to protect him from the organization.

He had made a very strategic mistake with this decision. You can't compete in politics with Iran. You can't trick them. The Iranian government isn't a simple and inexperienced government. They are devious. They have various tricks, and they show no loyalty. This is why, when Apo heard that Osman Öcalan was in Iran, he sent Cemil Bayık to Iran as an ambassador. Bayık made hard bargains for the return of Osman to PKK. As the result of the agreement, Iran gave Osman back to Apo. As easily as that. They only had one condition, saying, "Osman Öcalan took shelter with us and asked us for help. We will give him back to you only if you don't enact the death penalty." Cemil Bayık, who participated in this negotiation, said, "I am the guarantor. Take my word for it. We won't execute Osman Öcalan. I will somehow convince Apo."

Cemil Bayık had a high rank and a certain reputation in the organization, and Iran was well aware of it. If Cemil Bayık made a suggestion, they knew Apo would definitely listen to

him. Indeed, it happened just this way. The death sentence of Osman Öcalan was postponed solely upon the insistence of Cemil Bayık.

It turned out that Apo had actually been completely correct in his decision to impose the death sentence on his brother, because, as a result of his leniency and his promise to Iran and to Cemil Bayık to spare Osman Öcalan, he left himself open to a smear campaign. Now it was said that Apo would never forgive anyone who committed a crime, regardless of the pressure coming from international society and regional leaders, unless the criminal is a family member, in which case Apo does nothing at all. Apo was aware of this rumor. He had already approved the death sentence against Osman Öcalan, though he was his own brother! If he hadn't been able to sentence his own brother to capital punishment, he would have lost the authority to give a death sentence to anyone in the organization who committed the same crime.

On the other hand, Apo was also subject to the opposite criticism. The image was simultaneously created that Apo is such a brutal and blood-thirsty dictator—that in order to preserve his own power, he would even execute his own brother. Cemil Bayık had convinced Apo to change his mind in order to eradicate this second image and fulfill the promise that he gave to Iran.

And so, Osman Öcalan survived his betrayal. Bayık warned Osman, “If the same thing happens again, I will kill you with my own hands.” Osman returned to the party, but he had lost his previous authority. He was dismissed from his post in the PKK central command, and his membership to participate in decision-making and missions was suspended until the fifth congress (until 1995). This was the most severe punishment for him. The brother of our leader was now only a civilian in the organization. During this time, he was assigned to the most basic labor forces. He dealt with kitchen chores, cooking, washing-up, baking bread, and keeping

watch. He had no one's respect; neither did he have any friends. As I said before, whatever your rank or authority is, if you commit a crime, you get punished—even if you are Apo's own flesh and blood.

Cemil Bayık told Osman Öcalan, "Repair your reputation until the fifth congress. If you regain the trust of the organization, we will restore your membership." During this period, I witnessed for the first time, a young comrade and fellow guerilla die of natural causes. I was incredibly affected by this incident. I had seen many funerals; I had carried my dead comrades in my arms. But this friend of mine who died at such a very young age touched me deeply. I told myself that no one should die this young.

He had gotten lost at night while moving with his group. You'll remember that the years between 1994 and 1997 were troublesome ones. When he got separated from his unit, he was isolated in the mountains for 45 days. He knew the location of our warehouses of food and ammunition. He knew where our caches of supplies were hidden. I don't know if he panicked or got overwhelmed by fear, but he circled that mountain for a month and a half. Our comrades found him on the mountainside, nearly unconscious and brought him to the field camp. He was sick and weakened from hunger. He couldn't speak. We called the doctor immediately.

The doctor examined him for half an hour. He declared that our friend would only live for about three days. Of course, we were shocked. That's impossible, we said, and I argued, "He has stayed in the mountains for 45 days before he came to the camp. How can you say that he will only live for three more days?" This friend even started to speak, laugh, and make jokes with us. He was fine and appeared healthy. However, just as the doctor said, he died on the third day. We were all completely saddened. For the first time, we had actually seen someone die of natural causes, right in front of us. The doctor told us, "Comrades, this man ate raw grass

in the mountains for 45 days. His stomach was always empty. He had no nutrition to process. His organs weren't able to function. He had no chance of surviving.”

### **PLATOON COMMAND**

The command structure in other organizations and militaries differed from the command structure in the PKK. If you were a commander in the PKK, you were the leader of everything: every sphere, every variable. You needed to be able to anticipate danger and hunger, as well as numerous other difficulties, because you led the way in all matters. In other commands, the higher your rank, the greater your comfort. This was certainly not the case in the PKK. With us, the greater the rank you attained, the more responsibilities you accrued. You couldn't be a commander and send your militants to the front and remain safely behind. You were the platoon commander, and you commanded! This meant that if your team went somewhere, you must lead them, and the organization responded in kind. The guerillas in the team would never jeopardize the safety of their commander. Their reasoning was: “the platoon commander is my senior, and I must do everything in my power to protect him.”

There were some certain criteria that must be satisfied, in order to earn promotions in the guerilla force. A leading criterion was to have self-command of the standards of the party. You must be committed to your comrades, without any discrimination. You must protect your comrades under any circumstances and think of them before yourself. You should never relinquish your air of military discipline. You must be experienced in guerilla combat tactics and style of action and even conduct missions yourself, when necessary. Insufficiencies were especially impossible to justify in someone appointed as a commander. Finally, no one could



request a certain rank or position. You had to understand that duties were only appointed to you based on your own performance and the needs of the organization.

Even if you passed these requirements, the senior commanders in the northern provinces could only stay in a position for three or four years at most, though there have been exceptions. This command echelon was then withdrawn to the southern provinces or to Damascus, and a new command echelon was appointed in their place. Fatigue was the main reason for intermittent change. The command echelon that stayed in the fight for a long time might see slippage in their focus and control. Physical and mental weaknesses might creep in and costly mistakes might take place in battles. The effects from mistakes at that level are exponential. If a random guerilla made a mistake, the mistake was limited to him. But a mistake by the commander in the fight would not only affect multiple guerillas under his control but also the reputation of the organization. It was simpler and safer to merely switch out the command echelon in the north every three or four years.

A few days before leaving the winter camp of 1994, I was appointed as a platoon commander, even though I was quite young. A platoon consisted of 27 to 30 people. Since I was pretty inexperienced, I had hard times adjusting to being in this position of authority. Almost everyone in my team was older than me, and it was very difficult for me to give orders to these people. Guerillas, who were almost the same age as my father, were under my command. Since I was a platoon commander, the company commander was always advising me about how to act within the organization. This company commander had a big hand in shaping my personality and character. I was assigned to his squadron for a long time, and we worked together almost until the end of 1996. He never did tell me his real name, but his nickname was Orhan. I hear that he eventually died of a heart attack in Germany. But while he was my

commander, I took all of his actions and demeanor to heart. I looked up to him as a role model, and I always tried to act as I imagined that he would. I so wanted to emulate him with his ability to fight; his character, and his behavior throughout daily life. He was one of the rare people in the organization who was loved by everyone. Whenever someone had a problem or had failed at something, he would talk to that person for hours. Every guerilla knew that commander Orhan was someone who would think rationally and take care of everyone.

Since I had been so young, commander Orhan would always advise me as if I were his own son. I clearly remember the time he told me, “Deniz, I hope you will never use the phrase ‘I don’t know’ on the battlefield.” When I asked him why, he replied, “Imagine that your platoon is besieged and you have absolutely no chance of retreat. The guerrillas under your command will be hanging on your every word, and you will become their only hope. They will be looking to you and thinking, ‘Our commander will save us!’ So, in the middle of that ambush, if one of your guerrillas ever asks you, ‘commander, what are we going to do?’ and you answer him with ‘I don’t know!’ all of your guerrillas will lose hope. They will give up fighting and all of you will die. That is why, so long as you are a commander in the organization, you will never once use the phrase, ‘I don’t know’ while in combat. Now, if you are asked something in the camp or during trainings, which you honestly can’t answer, then you can admit that you don’t know. But in battle you have no right to say that, because, under fire, you are your fighters’ only hope.”

I had been in the region for almost three years, and by now I was familiar with the details of the terrain, as well as with the workings of the organization and the guerilla fighters individually. But the most vital knowledge that I held was that I had already decoded the tactics and plans of the enemy, though there really hadn’t been much there to solve. Those were the reasons I was appointed to the position of platoon commander, when the former one was sent to

Damascus. I was so young that I rejected the assignment at first. I told the leadership that the job would be too challenging for me, and that I simply couldn't accept it.

I shared these worries of mine with my company commander. He told me, "If the organization appoints you to a position, you don't have the luxury of refusal. They think you deserve this promotion and you will do your duty. Don't worry," he added dryly, "If you don't perform well, they won't hesitate to fire you."

### **FIRST MISSION AS A PLATOON COMMANDER**

A massive land attack was launched against us in April of 1994, just as we were leaving our winter camps and entering the battle season. As we were listening to Turkish military radio conversation in the middle of the night, we found out that the military was about to hit us. This mission was very important for our region, since we wanted to go into the new fighting period with a great victory. For our own morale, we needed to finish their attack by devastating their forces but without sustaining any losses ourselves.

When the mission started, we were on the outskirts of Kuris Mountain, which is connected to city of Bitlis. Kuris Mountain was of great strategic value for us, because there existed only two options in going up to the summit. It was also a steep mountain, and was both rocky and wooded. The forests offered little concealment, since it was the first month of spring. The snow was newly melted, and the trees hadn't yet blossomed.

Still, we knew it and its value well. So, as soon as the operation started, we deployed our entire force onto this mountain. The security forces thought that we were only a company, but we were deployed as a battalion of 130 people. The security forces knew as well as we that this

mountain had only two entrances. They were planning to climb the mountain at midnight from one of those entrances and hit us while we slept.

Our scheme was to act as if we were unprepared and we pretended not to know that the security forces were on the way. We left one of those entrances free, just like they wanted. This was of the time period just after the gendarmerie special operation units had been established in Turkey. So, the enemy's strength, collaborating in this operation, consisted of these special operations units. Just as we had figured, 18 members of these units climbed up to the summit of the mountain, from the unencumbered entrance, while we listened in on their radio conversations. We knew exactly where and when the Turkish soldiers were located.

The battalion commander ordered, "No one will shoot until this team reaches the summit." We knew the sun would brighten the mountaintop at around 4:30 a.m. As soon as the team reached the summit, we shot them all. All of them, except one, were killed. It was their wounded commander whom we captured. We forced the commander to speak and learned all the details of the operation, including how many days the operation would last, how many forces would participate, and would there be any airstrikes. We learned everything!

Our battalion commander confiscated the radio of the Turkish soldier and contacted their commander. Their entire force understood that the team they had sent to the mountain summit had been killed. As soon as they realized the situation, the battle stopped. A few hours later, our location was hit by Cobra-type attack helicopters. This battle martyred two of our friends, and three were seriously wounded. But the crippled security forces lifted their siege that evening. At midnight, after we had treated our wounded comrades and the captive commander, we climbed down the mountain and went back to the countryside. This wounded enemy officer was

sent to our camp in Iraq. As we had hoped, this battle had been a good morale booster for us since we had sustained only a few losses but had caused many casualties on the other side.

A week after this operation, one of the teams attached to our battalion was trapped in a ranger ambush while passing from one area to another. The youngest guerilla of us all was martyred in this ambush. He was either 17 or 18. As the team was in the middle of the ambush, the rangers captured his corpse. They were rangers of a village connected to the city of Siirt. I don't know for what reason, but they abused his corpse a great deal. His head was severed from his body, his organs were removed, and his feet were pulverized. He was then given to the animals in the village as food. We were enraged.

In the teahouse connected to the Baykan town, the ranger who had done this terrible thing was talking openly about how he had bashed our comrade into pieces, feeling proud of himself. He was repeating the story to anyone who would listen. "I shot the guerilla just like that and then I beheaded him like this. I did this and that!" The security forces decided to reward him because of what he had accomplished. They gave the man a G3 weapon with binoculars. This was a very important gift in that time.

All this information was passed along to us by the patriotic villagers. They gave us photos of the man who had perpetrated all the abuse on our comrade. The community's help proved that they, also, had been outraged by this situation. As we took in this information, there arose in our company a great feeling for revenge. So, it was agreed that, no matter how many losses we might suffer in the end, we were going to kill that man.

Of course, the village of these rangers wasn't an ordinary village. There was a military outpost right at the entrance. We observed those rangers closely for a long period of time. They were being armed and dispatched to ensure the security along the road between Baykan district

and the village. We noted they were leaving the village around 8:00 a.m., and returning about 6:00 p.m. There was a curfew that forbade anyone to use the vehicle road once it was dusk.

When we had collected sufficient intelligence, our commander held a meeting and told all of us, “Though our primary target is this man, my order is that nobody accompanying him will survive the attack. Kill them all!” Because we were only a squadron, we had asked for a reinforcement force from another region for this operation. The reinforcement squadron would besiege the village, while ours would trap the rangers who were out on security patrol. We took plenty of food provisions with us. The rangers were ensuring the road security in rotating groups of eight each day. We didn’t know which of these teams that man was in; therefore, we might have to nest at one place for a few days. In this way, we, as six guerillas, set our ambush on the side of the road.

The teams on the first and second days did not include the man for whom we were looking. It wasn’t easy to wait for him. Staying in place for two days, our movement was very limited. But, on the other hand, the feeling of revenge was very strong; very sustaining. It can make someone do most anything. We were rewarded on the morning of the third day, when we saw that the man and his team leave the village. We were so ready. Our comrades were situated in readiness for the ambush in different spots along the road.

Their team queued like a rope on the road. There were 12 rangers in total. When I looked through the binoculars, I recognized the guilty man from the trophy weapon he was holding. He was the only one holding a G3. The rest had Kalashnikovs. He was walking out in front of his team. I immediately contacted my comrades waiting in the ambush and said, “the target is walking in front of the team. Everyone shoot at him first.” The rangers would normally walk at a distance of ten meters from one another. The exit to the village was winding and

narrow, so, it was a difficult place to maintain team security, and they knew to be attentive there. But, when they reached the straight section of the road, they thought nothing would then happen and began to walk side by side. It was a unique opportunity for us guerillas, since it would be very difficult to kill them all when there was distance between them. That is exactly why they had maintained that interval of ten meters between them, so that some might escape if attacked. Walking side by side was much easier as targets.

Luck was with us. Just when they got in the ambush spot, they closed the distances between themselves, and our comrades began to shoot. All of these 12 village protection guards were killed at the one spot. When the village rangers heard the gunfire, they raced to save their comrades, but our backup unit fired at them and pinned them down. Under this siege, neither the soldiers in the station nor their rangers could get out of the village.

One of the men next to me said, “Comrade, if you let me, I want to bash the body of this asshole into pieces, just like he did with the body of our friend.” We were all highly emotional. I told him, “Comrade, go and do whatever you want to him but don’t touch the corpses of the others.”

I was following his actions through the binoculars. He first cut off the nose and the ears of the ranger. Then he beheaded him. His body was already blasted into pieces because of the bullets, so our comrade didn’t even touch his body. We then quickly gathered and escaped to the countryside. The security forces might ask for help from the neighbor villages, and we didn’t want to be there when that happened.

Meanwhile, our company commander contacted the head ranger of that village, via radio, and said, “You can fight us; you can aid the soldiers; you can even kill us, which is fair in war. But, if you disrespect the bodies of our fallen comrades, then we will obliterate your entire

village.” The organization was very sensitive about this issue. We had created many dead soldiers and rangers; however, we never mistreated their bodies. Never! Once a person has been killed, it is unacceptable to desecrate their corpse, even if they had been the enemy.

This mission made a great impact on the region. A ranger had bashed the dead body of a guerilla into pieces, and that ranger and his team were completely eliminated, before even a month had passed. All of the rangers in the region became afraid of us after this mission. They were now more careful. From their disrespect of our fallen comrade, we had taught them complete respect.

Our company commander heard about the incident of bashing the body of the ranger into pieces. Upon our return to our region, the comrade responsible for beheading the ranger went straight to our commander and told him, “We took revenge for our friend.” He had been awaiting his commander’s words of appreciation, but instead heard many curses from the company commander. “How could you do something like that? Who allowed you to do that, you, idiot?” The comrade gave our commander my name.

Our company commander had joined the organization in 1986. He sent for me and chastised me. “Comrade, even if they are your enemies, you will show respect to their dead bodies. You were overpowered by your feelings and lust for revenge, and you allowed someone in your command to behead the ranger. If you can’t learn to control your feelings, you will soon be in trouble. This emotional reaction of yours will only harm our party. If one bullet is sufficient to kill an enemy, there is no need to shoot three. There is no need to bash a dead body into pieces. There is nothing good in this. And, since there is no good, it will only bring harm to the organization.”



Our company commander talked to me about these issues on many occasions in the following way, saying, “Deniz, if you can’t better control your feelings, this might become a habit for you. Then, in each mission you command, your emotions could get the better of you.” Nevertheless, our situation was psychologically wearing on us. As the organization, we suffered a lot because of the village protection guards. They would instantly inform the military whenever they so much as spotted one of our footprints. These new patrollers didn’t behave the same way as the predictable military we used to know. The military performed operations in the spring and in the fall, like clockwork, but rarely operated in the winter. When we performed a mission in the summer, they would follow us just long enough to make a good showing. Then, they returned. It was like a sport. They didn’t risk going into the forest or steep areas. They were so predictable. But the rangers behaved completely differently. They were also from this region, as were we. They investigated everywhere in detail because they knew how. They’d come after us until the chase was finished. They were relentless. That’s why the organization hated them. They were exactly like us! The state had ensured that the Kurd was killing the Kurd.

### **THE CORRIDOR**

There was a lot left for us to do in the Garzan region. The organization at that time hadn’t achieved the full dominance in the regions in Sirvan province of Siirt and in Hizan province of Bitlis. We needed to open a corridor between Botan province and Garzan province, so first we had to terminate the dominance of the Turkish military presence there. Upon the opening of this corridor, the forces in Botan and northern Iraq could easily pass into the provinces in Turkey. This route had to be opened for the organization to receive reinforcements

from the southern border. The guerillas coming from the camps in northern Iraq were going to use this route while travelling within Turkey. The other reason for the importance of this route to the organization was that the command echelon and the management echelon would use this path for travelling in Turkey—because we had training camps, called command schools, both in the southern border as well as in Damascus, in Syria. The command echelon, who graduated from these officer schools, were to be appointed in the provinces in Turkey. In order to blow open this route, I was going to lead a battalion to attack from Hizan province, while another battalion, located in Botan province, was going to launch a substantial attack from Eruh and Pervari provinces. This would ensure that the two military stations along this route, and their two ranger villages, were going to be destroyed or disabled.

Both villages had been mixed up with the village protection system since 1984. Although the reason we were going to annihilate this village was to open ourselves a corridor, the guerillas also wanted to destroy these villages for revenge. Sabri Ok, who had been a central committee member of the PKK, had been delivered to the Turkish security forces by one of these villages in 1985. We decided we needed to take revenge for this incident. We were going to use this opportunity to give the message to the other villages of: “the PKK never forgets an insult made against us, no matter how many years may have passed.”

So, we attacked these villages. Our intent was to disarm the rangers, without harming any civilians. Our plan was simply to take the guards' weapons. But if they resisted, we were going to kill them all. With this mindset, we simultaneously raided both villages at midnight. In fighting with the rangers, some civilians also lost their lives. The official government tally after the fact listed 35 people dead.

For months, the press used the outcome of these missions against the organization. We were aware that this type of reputation tarnishing could happen, but one might naturally lose control of their feelings and actions during a battle. People can act emotionally and kill someone without checking whether they were women or children. In fact, that was what happened that night.

One of our guerillas did just that. His emotions caused him to react in a way that ruined the purpose of the mission. Some civilians ran and hid inside a certain house during the battle. The guerilla noticed this and set the house on fire, though he was fully aware that there were women, children, and old people inside. He didn't report his actions to any one of us. So we, as the PKK, got our reputation badly blemished from this mission. The senior officers of the party didn't accept the responsibility for civilian deaths in this mission. He notified the public via the press that this incident had happened without the knowledge of the PKK, so our reputation was healed somewhat. Also, after this mission, all the villagers on our route abandoned their villages and moved into the city center of Siirt. So, unintentionally, we achieved the cleared corridor we had wanted.

But for this, our commander was dismissed. This mission had caused a bad image of us, not only in Turkey but also abroad. Many governments already considered us to be terrorists, and due to such incidents, they now had reason to believe the PKK actually was a terrorist group. Upon the dismissal of the company commander, everyone in the command echelon, including myself, were called in for internal review. Whether we would be fired or not, would be based on the results of the internal investigation.

But the truth remained, that the last standing military station was now alone and defenseless. And the soldiers there knew we would be gunning for them next. So, in the

summer of 1994, before we could attack the station, the military evacuated their post and withdrew to the city center. In this way, a natural corridor was just about to be opened from northern Iraq to the city center of Bitlis in Turkey.

One village and its military outpost that was controlled by the enemy forces was still needed to be taken care of. Compared to other villages, this village was quite populated. This wasn't a village to be eliminated or frightened with a normal attack, and this was why the entirety of our forces in Botan, along with my company, laid siege on this village and station. We brought 2,000 guerillas with us, while intentionally leaving them only one route of escape.

Our siege lasted for a week. We had closed down all the roads over which reinforcements would have come. We knew that the ammunition of the security forces would soon be consumed. They were using up so much just shooting around randomly. When their reinforcements didn't arrive and they had no way to replenish their ammunition, both the rangers and the soldiers fled down the passage we had left free. It wasn't a real fight.

After this travel corridor was opened to us, our regional force was again questioned regarding the incident of the village raid. The party had decided to dismiss everyone under the command of the provincial force and appoint a completely new group. Meanwhile, the PKK leadership sent a general memo throughout the organization, notifying us that the rangers were no longer to be harmed under any circumstances. The security forces and the police in the cities were now the only acceptable targets.

During all of these incidents, I was still in the same squadron with Sevin, the woman I loved. She was very worried about me being questioned. She was aware that I would most likely be sent from the region after the investigation's report was drafted. She told me, "If you

are sent from here, I will also volunteer to leave this region.” I asked her to have patience and to wait for the conclusion of the questioning.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL PROPAGANDA**

During one of our road inspections, about midsummer, we met a Japanese tourist and decided to kidnap him for a few days. Our purpose was to host him for a while and tell him about our mission; our purpose, ideology, and why we fought against Turkey. We also thought to show him the broken Japanese gadgets we had: radios and other items, which were all made in Japan.

It highlights our level of global cultural illiteracy that we thought he would definitely understand the workings of all the Japanese gadgets. The comrades in the company who spoke English went up to him and asked him if he would repair the gadgets. Although the Japanese tourist checked all of our items, he said that he wasn't an electronics engineer and had no idea how to fix any of our technological problems. We insisted, “Aren't you Japanese? These are the products of your country. How could you not know anything about them?” The more the comrades talked, the more the man laughed. We hosted him for three days and took him around to our various companies.

Once we had set him free, this incident was broadcast throughout Turkish media, and as usual, they didn't tell the truth; especially not the television channels. They claimed that the tourist had been able to save his own life by escaping from us. Upon hearing this, the Japanese tourist cleared the record by explaining that he hadn't run away, and he had been hosted very well and then set free. His kind explanation relieved the organization very much.

In those years, such incidents would often take place, especially in the city of Van. Tourists were hosted by the organization for a few days and later set free. There was definitely no mistreatment. We simply wanted to impress these tourists. We were attempting to change the opinion of the world about us, through the eyes of these people. Actually, we were crafting a kind of organizational propaganda. When they returned to their own countries, they were affecting their personal networks but also were being invited to the TV shows. Meanwhile, the organization was impressing on the people in those countries, as well as our own, that our only purpose was to defend the basic rights of the Kurds. Therefore, the fact that the foreign tourists were hosted as captives was a very important opportunity for the organizational propaganda.

We were sometimes doing the same thing to the rangers. For example, in 1994, we took seven rangers as captives. They were en route to the city center by automobile, and we arrested them right there on the road. They stayed with us for 15 days. We hosted them very well, and then our comrades set them free close to their village. It was a very hardline village. The rangers there had caused the organization a great deal of loss. Nonetheless, once we set these captive rangers free, this village returned their weapons to the state and removed themselves from the village protection system.

These hardliner villagers' opinions changed completely, and they began supporting us. It was totally unexpected and even caused a domino effect. The other villagers, who witnessed what that village had done, followed their example and quit the village protection system, one by one. Our Kurdish society is like that. Once you did a favor for them, they would be committed to you forever. They would also tell everyone about this little favor, as if it were something very big. But the same philosophy held for maltreatment as well. If you beat up a villager, he would tell everyone what you had done—and embellish it with what you didn't do, but report it as if

you had: “Not only did the guerillas beat me; they robbed me; they assaulted my wife, and pummeled my child”

### **THE NEW COMMANDER**

The commander who had allowed the incineration of a houseful of civilians was removed. After his dismissal, the newly appointed commander had no experience in the region nor in the countryside. He was terribly inexperienced. Moreover, he arrived firmly convinced that our entire regional force was comprised of traitors. In every public platform, he scorned us saying, “It has been years since the party forbid these reactionary missions. Why are you doing such missions? Are you reactionaries?” However, as I said, this action had been the mistake of one comrade. There was no point in blaming everyone for it.

In addition to this scolding, none of our opinions would be taken into consideration during his command meetings. It was as if he were thinking, “they already made a mistake, so they would probably make it again.” This attitude disturbed me and my other friends very much. We became angry with this man and resigned from the command cadre. We didn’t intervene in anything. We wouldn’t help him make plans. We devolved into behaving like ordinary guerillas.

The commander was very illiterate, but we were tricked into thinking that he was effective, since he had come from Damascus where Apo was. Nevertheless, he was always making mistakes. In the middle of the winter, he brought a force from another region into ours. Were already 120 strong, but, he brought in 90 more guerrillas. We began to have trouble meeting the basic needs of so many and assuring in security issues.

We knew the security forces would perform a land-based offensive against us every fall and spring. The reason was simple. The trees had no leaves and hadn't blossomed yet. In other words, even if we were to hide in a crowded forest, we could easily be detected, since there were no leaves to conceal us. Also, it always rained during these times of year, and we had a lot of difficulty traveling among the regions, since the rivers were so flooded. So, in general, the security forces wouldn't make attacks in other seasons than these. There were almost no operations about which to worry after the trees had blossomed.

It was right when we were in such a difficult period, in terms of hiding, that this new commander brought another entire regional force to us. And, of course, the Turkish national security forces would easily be able to detect us. As we had predicted, around the end of February in 1995, a land-based security operation began in the area where we were hiding. The additional 90 guerrillas had left footprints in the snow, leading the security forces directly to our campground. The battle lasted two days. It began in the daytime and continued until dark, when both sides would stay in place and wait until morning. Five comrades were martyred. It was now very clear to everyone just how cowardly and untested was our commander.

Once the battle was over—that is, once it was too late—the commander of our force and the new force jointly decided that keeping both forces in one place was too great a risk. The other commander decided to withdraw to his own region. It was also decided that our own force would be split into two units that would camp in two different areas.

After the other force left, our commander objected to the division, saying, “We are going to stay together. Our enemies won't come back, but if they do, we will retaliate.” We knew that if we stayed at the same place, the military would recover itself and begin another land attack. No matter how many times we explained this to the commander, we couldn't convince him, and



he refused to let us relocate. We continued to stay where we were. Those of us in the command echelon were very angry but decided to do nothing.

In March, when everything was under snow cover, the security forces began another land-based operation against us. Once again, we detected the situation from the radio conversations of the soldiers preparing to participate in the operation. We were quite efficient at this practice of listening to the radio conversations of the security forces 24/7. We recorded them and tried to understand what they were attempting against us. Once again, we spoke to the regional commander about dividing our squadron into two, as a precaution. Despite all our effort, we couldn't convince him. The man was so very stubborn!

Unsurprisingly, the battle started in the morning, and even though we had the advantage of knowing the area, the military had the upper hand due to the climate conditions. Everything was covered with snow. The tops of the hills, usually very strategic for us, were covered in snow. It was well known that once you have secured the high ground at the top of a mountain or hill, it was easy to control the lower sections. So, we knew that if the security forces captured these areas, they could cause us significant losses by placing heavy weapons there. At any cost, we had to defend the hills, but the snow was restricting our ability to move about, though we had received warning and were prepared. So, the first two days, we had the initiative of the battle and took no losses; a few comrades received small wounds. Then, about evening of the third day, we lost one of the high positions. All our forces in this line had to withdraw. We had lost a very critical position, since it was the only high ground that also had a clear path all the way to the summit. The soldiers placed five tanks in that area.

We figured that those tanks could cause us trouble during the day but would probably do nothing at night. The system was so new that we were not aware of "night vision." Suddenly,

the slightest move of ours at night gave the tanks our target area. We couldn't even send reinforcements to our comrades on the summit. The enemy's tanks had divided the force in two. The soldiers were attacking from positions at the summit. With the tanks not allowing us to move, the enemy executed an intense bombardment of the summit by combat helicopters. Since we had no reinforcement, we lost our positions at the top. At least ten guerillas lost their lives and 12 guerillas were seriously wounded, waiting for death. We took the wounded to the field doctor, where they were treated, but without any high hopes.

During the evening of the fifth day, the current region commander, our previous region commander, and I had a short meeting. Actually, all the officers from the command echelons should have gathered, but since the battle still continued, those comrades couldn't leave their positions. Our previous regional commander really had no right to join the meetings due to the nature of his punishment, but this was an exceptional situation. He was simply a very experienced man, who knew the tactics and plans of the security forces very well, and that's why we needed his input to lead the offensive against the Turkish military. We had to remove the guerillas from this siege as soon as possible. Otherwise, they would all be killed.

This previous region commander told us that the only solution was for a chosen group of 30 guerillas to attack the Turkish soldiers from the rear. When the soldiers were raided from behind, their divided attention would open an escape corridor. The group of 30 guerrillas would escape through this open corridor, while the rest of us would pass to a steeper area, from where we could better defend ourselves.

So, on the night of the sixth day, this group of 30 guerrillas slipped from the circle, to cross the Silk Road, and attacked the soldiers from the rear, as we had planned. Unfortunately, the Turkish military had already prepared themselves against such a tactic. They had hidden two

tanks behind a small hill, next to Silk Road. Our group of 30 was trapped in a tank ambush before they even reached the road and 16 of them were martyred. Another 13 were wounded and captured by the security forces. A female guerrilla, who had been able to flee the ambush, came back to us. We hadn't been aware of what had taken place. We thought that those 30 were already out of the circle and would be attacking the soldiers at any time. This woman was able to catch us up on everything. Now, the only strategy we had left was to hide in small groups. Obviously, the military had resolved to completely eradicate us. Their attack was continuous, with no fewer than 15 tanks and four attack helicopters.

At times, there were even combat aircraft taking dives but not hitting anything. A bomb thrown from a war craft would not only harm the guerillas but also their own military, and so was not a resource. We, the remaining 51 guerillas, were now defending ourselves.

On the eighth day of the siege, the security forces began to come inside of our area. For their safety, we had left the doctor and the wounded comrades near the mountain summit in a hidden cave that was about 200 to 300 meters deep. We thought the enemy would never discover this place, but, sadly, we had made another strategic mistake. The wounded guerillas that were caught by the soldiers, told them, one by one, all the places in which we were hiding.

Soon, we heard the doctor on the radio telling us that the security forces were at the cave entrance and only being held back by gunfire from the wounded guerrillas. We learned that two soldiers were killed during this standoff, but when the soldiers became frustrated at not being able to enter on foot, they had one of their Skorsky helicopters fire gas canisters into the cave.

At this point, there was no need for them to enter. They just bombed the cave entrance and sealed our guerrillas inside.

Not until the tenth day of the operation were the soldiers ready to withdraw. But just then, they happened upon our footprints in the snow. About 30 people and I had hidden in a very steep area, after crawling across this snow. Our area was steep enough to dissuade the soldiers from pursuing us, but they had two helicopters make an excursion on the area where we were hiding. We had camouflaged ourselves so well, that they didn't have a chance of finding us by air. So, when they got no result from the helicopters, they sent rangers to our hiding spot to look for us.

By afternoon, the rangers reached our hideout. We had camouflaged ourselves in scattered groups of five or six, yet they were able to find us, at which point we immediately threw down our weapons and began negotiating with them. We spent 20 minutes trying to convince them not to reveal us to the security forces. One of the rangers asked, "But how are we supposed to explain all these footprints leading up here?" I suggested to him to say that the footprints simply belonged to the other rangers who must have investigated this area before. It was the head ranger who saved us. While we were standing there pleading with him, he contacted and related to the chief officer the entire assault and repeated what I had told him. So, the rangers left us there and returned to the enemy without exposing our cover. That was how we survived that battle!

But the battle had cost us dearly. We took 60 losses. This was a very serious blow to a province force consisting of volunteer guerrillas such as we. After the soldiers had completely withdrawn, I took four guerrillas with me and went up to the cave where the doctor and his patients had died. It took us three hours to clear enough rubble from the mouth of the cave to create an opening, but even then we couldn't go in. A heavy smell of gas emanated from the cave as soon as the entrance was opened. Our eyes spontaneously began weeping and then

swelling shut. We could hardly breathe and immediately turned back and retreated to our group. That was when we realized the military had thrown chemical weapons into the cave and blown shut the entrance to hide their crime. So, we were ordered by the regional commander to let the gas dissipate for a few days before attempting again to go inside.

The security forces had been feeding details about their operations to the press since the conflict had started. “We killed this many guerillas.” “Now we are moving into this region.” “We have taken this many captives, but the battles still continue.”

Our province commander hand-selected a squadron and brought them towards us as reinforcements, since the news reports had told him exactly where we were besieged. He contacted us by radio as he got closer and learned from us that the enemy had already withdrawn, so he and his unit could safely come directly to our location. Unlike the Turkish forces, we didn't report any of our movements in clear language. We knew full well that the military was always listening to us, which is why we spoke in codes and passwords. Sentences we frequently used had been written out and assigned numerical designations in a list that covered two pages. There was a code for anything we may have needed. For example, everything in the #27 group of code phrases had something to do with water. The Turkish soldiers couldn't understand these numbers we used and, in fact, most of our own guerrillas couldn't either. Only PKK commanders and other senior commanders were given these codes. That way, if an ordinary guerrilla were taken captive, the enemy couldn't press him for these codes.

After such heavy casualties, our regional commander quit his post and isolated himself in shame. He wouldn't speak to anyone. He knew he was mostly to blame for our staggering defeat. He knew that all of the guerillas who were alive had been saved, not due to him, but thanks only to our previous regional commander.

## THE CAVE

When the provincial commander arrived, we took him straight to the caves. Not only did we have to know how our comrades had died, and by what type of gas, but we also had a duty to recover their weapons and gear and to destroy the codebooks they carried.

We decided to enter the cave in pairs, and I was in the first duo. Only six meters in, our eyes began to burn and we immediately had to retreat. Covering my face with a wet scarf, which would at least afford me two minutes of protection, I took a flashlight and went in alone. Once into the cave, I recovered the weapon and other equipment of the first fallen guerrilla I saw, and then I got out. The second time, another comrade and I entered together, and as he collected the gear, I examined the corpses in order to try and determine the manner of death. I noticed one thing in particular. They all had a few drops of blood coming from their noses and ears. It had been ten days since they had died and their bodies were a bit swollen. We couldn't remove bodies, since they had begun to rot and there was the chance they might have fallen apart.

But after collecting the weapons and equipment, we began to collect the empty gas capsules. The writing was in English, and one of our comrades was able to describe how the writing on the canisters indicated chemical gas, as well as instructions how to throw the canisters, and how great an area each one would affect.

When our commander came to the province, he gathered all the command echelon and said, "Although the person primarily responsible for this incident was our region commander, you are each as responsible as he." Our commander then reclaimed the weapon and the equipment of the regional commander and threw him into our jail. The other commanders, including myself, were consigned to the internal review process. The province commander also

recommended jail for our previous regional commander, telling him that he should have intervened on the first day of the clash and taken the initiative, which was the party's tradition. If a commander couldn't keep command of the incidents during a battle and made mistakes that caused guerillas to lose their lives, the former commander was understood to have the right to intervene. By this precedent, our region commander was accused of not fulfilling his duty to intervene.

### **TRIALS AT GARZAN**

The operation against us had destroyed all our food and clothing. Our entire regional force was physically and emotionally drained. Can you imagine how it would feel to lose 40 comrades all at once? For these reasons, we were ordered to be sent to another region. We were sent first to Garzan province headquarters. We stayed there and recuperated for a month, while the command echelon wrote their after-action reports and defended each other to the ultimate level of detail that headquarters demanded. Our reports were first read by the province commander, and if there were any deficiency or some point, which wasn't fully understood, we were asked to rewrite them entirely. After they were completed, we were going to get called to the stand to defend ourselves in front of the organization, after which they would make a decision about us.

The day before the trials started, we received word that Apo wanted to speak with our province commander. We used mobile phones for this, which meant we had to climb a mountain summit, so that the phones could have decent reception for the interview.

My province commander took me with him and, as we were climbing the hill, told me that if Apo asked him something he didn't know, it was up to me to answer for him. Apo and the

commander talked 45 minutes about the battle, and then the phone was handed to me.

Apparently, our leader wanted to hear an account of what had happened from someone who had actually been there.

After I told him how many mistakes the new, inexperienced commander had made, Apo answered, “But, you all had a hand in this. You all share responsibility. The fact that the commander didn’t accept your advice is an invalid excuse. You even had another commander obliged to intervene, despite the fact he’d been demoted. What excuse does he have for keeping silent?” Then, Apo turned his criticism onto himself: “We sent the wrong man. We here at headquarters would never have thought that commander would prove to be so incapable of handling that region.” And he hung up.

The trials started the next day with both previous and new commanders. The judge and jury were ready, and the prosecutor began by calling for the execution of both commanders. The prosecutor knew the rules and codes of the organization intimately and so presided over our law. But the judge and the jury objected to these executions and overruled him. In the end, both commanders were merely dismissed from their posts, and their party membership was suspended for a year.

The rest of the command echelon and I only stood trial at the platform level, which is to say that our sentences were decided directly by the organization and not by any judge or jury. A three-member panel arbitrated the platform, which was really a forum for all the guerillas to weigh in with their suggestions on your punishment. Once all the suggestions were given, everyone voted, and the most popular punishment was administered. In our case, the organization declared a mistrial of six months—at the end of which we were brought before another panel and questioned once again, and then given back our old duties.



As soon as we were dismissed from our posts, our replacements' orders were then obeyed instead of ours, and all guerillas were sent back to their previous areas of operation, except for myself and the other punished commanders, who were ordered to stay behind at the state headquarters. There were no rank-and-file guerrillas in the state headquarters. Everyone there was a command officer, and nearly everyone had direct combat experience. We always travelled with the state commander wherever he goes. Everyone at state headquarters falls into one of two categories. They are either punished commanders, like ourselves, who were here to undergo all the trainings from scratch, or newly minted commanders awaiting appointment to their first duty station. Obviously, then, the headquarters' detachment had a lot of powerful officers with a lot of authority. That's why our arrival always inspired the regular guerrillas of any region we visited.

We covered many, many regions, since the state commander's job was to constantly travel and check in with each province. He didn't stay anywhere for more than three days, and so we 60 officers that were assigned to him received our training while constantly on the move. (the woman I loved had also requested to be assigned to headquarters, and her request was granted—and so we were able to travel together.)

The conditions, when the headquarters commander planned our mission of revenge, were that we were going to take our fight to the soldiers, and the military was going to be drastically shocked. Fully three of our regional forces were going to attack them simultaneously, in three different areas, combining direct attacks in some place, with raids and a forestallment in others. My group was tasked with blocking the Silk Road in three points, in order to disseminate organizational propaganda to the drivers we would stop. For this mission, two groups laid in

ambush; each two meters apart on either side of our roadblock, as we stood in the middle taking the drivers out of their cars and preaching propaganda.

The security forces brought panzers against us that first day, but when our ambush groups destroyed the tanks, the rest of the soldiers withdrew, because the military mistakenly thought our mission would last just one day, but we had already planned to stay for three. We wanted our message to the public to be clear—that we could control any roads we wanted, wherever they were, for however long we wanted. This was not an easy feat to accomplish in 1995, and it made a strong impression on the populace.

Meanwhile, what could the military do to us? Their hands were tied. We were among the civilians so they couldn't risk attacking us from the air; they could only fly by with their combat helicopters and try to intimidate us. It wasn't until the third day of our mission that they blocked off the traffic in both directions before the cars could reach us. No vehicles certainly meant there were no drivers to propagandize, but we had planned to finish the mission on this third day anyway.

The final tally for this mission was that we lost four comrades, but the security forces lost two panzers with all hands still inside. Incidentally, we also incinerated four public vehicles. After this mission, the headquarters unit took us to the Mutki region, which is connected to Bitlis, and we continued our retraining. Here we learned that the commanders who had replaced us in our positions were failing at their duty to control our former region. They were losing too many guerrillas during their battles. Part of the reason for this was the increase in the number of guerrillas in our ranks. Since our groups weren't as small as before, they were harder to hide and began incurring serious losses. Every mission now meant discovery, and very discovery meant battle. So, not only did the new commanders lack familiarity with the region, but the small-unit

tactics they had always relied on were no longer useful. As a result, the guerrillas they commanded were suffering.

### **SUMMER OF 1995**

While in the state headquarters in the summer of 1995, we decided to perform a mission against a ranger village located in Muş. We didn't normally kill the rangers, but the rangers in this village were oppressing the nearby villages. They were using scare tactics to force villages to register in the village protection system by leveraging the status and the weapons they had been provided. They were so overbearing in their control tactics that they didn't even allow noncompliant villagers to feed their animals in the fields.

There was a military station only 15 minutes from this ranger village, so as a precaution we set ambushes on every road going to the village. Then, that day at 2:00 p.m., we began our mission.

Shortly after the mission started, our ambush teams all abandoned their posts. We had expected the enemy to come down the regular roads in armored panzers or by foot; we hadn't considered that they might use tanks. As soon as our ambush teams saw the tanks, they knew they were outgunned. You couldn't do much against a tank, when the village was in a flat valley and the tanks could drive anywhere. They were not restricted to the roads we had prepared. The big problem was that those of us battling in the village had no idea that we had lost our ambush teams, along with their control of the roads. We were already devastated by the fact that both of our team commanders had been martyred, and three of our comrades were seriously wounded.

We were still planning on completely demolishing the village and still believing we had the force to do it, until the tanks came into the village and changed everything. Four out of nine

guerillas were seriously wounded in the tanks' initial bombardment, and we quickly understood that we needed to abort the mission and get our injured comrades to safety. The enemy would simply demolish our headquarters' force if we tried to continue the attack, so we retreated.

I was one of the senior officers who had been seriously wounded on this mission. Shrapnel had cut into my knees when a bomb had exploded near me. I wasn't as badly wounded as my other comrades; I could retreat from the battlefield. This was unfortunate, since the enemy attack was so intense that we couldn't even pause long enough to carry out the bodies of our dead friends.

A month later, the senior leadership of the party criticized this failed mission of ours. They asked, "Why would you undertake such a mission on a flat valley floor during broad daylight and not even take any measures against the tanks?"

They were right for criticizing us. We had known that there was a tank unit assigned to that military outpost, but we hadn't believed they would attack. We had been mining the roads so often during previous missions that the tanks frequently would avoid battles with us so that they wouldn't be disabled by our road mines. But we should have considered that this area was flat, so that the tanks had no reason to remain on the regular roads, and they hadn't. They entered the village from the fields in the valley, so the work we'd done to hide all those mines on the roads had been no deterrent at all.

The field commander, who had planned and coordinated this mission, was brought under investigation, and we all felt he had earned his punishment, since in the meeting we'd had before the mission, the entire command echelon had objected to this plan. Even when we saw that he had already made up his mind to attack this village, we told him he had to perform this mission at night, but he didn't accept this suggestion from us. "All our village missions take place at

night,” he had retorted. “This time we are going to attack during the day when the rangers don’t expect it.”

We had answered him, “Okay. Fine. Your plan is great, but this village lies in a flat valley, not in the mountainous countryside. It won’t be so easy to divert the reinforcement soldiers approaching from the station.” In addition, if the battle became prolonged, we wouldn’t have had any cover behind which to hide. It would be difficult to miss us in the open fields of a flat valley during the day.

But no matter how we argued, we couldn’t convince the field commander to abandon or update his plan. If we could have gotten in touch with the state commander, we might have had a chance, since he was a much more rational man. But he had been in a meeting at the time with five or six other people, so this mission went forward without the state commander’s knowledge. The field commander had designed this mission entirely on his own.

In short, he had failed. He not only got three comrades killed, but another 12 seriously wounded. Yes, we had killed 20 rangers in return. But at our level, having three martyred and 12 wounded in exchange was an expensive disaster, since our force was a special detachment of the organization headquarters and we all held at least the rank of commander. By the traditional equation of acceptable losses, it would have been acceptable if we had lost two ordinary guerrillas, in exchange for the 20 enemy that we had killed. To lose three commanders in a single, simple mission was unacceptable. It took so much time and effort to train and teach each commander and then allow them to accrue enough combat experience to truly lead.

At our suggestion, the senior officials of the party froze all the duties and authorities of this field commander. When the state commander returned a few days later, he got incredibly frustrated when he learned what had happened. He berated us, demanding to know how we

could have allowed such a flawed mission to proceed. We told him the field commander had made the decisions, and we hadn't been able to do anything about them. This made him even angrier. "You should have objected to it! You could have informed me about it! I am the commander of this unit, and nobody has the right to waste my unit on such a senseless mission," he scathed.

Ultimately, this field commander was dismissed from his position and sent to the south. We had a tradition in the organization to never keep a field or state commander in his former region of command once he was discharged. There was a strong danger that he might come to harm from the guerrillas he had wronged through his bad actions. But if anything untoward happened to an officer ranked so highly, the cost would be extreme, not only because of the loss of such a leader but in terms of all the guerrillas who would have had to be punished as well. The risk wasn't worth it, and so they transferred discharged commanders as soon as possible. No one could take the risk of a former field or province commander losing his life on his own battlefield.

### **DR. SULEIMAN**

In mid-1995, the PKK leadership issued a notice that we were going to decrease the number of guerrillas present in each province, so that we would be able to move in small groups once again. To achieve this, some of the guerrillas in Turkey were going to be sent south to Iraq and Syria, where they could participate in the fight against Barzani and carry out counterattacks against the KDP.

While I was assigned to state headquarters, our field commander was Dr. Suleiman, the brother of Selim Çürükkaya, another well-known senior official in the organization. The man

was a failure. Every time he planned a mission, guerrillas were killed. I had even heard it whispered that he was sleeping with some women in the organization, and I had warned him when I had the opportunity, saying “Comrade, there are some rumors about you.” He didn’t deny it, but looked very nervous when he saw that I had learned about it, as if he knew that I was going to notify the party at the first chance I had.

Therefore, in June of 1955, he called me to him while we were still in the field and said to me, “Deniz, I am tasking you with a sniper mission against the hill where the Turkish tanks are stationed; the one which protects the Mutki town of Bitlis. Take one guerrilla with you.” This was insanity. You didn’t order a sniper mission on a regular battlefield, using only two people, much less with tanks present that would surely obliterate you as soon as they noticed you. So I asked our company commander, “Comrade, do you know of any reason for this man to send me on a mission like this, especially now? Why is he doing this?” The commander replied, “He is sending you to your death. I don’t know what bad blood you two have between you, but this is a suicide mission. It will be almost impossible for you to survive it.” So, I said to him, “then I am writing a report about this. I will leave it in my bag. If I don’t manage to make it back from this mission, send my report directly to headquarters.”

From the armory, I requisitioned a Dragunov type sniper rifle. I shot it about 50 times, adjusted the scope properly, and got it ready. Before I left for the mission, Dr. Suleiman said, “Take whichever guerrilla you would like to be your partner. You should have someone go with you.” So, I pointed to his beloved guard. He was shocked. He hadn’t been expecting a move like that. “Why choose my bodyguard when there are so many other guerrillas here?” he asked me. “Well, you told me to take absolutely anyone I wanted,” I replied. “So I’m choosing him.” He couldn’t deny what he had originally said. I was thinking that now surely Dr. Suleiman

would cancel this ridiculous mission for me, if only in order to save his favorite guard. Instead, it became clear that he wouldn't cancel it even if I took all his guards with me. This is how determined he was to cause my death.

He also schemed to stack all the odds against me. For instance, though sniper missions are mostly always performed under cover of night, he made the condition that we had to assassinate someone between 8:00 and 10:00 a.m. "Ok," I said. So, during the night, the guard and I took our places on the opposite side of the hill. There were at least ten tanks in front of us and so close that the tiniest mistake would cost us our lives. I had us wait in place until 4:00 p.m. It truly would have been suicide to perform that mission in the morning, when all the soldiers are alert and attentive and the front is thronged with them. However, by evening, if they hadn't perceived a threat, the soldiers would withdraw to their stations and leave the tanks behind.

As evening drew on, Dr. Suleiman constantly radioed me, asking why we hadn't completed the mission yet. I ignored all his chatter. His guard asked me a few times, "Comrade, why are we waiting? Why haven't we started yet?" I replied, "Just hold on a bit longer. You'll know when the time comes." And at 4:30 p.m., I fired one, single bullet. One of the soldiers in the rear guard fell to the ground. Nobody knew from where the bullet had come. The soldiers intently investigated their surroundings, but we had already retreated into the depths of the woods. When we returned safely to camp, Dr. Suleiman was shocked. He asked us if we had completed our mission. When I said yes, he didn't believe me. "then call the guerrillas stationed in town and asked them about it," I said. So, they contacted a sympathizer who worked at the Bitlis Morgue, and he confirmed our story. There was nothing Dr. Suleiman could do to us.



Not even a week after this assassination mission, he assigned me a new mission in the center of the city of Bitlis. If he had sent me to a city I already knew well, like Siirt or its surroundings, I would have understood, but I had never been to Bitlis before. I was not familiar with the layout nor with any guerrillas or sympathizers in this city. So, I directly refused the mission. I told him to his face that I wouldn't go. Instead, I immediately got in touch with the state commander and told him everything I knew about Dr. Suleiman. Dr. Suleiman was immediately removed from duty and sent to Damascus, Syria. I only learned later that there had been many negative reports about him, and many guerrillas who had known about his immoral situation.

Immediately afterwards, the state commander reappointed me as platoon commander of my previous province. At first, I rejected this offer as well. I had been sentenced to be punished for six months and it had only been three. It wouldn't right to have been appointed before I fulfilled the six-month sentence. My excuse wasn't considered justifiable. Headquarters were also aware of the punishment they, themselves, had given me. They hadn't forgotten. But there was a need for an experienced commander in that region, and we hadn't been directly responsible for the losses there. Therefore, the woman I loved and I were sent back to that region. Sevin was promoted as the platoon commander, and we were assigned to be in the same unit.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE PKK ORGANIZATION

Around the fall of 1995, I notified the hierarchy that our company commander was insufficient in meeting his obligations, and this caused a risk in regards to the region. Therefore, this person should to be discharged, and an experienced commander needed to be appointed. headquarters management listened to me and reinstalled our former regional commander to his post. Now, we had strong, effective leadership, who not only was familiar with the region, but was very experienced in combat as well. The most significant detail was that we got along well with one other within the command echelon. After these personnel changes, our region began to avoid taking losses.

The name of the other field to which I had been assigned was “Middle Field.” Apart from this, there were northern field, Botan Field and Zagros Field. The Middle Field covered a very large area: Bitlis, some parts of Siirt, Diyarbakır, Erzurum, Muş and Bingöl were all connected to it. The Northern Field consisted of Tunceli and Black Sea provinces, and Koçgiri. Botan Field consisted of Şırnak, Mardin, and some parts of Siirt. Finally, Zagros Field covered Serhat, Kars, Ağrı, Hakkari, and Van. The field commanders of these regions worked in direct connection to the leadership of the entire PKK.

There was a hierarchy to the zones of responsibility, which is taken into account when guerillas were selected for promotion to the level of field commander. For us, Botan Field was the most important, both because of its proximity to the south, and because it had a force of 4,000 to 5,000 guerrillas, where most other zones only had a few hundred guerrillas. Besides, the weapons depot of the PKK was present in Botan. We stored various kinds of weapons there, from bazookas to howitzers.

Another significant feature of Botan Field was its location. In guerilla fights, the fronts and field were preserved while proceeding towards the target. Botan was the first field the organization preserved, then appropriated. That's why it was very important for the organization.

Equivalent in importance to Botan Field, our Middle Field was strategically crucial because all our forces used it to transfer from one field to another, such as the Northern Field and Amanoses. On the other hand, it was in the center of everything (hence its name), and the Middle Field was also our center of greatest contact with the public. All the city centers in the Middle Field were under the control of the PKK. Therefore, the most experienced and skilled commander would be appointed to this field. Halil Atac, (Nickname: Ebu Bekir) was one of the founders of PKK and was the initial commander of the Middle Field.

At first, the Northern Field (Dersim, Tunceli) didn't appear to be that important to us, but since the organization had recently discovered that it provided easy passage to the western parts of Turkey, it had become one of the most important fields.

To clarify: a field could consist of two or three provinces. Our field, by which I mean the Middle Field, consisted of three provinces—Garzan Province (Bitlis, Muş, and some parts of Siirt), Amed Province (central Diyarbakır and some parts of Bingöl), and Erzurum Province (Erzurum and Tunceli's Pülümür section on the west, and Serhad segment on the east). Each province's borders and delineations of responsibility were strictly determined. In addition, the most experienced and skilled commanders in each province were appointed as assistants to those commanders of their fields.

Amanoses was a province on its own. It wasn't connected to any field. Different than other provinces, it was directly connected to the headquarters of the PKK. This province was

located in a spot, which was very sensitive and strategic for the organization. You could easily reach the critical interior parts of Turkey, such as Antalya, Osmaniye, and Adana through Amanoses. The control of Amanoses had no field commander. Its defense was ensured directly by the headquarters.

A commander, who was in charge of Amanoses, could not randomly perform a mission. The headquarters must approve each step the guerillas there would take. In every other province, any leader from the province command down to the company commander level could plan and execute their own missions. However, the province commander of Amanoses could not carry out any mission without the direct approval of the senior leadership of the PKK. This was simply because the slightest mistake in this field might have heavy consequences for the organization. There were hundreds of thousands of tourists coming from around the world to this field for vacation purposes. Any mission performed there had the potential to cause much harm and no benefit. In recent years, the organization detonated a bomb in an area in Antalya, where there were many tourists. We wanted to strike a blow on Turkey's tourism economy. However, European states began criticizing the PKK heavily since we had wounded so many of their citizens. Our financial backers in Europe began withdrawing, one by one. After that, no provincial or regional commander appointed to lead Amanoses was given the right to act on their own initiative.

Each province was divided into five or six regions; each with its own commander. Under region commanders were battalion commanders, who were each responsible for 160 to 170 guerillas in the south, but only 100 to 110 in the north. Beneath that level were company commanders, each being responsible for 60 to 70 people. Then, there were platoon commanders under company commanders. A platoon commander was in charge of one or two squads. Squad

commanders were in charge of ten guerillas. When three teams came together, the result was one platoon. In addition, one region commander per province was appointed to be the assistant to that region's commander and could act on his behalf when the province commander was not in the province.

There was also a presidency council, which was the highest structure of the organization. It always consisted of about seven people, though its number was subject to change. This was the council that included Apo. Many people believe that Apo was the only party president, but that was not the case. The PKK was a true institution, which choose its own president. The members of the council were determined by a congress, which happened every four years, but now was held every other year. The 200 to 300 congress members' first task was to choose the members of the council, which had doubled from an average of seven to 13 now that we included women guerillas on the council.

The congressional delegates first voted on the members of the PKK central executive committee. A secret ballot was held to choose those 40 to 50 people, but the vote was counted openly. This executive committee then elected the eligible voting candidates for the presidential seat election. No one in the council could nominate themselves. By the end of their session, this 50-person committee had chosen who was appropriate for the presidency.

Candidates were determined by their rank in the organization, their mastery of our political and ideological content, the extent of their military experience, and the depth of their commitment to the values of the PKK. Once these criteria were used to determine a list of eligible names, a new election was held, and the council members were chosen. I believe at that time, the current lineup of the PKK Presidency Council was Apo, Murat Karayılan, Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, Musa Karasu, and three female comrades, whose names I didn't know.

These seven people chose the new president of the PKK. Since Apo was the one who founded the organization and who was the most experienced and competent among us, he was always voted to be president. However, since he was in prison, every six months the presidency rotated to a new member of the council. For that six-month duration, whoever was president was in charge of all decisions and approvals. However, tradition held that no one in the council—not even the president—could finalize a decision without consulting Cemil Bayik. His opinion was certainly asked every time. He had been friends with Apo since the founding of the organization, so everyone trusted and respected him a great deal.

As far as internal friction went, if you were dissatisfied with someone's behavior in the organization, you could write a report. These were taken very seriously, since everyone's production was essential for the function of the organization.

The reports were private. If I wrote a report about a province commander, then that province commander could not read my report. On the front of the envelope, you wrote the name of the institution to which you were filing a complaint. Any PKK institution, lower than this one could not open the envelope. If so, the punishment for such an offense would be serious. Incidentally, all reports had to be detailed and specific. Let's say I had a criticism about the region commander. I had to write the reason explicitly, such as he had caused a comrade to die because of his mistake in that mission. Then, the author of the report signed his name and his unit's name at the end. No such thing existed as a report without the name of the responsible party.

If you wrote a report, it would not be lost or forgotten. Reports were treated so seriously that, if you had not received a response in due time, you could even use the regional commander's radio to ask about your letter.

Besides complaint reports like these, each province had to give a balance report each year. Every notable incident was written in this report—from which missions had been carried out to which militants had defected and asked the Turkish government for amnesty. Also which newbies had joined since the last report. We had to give reports for everything.

All these reports were read and evaluated in turn during the military conference. A report of 15 comrades surrendering to security forces in a certain province would definitely bring that province under review. Obviously, if there were so many deserters from a single province, that province was not being managed correctly. Headquarters then gathered the other reports and all was presented to the defense committee.

Headquarters Command Management (HPG) then presented their findings from all these reports to the Public Defense Committee (YPG). This is where they would announce that, in the past two-year period, there had been 150 deserters, 200 losses, and 500 newbies.

The reports were not even written on paper any longer. They were typed on a PC and saved to a memory stick, which was then transported. A report written in Diyarbakır could reach clear to Iraq in the same day. Headquarters would read the stick on their own PC, write their reply, and ship it back. Internet existed, and might be faster, but could not be used, because it allowed location detection.

Our chain of command consisted of four fields, followed by the province commands under them. Next were the regional commands and, under them, the lowest who were the company commands. Let's say the guerrillas in one company suggested the replacement of one of their commanders. They would have to go up the chain and contact their regional command. If the regional commander saw merit in the request, he could directly remove the company commander, yet he would ask the province commander beforehand, as a courtesy.

The province commander received any complaints about region commanders and would then share the issue with his field commander, acting upon his opinion. All complaints about province commanders were made to the field command. In the same way, the field commander would notify the leaders one level above him—in this case, the HPG headquarters Command—and incorporate their advice into his decision. Complaints about field commanders were made directly to headquarters command.

There were 13 people in the headquarters Command Management (HPG). Every two years, they held an election to vote in a new headquarters commander. Whereas province commanders acted as military parliament members, field commanders comprised the HPG guerilla Parliament. The guerilla Parliament and command membership were different, with command members being of higher rank than the guerilla Parliament.

It would sometimes also happen that some of these province commanders in the HPG guerilla Parliament were also members of the PKK Headquarters Committee. In this case, if an action needed to be taken against a province commander who held membership in both groups, the HPG guerilla Parliament and PKK headquarters Committee made the decision jointly.

The Defense Committee (analogous to a Defense Ministry) was the liaison between the guerilla force and the PKK headquarters council. So, to get an issue before the headquarters Executive council, the guerilla must contact the defense committee, who would then contact the HPG headquarters Command on their behalf.

Everyone in the organization (if they were not under punishment) was naturally a member of the PKK. Suspending this membership was the heaviest punishment for the guerilla. In my opinion, this was worse than death, because you were stripped of every one of your rights. If you executed a man, you punished him once. But suspending the membership is not so. It



was ongoing. Everyone talked and gossiped about you. Suddenly, no matter how high a rank you held, there was no difference between you and a peasant, in terms of the organization. You had no authority, no right to make a suggestion, no right to criticize, and no one would take anything you said into consideration.

The organization also had a political infrastructure, which carried out tasks about relations with foreign states and political parties in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. There were four political parties of the organization. There was the HDP (the People's Democratic Party) in Turkey, the PYD (Democratic Union Party) in Syria, the PJAK (Independent Kurdistan Party) in Iran, and the PCDK (Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party) in Iraq. These parties were active in the political arena on behalf of the organization. These parties had no relation to the guerilla wing (including the defense committee,) either directly or indirectly. They were, however, directly connected to the KCK (Kurdistan Communities Unity). Otherwise, this political wing represented the PKK across Europe.

The political parties handle the relations based on the countries under their influence. For example, the PCDK handles the organization's relations with Iraq because it is their responsibility. The PJAK, on the other hand, handles the relations with Iran. If I am not mistaken, the PJAK was working through a peace process with Iran in 2012. Because of Iran's clever actions, the guerilla force was almost abolished completely and now the organization is only active in politics within Iran.

Until the Syrian war began, the PYD was only politically active with no guerilla force. When things got complicated, the organization immediately established the YPG (People's Protection Units). The rights of the Kurds in the region had to be taken care of somehow. When the ISIS problem emerged, the YPG began to protect the regions where the Kurds lived,

spanning from Haseki to Arfin. The Syrian government did not react to this because the purpose of the YPG was to only protect the Kurds and Arabs who lived in the region from the ISIS threat. Not only did Syria not react to the fact that these regions were under control of the organization, it even supported the YPG personally. The salaries of most of the YPG guerillas are paid by Syrian regime.

Besides this, the congressional works of these political parties are extremely important to the organization. Most co-presidents of these parties live within European countries. There is a board meeting held in Kandil once or twice a year where the conditions of these parties are examined. All the party representatives in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Europe are present at these meetings. The only exception is the HDP (People's Democratic Party), which is active in Turkey. Their representatives do not attend it because Kongra-Gel is still considered an illegal organization in Turkey. All the members of the HDP may be expelled from their duties under Turkish Grand National Assembly if they attend these meetings, which are still considered as illegal activity in Turkey. So, the HDP members simply do not attend these meetings. However, they are still informed about the decisions that are made at this meeting.

So, you could think of the KCK to be like a roof, under which all the other institutions and organizations dwell. The KCK was the top, no doubt. But under its shelter, the PKK headquarters committee was the brains, both directing it and determining the short and long-term policies. There could be overlap between the headquarters committee members and the executives of the Presidency Council and the management of the KCK, but not all, in all. For example, Zübeyir Aydar was in the Presidency Council of the KCK. He lived in Europe and, at the same time, he was co-president of the KNG (Kurdistan National Congress). Remzi Kartal

was also the co-president of the congress. All of these politicians were civilians. Besides them, the Presidency Council of the PKK were the functional leaders there.

In short, the committee members of the PKK headquarters constituted the brain trust of the KCK. Just like the institutions, which determine the strategies of the official state, the committee members of the PKK headquarters had this same authority in the KCK. Consider the United states. In that country, the strategies were determined by specific institutions. Whether they were Republican or Democrat, each administration was, nonetheless, responsible for applying these strategies. The method and the style of the execution of these decisions could be changed, but the intent must always be to apply the determined strategy to attain the target. And, exactly so, the PKK's leadership cadre was at the helm of the KCK, and this cadre determines the short, and long-term strategies to be applied by them in Turkey and Europe.

The PKK's headquarters Committee also determines the short, and long-term strategies of the guerilla force. It analyzed and determined staffing and growth goals. Some structural plans, such as your number of guerillas, would be at this level. Next year, you would appoint a new staff, and you would have responsibility for these regions. The cadre also determined some visionary targets for KCK, such as building a chapter of our organization in Syria. You would then get at least this number of votes in the elections. Therefore, whether Remzi Kartal or Murat Karayılan was appointed to the head of the KCK, the task never changed, because the overall strategy had been determined in advance. The purpose of the person who was appointed to lead the institution was to take the communally derived strategy to its target, and this was a simple yardstick by which to judge a leader. Unless the person who had been appointed applied the strategy, he was immediately discharged.

Now, as may be expected, there was always a conflict between the guerilla wing and the political wing. The conflicts happened because of disrespect for each side and for the work involved by the other. Now, it was a true statement that all the steps taken for the Kurds in Turkey and all the political declinations and the economic developments in the region occurred as they were spurred by the efforts of the guerilla wing. When there were still the old pro-Kurdish political parties present— the DEP (Democratic Party), the EMEP (Labor Party) and the HADEP (People’s Democracy Party)—the Kurdish politicians could not act as freely as they do now, because there was an incredible pressure from the Turkish state. It was the same situation in Iraq and Iran. For example, at one point, there was no executive left in the PCDK who had not yet been arrested in Iraq. Both the KDP and YNK put great pressure on this party.

However, with the increase of the acts of the guerilla force against these states, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran began refraining themselves from exerting control over our nationalists in their governments. In order to avoid the threat of dealing with our guerilla force, these states made way for the political structures we wanted, though under duress. I can explain this situation better by using Iran as an example. There was no political formulation of the organization in Iran originally, because Tehran was simply too strict. As they shut down all the oppositional political parties that were founded there, they executed all the members as well. Therefore, the PKK eschewed forming a political party there. Instead, we started to exercise influence in Iran through our guerilla arm. These conflicts were very severe in 2008. It was not broadcast much to the public, but the PKK managed the fighting very well. Think about it! Even the general of Iranian Revolution guards was killed.

After that incident, Iran was obliged to sit at the negotiating table and suddenly wanted to reach an agreement with us—according to our demands that we could establish a political party;

that our party would conduct all the same activities as their current, dominant parties, and that it could even participate in the elections. The guerilla force of PKK stopped all combat after this agreement and established the PJAK in Iran. So, just like the HDP did in Turkey, that group serves in the political arena in Iran now.

The conflict between the guerilla structure and the political structure was rooted in the discrepancy of the politicians living in mansions with their children (whom they had the luxury of having); but, once they made it there, they soon forgot the hardships that the countryside guerrillas still endured. They pretended that all the turns and changes, in the way the state related to us, happened because of ourselves. The guerilla force was angry at this outlook, saying, “Look my friend, if it were not for my hard scrabbling in the countryside, you wouldn’t even be able to talk to the public now. You wouldn’t have been granted the right to enter the Turkish Parliament and play the role you do in the mechanisms of decision.”

Another side to it was that everyone joining the PKK first stayed in the HPG camps, where their character and capacity were observed. During their stay in the guerilla force’s camp, the guerilla force connives, choosing the most intelligent, the most qualified, and the most competent individuals for itself, and sends the lazy, unskilled new members to the KCK. Naturally, this pisses off the KCK.

The guerilla force seniors would join the congresses of the KCK and the PKK. Although they participated there only as an audience, they criticized the political structure a great deal. I have witnessed it many times. They called out many times, complaining, “You have no obstacles in front of you. There is nothing forbidden to you. Nothing stands in your way. So, why did not you get organized in that region? Why did not you form your public committee before now? Why don’t you open public houses? Why aren’t you preparing youth camps? Why

are you only active in the legal field? You have billions, financially, yet despite all this, you can't be successful in achieving your mission?" The KCK always gave the same excuse in each case for the poor quality of its members as the reason. "All these failings are due to the men you gave us," they'd claim. "If you gave us men of higher quality, we could do what you ask."

### **THE REGULATIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION**

We did not have much trouble getting used to guerilla rules. There were some individual problems, but there is always an exception to these things. When there is no discipline, the system cannot work. For example, I love sleeping in the morning. At 4:30 to 5 a.m., someone on duty comes in and wakes everyone up for the morning muster. When I was with my friends, I would sometimes say that I would abolish the morning muster if I could. But, in the end, even though we found it quiet upsetting, the rules were very important for the proper functioning and stability of the organization. Once a guerilla got used to the comfort, you would not be able to make them get over it.

So, there was a strict discipline approach within the organization. No one would take you under formal investigation simply because of a few initial mistakes you made. However, they would warn you verbally. There were some moral rules that were known by everyone. For example, you had to go to bed at 9 p.m., but you wanted to listen to the radio until 11 p.m. or 12 a.m. But you cannot disturb your comrades. So, if you wanted to listen to music, you must use earphones. Your comrades might want to have a rest because they may have things to do in the morning. You have to respect the rights of everyone. If there happens to be someone who is insistently disrespectful regarding these rules, then he gets a written warning. Normally, each

rule is stable and written. The hour one must go to bed, the hour one must wake up, how you will treat a commander, etc.

There is a great culture of respect for the teachers and trainers within the organization. When an instructor enters a classroom, everyone in the class stands up. You must stand up no matter whom the person is that is giving a lecture whether they are superior or inferior to you. For instance, let's assume that in the training commission there are three guerillas for a day. Even a battalion commander or a PKK central headquarters member does not have the luxury to stay seated when these three guerillas enter the room. Everyone must arise. Even if Cemil Bayık is in that class that day, he has to stand up when the commission enters. Besides even that, the commission has to allow you to sit down; you cannot sit down on your own without their permission.

Also, there is an obligation that each member of the organization has to write a report once. Sometimes, the draft arrives and the reports are written in accordance. All of them are read and evaluated without any exception. Women have to write three reports: one to the military headquarters, one to the central executive committee, and one to their own headquarters. Men have to write reports to only the first two institutions listed above. Whether you are a normal guerilla or a ranked commander, these reports have to be written once a year.

Apart from the normal obligation of writing a report, each guerilla can write reports pertaining to any issue whenever they feel the need. I mean that there is not a limitation; you do not have to write only the required reports each year. You can utter a criticism or a suggestion in these additional reports and even give your opinion about a work. After writing a report, you have the right to ask for feedback. For instance, let's say you wrote a suggestion report. You can ask for the conclusion of your report from the institution you wrote it to. You had to be

given a reply whether it be negative or positive. For example, you have made a suggestion about wanting to transfer from one area to another. A reply must be given to you within a month.

You have the right to ask for a reply, but you do not have any rights on whether your opinion is accepted. Another issue about reports is that it can only be opened by the institution where the report was sent. No other institution of the organization can open the report. If something like that happens, then it can go under a heavy sanction. For example, if a guerilla wrote a report to his province commander, no one but that commander may open it. If you want to write a report to the HPG headquarters command, you can either send your report directly to the HPG or you can sent it to a specific person among the seven people there, stating HPG. If you write the HPG/Bahoz Erdal, no one but Bahoz Erdal himself can read your report.

Of course, there are exceptions: if a guerilla wrote a report to the province commander and the province commander is not in the region at the time (he could be somewhere else for a meeting), then he can instruct his assistant to open the report, read it, and inform him on the issue when he returns. Or he can instruct him not to touch the letter and that he will read it himself when he comes back.

There is also an oral report system in the organization. In the north, the system is very flexible, but in the south oral reports are taken on a daily basis. Everyone on the team gives a feedback report about what has happened during the day. The commander of the team gets the oral report from everyone. You can give information about anything, whether it is negative or positive.

In addition to these daily oral reports, there is team reporting every three days. Also, this is not done alone; the team gathers and gives an oral report together. On that same day, the



company commander evaluates the reports given by the guerillas. While these reports are received, anyone can state their opinions, but it is not required that you say something.

On the fourth day, battalion management gathers and evaluates all of the reports. battalion management consists of company and team commanders. On the fifth day, the conclusion of those reports is given orally to the guerilla structure. Each commanders shout out the conclusions of the reports to their units.

There is team meetings held every 15 days where everything that has happened is evaluated. These meetings are more extensive than the oral reporting. In this meeting, you can say things that you forgot to say in the oral reports. You can evaluate only your own team in the oral reporting system. You cannot reveal your discomfort with another team. However, in the team meeting you have the chance to evaluate the lifestyle of the three teams and give your opinion about an incident that has happened with another team.

Also, there is a company meeting once a month where the gatherings of the three teams are evaluated. This evaluation lasts from half a day up to a full day. Everything that has happened in their region and in other regions in the last 45 days is completely evaluated.

In these meetings, the commanders are not the only ones who speak, but the guerillas also have the right to say their opinions. You have equal rights with those within the commandment echelon. No commander can tell you that you have no right to evaluate an issue. First, the lifestyle of the company is evaluated in these meetings. Then, you can criticize the company commander, the battalion commander, and even the region commander. For example, a guerilla can easily criticize the specific actions or behavior of a company commander.

There is an executive meeting held once every two months. Battalion commanders, the region commander, and two of his assistants participate in this meeting. These high-ranked

administrators evaluate the entire region, and then they notify their battalion about the results of the meeting. Let's say there was a particular problem in a battalion and they would evaluate it as such. Based on their discussion, that person was punished because of what happened within that battalion. All these things are reported to each battalion by their commanders.

Once every two years, there is yet another conference that pertains to the guerilla force. It is mostly highly ranked individuals that participate in this conference. In addition to these high ranked commanders, representatives from the political extensions in Iran, Syria, and Iraq participate in these conferences simply as observers. There is no congress of the military force; they only make a conference. There is a headquarters team that consists of 50 people who are chosen at the end of this conference. They come from within the headquarters commandment. These 50 people come together and establish a commandment council of 11 people. Finally, these 11 people choose the headquarters commander. This selected person is submitted for approval by the defense committee. The military council is subordinate to defense committee. When the defense committee approves this person, they become the headquarters commander. If they do not approve them, the commandment council will have to make another election. Apart from some exceptions, those who become candidates are generally appointed as headquarters commanders.

The present headquarters commander has the right to postpone this conference for six months in case of an extraordinary situation. For instance, you have heard that Turkey will perform a military operation. It is risky for such an amount of people in the commander rank to gather. So, the date of the conference is postponed. The guerilla council can postpone the date of conference for six months. I mean the headquarters commander cannot postpone the

conference on its own free will. They need the approval of this council of 50 people. In the same way, in case of an extraordinary situation, the conference can be made six months before.

In extraordinary situations, the condition of all the provinces is evaluated. Four months in advance, all of the province commanders write reports telling about the situation in their provinces. These reports are read during the guerilla conference. For instance, let's say that a province commander in the north could not attend the conference due to the clashes there. That individual can send what he wanted to say at the conference as a report to the secretary of the conference and then his opinions are read at the conference. During the meeting, answers are written to the guerilla council. The conference is over in 15 days at the earliest, but they can last up to a month sometimes.

Again, the place and the importance of the guerilla force in the organization are different. It is autonomous within itself, but its initiative area is very large. For example, a guerilla commander can easily criticize the headquarters committee of the party, officials of the KCK, or the officials of the Kongra-Gel management. But these institutions that I listed can never criticize the guerilla force directly. If they have a problem, they notify the People's Defense Committee (KCK).

There is also a reward and punishment system in the organization. What I mean is that life is not based simply on punishment within the organization. Just like you punish someone when he makes a mistake, you also reward him when he is successful in doing something. The punishment system in the north is more flexible. It is not as strict and straight as it is in the south because the conditions in the north are worse.

It can be so bad in the north that you do not even need to give an oral report everyday if the situation does not allow for it. It may be 15 days and if things are not OK then you can miss the team meeting. In the north, the rules must be flexible based upon the conditions there.

There are written and non-written rules. The regulations do not write out the exceptions straight. What I mean is that there are not rules that are only for a specific region, like different rules only for the north or the south. The regulations are written in sharp sentences and define the general framework—and reveal the more concrete rules. However, the commanders in the north and south soften these rules according to the conditions of their regions.

Guerilla regulations clearly define which region the high-ranked guerilla will be on duty for and for how long they will be there. For instance, a commander would not stay in the same region for more than four years no matter how highly-ranked he was. A normal guerilla can stay in a region for up to ten years. However, a high ranked commander can stay at their present post for a maximum period of four years. This rule is the same in the north and in the south.

There is a specific difference between a guerilla and a commander: the guerilla can make many suggestions on his behalf like he wants to go to a specific region. But a commander does not have such a right orally or in writing. What I mean is that after being promoted to commander, the duty is assigned, not requested.

There is such a culture within the organization that a commander would not really make a suggestion for himself. There is not such a thing as being a volunteer for a particular duty. If someone wants to become a higher rank or go to a certain place, that person will be pacified by the party and no one would trust him very much. This is because once you join, you are giving all of your free will to the organization. I mean that you are actually willing to go wherever they appoint you.

There are also some clauses in the regulations about the numerical order of guerilla force. For example, a squad consists of three to five guerillas. Two to three squads make up a single platoon. Then, two or three platoons make up one company. The management of a company consists of both company commander and platoon commanders. Battalion management consists of a battalion commander and also company commanders. The platoon management consists of a platoon commander and squad commanders. All of this is clearly stated in the regulations.

Each battalion, company, platoon, and squad in the organization has a name. They are usually named after the martyred. For example, the battalion of the Martyred Mahsun, the company of the Martyred Kemal, and the team of the Martyred Mehmet. Names are given according to the level. You can name a team after a martyred guerilla or name a company or a battalion after their martyred commanders.

The number of female guerillas to be employed within each unit is also determined by the regulations. For example, there has to be one female company and two male companies within each battalion. As I have said, the management echelon of a battalion consists of company commanders. The organization applies a positive discrimination for female guerillas in the battalion management. Besides the female company commander, the female guerilla who is the commander of the first platoon of the female company also works in the battalion management. What I mean is that battalion management consists of two females and two males.

The guerillas determine the candidates they want to be a squad commander. In the same way, the management can also declare their candidate and ask the guerillas to determine their own. Then, the elections are held to determine the squad commanders. Once these team commanders are elected, they immediately start on duty.

The appointment of a company commander is decided by the battalion and regional managements. The appointment of a battalion commander is decided by the regional and headquarters managements. But there is such a rule that says a regional commander cannot appoint a battalion commander without the approval of the headquarters management.

### **EVACUATION OF THE HILLS FOR THE WINTER CAMP**

But to return to my own timeline, our province commander sent Sevin and me back to our former field. But, when we arrived in our former region, we learned that the state security forces had taken it over. All the strategically significant areas were now controlled by the enemy's tanks and thermal cameras. So, now if we moved across any open areas at night, the thermal cameras would immediately detect us; thus, our movement was severely restricted.

The comrades who had taken our place had not been familiar with the region, so they suffered 15 losses in three months. Since they did not know the back roads and secret paths, they were caught up in tank ambushes in the open field.

So, by my suggestion, the command echelon went under revision. After these leadership changes, our priority was to carry out missions against the security forces in order to expand our freedom of movement. Otherwise, we would neither be able to safely stay where we were nor prepare for the winter camp in the fall. (We had to transport food to the camp field and lay in supplies all during the fall, so we could not easily stock the food and ammunition if the security forces did not leave their positions.)

There were also some teams of rangers settled in our field. In contrast to the security forces, these teams were very unstable, and constantly relocating. They were staying in a different spot every night. They were not large groups but very lean. A ranger group might have

15 people in total. Moreover, they knew the field better than we did, because they had consistently been rangers in their own lands, whereas we had been away.

The result of all these disadvantages was that the command echelon, replacing us so frequently, lost control over very many strategic areas. While these locations were under state control, the Turkish soldiers placed mines there. Now, almost all the paths were full of mines. I have said before, the fight between the years 1994 to 1995 was very brutal. Their purpose was to restrict the mobility of our regional force and, once they had softened us, to destroy us in the fall or winter. We had already been in the field for some time, when we discovered it had been mined. Five of our comrades stepped on them before we knew it. Their feet were blown off from their ankles. Three of them were martyred.

We had to do something. We decided to act against the rangers before we took on the security forces, since the security forces were staying in a stable position and would not easily abandon their location. They were predictable. But, we did not know exactly where the rangers stayed, so they were more dangerous to us.

Once, we managed to detect the location of a group of these ranger teams between the cities of Siirt and Bitlis. As I said before, they were constantly on the go. They would never sleep in the same place they had stayed the night before. They would stay in a location until evening, preparing as if they were going to stay there overnight; building positions with stones. But they then moved somewhere else in the pitch darkness of the night, trying to throw us off the scent. We followed this team for about a month. We realized they always used the same tactic. One day, they stayed stable until evening. However, they changed their location during the evening and climbed to a hill but did not encamp. They failed to dig in a defensive position, thinking no one knew that they were there.

We made our raid at around 10:00 p.m. They had a team of 12. We killed nine and left three alive. We did not bother trying to converse or persuade them to our side. We were sick of it. Also, there was little point in it. This had been one of the most belligerent and effective teams in the region. We had made a raid, some time ago, on the village from which the team came, and had killed many of the villagers. Therefore, they were very incensed, very vengeful, and very dangerous. They were wholeheartedly joining in every operation alongside the security forces. They patrolled around our field, as an advance unit for the military. That is the reason we chose this specific ranger team to target.

Once the members of this team were killed, the other ranger teams withdrew to their own villages. They all realized that we had uncovered the strategy that they had developed. Now they were the ones who were unsafe.

And so, the time came to address the stable security forces. The military was dug in at three different points, but they had tanks at only two points. We purposely became familiar with the movement patterns of the soldiers before we attacked.

The nearby stations were meeting all their supply needs, except for food. The military vehicles would carry the materiel to the furthest point that the road reached, and the items were transported from there by mule. Apart from this, we learned where they got their water, which paths they used, from where their food came, and the habits of the soldiers' shift change. There were 40 to 50 soldiers on each hill, and these soldiers were sent back on the fourth day of each month, with new ones replacing them. So, we began by planting mines on the paths they used two days before the guards were changed.

But, in order to leak into the hills where the enemies were encamped, we needed more information. So, at night, despite their thermal cameras, we would approach them at a distance



of 50 meters. With small groups of two or three people, we were collecting as much intelligence as possible. The thermal camera was not as effective as it was first considered to be. It could not detect everything. We also made note of the fact that there was only one thermal camera on each hill.

We knew that after we destroyed one of the ranger teams, the rest would withdraw. Our surveillance of the permanent soldier camps revealed that the teams that retreated would sometimes race up the other hills to the aid of their fellow soldiers. What the soldiers did not know was that the ranger teams we had intimidated were now working for us. These rangers were transmitting details to us such as how many thermal cameras there were and what kind of weapons the soldiers had.

Thanks to their intel, we were able to mine the paths they used. All three hills on which the soldiers camped were now ringed with mines. It was time to draw the soldiers down into the field in order to get them to step on the mines. So, we laid down harassing fire and assassinated one or two soldiers by sniper shot. We would send three guerillas, and they would perform an assassination each and come back. After getting out of the effective shooting range of the soldiers, they would intentionally let themselves be spotted. The military was not only using howitzers, but they were also chasing our guerillas to block their escape and kill them. However, since we laid mines around the hills, the soldiers were stepping on the mines with every step in pursuit.

The military now had no will to remain in their positions—not only because of the mines, but because of the snipers we sent to demoralize them. Our men were hiding in the steep and wooded field at a distance of 150 to 200 meters. When they found an opportunity, they would shoot a soldier with a Dragunov assassin weapon and then retreat. We caused the military to feel

so frustrated and disheartened, because now they were the ones unable to move freely throughout the autumn. Finally, they left all three of the hills and withdrew to their headquarters.

So, in this way, in just three months we had managed to disable both the military and all the rangers. It was a great relief for us, since otherwise, we would not have been able to lay in all our essential food and ammunition before winter. This is how important the control of our geographical area was for the guerilla. Once you abandon a position over the winter, you lose the control of that area. As I mentioned, in the previous year, we had abandoned our field for a month and a half and by the time we returned, the Turkish soldiers had taken control of the strategic positions and rangers were patrolling throughout the area. All these changes happened in six weeks. Just like that, the hills were under their control. The teams of rangers had learned the details of the field, and the mines were placed. This is why, when our command echelon was reinstated, we became so adamant about sweeping and holding our ground before winter came.

### **THE BACKGROUND OF A LAND MISSION**

It was around this same autumn, while we were finally free to prepare for winter, that we were attacked by a land assault. The leaves of the trees had already fallen, and the field visibility had become convenient for an operation. We lost two comrades in the battle. One of them was the platoon commander. This was a huge loss to us, because not only had he been very familiar with our field, but he had been on excellent terms with all the guerrillas and the civilians in the region. Consequently, we had many difficulties during the preparations for the winter camp. The platoon commander had been responsible all those years for supplying what we needed. He knew what to get and from whom, and he knew how to bring these supplies to the camp.

Without him, we would have to do the best that we could, so, I went down to the city of Siirt with two comrades. The journey took two nights, since we only moved after dark. I knew some of the peasants in the valley and had visited with them for the Newruz celebrations in 1993. It was through the help of these peasants that we were supplied all our needs in 25 days. We bought all our essentials: food, flour, sugar, oil, fire, tea, meat, etc. We bought all these supplies with our own funds. We used Deutschmarks in those days and would occasionally use American Dollars as well, but not very often.

With the supplies purchased, now the most difficult part of the task had just begun. We had to carry all of these staples we had just secured into the countryside. For this, we bought 16 mules from the peasants. Upon taking our supplies to the countryside, we had planned to give the mules away to the peasants. They would look after these mules, use them for their own task, and give them back to us when we needed to once again port our supplies out to the countryside. Since there were no drones back then, we could easily carry our supplies by mules yet still avoid detection. The military stations were only at specific locations. We decided on the paths to take simply according to which ones avoided those spots. We would travel each of these planned paths twice, without carrying anything, before loading and transporting the supplies by mule.

And the philosophy of the plains was also in our favor back then. Not all the military stations were like this, of course, but the stations on the plains held the attitude that, "If you do not interfere in our business, we won't interfere in yours." Of course this was not official, but these were the unwritten rules. In exchange, we also did not attack them.

We would never attack or perform a mission while preparing for the winter camp. During this season, when the security forces went on a mission, or entered our field, we would hide, so as not to disclose the location of our camp fields. If we made any contact with state

forces in the fall, they might think, “If this guerilla army is here in this month, then they will stay here in winter as well.” And they would be right. That’s why we absolutely would avoid any contact in the fall.

Even if we did undertake a mission, we would perform it far away from the camp field, as a diversion. Sometimes, when we were just about to start the winter camp, I would send five teams to areas far away from the camp field and allow them to get noticed by the security forces. Sometimes, I would send these teams to the villages, because we knew there were people in each village that worked for the military. We knew who they were but pretended not to know. Our comrades would go to these villages before the winter camp and deliberately visit those households. Naturally, these military informers would run straight to the government with the information that they had seen us. When the security forces learned that we guerillas were visiting the village, they thought that we were located nearby, and their superiors would station them there throughout the season. Once we had tricked them like this, we could spend the entire winter comfortably.

When we visited these false villages in fall, we would give the villagers a list of supplies we needed, even though we no longer required any of them. For realism, the lists would contain mostly things to be used in winter such as heaters, nylon blankets, pickaxes, salt, and oil. We knew that this list would go straight to the security forces. It was a guarantee that the village informants would definitely drop by the station before supplying us and say, “Commander, look! They have given me this kind of list. I will go and fetch these items, but, just so you know!” The commander would look at the list and see the things to be used in winter. It would be natural to conclude that we must be encamping near their town for the duration. However, what delivery of such a list actually meant was that we had finished all our winter preparations with

enough time left over to deliberately fox the military. We did it to misdirect them, and we were generally successful at such ruses.

Before hunkering down for winter, the military sprang an operation on us in the area in which we were entrenched. We abandoned the area and lugged everything to another area at a distance of a night's travel away. If we wanted, we could always sneak away from a battle, but in this timeframe, we intentionally tried to get in contact with them. Because, again, if we contacted them in this season, they would believe that we were staying near the place of the confrontation. Indeed, six of our comrades got wounded in that particular battle, and three of their conditions were serious. Each were shot in their chests. Without surgery, they would die, but there was no way to bring a doctor from a hospital to the countryside. Therefore, all these comrades did die.

### **INVITATION TO DAMASCUS**

After this battle, the security forces bragged to the media, "We killed eight PKK militants!" The executives of the organization were naturally worried. They began to wonder if it were true. But an oral report was received daily at headquarters from us guerillas in the countryside. Around 10:00 a.m. every day, one by one, all regions give information about the incidents and developments in their area of operations. When the connection was provided, I told them in codes that the news report was a lie and that we had six wounded guerillas, three of whom later became martyred.

After the daily report, headquarters would reply, "All commanders must listen out for the big radio. We will be making contact!" We thought that headquarters would make a statement. We had two distinct kinds of large radios, which we used to communicate with Iran and Syria

from our location in Turkey. One of them was as big as a MacBook and could be set on a desktop and remain permanent. The other one was half its size. We had recently bought them from Japan, and both ran on batteries. Their antennae were four meters long and faced three directions: east, north, and south. There was a panel in the middle of these antennae, which could be turned towards whichever direction was the contact. We turned it to the direction of Iraq and Syria. As we were waiting, we suddenly heard comrade Apo speaking.

When Apo talked on the radio, he would first contact the provinces where the greatest problems had arisen. So, this time he spoke first to the Serhad province. They had suffered many losses that season. After he finished addressing them, he talked to the Dersim field commander. It was after that, that he began to speak to our field commander. He asked whether the media battle report and the losses it claimed were true. Our field commander told him that these reports were not true. Apo asked where the battle took place and the commander answered “In the Şirwan district of Siirt.” (It is worth noting that Apo did not speak in codes on the radio. He spoke clearly.) Apo asked our commander to include a commander in the conversation who had directly been in charge during these conflicts. Since our company commander was not prepared, I spoke on the radio on his behalf, just in time to catch judgment from our leader. Apo criticized the battle saying, “Why did you perform such a mission in such a season? Why did you do this in this kind of area?” He thought that we had conducted our mission in the same area as our permanent winter camp. Once I explained our strategy behind the battle, he sounded a bit more relieved and asked me, “You’ve been in that region for a few years, right?” I answered, “Yes, President Apo!” Then he asked me, “Have you ever come to Damascus to be trained?” I replied, “No!” That’s when he invited me, saying, “then come to Damascus when appropriate

for your region. I will inform your province commander, and they'll send you at the first opportunity." Then he hung up.

When he had finished speaking with the other provinces, the interpreter, standing beside our province commander, asked him not to leave. That's when we realized he was going to give our region an encoded message. My province commander told me to keep the radio on, because the message might be about me. In code, the province commander talked to Apo's interviewer. Then, through the radio, he told me, "You are wanted in Damascus. Prepare ASAP!" But I told him, "This season is really difficult in which to travel and we're about to hunker down in our winter camp. In addition, one of our best platoon commanders just died. I'm the only leader left who really knows the area. Can we wait until spring?" Not that I did not want to go to Damascus by the personal invitation of our leader! I did. But it was even more important to me that I not abandon my responsibilities. The province commander responded by agreeing that, "Okay, we will think about it." Then I heard later that headquarters command thought I was right, saying, "It is difficult now. He is needed there, too. He can come here next year."

Torn as I was, my gut told me it would not be right for me to go to Damascus at that time. We had already lost 50 to 60 guerillas the previous spring. The entire executive board had been dismissed, and the membership of two region commanders had been suspended. Moreover, the platoon commander had just been martyred. If I had accepted Apo's invitation, despite such conditions, I would have left my company in a dire situation. If I thought about nothing but my own interests, of course I would have gone straight to Apo in Damascus! But I liked my men very much. They were very committed to me. If I left them alone in winter camp and something happened to them, I would regret it for the rest of my days.

## AN UNEXPECTED INCIDENT

The year of 1995 turned out to be a very interesting year. Many incidents occurred, one after another. To begin with, just as we were about to enter the winter camp, our company commander fled with a female guerrilla. We learned they ran away to Botan field to join the guerilla force there.

The company commander had been sentenced for a mission he had enacted. He ran away because he just could not bear his punishment. While being trained at headquarters, he had planned a mission and had been given command of it. While the mission plan could have been applied in traditional ways, this comrade was brutal and cruel in his execution of it. In short, the organization had realized that the Turkish soldiers and the rangers had been dressing up in PKK uniforms and visiting villages to ferret out the villagers' relationship with the PKK. Our headquarters unit had received intelligence about these imposters: where they had been staying; which paths they used most frequently; which villages they had already visited, and which they would visit next. With this information, our old company commander had planned an act against this deceptive team.

They laid an ambush on the path over which these soldiers and rangers most often drove their van. They killed every single person of this special team. They could easily have taken most of them captives, if they had wanted. According to some of the guerillas who accompanied this commander, a soldier and a ranger escaped their van and tried to surrender. Our comrades reported that these captives told our commander not to shoot and that they were surrendering. But the company commander had given a strict order saying that none of the members of this impersonator team would be left alive. So, the guerillas, under his command, frog-marched this group of 16 rangers and soldiers and executed them by firing squad. But even this atrocity was



insufficient for the commander, because then he ordered his guerrillas to throw the corpses in the van, and light the van on fire.

As soon as they returned to headquarters, the guerillas filed a complaint about this incident with the province commander. They were very disturbed by what they had been ordered to do. The guerrillas reported that they could easily have taken all the soldiers captive alive, if the company commander had not overruled them. The province commander, himself, was shocked when he heard of this ferocity. The command team had already heard some rumors that “the PKK had burned soldiers alive,” before the responsible team even returned to headquarters, but they had not believed it. They had been positive the news was a Turkish state smear campaign, since they did not use such horrific tactics. Obviously, they figured the media must be giving false information.

When I first heard of that incident, I thought to myself that it was a conspiracy. Only gradually did it become apparent that the reports had been authentic. The company commander had honestly, intentionally executed, and desecrated those soldiers. Let me assure you that the instant the province commander heard about the incident, he came down on the company commander like a ton of bricks, right in front of everyone. “Even a government agent would not do what you did. Are you an agent? Do you work for the government? Who are you, actually?” He demanded he turn in his gun and then he threw him into jail. The company commander got very angry at this dressing-down from his superior and retorted, “I earned this gun in this organization, and I will only give it back when I am dead. Nothing short of that will make me return it. If you force it from me, then do not bother ever retuning it to me.” The province commander could not take his arrogance any longer and sent him to our region for us to deal with him.

When he arrived at our region, I asked him if he really did what was reported. He said, “Yes, I gave the order and my guerrillas carried it out.” I asked him how he could do such a thing, and he told me, “I could not forget those 60 friends of ours whom they killed this past spring. They cost us some comrades with whom I had served for a long time.” I replied, “It’s normal that we lose guerrillas. Whenever there is a battle, their side will lose lives, or ours will. It was our own mistakes back then that cost us so many comrades. This is no justification for your war crime. It is no excuse! You set 12 people on fire in this mission, but the real harm was to our reputation. The media is now using this incident against us, and your own reputation in the organization has been harmed as well. Which commander at the province, or even company command level would trust you now to complete even the most insignificant mission?” I berated him like that for a long time, after which he said that he did not have to stay in this field and take such abuse.

### **AN ACT OF ESCAPE IN THE CAMP**

In the fall, we migrated to the area of the winter camp. The evening we were about to enter the camp, the duty officer came up to me and said, “Comrade, here is a note written for you.” I took the note. The company commander had written, “I am not going to the security forces to rat you out, so you do not need to relocate your winter camp. Stay where you are!” This was in reference to the rule in the organization, which stated, for pretty obvious reasons, that you must change the place of the camp if someone deserts and knows exactly where camp is located. This may sound like an overreaction, but relocating our field as a precaution is better than risking our entire field force. Still, to move our camp so late in the season would have been both arduous and dangerous, so the company commander had written in his note that we were

not to worry nor relocate. He had gone to Botan field and he would get in touch with us in two or three days.

His defection was so troubling that it brought our regional commander straight to our location. I gave him the note and he asked me, "What do you think? Do you think he would reveal us to the security forces?" I said, "I do not think so."

The morning after his defection, our camp was suddenly attacked by cobra attack helicopters. We figured the defector had informed the enemy of our location. Then, they obliterated our mules, and we realized they had not seen us, they had only spotted the pack animals. We had only three mules, and they killed them all.

At 8:00 to 9:00 a.m., that same morning, I found a missed call on my radio. It was the company commander who had deserted us. I asked him where he was and he replied, "Do not worry about me! Are you guerrillas alright?" "No," I said. "the enemy just destroyed all our mules. Now, how did they spot them?" He answered, "It was not I! Please believe me, I am still in the countryside. I did not defect to the security forces. I am on the hill opposite your location. I can see you from where I sit," he said. So I told him, "Then come back here, since the regional commander is here now. Come back, otherwise everyone will think poorly of you." But I could not convince him to return.

I radioed to him, "Okay, if you really want to leave, a force that belongs to our region is bringing from Botan Field some grenades, bullets, and other weapons. Why do not you welcome them on the way? Here is the channel they're using. You must contact them in advance so as to avoid any misunderstanding." He could have been mistaken for an enemy and killed.

Meanwhile, our team had settled into the winter camp field. We had not changed our location. I contacted the Botan force three or four days after my radio conversation with the

defector. We were using the role communication system belongs to the Turkish security forces. We used codes, of course, since the security forces were bird-dogging us 24/7.

It was through this system that I talked to the unit that was bringing us the weapons. They told us that they had our “fugitive,” which is when the regional commander took the radio from me and joined the conversation. He chewed out the company commander saying, “Are you a coward? Why did you run away? You will come back this instant.” There was a long silence from the company commander. Then he said, “I won’t come back.” The regional commander answered, “Look, if you go to Botan, the field commander there is my childhood friends and I will tell him to throw you directly into jail. He will do whatever I ask of him. You broke our rules, took a woman and fled from one place to another with her. They will keep you in jail for months.”

The company commander said he was not planning to stay in Botan but was just stopping over there on his way to Damascus. The regional commander said, “What makes you think they will allow you to go to Damascus? They won’t send you there. They will keep you in jail for months. It is not even certain what decision the organization will make about you. It is best for you if you face us directly and come back here as soon as possible!”

And so, six days later, the company commander, and his woman, returned to the camp with the Botan group that replenished our ammunition. We certainly could not let him keep his old job. The organization had a set of official rules, and no one is an exception. He stayed in jail for 15 days, but I did not confiscate his weapon. This was because I knew his character. He also used to outrank me, but, in those days, I used to respect him a lot. That’s why I did not treat him strictly by the book. I was appointed as the company commander, once he was put in jail. I held that position between 1995 and 1996. So, in the end, his cowardice got me a promotion.

I had mentioned to you before that I was not all comfortable about this promotion. I told the regional commander about my discontent many times. I was only 22 years old, and yet I had been given a great deal of responsibility. In order to carry out a mission, one needs to strategize for months. We were preoccupied with the negative reaction of the public now that we had undertaken a mission against the rangers rather than the security forces. Since the field where we were located was full of ranger villages, how could we avoid battling more rangers? Our task was too challenging. That's why I found it so hard to be a company commander and so I objected to the duty.

But the regional commander was determined. I realized then, that he was not going to change his mind. So, I told him that I would accept the command but only on one condition. "You will take these older, respected commanders out of my company." The regional commander laughed. "Are you crazy? How could I afford to transfer them out in this season?" I said, "I get embarrassed when I have to order them to do something." He replied, "I will talk to them. It won't be a problem." He gathered all the wise, respected older commanders and told them, "He is your company commander, but he is shy about giving directives to you. So, if there is something to be done, please do it before he tells you." I tell you, having these experienced soldiers directing themselves sure helped me a lot.

### **NEARLY DEAD**

Before we had even left the winter camp, early in the spring of 1996, the military began advancing towards the region in which we were located. One of the duty officers wakened me one night at midnight. He told me that they had noticed something on the radio, so I turned it on and listened for a while. The security forces were definitely discussing something, but they were

using crypto. We could not understand the conversation, but we could tell among which stations the conversation was taking place. The notable thing was that the stations connected to one province normally would not talk directly to the province central command. But that was far from the case this time. I realized that all the stations in the province were talking to their headquarters directly and that there was a tense talk between the cities of Bitlis and Siirt.

It appeared obvious to me that they were definitely getting prepared for an attack. Otherwise, these two provinces would have nothing to do with one other. I immediately contacted the hillers, who were responsible for the security of our camp. I asked whether they had reached their intended position. The hillers were from the female cadre that day, and one of them told me that they were not at their position yet. It was almost 3:00 a.m. They were to have been on the hill by 2:00 a.m. I reprimanded this woman, saying that they were almost an hour overdue, and there was no excuse for not being there by now. She replied, “Comrade, there is something on the hill. We do not know if it is animal or human, but something is definitely moving up there.” I told her, “Absolutely do not go up there! Keep two experienced people with you and send the rest back to the camp.” She panicked when I gave her those orders. She asked me, “Why?” I answered honestly, and said, “Those are probably Turkish soldiers on the hill. We have overheard that they are advancing towards our camp. With the two people next to you, approach the hill about 50 to 60 meters further. Then, do not do anything till you hear from me!”

I was going to organize our guerrilla army and leave the winter camp field but now realized that we were surrounded. There was another strategic hill next to the camp, and I had been planning to go up there to make our escape. But the crafty soldiers had taken their position there during the night. Of course, we did not know that yet. It was not until they began shooting intensely at us from that hill, as we walked in the stream at 5:00 a.m., that we had the first sign

that they had noticed us. I now ordered the three female guerillas that I had left on the hill to shoot the soldiers who were shooting us. “Shoot until you run out of ammunition and then retreat to a safe area.”

We were surrounded and caught flatfooted, but we knew of a very steep, strategic spot that the soldiers would not be easily able to reach. In such battles, whoever gained dominance of position in such a place, would dominate. There were only two paths going up there, and I directed my team to head there. But we again began taking heavy fire. The male advance team was the only team that could safely reach that area. The one female group, and the male unit I was in, were now blocked from any hope of crossing over.

The soldiers nearly completely surrounded us. Our probability of escape was not very good. If we were going to have any chance to make it past them, we would have to move with focus and unity. In order to ensure coordination, I took my position on the ground between our two teams. It was around 10:00 a.m. and we had not yet sustained any losses. The three female comrades caught up with us from the other mountain. There was a tense skirmish on the spot where one platoon had taken a position, and yet there was no battle on another spot where another platoon was positioned. I became suspicious of this. I asked that unit commander on the radio if there were any movement anywhere around them. She said, “No!” I noted that there was a stream opposite their position and, on the far side of the stream, there was another hill. I determined that this would be our passage of escape.

But before I directed the group there, I told the commander of the female unit, “Watch that area very closely, this silence isn’t normal.” She contacted me 15 minutes later, saying, “You’re right! A unit of their military wants to sneak through our front line from the direction of the stream.” I asked her, “Are there any soldiers on the top of the hill?” She answered, “No,

comrade! I did not believe so.” I told her, “Check it more carefully. It is a very strategic location. Are you positive that no soldiers have positioned themselves there?” She answered, “No, there’s no one.” (In the heat of battle, we naturally do not use any codes on the radio. We just speak plainly. The military does the same.)

Meanwhile, my assistant was with me. I told him, “Comrade! I will go towards the break in the line.” He said, “Comrade, wait! Let’s take this male platoon with us.” I told him that would not be necessary. I retrieved a pair of binoculars from the female unit and started to scan the stream. A military team of 25 soldiers was just waiting there, standing in the stream. I observed them for a while and then realized that they had no intention of breaking through our line. They appeared content to stay there, just waiting. What was going on? I could not make sense of this. Although in retrospect, I should have been able to see what was happening. How many times had I trained others to defend the rear flank, but now I had forgotten to check it. Instead, I had relied on the assurances of others. The guerrillas whom I had asked concerning it, had told me that there was nothing there, and that our rear was safe. Since I had performed many assassinations before, I knew to give importance to a 360-degree situational awareness. I again observed the behavior of the soldiers in the stream. I now knew for sure that they would not sneak over to where we were, but still their purpose still eluded me.

Meanwhile, one of the platoon commanders contacted me and said that a howitzer had hit the male company and two guerrillas had been wounded. It was now imperative that I find a way out, before it was too late. It was drizzling, and fog was settling over everything. It was unusual weather. I was still talking to the male company on the radio and directing them how to change their position. I had taken cover behind a boulder, but while issuing orders I inadvertently



moved away from the rock. I suddenly felt a pain in my head. It was as if I had been hit with a very solid object. I do not remember anything after that.

[Deniz showed me the cavity on the top of his head. The sniper's bullet had hit and broken the skull bone. There was only membrane left between the brain and the skull. Doctors in Syria had later placed a piece of bone over the area.]

Just before the incident, I had been talking to the platoon commander on the radio. When my radio fell to the ground, the commander of the female company, who was with me, took the radio and told the commander of the male company that I had been martyred. Everyone was shocked. "How could he be shot? There isn't even a battle there." The female commander responded, "We do not know. But we do know there was the sound of a sniper bullet, and then he collapsed."

When I came around, I opened my eyes for a moment. I was lying there in the dirt. I saw the women around me crying. I lifted my head and asked the woman next to me, "Comrade, what happened?" She answered, "Comrade, you were martyred." I said, "If I were martyred, how could I talk to you now, you, idiot?" "You were hit on your head by a bullet. We thought you had died," she said, through her tears. I put my hand up to my head and felt the place where the bullet had struck. They made me lie back down, and I could feel I was bleeding from my head, as the blood ran down my neck. I put my hand to my neck, and it came away wet with blood. I realized at that instant that if the bullet had hit my neck, I would have really been dead. I felt around my whole neck with my fingertips. There were no wounds that I could detect and I felt an intense relief.

I immediately resumed issuing orders. "Bring me a piece of cloth immediately. I need to clean away this blood around my neck and head." After wiping off the blood, we could see that

the bullet had only glanced off my skull. I took back my radio and contacted the platoon commander. He was shocked. "Were not you martyred?" I responded, "No, just a misunderstanding." I did not tell him that I was injured. Meanwhile, when this company commander had told everyone over the radio that I was martyred, the company commander with whom I was in love (Sevin), left her position and came to where I was. When she saw me, she exclaimed, "Comrade, you are alive! Why did this woman announce that you were martyred?" I replied, "There is nothing wrong. It was just a misunderstanding."

Even though I had not stood up yet, I knew I would not be able to walk. At least now there was no longer any mystery behind the silence on the hill. The soldiers standing in the stream had only been there to draw our attention. In order to get into a vantage point from which to spy on them, and shoot them there, we guerrillas had to move out from cover and make ourselves visible. The military had cleverly engineered this and, in anticipation, had placed some snipers on the opposite hill. Their purpose was to eliminate each guerrilla who emerged from hiding, in order to shoot their friends in the stream. But I was the only one they managed to shoot, so we got off easy.

Clearly, we could not be staying there any longer, so I stood, with the help of the others. I started to walk slowly, but fell to the ground after only a few steps. My vertigo was so poor that I could not walk any further. The women with me were very short and unable to support me very well. Our slapdash plan was to cross to the safe place on the steep area where our lead team had crossed before. A thick fog crept in before we tried to move that way, and the range of vision suddenly dropped to under twenty meters and it was still drizzling. When it was foggy, the battles were mutually halted, but we knew the security forces were now preparing their attack plan. Obviously, they were planning to attack and destroy all of us on the hill. I whispered,

“This fog is a great opportunity for us. Under its cover, we should rush to the steep area.”

Thanks to that thick fog, we safely crossed over and met up with our team in that area.

It had been just in time, too, because, as soon as the fog lifted, the military began to use howitzers to shoot at the hill from where we had just escaped. They carried out a very intense bombardment of our former location with bazookas, flame throwers, and more types of additional weapons than we could ever imagine. I felt sure that they were going to sneak past our front lines after this. It seemed pretty clear that the military thought we were still there. So, the bombardment proceeded with an intense fusillade of technology, until suddenly it all cut off at once. They had been issued a stop order through the radio. They all quit because there was no counter-attack from us. We heard the enemy battle commander consulting with his fellow commander. “This silence isn’t good. They must be planning something,” he said.

Obviously, they expected a counterattack. The commander said, “I do not like this silence. Pay close attention to the areas where those guerrillas could sneak through our lines.” All the other commanders answered, “Yes sir, we are looking closely. There is no movement.” Then, one of them said, “An hour ago we were in a close battle with that location, from only 20 meters away, yet now there is no movement on that hill.” Their battle commander finally said, “They probably escaped under cover of the fog.” Then one of our commanders said over the radio to the enemy leader, “You’re too late. But if you still want to come over, I can give you the address. We will be waiting for you there.” The battle continued verbally, as their commander swore at us a great deal, and our commander swore back.

They finished their attack on the evening of that same day. We incurred no losses, but three people were wounded, including myself. Our province commander, himself, visited our region after the incident. He knew how to treat wounds, such as mine. I had already been

“treated” by our female doctor, but she had not cleaned the wound well. Women are more squeamish in such situations. My skull bone had been broken and chipped when the bullet hit, so there was only a skin flap left over the hole. Our female doctor had only covered the skull hole with the flap of skin. All the hair, blood, and dust had stayed packed inside. The province commander opened the wound again and cleaned it out very well. He touched the membrane against my brain with the stick of a piece of plant, and asked me, “Can you feel me touch you there?” I said, “Yes!” He told me, “If the bullet had broken this membrane too, your brain cavity would have filled up with blood and you’d be dead.”

## CHAPTER 11

### ON THE WAY TO DAMASCUS, SYRIA

If you recall, in 1995, before the winter camp, Apo himself had invited me to Damascus. Now, the province commander said, “Do not stay with us any longer, especially wounded as you are. We need to answer Apo’s order and send you to Damascus as soon as possible. You can receive better treatment for your wound in Damascus as well.” They gave me an escort team of 16 guerillas. Some of them were responsible for getting me to Damascus safe and sound, while some of them were, likewise, being sent to Iraq and Syria for training.

The regional commander told me, “First make a visit to the province commander. He is holding some reports, bound for Damascus, that you’ll need to take with you.” When we arrived at the province commander, he told me, “Look, only three of you 16 are going all the way to Damascus. So, when you’ve safely reached the south, nobody should argue with you about the right to go to Damascus also. Everyone’s destination is clear.” I then pulled the province commander aside and said that there was something personal about which I wanted to speak to him.

I mentioned my girlfriend’s name and told him that I wanted her to come with us. (She, too, had been in the same region for four years, and was completely burned out.) The commander smiled kindly at me. “Deniz,” he said. “Besides the fact she is burned out and due for a change, are you sure you do not have any other reason to ask to take her with you?” I looked at him. “You know my reason very well, comrade,” I said. The commander then said to me, “I can send her to the south with you, but, after Damascus, what are you going to do?” I held my ground, “She has earned the right to go to Damascus. She has a bright future ahead of

her, and she is as talented as any senior officer. Write the transfer orders that you have selected her, for higher level training in Damascus.” He relented. “All right, I will. But absolutely nobody can know about this relationship between the two of you.”

On my return to the regional commander, I gave him the transfer orders. He smiled as he read it. “So, you really want to take Sevin with you?” he said. “Yes, comrade,” I replied. He gave it to me straight, saying, “Look, up here, we are aware of the relationship between the two of you, but in the south or in a battle zone, your entanglement with each other will do no good for either of you.” He continued, “Comrade, you two have been with each other for four years. You came here to the north together. Nobody here has said anything against it. However,” he warned me, “Be careful.” I answered, “You’re right, comrade. I have loved this girl for four years now, and I haven’t even held her hand. We truly are in love with each other. This isn’t about sex.” He answered, “And that’s why we tolerate the two of you.”

The commander’s guard called out to the girl whom I loved, “Comrade, prepare! You are also going to Damascus.” Sevin was elated. He told her what he had told me. “Such affairs are tolerated in a war zone but that isn’t the case in the south. Nobody there would show you any mercy. Take care.”

Then, as a group of 16 people (four women, 12 men), we set off on our journey. From the district of Şirwan, we were going to travel to Eruh, through the city of Siirt, and from there we planned to travel to the district of Botan. We had a one-day rest somewhere next to the Siirt stream. During this resting period, I wanted to contact the Eruh guerrilla force to decide with them on a meeting point for when we got closer to their area. I took a comrade with me and climbed up to a hill where I would have better radio reception. Before leaving, I told the rest of the group to rally at the field and meet us at the top of the hill after the sun set.

Just as we reached the hill and were speaking to the force from Eruh, we heard gunfire from the spot we had just left. The security forces had noticed our comrades and started a battle. We remained where we were. What could we do? We neither saw nor heard from any of our comrades until 10:00 p.m. We were worried. I risked making contact with them by radio around 1:00 a.m. I asked them where they were, and how they were. They said that they were okay and they had escaped from the area in the dark. But the problem was, they also did not know where they were hiding now. They tried to describe their location, but we could not quite figure out where it was. We were in a vast area. Finally, I gave up. "We will meet each other in Eruh. No need to gather now," I told them.

The path we were now traveling was the same one we had used to pass from our training camp into Turkey back in 1992. It had been four years. As we proceeded, we tried to remember, "Was not there a boulder here? There must be a tree there. There was a village over there...." Really, we were making it all up. It was nighttime and we could not see anything, yet we walked nonstop. We did not even have drinking water left, so we were very thirsty. This whole time we had no idea where we were going.

Around 3:00 a.m., we came across a river. We tried to remembering the name of the river. We could see mountains in the moonlight. They were beautiful, except we did not know which mountains they were. We got even more confused when, while walking along the edge of the river, we came to an asphalt road. In 1992, there had been no pavement on our route. At this point, though we were not aware of it, we had gone to the town of Mawa instead of Eruh. We had gone completely in the opposite direction!

While following the path, we suddenly came upon a long iron bridge. Someone on the other side of the bridge was patrolling it with a flashlight, and guard dogs were constantly

barking. We figured that the people we were hearing were probably nomads, who were, most likely, grassing down their animals. This was a great stroke of luck for us, because shepherds would have no problem with us. We were more than happy to head in that direction, since we figured we could learn from them where we were. But, before stepping on the bridge, we noticed that there was a big hole which had been dug to the right of it. It looked like a foxhole; such as military men digging into position. I checked it over for a while, but, could not understand why it had been dug.

We started to walk slowly across the bridge. We had not had any food or sleep for approximately 11 hours. We were hungry, thirsty fugitives. Just when we arrived at the end of the bridge, my companion beside me quietly tugged on my arm and pointed to something. In that instant, I realized that the set of tents I had taken to be a nomad village was actually a military encampment. They were experiencing an electrical outage, and that's why the soldiers had been patrolling in the dark with flashlights.

There were two iron guard shacks right at the beginning of the bridge, and each was manned. One soldier looked as if he were dozing off, but I told the comrade next to me, "There is no escape!" Even if we could pass by these guard shacks, those soldiers in the station would notice us. But if we went back, there was surely a soldier there as well, who probably had not noticed us before, because he had been asleep. But, to go forward was to walk directly into the military station. I looked down, and the river seemed to be deep enough, so I told my comrade that only one solution remained to us. We would have to jump off the bridge and into the river. Since there was no electricity, I figured that even if the guards heard our splash, there was nothing they could do to us.



My comrade followed my logic, and said “Okay!” We both mounted the rails. All our gear was still strapped to us—our weapons, our armor, and ammunition. The bridge was about four meters above the water. We jumped. The soldiers definitely heard the splash, and began searching the river with their flashlights. We were proceeding slowly in the water, covering ourselves by staying close to the shrubbery at the water’s edge. Before we were even 80 meters downriver, their electricity came back on. By the absolute worst luck, they had placed a very powerful spotlight right in the middle of the river, and the guards spotted us immediately.

We left the water and made a run for it. We came to the edge of a large field, and the soldiers tried to block our way onto it with panzers, each of which had its own spotlight, so we crawled to the edge of the road, in an attempt to avoid them. When a panzer headed toward us, we would hide. When it passed, we would get up and keep running. We kept that up until we vanished without a trace.

Soon, we were walking on the paved road again. My comrade asked me where we were headed, and I replied, “I do not know. We’re following this road wherever it goes.” He responded, “Well, what if this time it takes us right into a military battalion, and for once we do not manage to escape.” We had to laugh a lot at our good fortune.

On one side of this road, there was a wooded hill. I said, “Let’s hide in the woods and surveil the area. We can wait until it gets dark tomorrow night to set off again.” As soon as we hid ourselves among the bushes, we passed out cold. We were so exhausted that we did not wake up until 3:00 p.m. the following afternoon. Once we were awake, my comrade stepped away in order to pee, quickly! However, he immediately came back. “There are the footprints of soldiers,” he said. I checked his story. There was a path to the summit of the hill and there really were Turkish soldiers’ boot prints. I thought for a while and I decided that this hill was

only a security hill; I said that the soldiers would take their position on the hill during the day and at night, they would be leaving.

So, we waited where we were, smoking and chatting with each other until the soldiers began coming down the hill toward us around 4:00 p.m. They were stupidly walking in a group, and only 10 to 15 meters away from us—a convenient target. We easily could have killed them all. It was our ignorance of not knowing where we were that prevented us from taking this opportunity. If we had shot them, where would we run? Where could we hide? We did not know the area, so we could not take the chance.

My comrade was fervent that “We shouldn’t miss this opportunity! Let’s kill them all!” But I said, “Are you crazy? Do you have any idea where to go to escape? We have no idea where we are!” During our debate, the soldiers continued past us and down the road, where two panzers picked them up and took them all away, alive and unhurt.

Once they had left, we came off the hill and continued our journey. We came across a village, and surveyed it with binoculars for a very long time in order to ascertain whether it were a ranger village or one patriotic to Kurds. But just watching the daily life of the villagers was not showing us either way. So, I had a brilliant plan. “Before it gets dark, let’s arrest someone on the bridge and make them tell us about this place!” Just then, we saw an old lady leading a horse with a rope, headed back to the village. We were still 50 meters away, when we began to call out to her, “Auntie! Auntie!” She started to run as soon as she heard us, and so we were obliged to chase her. We absolutely had to catch her because if this were a ranger village, she would alert them and they would never let us leave there alive. When she tripped and fell, we finally caught up to her.

We asked her, “Why are you running away, Auntie? Why are you frightened?” She answered, “You must be state soldiers!” I was shocked. “State soldiers? Why would you believe such a thing?” She said, “You must have been with those soldiers! They just left by vehicle, but you’re still here. They must have left you behind, right?” She was frightened and babbling. Nothing we could say was going to convince her. So, I finally just asked her directly, “Is this village a ranger village, or is it patriotic to the Kurdish cause?” She said it was not a ranger village, and we were greatly relieved. Then, we asked her the name of the place, and she responded to us with a question of her own. “Son, what are you doing here, if you have no idea where you are?” “Auntie,” I said, “You are right to ask. But it is a very long story. Suffice it to say that we are quite lost. Won’t you please tell us where we are?” But no matter what we tried, she absolutely would not tell us the name of the village which had taken us so much to overcome in order to reach.

There was nothing to do, but take the risk and go into the village. Then, we met an old man. We trusted what the lady had told us, and we honestly told him that we were patriotic guerrillas. This man said to us, “I will test you by asking you a question. If you answer it correctly, you are what you say. If not, then I know you are state soldiers.” “Go ahead and ask,” I dared him. The old man’s test was to ask me the name of a fellow guerrilla—and it just so happened to be a comrade whom I knew very well! I was able to describe my friend to the old man in great detail, telling he had blue eyes, was fairly short...etc. The old man embraced us. “That’s right! You must be one of us.” And that’s how I found out my friend was this old man’s son.

He was shocked when I told him the situation. “Comrade, this is Mawal, not Eruh!” he informed us. Our hearts sank. “You got so lost, you came all the way over to the Mardin side!”

I asked him how we could contact representatives of the organization in that region. To our good fortune, the regional force had stopped by this village just the previous night. “When will they return?” I asked him. “They are going to come back on Monday afternoon,” he told me. “They wanted certain supplies which we are now trying to collect.” So, it looked best to stay in one place for two days, if there were a safe place to wait. “Do not worry,” he assured us. “We will take care of you.” And then he offered us a nice meal.

Once darkness fell, we were given a young shepherd to guide us to the safe waiting place. He took us to a cave about two kilometers from the village, where we were given food, tobacco, and other essentials. “You can stay here for two days,” we were told. “And there are shepherds all around this mountain, so do not worry about security. They will alert you if they see any soldiers.”

When darkness fell on the second day, two people from the village came to our cave and told us to stay where we were. “We have told the local guerrillas about your situation,” they said, “but they do not believe us.” The organization’s regional headquarters had told the villagers that we must just be state soldiers trying to entrap them. So, we asked the friendly villagers what our next step should be. They described a different location and told us how to get there, saying, “Be ready there tomorrow evening. They will be waiting to meet you.”

What else could we do? The next evening, we went back to the village, enjoyed a lovely dinner, and then set off once night had fallen. We were following the paved road to Eruh when the local organization contacted us through the radio, and told us they would now give us some instructions to follow. Their questions were stupid from the start: “How many in your party? Why are you here? How did you get here?” I was instantly angry, responding, “Why do not you stop asking us such stupid questions over the radio? Why do not you tell us where you are? We

will come to you, and you can ask whatever questions you want of us directly.” But his questions did not stop: “How can we trust you? What if you are a state soldier?” He completely ignored anything I had said and kept replying with more questions. This made me even more angry. “If I were not a fellow guerrilla, why the hell would I have waited here for you like a target for three days? How would the villagers have given me the information that you were coming? What kind of idiot are you?” But nothing I said was going to make them trust me.

But all this time we were following their instructions. We began walking directly on the pavement like they told us to do. It was pretty pleasant, actually. The weather was lovely and the landscape was awash in moonlight. We were sauntering straight down the middle of the road because vehicles were not permitted to drive on it after dark. The whole scene was quite nice. And in all this calm and beauty, I asked my comrade, “If you were to set an ambush for us, where would you place it?” I absolutely knew that the local guerrillas were waiting in ambush for us. Their suspicious questions had made it evident. The comrade indicated the back of the hill that we were approaching. “I would lay in ambush there,” he told me. “I would kill whoever arrived. Then, I would flee back into that wooded area.” I agreed with him, “I bet they’re waiting in ambush there for us right now.”

The instant we arrived at the back of that hill, we were contacted by radio and told to back up for 80 meters. I naturally got angry over this order. I asked the speaker why we had to go back, when he had just told us to move forward? “And now I want you to go back,” he replied. We had to do whatever he wanted, regardless of how angry it made us, so, of course we backed up for 80 meters.

Then, he made contact again and told us to lay down our weapons. We figured that we would be able to see the person holding the radio, being this close, but, we only learned later that

the leader, speaking by radio, had stayed 50 meters away from us so we could not detect where he was. But, suddenly, we did see someone. There were six guerrillas beside the road, holding bixi, bazookas, and all sorts of other weaponry.

There was nothing for us to do but comply, so we put our weapons on the pavement, raised our hands above our heads, and walked forward, away from our weapons. The guerrillas surrounded us; three from the front and three from behind, and began body-searching us. “We already left the weapons back there!” I protested. “What in the hell are you looking for?” I was very frustrated by now. The guerrillas searching us had been ordered not to talk to us. Their job was to take us to their leader. I asked them the name of their commander, and, coincidentally, their commander turned out to be a friend of mine from back in 1992! He was always filthy. We could never make him wash or care about his hygiene, so we had nicknamed him Dirty Mehmet.

We discovered that this company was the roaming unit of Botan province. They were sent wherever there was a need. The province commander recognized me the instant he saw me, and we embraced. But I was still angry. “You made complete fools out of us for three days straight! You called us liars, swore at us, and gave us stupid orders! And now here you are, hugging me as if we were friends!” He had the manners to apologize to me. “There are so many state soldiers here,” he informed me. “Comrades who desert us and join the state military patrol in groups just like you. We mistook you for them.” I asked him, “Does that make sense? Look at us. There’s only two of us. We’re here where we arranged to be, and we have the same types of weapons as you. And, if we were soldiers, would we ever have radioed you to tell you our location?”

“We made a mistake, comrade,” he admitted. “Please forgive us. All the same, it makes no sense. What are you doing here?” I told him that we had been going to Damascus. “We were attacked, and then we became very lost.” He was especially interested in how we had crossed the river. “Over the bridge,” I said, and when he asked me which one, I told him, “There was a bridge downhill, with a soldier encampment on it. We crossed that one.” Coincidentally, this unit had been planning out a mission to take out that same encampment. He was very curious about how we could have crossed the bridge and not been noticed. When I told him our story, he saw an opportunity. “Comrade,” he asked me, “please help us with surveillance of this encampment! We truly want to destroy it.”

“Go and do your own reconnaissance!” I was still annoyed. “We have to go on to Eruh as soon as possible. Contact the Eruh force for us, and ask them if the rest of our unit has already reached there.” So, they contacted them, and we discovered that everyone else from our unit had arrived there safely. I said, “Tell them not to wait for us. They should move on.” We stayed with this company for a week. Then, one unit took us to another, which took us to another, all the way to Eruh. We stayed only a few days with each force and finally reached Eruh. The other group, with whom we had started, had reached Iraq by the time we arrived in Besler, despite the fact that there was a road of ten days’ journey between the two. That’s how far behind we had gotten.

The command echelon of the Botan management was having a meeting in Besler. They asked us to wait until the end of that meeting, so that we would take the results with us to headquarters in Syria. We accepted this request. The meeting finished, and we were about to leave when the province commander said to me, “Deniz, a unit of ours in Şırnak wants to execute a mission. Would it be agreeable with you to check over their plan, and see if it is

feasible or not?” What could I do? I had to say, “Yes!” We had been their guests for two days. How could I refuse?

I went to the city of Şırnak where this unit was located, and I checked their plans. It focused on a hill, which the security guards held. It had a three-story structure on it, surrounded by smaller buildings. Their plan was simply to shoot this hill. “But you cannot sneak through their lines with the large force you have,” I told them. The unit commander said, “We have Russian made Aspinay rockets (similar to a Bazooka-type rocket launcher, about three meters long and shoots rockets that are one meter in length.) We will attack them with those.” Of course, I had never seen this weapon before. I did not know its impact area, specifications, or how it was used. So, I asked, “Would these rockets reach that hill from here?” The strategist answered, “Do not worry, comrade. They would reach.” “Okay,” I said, walking him through his plan. “Let’s say they do reach. You must be effective the first time you fire. Otherwise, the entire force there will run into their shelters,” I warned. “Our purpose is to demolish that three-floored military building,” he replied. “Okay, if your purpose is not to leak through their lines and infiltrate them, but only to fight in terms of technology, then there is no problem with your mission planning,” I said.

Finally, I asked them if they were taking any measures to protect against a counterattack. “For example, let’s say you fired three or four rockets. Şırnak is in this region, as you know. There is a military unit in downtown Şırnak, and also a watch hill, plus the hill which you are planning to attack. After you have fired the rocket, you will be under fire from two, three, or even four sides with howitzers. Have you taken any measures against these?” (We very frequently encountered this situation in the north. We would fire three rockets, and get a response of dozens of cannonballs from the security guards, costing us the lives of many of our



comrades.) The team commander said, “Yes, our countermeasures are shelters we have built. After we strike at them, our force will hide in these shelters.”

As a final step, after all of this, I contacted the commander for the Botan province, with whom this unit was connected, and told him, “On paper, their plan is fine, but I am not familiar with this weapon they are using. So, I cannot say whether they will succeed or not.” Of course, since now we were curious about how the mission was going to turn out, we stayed there on the day it was executed. While they were firing the rockets, I was watching the target building with my binoculars. They fired the first rocket, but, though I was watching the hill, I saw no rocket arrive. Nothing at all happened to the target building. We did not understand where this rocket had gone. We had heard a loud noise, but it sounded as if it came from far away. I asked the mission team where they had fired that thing. (Even the Turkish soldiers were looking around to figure out from where the noise had come.) The guerrilla who controlled the weapon said that the rocket had probably gone over and down behind the target building from above. They prepared a second rocket. As the security forces were trying to pinpoint from where the noise had come, we had time to ready an entire second rocket. This rocket reached the hill and hit the first floor of the building. Before we placed the third rocket, howitzer fire started to rain down on us. This gunfire was coming from the other hills close to the city of Şırnak. No one in our team lost their lives, but, I do not know if the military lost any soldiers, either...

### **THE DARK FIGURE: ŞEMDİN SAKIK**

The day following this mission, we went up to the guerrilla detachment located in the Cudi Mountains. The plan was for me to pass into Iraq, after staying with them a few days. However, once we were in Cudi, someone contacted the Cudi force by radio and said, “We are

coming over, our comrade is en route to you.” I asked the regional commander if he could tell me who this comrade was. He replied, “Zeki (Şemdin Sakık) will transfer to Botan Field Command, so he is on his way here from Iraq.” When I asked what time exactly Zeki would arrive, the commander said they would most likely arrive by nightfall. I did not want to talk to Şemdin Sakık. I had never seen him in person before anyway and had only talked to him that once via the radio. (But he had cursed me out soundly that one time. And I had cursed him vigorously, in response.)

This animosity all stemmed from when we had been about to enter the winter camp. The military had conducted an operation against us then, and three of us had lost their lives. Şemdin had been the commander of the headquarters at that time. Instead of reaching out to the provincial or the regional commander, he had contacted me directly. “Who the hell do you think you are to plan your own missions? Who are you to send these people to their deaths?” He had sworn at me very badly, despite the fact that he did not know anything at all. The provincial commander had been the one to plan that mission. Nonetheless, after he told me off, this moron ordered me to write my report and send it directly to him. Meanwhile, our provincial commander said, “You cannot directly ask for a report from Deniz. You do not have that authority, and besides this is out of your jurisdiction. If you have a criticism of him, tell it to me. I will tell his regional commander, and his regional commander will report back to me on the situation. You just cannot directly call Deniz to account for these deaths, because I am the one who designed this battle plan.” Upon hearing this, Şemdin also started to curse the province commander. Afterwards, the province commander told me to rest, and that I was not going to be writing any reports. It was then that I understood there was a standing dispute between Zeki and the seniors of the organization.

One intriguing feature of our party was that nothing remained a secret for long. Zeki had made great mistakes in the past. Apo, himself, had given Zeki the authority to visit and control the northern cities in Turkey in 1994. During that time, whichever province Zeki visited, the command echelon of that area was destroyed by the Turkish security forces. It was uncanny. After we left Garzan province to head to the south, both our province commander and their assistants got martyred. We knew that Zeki had something to do with all these deaths. It began with the uptick in battles in our province soon after we had left it. Of course, we were still following events in our old province from over the radio. Wherever this greatly respected province commander went, the province he entered would definitely be subject to a raid. As that connection was made, everyone was surprised and thought this all could not be merely coincidence. The problem was that nobody could figure out how he was being targeted for attack. Was he being surveilled by the security forces? Was he being trailed by some other, more insidious method? The senior officials of the organization finally just ordered the province commander not to move anywhere.

One day when we were all listening to the radio, Zeki started calling out our province commander, using very provocative and insulting words. “You have no right to live, because you only live off the blood of your guerillas. How is it that our comrades died every time you went into a battle, but you have always come through with your life?” We were learning of this after my team and I had already set off for Iraq. During our journey, I told the regional commander, “Comrade, use this radio and stop him. Tell him that his tone and attitude are out of line, and that he cannot treat a province commander like that.” It was just my luck that the regional commander had gotten fearful and did not want to intervene in that confrontation.

Meantime, the province commander began feeling incredibly guilty over what Zeki had said to him. This commander told the other comrades, “Do not worry. If another battle happens, I will let myself be martyred, rather than allow any of you to die.” This province commander, named Kemal, was loved very well by Apo, and he always said of him, “If there is anyone after Mahsun Korkmaz (Korkmaz is still viewed as the most important spiritual commander of the HPG) whom I would have succeed me, it would be Kemal.” He was elected to the PKK’s Central Committee membership when he was only 22 years old. That is how talented he was. But Şemdin was jealous. That’s why he was dismantling Kemal’s confidence on purpose.

When we reached Mawa, they were in mid-battle. The management team had come under attack in Tatvan when the province commander had gathered them together. Because the province commander had fought on the front lines, he was the first one wounded. There were two regional commanders and two platoon commanders with him at the beginning of the fighting. They had carried him somewhere safer. The province commander had said, “Lead our detachment of new guerrillas safely out of this unexpected battlefield. Leave me here. I will ask for only two volunteers to stay behind with me, and we will fight against the soldiers until you escape.” They flatly refused, saying, “We will either die with you or we will get you out of here with us.” One of the former guerillas took the new ones out of the skirmish. The rest of the command echelon died in that skirmish. I mean a full 21 senior officers were killed there. All because Şemdin had been envious of a man better than himself and goaded him into becoming a pointless sacrifice.

As incredible as that level of treachery was, Şemdin’s mistakes were not limited only to that situation. He also visited the province of Serhad around that same time. We had a force of almost 600 in Serhad. After he stayed there for a week, he went to the district of Dersim, and

was put in charge there. Then, for no apparent reason, he contacted the province of Serhad and invited all the command echelon to come to Dersim for a meeting. Everyone was shocked. They pointed out that they had all just been together a week prior and wondered why he had not told them then whatever it was he wanted to share now.

So, suddenly, the entire command echelon had to move to Dersim in the middle of the winter, right at the time when such movement is hardest to conceal. During this journey, the whole company got trapped in an ambush and were martyred. Imagine! The entire command echelon! Every company commander, each of the battalion commanders, the regional commander, the province commander, and all of the province commander's assistants. Each and every one of these distinguished and rare leaders were killed there in one single ambush. Immediately after they were all killed, the entire Serhad province force of 600 guerrillas was also liquidated. The security forces had noted their opportunity. Realizing that all the commanders were dead, they took their chance to kill all the now-leaderless guerillas. Indeed, they killed almost 300 guerillas before they were stopped. This was all because of the criminally irresponsible behavior of one idiot. Zeki!

Zeki then went to Dersim, and Dersim suffered the same fate. In fact, the entire leadership cadres of Serhad, Dersim, Amed, and Barzan districts were liquidated because of him. After these incidents, he was recalled to the south to justify his actions. We guerillas did not know at the time, but Apo and the senior officers had sent Zeki to the northern provinces on purpose. Because of the incident that took place in Bitlis in 1993 (with the 33 martyred Turkish soldiers) the organization had developed its suspicions about Şemdin. Everyone was wondering whether Şemdin had any connection with the JITEM [Turkish gendarme intelligence unit] or other intelligence units in Turkey, because by this time we had heard many times that Şemdin

Sakık had often spoken with Mahmut Yıldırım [Code name is Yeşil; a Turkish intelligent agent). In order to clear up these doubts, Zeki was appointed with these critical missions. The organization used this strategy from its repertoire: If it suspected that one of its members were working for the government, it would paradoxically give that person even greater responsibility. Really this meant greater and larger opportunities to reveal their own weaknesses or deceptions. Oh, and how very closely organizational leadership would watch them then!

After all of these incidents, Şemdin was called back to the south and forced to remain at headquarters command for some time, but he kept on doing whatever he wanted. As the commander of our headquarters, he called a meeting of all the senior officers. Murat Karayılan, Duran Kalkan, Harun Atmaca and Halil Ataç (Bekir) were all present. Only Cemil Bayık and Apo were absent. Much to his surprise, the majority of comrades there began to criticize him directly. He had never heard their true opinions of him like this. He could not handle it and got very angry. “I did not invite you here to criticize me. I called you here to criticize yourselves!” He said. But before they could even start following his silly command, Şemdin started to pick each of them apart. He blamed one of them for being unsuccessful and a snob. He told this commander that he would destroy both himself and his province. Then, he told someone else that he was a weakling in terms of combat, and that he should have taken additional training to counter his cowardice. But the biggest load of criticism was directed at Murat Karayılan; “You want to steal my authority. You are planning to kill me and take my position. Learn your proper place, or I will teach it to you.” Of course, everyone was shocked to hear such disrespectful paranoia. But there was nothing to do. Zeki was the commander of the headquarters so, nobly, they listened to him in perfect silence.

The senior officers of the party had reached their tipping point. They appointed Zeki as the field commander of Botan. How shameful. He was downgraded from the commander of all of headquarters, to the commander of a single field. In addition, our force in Botan was in a very difficult situation at that time. All the villages had been evacuated of civilians, and the guerillas were having a very hard time having all their needs supplied. Procuring a few bags of flour, cheese, and bread was almost more difficult than destroying a military station. There was also no drinking water. This was their purpose in sending Zeki to such a difficult field. It was a test of his ego. Senior officials wanted to see whether the self-important Zeki would work under such conditions. Then, as an extra insult, they appointed the comrade previously in command of Botan field (Murat Karayilan) to come be the commander of our headquarters. Şemdin had been passing through Cudi Mountain, when he was appointed to be the Botan Field commander.

For each and every one of these reasons, I hated Şemdin. And there I was in Cudi, hearing my comrades tell me that this same Şemdin was now going to visit the area. I asked them how one could pass into Iraq. It was only 9:00 a.m., so they were curious as to why I wanted to know so far in advance of my planned trip. In order to quell any doubt about my intent in the mind of the Cudi guerilla force, I said, “We will set off tomorrow evening, you had better describe the way to me during the day, so that we do not lose our path to Iraq.”

Guerillas described the area to me. This is how you cross the border; this is what the passage area looks like, and so forth. We had lunch, and around 11:00 a.m. I told the Cudi commander, “Good bye. We are setting off now.” The commander replied, “Are you crazy? How could you leave at such a time as this, and during the day? We have difficulty passing over the border even during the night.” I said, “Look, I would rather die than see that moron, Şemdin.”

Kemal, the province commander, handed us two written reports as he said farewell to us. Both envelopes were closed and officially sealed. The Kemal commander had said that no matter what happened, even if there were only one person of our group of 16 who could flee an ambush or other catastrophe, the last survivor absolutely must take these reports to the party leaders. The reports were both about Zeki, and one of them was addressed to headquarters in general while the other was directly written to Apo. I was certain that if Zeki had seen me in Cudi, he would have taken the reports and any other information I had on me, since he knew I had come from the province. That's why I rushed away in the afternoon, although that province's leadership insisted vocally that we stay.

We ran straight into Şemdin's guards, just as we approached Hezir Stream. They had left Şemdin somewhere safer, thankfully, before bringing their horses to be watered. When they saw us, they wanted to know where we were going. "We're on our way to Damascus," I told them. Then, I asked, "Where is Zeki?"—as if I wanted to meet with him. So, they told us where Zeki was, at which point, we promptly ran off in the other direction ensuring our path took us nowhere near him. I had a strong desire never to have to hear his curses again. If we met again, I was likely to kill him. My revulsion of him was so strong, it had motivated me to take my unit over a border in the middle of the day. The border was so dangerous that our comrades usually waited and surveilled for weeks before attempting to cross and then only ever at night. Yet, when we crossed, there was not a single soldier or an intelligence officer to be seen!

After crossing the border, we went directly to the PKK battalion. They interrogated us, asking, "From where are you coming?" "We have just come from Cudi, heading to Damascus," we answered. They were suspicious. The commander of the battalion asked us when we had gotten underway. I said, "We set off this afternoon and we have just arrived here now." The



commander was shocked and asked again, “So are you telling me that you just now crossed the border? During broad daylight?” Again I said, “Yes!” “I swear that is an incredible tactic!”, he crowed. “Why have we been sending groups over only at nights for years? Let’s begin sending all our units over the borders in broad daylight, since the border is apparently wide open!” I said, “Comrade, please exercise caution in imitating me on this. Honestly, I really do not know whether the border was empty or not. My aversion to Zeki was simply so strong I happily took the risk of dying.”

Having safely crossed the border, we did not linger, but immediately went to Haftanin regional camp, and there we found a surprise. Zeki had contacted the Haftanin regional commander and told him to send my fellow comrade and me back to Cudi. Obviously, his intent was to take back the sealed reports from me before getting them to Apo. The commander of Haftanin could not do anything. “Comrade, we have to send you guys back. He gave us a strict order.” It was our good fortune that Murat Karayılan, the headquarters commander, himself, happened to be listening in on the conversation just then. “Deniz won’t go back to Cudi,” we heard him say, “because we are urgently waiting for him here at headquarters.” Once headquarters spoke, there was nothing Şemdin could say against it.

Therefore, Murat Karayılan sent his own driver to fetch us from Haftanin. We had been planning to reach as far as the main headquarters in Zap, from the roads along Haftanin, Zaho, and Dohuk. If we walked, it would have taken us seven to ten days. But, it would only take six hours by car.

I suddenly decided that I wanted to drive. So, I took over the car from the driver. Just my luck, I caused an accident at the entrance of Zaho, Iraq. I had not driven for a long time. A curve appeared as I was speeding, and the car flew off the road and hit a house. The steering

wheel impacted my chest very badly. Comrades immediately took me to the hospital. I was treated in Dohuk Hospital for two days. After I was released, we finally continued on to headquarters command.

The instant we reached headquarters, I found Murat Karayılan. He immediately asked me for the reports, and I turned them over to him. He was a bit angry with me because of the accident. “You had not driven for a long time and all you’re used to is mules. Why in the world would you choose to drive now? Thanks be to God, you all are okay.” Finally, he was able to read the reports I had taken such pains to deliver intact. After reading over the reports, he realized one was written for the entire command echelon. He said, “Take this one back. You can give it to Apo when you reach him.”

Karayılan then asked me about the losses sustained in our province. “When is the last time you bought an electronic gadget in your region?” I told him the month we last bought the gadget in question and told him that everyone in all the regions bought these gadgets at the same time. “We have suspicions about these gadgets,” he told me. “The enemy might have placed bugs in them.”

“Comrade, these losses are not because of a secret bug or, an inefficient style of moving, or even an information leakage from headquarters. The blame for all these mistakes lie with Şemdin and with you,” I said. Naturally, he got angry when I said this. He demanded to know how they could be the ones to blame. So, I enquired, “Comrade, when Şemdin was the commander of our headquarters, did not you listen to the conversation he had with Kemal?” He replied that he had not, so I said, “Please listen to that conversation, and you will find out the truth of the matter.”

If that province commander had so chosen, not one single person from his leadership echelon would needed to have been martyred that day. How could 18 inexperienced, brand-new comrades have been saved, including all their weapons, but nearly two dozen of the most experienced commanders in our organization somehow succumbed to being be martyred? Leaving all of this aside, a province commander would never have led a charge into a battle in the first place. Not even a company commander would fight in the front. Zeki had berated province commander Kemal so badly that his entire command staff officially committed suicide, by rushing to the front.

### **THE ARREST OF ŞEMDİN SAKIK**

My friend and I were staying at the barracks of the guerilla training school in Zap region. We were waiting for audience, for duty, and for assignments. Meanwhile, seeing as we had nothing to do, I visited the hospital in downtown Zap, Iraq. The doctors checked the wound on my head, but in the end they advised me to see a professor in Damascus, Syria if I were to go there soon.

At the beginning of August, when Murat Karayilan's messenger had called me, he had also contacted 14 other guerrillas. Karayilan told us that we were being tapped for an important task, but he gave no explanation. I looked at the people around me. We were all guerillas of commanders' rank. I started to consider the importance of this task, which required so many high-level commanders. I asked Murat Karayilan, "Comrade, may I please ask you about this task? What is the nature of this mission, exactly?" "It's a chore you will love!" Karayilan said, and then laughed. That was when he informed us that we were setting out to arrest Şemdin.

“Arrest! Let me emphasize that,” Karayılan stressed. “I am specifically prohibiting you from killing him. Arrest only!”

We were all instantly euphoric. Meanwhile, Karayılan had informed Şemdin and called him back to headquarters, since he was now officially under inquiry. Our entire cadres of commanders were going to Botan, straight from headquarters to arrest Şemdin, the moment we saw him. When Şemdin first heard this from Karayılan, he began objecting strenuously, “Who do you think you are to question me? Nobody has the right to question me! I am not coming to the south, and that is the end of the matter!” Şemdin was being so insubordinate that Karayılan immediately told Cemil Bayık what was going on. When Cemil Bayık heard that not only was Şemdin resisting the trip down to the south but was even refusing to answer questioning, Cemil Bayık took the radio himself and said directly to Şemdin, “Get yourself to headquarters now, Zeki. I will meet you there.”

The reason that Şemdin had rejected Murat Karayılan’s direct order to return was his simple fear of the headquarters command team. Şemdin was terrified they would execute him in secret. So, when Cemil Bayık intervened, he was greatly relieved. Cemil Bayık is a symbol of reason. All guerrillas knew this, just like they knew that if Cemil Bayık promised something, he always kept his word. So, Şemdin must have thought, “If Cemil Bayık is there, then nothing underhanded will happen to me.”

It was strange to be traveling in vehicles again so soon. But the fifteen of us reached Haftanin camp in three trucks. We were going to arrest Zeki in Besler region after crossing to Cudi from Haftanin. Each day, we turned on the big radio that we had, and received information regarding Şemdin’s location. One night, just when we were about to reach Cudi, we got the update. “Go to the Hakkari border, Şemdin is coming through Hakkari!” This was bad news.

There was no way we could get there in time. The new location was just too far from where we were. In addition to that, there were very many points along that road which were not at all safe for us.

We also moved to the new route by car. There had been a serious fight between the organization and the KDP in 1995. The KDP had received a big defeat in this fight, and had been compelled to accept every condition the organization had set for it. According to the conditions of the agreement, the PKK was going to conduct political missions in cities with the guerilla and establish guerilla stations next to Peshmerga stations. No limitations or restrictions by the KDP would be countenanced. Each and every one of the provinces and cities had accepted this agreement, except one province. The leader of that city was the chief of a tribe and was opposed to this agreement. In every public platform, he was expressing his strong opposition to it. This chief was vocally telling the guerillas that they should never again enter his region (Begova); otherwise he would order his men to kill them.

Bad luck! We had to use the Begova road to cross through the border of Hakkari, because that's where Şemdin had gone. At that time, Begova was close to declaring its independence. They left the PKK alone, and did not even recognize the authority of the KDP. There was a town of only 2,000 people. Yet, at the entrance of the city they halted our trucks and told us we could not pass. No matter how hard we argued, we could not convince them to let us through. Finally, the Metina province commander told them to go and bring their chief.

When the chief arrived, our commander told him, "Listen, we are only going to use the road and go to Hakkari. We won't stay in the city. We won't conduct any political or guerilla mission at any point." Again we received a negative response, upon which our commander placed a single call. I do not know what kind of order he gave, or to whom, but instantly they

opened the road. They gave us an escort of three cars ahead of us and three cars behind. This was how we reached the area of Kasure, in other words Çukurca. There, we began to wait for Şemdin. We had already been informed by radio that Şemdin was going to cross the border that same night. It was 6:00 a.m. in the morning, when Zeki and his men crossed into Iraq. There were a full company of guards in place with Şemdin, to protect him.

Our platoon commander delivered the note to Semdin, which headquarters had written. I did not know what was in the note, but after reading it, Şemdin asked, “You won’t tie me up, will you?” The Metina commander said that he would not, but informed him that “we do need to take back your weapon.” Şemdin had a Smith and Wesson brand weapon. He unholstered it and gave it to his chief bodyguard, telling him, “From now on, this is your gun. Take good care of it. It’s quite expensive.” Then, we prepared to leave and saw Semdin’s bodyguards preparing to come with us. Our commanders approached them and said, “Your mission is over. Hang around here for a few days, and then you can go on to the headquarters.” They got very angry upon hearing this. Our commander saw this, and said very calmly, “Do not resist, or we can arrest you, too, if you like. So, how about not making any trouble?” (Actually, our commander was wrong in this stance. We should not have taken Şemdin, without explaining everything to his guards, because they were the ones responsible for Semdin’s protection.)

With Şemdin secure, we drove first to Amediye, in Iraq. We decided to eat in a nice restaurant in the tourist area of Amediye. The windows of the cars were tinted dark black, not see-through. We were getting out of the cars, and Şemdin was about to get out also. But once he looked outside, he told me to call my commander and warn him, “It’s a bad idea for me to get out of the car. All of those Turkish journalists know me. Trust me, it’s better if they never know I’m here.” Then, we also recognized Namık Durukan and some other well-known journalists,

who were all waiting on the other side of the road. That was when we found out that the organization had decided to give some Turkish captives back to their families that day. The journalists were there to report the moment of delivery. There were also high-profile deputies, such as Haşim Haşimi and Fethullah Erbaş from Turkey. Our commander had to accept Şemdin's wisdom in this. "Alright. Then stay in the car and we will send you food."

After the meal, we drove directly to headquarters. Rıza Altun welcomed us. He first thanked us, then told us, "Leave the comrade Şemdin [Zeki] with us and go see Murat Karayılan." He called out to two guards, "Take Şemdin to the cave and tightly bind his hands and feet." They had prepared a room in the cave just for him. And Şemdin could not utter a word against this. He just asked if he could see comrade Cuma. Rıza said, "Not now. You can see him later." (Cemil Bayık [Cuma] was in fact in Damascus, but Şemdin did not know this.) When we went to meet Karayılan, we learned that five additional people including two senior commanders had been arrested. These two commanders had divided the forces between them when Karayılan was the headquarters commander. They had taken control of the guerrilla forces in Botan and Zagros, while Şemdin had controlled the guerilla forces in the north. They also arrested three females, who used to work in the headquarters command. So, in 1996, Zeki and all of his confederates were arrested.

A ceremony was held for delivery of our Turkish hostages back to their families. Only five days afterwards, we took Zeki to headquarters. The battalion in the school, the female battalion, and about 400 unassigned guerillas gathered at the ceremony Field. Fethullah Erbaş, who was the deputy in Turkey back then, made the first speech. Murat Karayılan also spoke on behalf of the party. "These soldiers have been our guests for two months. We will now return our esteemed guests safe and sound to their families," he announced. I do not remember the

exact number, but I think there were about ten soldiers who were delivered to their families, one by one, to accompanying applause. Interestingly, two Turkish soldiers took the microphone to say, “We do not want to go back, we want to join the organization.” One of them was a sergeant, and the other one was a new recruit in the Turkish army. (The sergeant is still in the organization. He has been serving at the administration level. I do not know what happened to the younger soldier.) Everyone went back to their families except for these two. And the journalists took pictures the whole time.

### **THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT AGAINST APO**

It was during this same period that a new negotiation process had begun between the PKK and Turkey. The Turkish President, Erbakan, had sent Apo a letter. In this letter, Erbakan penned his wish to hold negotiations for a peace, as there had been in Özal’s time. The organization accepted this offer at first, but the ceasefire was very brief. It was cancelled in May of 1996. The reason for this was simply that, during the peace process, an assassination attempt was made against Apo. In response, Apo made a very sharp speech and cancelled the ceasefire. He declared, “You first placate us, telling us to solve this problem with negotiations. Meantime, you also try to eliminate the leadership. Your truce is not sincere. From this point forward there is no ceasefire!”

Now, the organization runs two schools in Damascus, Syria. Education in one of them is taught in Turkish, and the other is delivered in the Kurdish tongue. Trainings were also given in houses which Apo had bought in Damascus and Halep. On the day that this assassination was scheduled, Apo had intended to teach in the Turkish school, but he did not attend this class for some reason. He went somewhere else. Cuma gave the training instead. The school was located



on a vast campus, surrounded with walls and wired fences, three meters high. There were Syrian officials stationed close to this complex. It was not a place where people could easily come and go undetected.

On the other hand, the security of the camp perimeter was provided by Syrian troops and their intelligence service. They patrolled around the camp 24 hours every day. Moreover, whenever Apo was in residence, a Syrian military helicopter would fly over the camp for extra insurance. Apo was extremely well guarded.

But on the day of the assassination attempt, in the entrance of a narrow street next to the school, a Mercedes full of bombs had been parked and left in front of a home where an Arab family lived. Their suspicions were aroused concerning the car, so they approached the school security guards and asked them if they had left the car there. Both security guards approached the car and inspected it. There was no one inside and the doors were locked. They came back to the compound area and informed the management. Just then, the car was detonated, and 15 meters of the wall around the camp was obliterated. Every piece of glass in the camp had been broken into pieces, from the force of the blast.

Much later, we learned that this cowardice was conducted by some Turkish military officials to spoil the peace process. Suddenly, two high-ranking Turkish commanders were fired, effective immediately. We became more and more shocked with every new detail we learned about this attack. The Turkish military authorities bought off the Syrian intelligence officers. Furthermore, the KDP and the YNK had supported this assassination attempt. Eventually, it came out that Turkey, the KDP, and the YNK all signed an agreement in Dublin in 1995 to destroy the PKK. They even had the blessing of the United States. This assassination plan was framed there at that time.

How interesting to watch the subsequent disputes which emerged within the government of Turkey. Prime Minister Çiller blamed the leader of the opposition party, Mesut Yılmaz, for giving Apo advance information about the operation. Rumors emerged that Mesut Yılmaz worried that Çiller would get more votes if the assassination had succeeded and had informed Apo about the assassination attempt ahead of time. I do not know how true any of the particular rumors were, but I know that Apo did not attend his class that day. There is no doubt that someone must have told him beforehand.

So, on May 6th, 1996, for the first time in the history of the party, we conducted a self-sacrifice mission. I do not know what celebrations there were on June 10th, but for some reason the Turkish soldiers had organized a magnificent ceremony. Maybe it was for the liberation of Tunceli. The official government report listed that seven senior officers from the Turkish Armed Forces' command echelon lost their lives that night.

Who performed this mission? A female comrade named Zeynep Kınacı (nickname Zilan) was the first self-sacrifice in the party. I would like to draw your attention to the distinction that it was not actually a suicide mission. The organization did not consider such acts to be suicide missions, and did not describe them that way. To us, a suicide attack means “dying for nothing, without any plans or goals.” But a self-sacrifice mission is not so. It is strategized, voluntary, and deliberate. The mission gives a direct message. “If you attempt such assassinations against us, we have the power to perform similar targeted missions against any level of your officials that we so choose and at any place across Turkey.”

Such missions had been prohibited until then. In all his orders and trainings, Apo always underscored the fact that, “We do not fight with the Turkish public. Ours is not a fight against the Turkish people. It is against the government and the system. There is no such thing as

taking the civilians as captives or hurting a bureaucrat or a deputy.” However, after this spiteful assassination attempt against Apo, the government needed to be sent a message. This message found its address through Zilan’s courage. “If you do not obey the rules of war, neither will we. We will perform self-sacrifice missions all around Turkey.”

Let’s be clear. Zilan volunteered. She had written three letters prior to undertaking this mission. One was for Apo, one for her family, and one for her friends. All over the Turkish media, claims were made that Zilan had psychological problems—that the organization used her illness for its own interests and forced her into this. They lied. How could you ever force anyone to carry out such a personal mission? You cannot. The fact that this act was on the agenda of the press for days, was a sign of new tactics emerging in the organization, in response to the state. If the Turkish army performed traitorous acts anywhere in the future, the organization was prepared to retaliate with self-sacrifice missions in different cities.

Simultaneously, with this mission, another mission was performed against the security forces in Zagros. The assassination attempt against Apo enraged us guerrillas a great deal. We were fixated on somehow taking our revenge. The management of Zagros province had placed mines and bombs several months before, across a vast area, to be used in future guerrilla missions. The Zagros force had done months of surveillance to determine the locations where the security forces took their positions during their land operations. They chose their entrapment positions well, in case a land battle erupted. Mines were placed in every possible target area. Following the assassination attempt, Zagros province forces carried out a few bursts of harassing fire in order to draw the security forces into the minefield. Just as the province forces had planned, the security forces came out into the field where the guerillas had emplaced the mines. Our comrades then blew up the mines. All at once, nearly 70 soldiers were killed. This action

was voted to be our best mission of the year. Before this one, our missions against the soldiers had been only simple assault missions, engaging them with only light harassment fire, or by placing as few as one or two mines on their roads. When these tactics proved to be so successful, such missions and techniques were used more often in the following years. We got serious!

### **DURAN KALKAN, THE HEADQUARTERS COMMANDER**

Meanwhile, as all these incidents were taking place, I was still trying to get to Damascus. Once, while I was preparing again to go to Damascus, another conflict emerged between the KDP and the organization. The KDP martyred two of our comrades. Upon hearing this, the headquarters command ordered all the forces along the southern border to take up their attack positions. There were 210 guerillas in the school where I stayed back then. I only knew the name of Duran Kalkan. I had not yet met him, but I knew that he had been appointed as the headquarters commander back when Şemdin had been arrested and brought back there. This was the same time that Murat Karayilan had been appointed as the field commander for Botan. So, while in the school, waiting to go to Damascus, the leadership gave me a force consisting of 20 females and 40 males. He said, "Take them to headquarters with you. They will tell you there where to go." This force consisted of company, battalion, and platoon commanders, but I would not accept them. "Look," I said, "there are more experienced comrades here than myself. They know this area better than I. They can take them wherever you want." But leadership would not accept my excuse. When I accepted the fact that this assignment was going to stick, the first thing I did was give those officers the report I carried; the one which was addressed to

Apo. This would be safer, I felt, in case I ran into any fighting. I charged them to take the report to Damascus and gave it directly to Apo, as soon as they possibly could.

I then took that detachment to headquarters. As I mentioned, I had never before seen Duran Kalkan, the headquarters commander. So, I asked two comrades in the headquarters to describe Duran Kalkan to me. They told me that he was tall, bald, and old. Therefore, 60 of us were sitting in the dark, patiently waiting for Duran Kalkan to arrive. We had heard that he was talking to Apo on the phone. There was a man from Syria sitting next to me. He knew that I did not know Duran Kalkan. So, whenever he saw someone old and bald, he would tap me on my arm and say, “Comrade, there is Abbas (the nickname of Duran Kalkan)” Each time, out of respect, I would shoot up to my feet. But then I would look around me, and there would be no one else standing. He was teasing me. Finally, at around 11:00 p.m., Duran Kalkan really arrived, and the Syrian pointed him out to me. Of course, I thought he was fooling me again, so I did not stand. When I saw everyone else standing up, waiting in silence. I stood up immediately.

They had turned on the generators to power the lights for the meeting room. Since I did not know Duran Kalkan in person, I told the Syrian to answer, if he asked any questions. Duran Kalkan then spoke. “You have a hierarchy right? Everyone knows his leaders and platoon.” The Syrian replied “Yes!” to whatever Duran Kalkan asked. Too late. I learned that he did not know much Turkish and did not fully understand what Duran Kalkan was asking him. I was thinking to myself that the Syrian was lying. We did not have any clear organization. There were no assignments into squads, teams or companies. Nothing. Everything was undefined. Duran Kalkan then said, “Okay! Then, you will go to the parade ground tomorrow. There, I will tell you the areas to which you will be assigned.”

I was angry with the Syrian after Duran Kalkan left. I took our group and started to arrange the squads, teams, and company. I told them, "Look. I'm going to count you off, person by person, and whoever gets the number ten will be the unit commander. Whoever gets the number 21, will be the platoon commander." What else was I supposed to do? I did not know anyone. "1,2,3,4,5... 10," I counted. "Comrade, you are the commander of these ten people. Get to know your comrades. I give you ten minutes! Get acquainted with each other; arrange your hierarchy," I said. Through counting like that, I appointed three platoon commanders. I was the company commander. Under me, I had two male and one female platoon commanders.

This was the way things stood by the next day when we went to the meeting place and found the local forces of 150 ready and waiting. I had not known anything about this. We all sat down. Pointing to our force, Duran Kalkan said, "The leader of this force should rise." I stood. He looked at me, and said, "Unless I remember incorrectly, you were not the leader last night." "No, another comrade had stood for me," I admitted. "As I had never seen you before, I wanted to take your measure first," I confessed. Duran Kalkan replied angrily, "Who do you think you are? Do you need an interpreter or a consultant to talk to us? How could you make someone else talk to me while it was you, the whole time, who was the leader of the team?" I remained silent, waiting.

He asked me if we had a hierarchical order (unit, platoons, etc.) when we were sent from the headquarters. Somebody must have complained about us, I realized, as soon as he asked the question. There must have been some order or task we had failed, of which we had not been aware, because we were new. Obviously, we had been caught, so there was no sense in trying to cover up our mistake now. So, I loudly shouted, "No!" "Then why did your assistant say 'Yes?'" Duran Kalkan demanded. "Comrade, I replied, "he is from Syria. He does not speak

any Turkish. He simply said, 'Yes!' to everything you asked. "Well, do you have a hierarchy now?" he demanded. "Yes," I told him. "We arranged it last night." He asked how that had even been possible. I told him exactly what we had done, randomly counting off. This got Duran Kalkan upset again. "What authority do you think you have to determine an entire organizational structure so haphazardly? How can you build an entire hierarchy of command in so few as 15 minutes?" he yelled at me, in front of all the guerillas.

I felt so offended at being called on the carpet in front of every single member of our forces. It would have been acceptable, had I only dressed down in front of the force I had arranged, since they already knew the situation. But this was the entire local force of 150 people. The guerillas were forming their first impression of who I was. I needed to salvage my pride, so before Duran Kalkan even finished his speech, I interrupted with, "Comrade, just let me tell you something. This Syrian comrade replied 'yes!' to you, so as not to disappoint you. When he said yes; he committed us, so then I was forced to make such an arrangement as I did. I am not familiar with anyone in this force. I have no connection to any of them. The leadership of the school told me to take them here to headquarters, and that's what I did. I am sure their previous rank structure was pretty much the same. After all, it does not really matter which one is assigned to be the platoon commander or the team commander, so long as they each do their jobs. I had a problem, and this was my answer to it. With unfamiliar guerrillas, what else could I have done to create a new structure in the amount of time I had? Their system is more or less unchanged."

Of course, Duran Kalkan became even more frustrated. "Who do you think you are to speak to me like that?" he shouted. I could not take his attitude anymore so I addressed him again, "Look, comrade, I was told to take this force to headquarters. I brought them here safely

and here they are. I am turning them over to you. My mission is now over. I do not care how you arrange them from here, or whom you will appoint to what position.” With my speech done, I deliberately sat down. Duran Kalkan was furious. “Stand up!” he ordered. “How dare you sit without my permission? Who the hell do you think you are? Who gave you this mission? How could they assign someone like you team of 60 people?” I stood up again. “Look here comrade Abbas, if this is your approach to things, then I will leave this meeting now.” There were two people from the leadership echelon who had come with him. One of them was male (Ali Sapan,) and the other one was female. They called a ten-minute cigarette break for all assembled. After this break, I did not rejoin the meeting. I was just sitting alone when one of Abbas’ personal guards came up to me, and said, “He is specifically calling you, so come back to the meeting area.” I said, “Go and tell him that I refuse to join the meeting.” And I did not go.

In five minutes, the same guard returned, and said, “You are hereby ordered to return immediately to the meeting area. He has something to tell you.” This time, I went. Regardless of my personal feelings, he was the headquarters commander, and what I had done had been disrespectful. He asked me to stand and inquired as to why I had become angry. “Comrade,” I addressed him. “Again, I know no one from this guerilla force. Officials at the school ordered me to bring them here, and that is what I did. Many of them, I have never seen before. How can I evaluate what rank they should have? Random assignment would be just as effective. So, I counted them, and I chose the commander of the platoon or the unit based on specific numbers, which I had assigned.”

Of course, Abbas was calmer then. “Such cover-ups are wrong,” he stated.” At least you should have stood up that night and revealed that the speaker did not know much Turkish, and



that you did not have any rank system or orders.” That was it. This was how that incident was amicably settled.

For the record, only two comrades’ assignments of those 60, were changed. The rest remained the same. So, all that swearing and insulting and chest-beating had happened for nothing. One of those changes was a ranked officer, who already was the battalion commander, was demoted to a unit commander that day. This had offended him, and that’s why he changed places with the battalion commander. And those were the only two re-assignments.

## CHAPTER 12

### WAR AGAINST BARZANI'S PESHMERGHAS

And so Abbas appointed me as the commander of this company and sent us to a hill in Zap region in Iraq, to fight against the KDP. We were having a lot of difficulty, especially in October of 1996, when the KDP was receiving support from Turkey. The Turkish aircrafts were constantly bombarding our camps. Once they saw that our southern camps were surrounded by Dochka anti-aircraft weapons, their planes would not approach as closely as they had. They would send long-range bombs at us from a distance and then turn tail. These bombs were unable to hit their targets, or they were disabled before they hit.

But, as with most things in this conflict, the situation was soon to change. The Zap area was a vast basin of 20 kilometers in length, surrounded by hills. Every hill was crowned with Dockas. We were safe. However, this situation eventually turned against us. I may never know the truth of it, but we had received intelligence, which indicated that the Israeli aircraft were flying surveillance missions above us in league with the Turkish planes. We heard that these Israeli pilots were training the Turks in their tactics for how to disable or evade the anti-aircraft weapons we had mounted on the hilltops. In fact, 15 days after this intelligence report, an intensive air attack occurred. The aircraft were bombing the valley by running in lower than the level of our guns, and then flying back.

Since our anti-aircraft weapons were placed on the tops of the hills, we could not do anything, because Dockas do not shoot downwards. We began taking many losses, due to this new tactic the Turks were using. On my team alone, we had three martyred, and 16 seriously

wounded. Some of them had their feet ripped off and some were blinded—injuries of a type that, even if they were treated expertly, would prevent that guerrilla from ever fighting again.

We had to find a solution; otherwise we were going to lose many comrades. We began by placing four smaller-sized Dockas inside the valley walls themselves. When the Turkish aircraft repeated their trick of diving into the valley, these four Dockas started shooting simultaneously at one of them. When the aircraft was shot this way, it flew higher to escape, which then placed it in the sites of the Dockas above, and these higher Dockas shot the aircraft again. In this manner, we managed to disable the aircraft. If I am not mistaken, this particular one fell down near the city of Batman in Turkey. After this incident, the pilots stopped using this tactic they had learned from their Israeli counterparts. They still flew above the camp area a few times, but their weakened attacks were not as dangerous anymore. We knew now that such attacks were not as harmful.

By the end of October, the KDP indicated that they wanted to make peace. They informed us that two of the PKK militants they had killed were by mistake; that it had been an individual mission, and that the responsible parties had already been punished. It was just an excuse, because we knew the KDP had already been worn down by the war in 1995. The PKK had performed simultaneous missions on their 23 stations and conquered them all. Even the YNK (The military forces of Jalal Talabani) had invaded Erbil by taking advantage of the newly weakened status of the KDP. With the beginning of the peace negotiations, I was no longer needed in the field. Consequently, I finally went back to the school at the beginning of November. The leadership of the school called me on the evening that I was waiting to be sent to Damascus. Seyit Fırat and Ali Sapan, who were currently working as political activists in Turkey, were the heads of the school management back then.

They told me, “Comrade, you are to be trained for a serious mission, and you need to go to the headquarters as soon as possible,” I asked them if they knew about what the mission entailed and, interestingly, they said they did not. I asked if I were going there alone, and they told me that another comrade was to go with me, naming the person. It was the woman with whom I was in love—Sevin. I was both happy and fearful. I worried for her safety, if it were to be a dangerous mission. At the same time, I was happy at this further opportunity for us to be together. Again, I asked Seyit Firat what our mission might be. “We know nothing,” he repeated. Of course, both Sevin and I began worrying in earnest about whether they had learned of our relationship.

Regardless, orders were orders. We set off in the evening. Since the location of headquarters had been changed, they gave us two guides to take us there. We reached the headquarters at midnight. When we arrived, an official directed Sevin to the female barracks and indicated that I should go to the male unit. Before this guy even finished speaking, I asked him again why they had called us there. Paradoxically, when he said it was not urgent and that we could speak about it later, it made me even more curious.

As ordered, I headed to the male barracks. There was no one inside, only a caregiver. He brought me food, made my tea, and attended to my other needs. “Comrade,” I asked him, “Surely, you of all people must know why they called us here?” I was practically demanding the answer. “Comrade,” he placated me. “I really do not know. All they said to me was, ‘there is a guest. You should take care of him.’ So, here I am.” Then, a different person came up to my solo barracks on the evening of the second day. I knew this man. He had been the battalion commander in the city of Hakkari. They had told him no more than they had told me: “Go to the headquarters immediately. You have an important task.” Together, we tried guessing what it

could be. What kind of mission was it? Why were we they ones they had called? Had we made some kind of mistake, and this “secret mission” was their cover story to get us here to question us? We obsessed over every possibility. During our stay, two more people joined us on the evening of the fifth day. The information they had been given was identical to ours; no more, no less detail.

I do not remember precisely whether it was the sixth day or the seventh day, but while we were having breakfast in the morning, someone came inside our barracks and said, “Comrades, Abbas wants to see you.” Four of us instantly got ready and left the barracks to meet with him. I saw that Sevin and another woman, unknown to me, were waiting there. Duran Kalkan, himself, turned to the group and said, “We’re sending you to Damascus, but you won’t say anything about this to anyone.” I immediately asked, “For what reason do you want to keep our travel destination a secret?” His instant reply was, “Almost everyone wants to go see Apo in person for this training. So, to reduce the demands, we told everyone that the camp was closed, and that we no longer send anyone there. If they find out that we are sending you there, and we were lying to them, they will rebel. That’s why it is a secret.”

Before we left, Comrade Abbas said, “There is something else. There are six senior executives who have been arrested. Three of them are males (Şemdin Sakık, Ali Haydar Kaytan, and Hamili Yıldırım.) Three of them are female. (I do not remember their names). You will also see all these captives safely to Damascus. One of us said, “Are we six people enough to escort and guard these arrested seniors all the way to Apo? We might have trouble in terms of security.” Abbas replied, “There won’t be a security problem. You will travel by car. For your safety, you will be escorted by two trucks full of Peshmerga teams. (These were soldiers who

fight for Barzani.) Our comrades in Syria have been informed of this as well, so another two cars will be waiting for you there.”

And this is how we set off, escorting the captives, on November 7th, 1996. Şemdin was very nervous. He was afraid of Apo, because Apo had given him many responsibilities, all of which he had ruined. During the last two years, Şemdin was given the authority to supervise and control all of the states within Turkey. He was assigned as the head commander of Botan Field, and he was even assigned as the leader of headquarters command. However, he had abused his authority in all of his duties. Apo was definitely going to call him to account for his sins. He was so nervous, he sounded pathetic as he spoke to us.

During this trip, Semdin asked me if we had ever talked before. I said, “No!” I still had absolutely no desire to talk with him. He asked me from which region I came. I said, “I’m staying somewhere or other. It’s not important right now.” He kept insisting and was really getting on my nerves. So, I told him the truth. He asked me again if I were positive that we had not talked before. I saw no point in hiding it now. “We did have a conversation on the radio in the spring of 1996. You wanted a report from me and I would not write it,” I said. He was quick, and instantly remembered the incident. Semdin said, “It was you who berated me, was not it?” I replied, “Yes!” He asked me, “Why did you do this?” I was now angry again. “I was not going to teach you how the organization functioned. I should not have had to, since you were the one who had trained us on the rules, when we first joined. You knew you could not directly demand that I give you a report without the province commander knowing about it. I chewed you out because you made a mistake. In answering, you that way, I could have been put in jail for months, but the epic scope of the mistakes you had made, gave me courage.” Şemdin

Sakık stopped cold for a long while. And then, laughing, he said, “So, sometimes people you bring up might be your downfall.”

When we had crossed into the Syrian border, we were taken to a house with the group who had welcomed us there. These people told us to stay with them that night; that they would come collect us the following morning, and we all would set off again. Around 9:00 a.m., a Jeep belonging to the Syrian intelligence service came by. One Jeep! There were 12 of us! When we were about to ask them to provide us another vehicle, they told us they would be sending an additional car in the morning.

This is how we came to stay there one more night. A Mercedes that Apo used came by the following morning, and we set off in these two cars. We were nervous. None of us had IDs, and there were checkpoints everywhere. The first time they stopped us was at the entrance of the city of Halep, in Syria. There was a Syrian man in our jeep. This man showed some special card to the police officers. It was not an ID, but I was not able to see what was written on it. When he showed it, the police officers stepped back and allowed us to pass. In this way, we sailed through all the checkpoints and reached Damascus.

We arrived at the field camp at 4:00 a.m. The guards told us that Apo was going to hold class in the Turkish language school around 9:00 a.m., and that we should go there. So, we had breakfast and, when we were about to settle in for a rest, the guards announced that Cemil Bayık was waiting for us. The arrested officers thought Cemil Bayık would set them free. They got the opposite of what they hoped. As soon as they reached Bayık, they were all sent straight to prison.

But, with us, Bayık introduced himself. Then he turned to me, saying, “Comrade, I am thinking I remember you from somewhere.” “That’s right,” I agreed. “I was your guard for

three weeks in the Haftanin camp in 1992.” He told me, “You have changed a lot. I did not realize that you were still alive.” I smiled at him, and said that I was still very much alive. Then, Bayık turned to us all and said, “Apo will come here tomorrow. Be ready for him by 10:00 a.m.” We all headed towards the door, and I was just about to leave when he added, ‘Deniz, you stay!’” I went back over to him, and he asked for the situation report on my province. “Comrade, explain to me why you had so many losses from your executive echelon? We understand that Şemdin berated your province commander until he killed himself, but how could the Turkish military know where commander Kemal had gone?” Do you think the headquarters had an insider agent working for the Turks, or do you think these radios that had recently arrived from Europe could have been wired with enemy surveillance devices? Is it possible?” he asked.

I said, “Comrade, do not think that these things are true.” He asked me, “Why are you so sure they are not?” “Comrade,” I said, “these radios were distributed to all areas over the entirety of the country. So, if it were the case that they were bugged, the security forces would be listening in on everyone. Out of so many compromised targets, why would they only follow the province commander Kemal? If a soldier found a vulnerability in us, they would never pass up a crack at a company commander, much less leave the province commander alive. And it’s not plausible for there to be an insider agent in the region. Who would risk his own life to provide the military with such intelligence? No one would willingly go to their death. The only man spared by this attack was the single best officer under the province commander. We all knew him. He was a very good comrade. He was not a spy, so the two reasons you gave were not very plausible.” He considered what I had said, and then asked, “Why did these deaths happen then?” I asked him if he had listened to what Şemdin had said to province commander Kemal on the radio. When he admitted that he had not, I told him everything. It was the first



time he had heard any of it, and asked if I were positive. I told him he should listen to the records. “I know which day the conversation between them took place. Ask for them to bring you the records.”

Cemil Bayık was shocked to hear of all this. “Deniz,” he commanded, “you will be here while we question him. I want you to stand up and tell everyone what he has done,” I told him that Semdin would answer none of my questions. “I am the chief executive of the inquisition,” he informed me. “He has to answer my questions. Whatever you ask him in my presence, he is compelled to answer,” he promised.

Two days after this conversation with Cemil Bayık, we were invited into Apo’s presence to share lunch. We each introduced ourselves to Apo. This was the first time I had ever seen him in person. While he drank his tea, he asked me, “Are you the one who has come from Garzan province?” I replied, “Yes, sir. Sevin and I came from Garzan.” I had mentioned before that Apo had loved the province commander Kemal very much. He asked me why his good friend Kemal had been martyred. I told him what I knew. He was not convinced, and said, “This story you have been telling me is not satisfactory, Deniz.” “Sir,” I protested, “Kemal was deeply shamed by what Zeki had said about him. If such a guilt trip had been placed on me, I would have either quit the PKK altogether or fought in the front lines in the very next battle.” Apo got a bit angry when I said this. “That’s the part I do not accept,” he said. “How could a province commander commit suicide like this? Was it a noble solution? Who could possibly have benefitted from his suicide?” He answered his own question: “Zeki would! A clever man would never have committed suicide. He would have known to protect himself, in order to inform us firsthand about Zeki’s glaring mistakes. No, this ‘suicide’ must have been a mission against the party. Because, unless I have been deposed unknowingly, Şemdin is not the one who

leads this party. If Kemal had been offended by what Şemdin said, he would have just given me a call and told me that he did not approve of this man, and then given his reasons. The idea that he committed suicide rather than address the issue itself is simply outrageous.”

I interrupted him, “Sir, he had written a report to you. If it had reached you before that battle, he might still be here with us now.” “The report arrived late,” Apo countered, “but I made it a point of talking to all provinces once a month. All the province commanders had the phone number for the direct line to Damascus. They could have called whenever they wanted, and asked for me. So, why did not my friend, commander Kemal call and ask to speak with me, since obviously Zeki was such a huge problem? My question is, did someone prevent him from doing so?” Apo was very frustrated. “Regardless, Zeki has been arrested. Everything will be revealed in the due course of time,” he said. He turned to Cemil Bayık and said, “Establish a findings commission of three people and investigate this incident immediately. Clarify Şemdin’s situation to the finest detail. We missed the chance to thoroughly investigate this man after that incident in 1993. If we had performed a good investigation; if we had done our jobs then, this tragedy would not have happened. Whatever sentence the committee decides on, at the end of this investigation, make it happen,” he commanded. Then, he stood, and everyone left his room.

### **MAHSUN KORKMAZ ACADEMY**

I started my training in the Mahsun Korkmaz Academy in Damascus. In this academy, trainings are taught in cohorts. When a cohort finishes the training, the comrades comprising that class are sent to the provinces in the north and south, as commanders, and another cohort starts their training. Each cohort consists of 180 people. I have mentioned that there were two different schools in Mahsun Korkmaz. One of them was taught in the Turkish language, while

Kurdish is all that is spoken at the other. So, those who do not know Turkish still have the Kurdish school available, and are educated equally. Apo taught classes in both schools. He spoke Kurdish in the Kurdish school and Turkish in the Turkish school. There had been some propaganda, a long time before, saying that Apo was originally from Armenia, and he could not speak Kurdish. The Turkish public just swallowed that lie, without doing any research for themselves. I tell you; I was trained in both schools myself. Apo would sometimes lecture us in Kurdish for two hours.

We arrived at the camp as our future classmates were also arriving, at the start of a new cohort. Some students even came from Europe. They had to first fly into Iran, and then reach the camp field in Syria by ground routes, so as not to draw any attention. Traveling this way, did not cause us as much trouble as we would have thought. We were even shipping our weapons from Europe by plane. It goes to show that you can do anything in this world, as long as you have money.

I guess it was the spring of 1997. There were obsolete Russian missiles called SAM-7s defending our southern border. We needed to somehow replace them. So, Strela brand missiles were brought from Russia. These missiles were first transported to Europe by plane, and then shipped directly to Syria. Once in Syria, they were distributed to all the other lines in the south. It turned out, commercial shipping companies had few scruples.

Regarding my education at headquarters, it was just before I finally started my training under Apo and his friends in these exclusive schools, that Comrade Cuma called me in to his office. "You have a doctor's note in your file," he said. "So, now our medical team are asking if you need treatment. You're not sickly, are you?" he inquired. "No, this note is not about a disease," I assured him. "It's just that I took a wound to my skull in the last battle." "Then the

first thing you will do tomorrow is to go to the hospital and get it professionally treated,” he said. He assigned me a female comrade who spoke Arabic and sent us to a hospital in the city center. The organization had a prearrangement with this hospital in Syria. There was a special cadre of doctors who were reserved for us who received wounds in the countryside.

They arranged for me to be seen by a doctor who was also a professor. First he re-opened my wound as a crust had formed on it. He cleaned the cavity and then took measurements of the hole broken into my skull bone, and said, “We need to close this area, so come back in three days.” Three days later, we returned. He had carved a piece of animal bone into the same size and shape of the wound-hole in my skull. He fitted this piece into the hole in my skull and closed my scalp back over it. The doctor told my comrade, “He should take precautions. If the environment gets too hot or too cold, he may feel a little vertigo.” So, that is the story of how the wound on my head was treated.

They had accepted me into the Turkish school for my training. I was happy about this, because Cuma was giving most of the lectures in the Turkish school. He rarely gave lectures at the Kurdish language school.

During the trainings, he called for me, and I went up to his room. He asked, “How is your head wound these days? I said, “I do not have any problems. The wound on my head is much better.” He announced, “We are going to appoint you as Apo’s bodyguard. We have selected a group of you. They will get trained in both close-proximity security and distant personal security. I will register you into that group.” “Comrade,” I answered. “I am honored, and I would love to be his bodyguard, but I have one condition. Let me first check out how difficult the training is. If I can, I will go through with it,” I promised him. “But, if it is very demanding, I will give it up and come back to the camp.” Cemil Bayk accepted this condition.

I had not been in Damascus even two weeks when I was reassigned to a location that looked like a farm. There were 18 of us there. All were experienced guerillas. There were two people from the Syrian intelligence service. They were Syrian, but they spoke perfect Turkish. They were our trainers, and their training regimen was intense. I could only endure it for a week. It was too heavy and tiring. For instance, consider the width of a Mercedes car. We were to open the car door for the official, then jump over the car, cross to the other side, and sweep our right and left fields of vision, using our weapon. Next, while walking on the road, open fields, or between houses, the trainers would try to shoot us with plastic bullets, at which point we were to raise the suitcase they had given us to always carry and were to press the secret button on it. The suitcase was the armor, and when deployed, it covered the entire person's body. You also had to participate in heavy athletics to be in shape for all this work.

While I was going through this training, Comrade Cuma came by, and I approached him, admitting, "Comrade, I cannot do this training. I cannot do what they command. All this jumping over cars, opening armor... this is not my cup of tea." Cemil Bayik entreated me, "Look, do not you see that this is an opportunity for you? When you finish the training, you will be close to the Leader. You will have such access! You are worthy. That's why I chose you." I was very sorry to let him down, but facts were facts. "Comrade," I said to him. "I'm sorry, but I cannot do it. I would love to, but this is not something of which I am capable. I would feel so guilty if something were to happen to our leader, when I was his bodyguard." At this, Cemil Bayik tried convincing me a bit more, but the fight had gone out of him. When he saw that I would not change my mind, he said, "Okay, obviously you do not want it anyway."

That very day, I went back with him to the main camp. Then, I learned that only four of those 18 people had been chosen as Apo's bodyguards, and the rest had also been sent back. So, apparently the training was too hard for nearly everyone.

So, back in camp permanently, I attended the Turkish school, where Apo lectured us two or three times a week. Apo gave the lectures during the day, and sometimes would stay in the camp, and sometimes he would leave the camp after the training. On the days he was absent, the trainers he had handpicked to run his academy gave the lectures.

Apo would casually play volleyball, and then soccer, after the training. Before I knew him, I was so worried about expressing myself around him. But the leader himself was coming up to us. He made himself so approachable that you would suddenly forget who he really was and begin to treat him as a friend. He would always care and always ask questions. We always felt free to answer. We would even have two-way discussions, just like peers.

At Mahsun Korkmaz Academy, none of the trainings were practical. They were all theoretical trainings. For example, we would have a class called "military Terms for War and the army." Besides this, there were political and ideological lessons. Yalçın Küçük, a well-known professor in Turkey, would visit the camp once for each cohort and stay there for two weeks. He visited the camp when we were there and gave us a lesson called "the Truth About Apo." The trainings would take a half day, from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. We were free after lunch. We could spend this free time reading a book or participating in social activities.

Sometimes, committees from abroad would visit the camp. They would not train us but examined how our training was delivered and asked whatever questions this brought up for them. They especially came to hear Apo's lectures. During my stay there, some official committees from England, Germany, and Greece visited. They stayed in Apo's own house with him.

This was all in the spring of 1997. One day, Apo was having a question and answer session with us trainees, instead of giving a lecture. First he would talk about a subject, then he would ask for our opinions. There were four German officials visiting during this lecture, and they were all very athletic. We were all very surprised that two of them could speak perfect Turkish. One of them raised his hand to ask a question. Apo responded, "Please ask!" The German explained, "I want to ask the room." Apo allowed, "Of course. You can ask your question to anyone and everyone you want. Now, there was a person named Selim Çürükkaya who had left the organization. While hiding from us abroad, he had written a book against Apo and the organization. The German turned to us all and asked, "Is it forbidden or allowed for you to read this book?" Apo turned to the whole classroom and said, "Whoever wants to answer this, just raise your hand." One of us stood up and said, "Let's go the library. We have the book. Whoever wants to read it can read it, of course," he said. The German then asked again, "Are you sure it isn't forbidden for you to read?" Our comrade was surprised, "Do not you understand? If it were forbidden, why would we have it in our library? Whoever wants to read can read it, whenever he wants," he said.

The German turned back to Apo, and said that he wanted to ask another question. Apo allowed him to ask it. He said, "Under what circumstances would you forgive Selim Çürükkaya?" Then everyone understood that obviously, the German officials had come to the camp on behalf of Selim Çürükkaya. Apo was silent for a moment, but shortly said, "You had better leave and instead send the man who makes you ask this question. You do not know how we work. This organization would never leave someone alive once we have issued a death penalty in his name. Tell Selim that we have issued no death penalty. If we had, he would

already be dead. He wrote bullshit about me, but that was okay. We honestly just did not have the time to waste on him.”

The German interrupted once again and asked, “Then why did you kill Cemil Işık in Germany? He merely left your party. If, as you say, you have no time to waste on your defectors, then why did you execute this other guy in Germany?” Cemil Işık had been the commander of the moving battalions in the Botan Field between 1988 and 1989. He was someone who improved himself militarily. His nickname was “Hogir.” Although he was a military genius, he caused the organization a lot of damage in those years. This man was the single main reason behind the increase in the number of rangers in the areas of Botan, Hakkari, Şırnak, and the surroundings. For example, in 1989, he executed two entire villages, complete with women and children, for no reason. Despite this cruelty, six tribal leaders in the region visited Cemil Işık to settle the issue and forget about all past mistakes. However, Cemil executed all of these well-respected leaders, even though they visited him as friends. Of course, the organization had no idea that any of this was going on. Moreover, his actions violated our rules. It is the policy of the organization that, if someone voluntarily visits you in peace, you cannot harm him, even if he is your enemy.

Directly after this incident, Cemil Işık was brought under internal investigation. Cemil Işık, Sarı Baran, Mehmet Şener, and Şahin Balic had already formed a cabal against the management of the organization. While under inquiry for this, Işık ran away to save himself from the same fate befalling the rest of the cabal he had established. First, he took shelter in the Iraqi Government. While he was in Iraq, he contacted the organization twice, begging to be forgiven. Then, Cemil Bayık told him, “We do not have the luxury to give you forgiveness or not. You did not harm us, you harmed the peasants. Come back, and if the peasants forgive you,



we will forgive you, too. But if they do not, we will carry out justice.” But Hogir already knew that the peasants would never forgive him. That is why he left Iraq and asked the Turkish security forces to give him sanctuary. He switched sides, and between 1991 and 1992, he worked for the military units connected to the JITEM. It is well known that he had something to do with many extra judicial killings during that period. I do not know how, but after this, he managed to run away to Germany. In 1994, he was noticed by a PKK sympathizer in Germany and was killed.

So, Apo related that story to the German official now in his classroom. “You see? There was no death penalty issued for him. We could have killed him when he was in Iraq, or in Turkey while he was working for the JITEM. A patriotic citizen noticed him and killed him without our knowledge or consent. That assassin was not from our team.” The German said he was convinced, but Apo was angry at him nonetheless. “I thought you were our guest. You have abused our hospitality. If you want to visit here again, visit us as guests only. You, yourselves, are always welcome. But first you need to do your homework and get to know the organization. Do not come here again with stupid questions,” he said. And that concluded class for that day. (The regular public could also visit the training camps from time to time. The local Syrian families would be our guests for a few days, touring the camp and conversing with our comrades.)

### **MISINFORMATION ABOUT ADMIRATION FOR APO**

During the founding years of the organization, very few Kurds were given the opportunity to study at university. Nevertheless, each Kurd who had been able to study there, and achieved a career afterwards, had joined our struggle. Apo had been a Turkish state official;

Halil Ataç had been a teacher; Cemil Bayık was a historian; and Bahoz Erdal was a doctor... (There were hundreds of examples like that. Bahoz Erdal and Bashar Assad were classmates. They both studied in the same class at the same university, and Bahoz Erdal graduated first in his class. Then, when he saw what Kurds had been through, he joined the organization. He left everything behind; money, a normal life, and his successful career.)

Sixty percent of those who joined the organization, were Kurdish peasants. Most of these people had never even been inside a school. That's why Apo gave such importance to the concept of the peasantry. They were blank slates. But, thanks to the importance the organization gave to education and self-improvement, many peasants would gain enough knowledge to evaluate developments around the globe, not only in Turkey.

Apo would especially emphasize the impact of education on himself: "If I had not read Marx, I would most probably be an Imam (religious leader) now." The philosophy of the organization was Marxist, but there were people who prayed five times a day and fasted during the month of Ramadan. There were even women guerillas that wore headscarves. Everyone had freedom of choice; freedom of religion. They could believe whatever they wanted.

I witnessed this in person. In my very own unit, there were people who prayed five times a day, and who fasted during the month of Ramadan. Also women with headscarves. On the other hand, there were guerillas who were atheists, who believed in no religion, and who ate pork without hesitation. The organization was not against religion. It was against the groups who used religion to take advantage of people. The senior officials told us many times, "Whatever religion you followed, (Christianity, Islam or Buddhism), have it be transparent. Tell the public all the details about these religions. Then, let the public choose its own religion with full information, using their own will."

Especially in Turkey, our PKK organization was presented as an enemy of Islam. The reality was nothing like that. I heard Apo say many times, “Mohammed, peace be upon him, was the greatest revolutionary of his era. No one but him could have managed to impress and transform such a tribal Arab community, and make them adopt a completely different life than the traditions they had known. For example, praying five times a day. Maybe people were doing that as a spiritual safeguard, to ensure they would go to heaven after death. But he used the institution of these rituals as an occasion to teach the people hygiene. So, not only did the people learn a ritual which would make them feel closer to God, but at the same time the ritual ablution taught them to be clean and healthy.

“The ritual of fasting worked the same way. So, he started with a tribal community which practiced many perverted traditions, and he turned these people into a pure populace which fasted and prayed five times a day. He did this in a short period of time. Mohammed was such a great person, that when he said alcohol was forbidden, people instantly took all the wine they had in their houses and poured it onto the streets. If I told you today that I forbid smoking, how many of you will throw your packs on the ground and stomp on them? Permanently affecting population-wide changes was not an easy undertaking.”

Apo used to say, “Before making a decision, learn the truth and details of everything. You should not have an unyielding opinion. For instance, today this is a tree. But tomorrow it may be firewood, or a table, a pencil, or a chair. It can change. So, there is no such thing as I was born this way and I will stay this way. Everyone changes, but the time and the style of the change is what’s important.” This was the main dialectic Apo adopted.

Yet, the local and the foreign media were spewing propaganda that said Apo would kill everyone who had the potential to suppress him. This was a disgusting lie! If that were Apo’s

goal, he would have killed Cemil Bayık. Bayık was one of the founders of this organization. After Apo, he was the man that everyone loved the most, in the organization, even though sometimes, he would not follow Apo's rules. After him came Duran Kalkan, Murat Karayılan, and so on down the leadership hierarchy. Each of these people had great authority in the organization. If Apo had not wanted anyone powerful around him, would he have left any of these people alive? If Apo were a dictator, would not he have killed Cemil Bayık before now? I personally heard Apo say many times over the radio, "I wish any one of you worked hard enough to remove this load of leadership from off my shoulders!"

Before making such accusations, one also needed to very closely investigate the executions in the organization. You cannot be enlightened by rumors alone. Apo did not approve any of the senior executions, except those three people: Şahin Baliç, Terzi Cemal (the man who had been responsible for the southwestern regions, before his direct relation with MIT was revealed,) and I do not remember the third name. Apo approved the execution of those three people only. He had no foreknowledge of Kor Cemal, Adnan, Topal Nasir, or executions of many other top PKK organizational heads.

Those assassinations aside, Apo felt highly disturbed by the executions we performed against the villagers. He once told me off harshly. While I was undergoing training at school in Damascus, I was occasionally assigned guard duty around Apo's house. There was a guard shack right on the corner of the garden. One day, while I was waiting in this shack, someone shouted, "Comrade, come here!" I looked around. The lights were on, but I could not see any one. Then, I heard the same voice saying, "I'm telling you, come down now." So, I went down to the cottage and saw Apo in front of me. He began to chat with me, asking many questions such as in which states and at which capacity had I served so far. I was giving short answers in

order to brush him off and go back to my duty station. He understood what I was trying to do and asked, “Why aren’t you giving proper answers to my questions?” “Sir, my duty station is empty. If you want, I can give you long answers another time.” In the meantime, my superior on duty had realized that the guard shack was empty. There was a wall made of bricks, with holes in it, all around the property, and he had not seen me talking to our leader. He got angry and hollered from the other side of the wall, saying, “Why have you abandoned your duty station?” I responded, “The leader is standing here with me, and he called me down.” Then the superior lost all his anger, and said, “Okay. I’m going up there, you can stay where you are.”

Apo asked me tough questions about our uncontrolled missions against the rangers, back when that travel corridor was being opened into Botan Field. “Sir, in order to open that corridor, the ranger villages had to be disabled,” I maintained. He got upset, and replied, “That corridor would have been opened one way or another, but how could anyone have employed such cruelty just to open a corridor? How could you kill that many people? I want to send you to the same region, but it worries me. Will you promise me that you won’t do anything like that, ever again?” he entreated me. “Sir, I can promise you, on my behalf, but there will be actions which are still outside of the control of my command echelon,” I explained. He got more frustrated. “You are a commander! You must know what’s going on in your own unit. If any action by your unit happens outside of your control, then you are not the commander of that unit,” he answered. I really took to heart, this lesson from our leader.

One other of the biggest slanders about Apo is that he considered himself a God. Rumors existed that he had pictures of himself everywhere, from the classrooms to the corridors; from the kitchens to the restrooms. I can tell you, because I witnessed it, that before Apo was arrested, there was not a single picture of him anywhere. Not in the meeting rooms nor in the classrooms.

In the meeting halls, there were only pictures of the founders of the organization, who were martyred in the early years—Cemal Bir, Mahsuni Korkmaz, Hayri Durmuş, Hakkı Karer and so on. The senior management allowed the pictures of Apo to be posted in the classrooms and meeting rooms only after he was arrested.

As I said, I attended the lectures both at the Turkish and the Kurdish schools, and I also stayed in the barracks of the Turkish school for six months. I attended the lectures at the Kurdish school, as a guest, a couple times. If there were a picture of Apo on the wall in a classroom, there would be pictures of the martyred founders on the right of Apo's picture, while on the left, there would be the pictures of important commanders who lost their lives in the battles. This classroom setup remained the same even after Apo was arrested.

Look, it is well-known that I left the organization after my falling-out with one of my fellow commanders. I firmly believe that a few individuals treated me, and the people around me, very unfairly. You would think that, under these circumstances, I would be eager to tell you that Apo was a dictator and a psychopathy—someone who considers himself a God and did everything he could to prevent promotions within the PKK. Certainly, this would be one route by which I could take revenge for the poor treatment to which I felt subjected. But I would simply be lying if I said these things. If Apo really were as terrible as that, how could he possibly be loved so very much by all the Kurds of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey? My slander would make no sense.

### **WRONG INFORMATION ABOUT EXECUTIONS IN THE ORGANIZATION**

False propaganda can only polarize people, and there was some news that was constantly on national and international media, reporting that Apo has been casually taking lives, destroying

the commandment echelon, and executing prominent people. Problems cannot be solved by slandering the organization and making them appear evil. If Apo were like that, he would have quickly killed Şemdin Sakık, and even though execution was demanded for him twice, it was never carried out, because Apo cancelled it himself. Those who circulated that slander should have been made to give an actual example of someone who was supposed to have been killed by Apo's order. But they cannot, because nothing like that ever happened. If Apo had wanted, he could have killed his ex-wife, Kesire Fatma. He could also have prevented those who fled to Europe, like Selahattin Çelik or Selim Çürükkaya, from living for even one more day, but he did not kill any of them.

I witnessed myself the German authorities who came to Damascus to ask Apo to forgive Selim Çürükkaya. Apo answered them, "Are you idiots? There is no execution order from the organization for that man! If there were, we would have already killed him. He can stay in your country, the way he is living now, but keep him away from us." Also, Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş wrote some strongly worded articles about Apo, and the organization verbally warned them twice. Both of them ignored those warnings, and so the organization killed their guards in order to frighten them. After that, they kept silent and gave up their slandering.

I do not know where or how, but those people who spread propaganda about the organization, also found the names of a few people, martyred within the organization, and they ran a slanderous campaign, stating that those martyrs were executed by Apo's order. Mehmet Sevgat (nickname Bedran) was the commander of the first attack performed by the organization in Erüh, district of Siirt, Turkey, in 1984. There had been propaganda reports, saying that Apo gave an order calling for Bedran's execution. It was a lie! Bedran was martyred in a clash, and was not killed by the organization. Murat Karayılan was seriously injured twice and almost died.

Murat was the headquarters commander and coordinated many of the battles himself. If he had died in one of those battles against the Turkish army, those propaganda experts would definitely have said that Apo sent him to his death.

Mehmet Cahit Şener was executed, but he was not executed for being against Apo. An American journalist shared this incident with the world, without knowing all the details. Cahit had been arrested by the Turkish security forces in 1980 and imprisoned in the city of Diyarbakır. While there, a large revolt occurred on July 14th, 1982 (Mazlum Doğan set himself on fire during that revolt). Şener had supported Mazlum in this resistance and staged a death fast (hunger strike) with the other imprisoned comrades as an act of political protest. At that time, all PKK prisoners were housed in separate cells, so no one knew it then but Şener had changed sides and had become an agent for the Turkish security forces. While his friends were dying, one by one, due to the death fast, Şener was eating regularly.

Mehmet Hayri Durmuş, Ferhat Kurtay (set himself on fire in this resistance) Kemal Bir, Akif Yılmaz, Şener Bir, Mustafa Karasu, and Ali Çiçek were also present in this hunger strike of 63 days. In the end, there were only two survivors of this resistance: Mustafa Karasu and Mehmet Cahit Şener. Mustafa Karasu's death fast, on the other hand, was terminated, and he was force fed, after he fainted from hunger.

After this incident, Cahit Şener became the leader of the PKK prisoners at Diyarbakir prison, and was immediately hailed as a hero. Everyone thought Şener had joined in the hunger strike, along with the leaders of the organization, and survived. No one realized he was actually an agent of the Turkish government, while posing with the PKK prisoners. During the following years, he was set free by the government and ordered to go to Beka Valley, in Syria, and the capture control of the PKK camp management. Of course, he could not do that at that time, so



he went to Damascus, and while there, dealt with situations concerning Syria. Rumors spread that he was making connections with Turkish security forces in order to annihilate Apo, but the organization could do nothing at the time, since they had no definite proof.

However, his lifestyle and relations were different from the norm found within the organization. For example, Mehmet Şener was the first person who appointed a female close protection guard for himself, and when Apo saw his weird behavior, he sent him to countryside. He did not want to punish him directly, because the guerillas might raise their voices and oppose him, since Şener was considered to be a hero back then. That's why Apo sent him to harsh conditions of the countryside on purpose, so that his masquerade would be made known, and the cadre would discover who he really was.

Şener was planning to capture the organization in the fourth congress, being united with Sarı Baran. The fourth congress of the PKK took place in February 1990. During that time, Apo made strong criticisms concerning the guerillas out in the mountainous areas. Şener wanted to pacify Apo and said he would talk to each person within the commandment echelon, one by one. During the meetings, Apo used to criticize them and ask why they did not perform proper missions or use guerillas for the correct purposes. Şener took advantage of this, by gathering the guerillas in the commandment echelon and saying, "I still do not understand why Apo is criticizing you. You are giving so much of yourselves in fighting and sacrificing your lives. Despite this, Apo is leading a luxurious life in Damascus and then criticizing you!"

Of course, Şener and Sarı Baran thought that Cemil Bayık would not join the congress. Cemil Bayık had been sent to Iran and Iraq for some kind of negotiations, so when he unexpectedly did join the congress, their plan fell apart, and they both fled from where the

Congress was being held. Sarı Baran took refuge in KDP Management, and Şener was killed by the organization while hiding in a house in Syria.

Şener's main purpose had been to slowly eliminate the organization from within. He had made a collusive agreement with the Turkish security forces while he was in prison. The security forces had set him free under certain conditions. He was to go back to the organization, leak them information, and cause discomfort in the management level. Şener was a clever person. Even Apo had said a few times, "If there were four people as intelligent as Şener among you, our struggle for independence would not last very long. We would have reached our goal much sooner." Nevertheless, he used his intelligence for his own personal goals, and he resembled Semir, in many aspects. He wanted to take the organization abroad and continue the struggle with a marginal group and was considering using banners and social gatherings.

There had been a law, called the guerilla law, that had been applied in the organization prior to this congress. The reason for this law's creation was to force the children of politically and economically strong Kurdish tribes to join the organization, giving those tribes a closer look and better understanding of the organization. But, after the fourth congress, in December 1991, this law was abolished by Apo, because many guerillas had misused it. By that time, guerilla forces, in some provinces, were making raids on the villages and abducting all the children, whether rich or poor. Because of those mishandlings, Apo forbade the further application of this law.

The tribal system has been dominant in Kurdistan for hundreds of years. If a tribe did not join or support the organization, they were then constantly pushing against the organization's activities within their area. So, the organization thought if they could make the children of those tribes join our cause, then they could make the families and tribes committed to them as well.

However, as stated, the guerillas often misapplied this law, capturing every single Kurdish boy or girl, regardless of their wealth status. Therefore, some Kurdish tribes began to hold a hatred against the organization, and many Kurdish peasants sent their children to the western parts of Turkey, so that when the guerillas arrived, they found no young people in the homes—only parents and grandparents.

Hakkı Karer was one of the founders of the organization, but he had been killed by another Kurdish organization, which took place on May 18, 1977, and not by Apo! Mehmet Karasu and İbrahim Bilgin were killed in 1983 by the KDP when they were sent to be mediators in a war between two Kurdish organizations operating in northern Iraq, the KDP and the YNK. During the negotiations, the Peshmerga forces of the KDP killed them. The YNK delivered their bodies to us in 2000. Their corpses are now buried in the PKK Martyrdom Cemetery in Kandil Mountain.

Terzi Cemal was the person who stayed in the organization the longest, despite being an agent working for Turkish security forces. He completely wiped out the southwest province of the organization, through his cooperation with the Turkish government. He informed the government security forces whenever large groups of guerrillas were travelling from one place to another within that area. Each time, the security forces laid an ambush and destroyed those large groups of guerillas. After those incidents were revealed, Terzi Cemal was executed in Damascus in 1993.

Halil Çavgun, Salih Kandal, and Cuma Tak fought against the Bucak Tribes from 1978 to 1979. That incident is called the Hilvan-Siverek Clash, in the history records of the organization. Apo had nothing to do with any of those clashes.

Sahin Dönmez was executed for good reason by the organization, while he was living in Istanbul. He had caused great damage to the organization during the military coup of 1980 in Turkey. When arrested, he informed the Turkish security forces about Apo's hideout. At that time, Apo was living in an apartment building in Diyarbakır. However, in July of 1979, just before the coup, he had moved to Syria. Şahin Dönmez also informed the security forces about the hiding places of Ferhat Kurtay, Mazlum Doğan, and many more.

Dursun Ali Küçük (a.k.a. Dr. Ali) left the organization in 2007. Before he left, he set forth this final statement: "Let your most trusted man face me for a debate. He will defend the thesis of the organization, and I will defend mine. Whoever loses the debate will be arrested and expelled from the organization." He was actually expecting either Duran Kalkan, Mustafa Karasu, or Murat Karayılan to come forward for the debate. But, instead, Cemil Bayık came forward. When Dursun saw that Cemil Bayık was sitting on the debate platform, he changed his mind and told the organization officials that he had acted stupidly, and begged for forgiveness. However, he deserted the organization soon after he was forgiven by Cemil Bayık.

I stayed in the same cell with Şemdin Sakık, for a few months, in Diyarbakir prison. He was no different than the Turkish media outlets in regards to spewing false propaganda, and Şemdin still blames Apo for all the bad things that happened. He told me that Apo had purposefully sent him to Amonesses, so that he would die there in one of the clashes between the guerilla forces and the Turkish security forces. This made me very angry, and I asked him, "Why would Apo send you on a death mission?" Şemdin had already been sentenced to death at that time, but the execution had been postponed by Apo in order to give him a second chance. I asked him again, "If Apo had sent you to Botan field, would you say the same thing?"

I remember that period very well. Şemdin had actually asked the organization to be sent to Amonesses, but he made foolish statements to the Middle Eastern Press, soon after he was assigned as the commander there. “I will turn Amonesses into Vietnam. I will destroy anyone who stands in front of me.” He even said that if the American government continued to help Turkish security forces, he would start attacking American targets, such as the embassy, consulates, and the U.S. military establishments, within Turkey. He said all of this of his own accord.

After Semdin’s ridiculous statements to the press, Apo even had to make a press briefing to defuse this ugly and stupid situation with the United states. Apo also communicated with Şemdin through the radio. We all heard it. It was clear that Apo was extremely angry with Şemdin. “Why do you cause the world to be against us? Has America ever targeted the organization directly? I know they are indirectly supporting Ankara, because they have military, economic, and political interests in Turkey, but America has never directly waged a war against us. Why are you now pissing off Americans? Why do you multiply our enemies?”

Şemdin complained in the prison also. He cried that Apo still wanted him dead, even though he was incarcerated. One of those incidents was reflected in the Turkish press in 2010. It said that Apo wanted to execute Şemdin in prison. The press indicated that one of the repentor convicts sent a model ship, made out of wood and decorated with light bulbs, to Semdin as a gift. Word on the street was that a bomb had been placed inside the ship. I know very well the person who sent the gift. I do not remember his real name, but his nickname was Cihangir. He is probably among the Kurdish political prisoners now. As a matter of fact, the public prosecutor interviewed me to take my testimony on this incident. At that time, I said, “Mr. prosecutor, something fishy is going on here. Şemdin was trying to re-win the favor of Turkish security

forces by declaring that the organization was still trying to kill him, since he could do damage to them, with his knowledge. The repentant convict, who sent the so-called bomb, aimed to win the trust of the political prisoners by attempting to kill someone who had been sentenced to death by the organization. So, both Şemdin and Cihangir risked doing something like that in order to reach their goals.” I later talked to Şemdin about this so-called “assassination attempt.” I straightly told him, “You guys planned a very smart game. Whose idea was that? Yours or Cihangir’s?” Şemdin suddenly got nervous. “I do not understand what you mean. What planning? It was a fact. That guy wanted to kill me!” Although he denied this so-called assassination attempt, I already knew that Şemdin and Cihangir were close friends, even before they were imprisoned. Cihangir would never attempt to kill him.

The thing that was called a bomb by the press was nothing but a small quantity of match dust, and the Turkish press liked to exaggerate those kinds of incidents. Cihangir acquired a small amount of “gunpowder” from several boxes of matches, and then placed this explosive substance inside the bulb sockets in the model ship. Supposedly, Şemdin would plug the model ship in, to turn on the lights, and the electricity would contact with the gunpowder and the resulting explosion would kill him. This was a fabrication! You cannot kill anyone with a small quantity of gunpowder acquired from matches. At the most, that kind of explosion would only result in a loud noise. If Cihangir really wanted to kill Şemdin, there were many other methods, and, as I said, this incident was a scam. But it had worked. Thanks to this so-called killing attempt, Şemdin became the topic of conversation for both the press and the security forces for months. The repentant convict, Cihangir, made himself accepted within the political PKK prisoners by declaring, “Hey, even though I could not, I tried to kill this traitor of our organization.” It was that simple.

There has been a rumor going around, in recent years, stating that Apo established the PKK, but did not leave anyone alive who could potentially replace him or oppose his leadership. There was much information pollution, regarding this propaganda.

If someone deserts the organization, particularly, someone from the command echelon, then he or she is immediately declared a traitor by the organization, as I was declared a traitor. Shamefully, that had put so much pressure on my parents.

In 2011, the prison administration placed a repenting comrade, who surrendered himself to the Turkish security forces, in the same cell as me. While together, I asked him how the organization was now viewing me. "You are being pictured as a bad example, in nearly all of our political and organizational trainings. Deniz's approach was this. His style was that. He was so into women. He would not conduct any missions against the enemy, and so on. The trainers were doing everything they could to defame you, Deniz." I replied to him that this was all normal, because I had quit the organization by fleeing. No one in the organization would think about, or remember, the heroic missions I had achieved in the past. However, if I had been captured by the enemy during a clash, then they would have declared me to be a great hero, by telling victory stories about me, that I did not even achieve. Since I fled the organization, people there would now do anything to blemish my past reputation. In their opinion, I am someone who surrendered himself to the enemy. To prevent other guerillas from deserting the organization, they had to slander anyone who had surrendered themselves.

I do not know if I am on the execution list, but the organization does not let high-ranking deserted guerillas, who collaborate with the security forces and who give secret details about the organization, live very long. On the other hand, they do not care about, or spend time and effort to find a foot guerilla, who served the organization for a couple months and then deserted.

Again, if the person who has left was from the command echelon, and if that person provided the security forces with some secret details that could potentially harm the organization, then he or she would definitely be put on the execution list. Şemdin Sakık is on the list, but Selim Çürükkaya is not. Selim wrote many humiliating things about the organization, but he did not participate in the missions with the Turkish security forces against the guerillas or in annihilating some of his own comrades. On the other hand, if they really wanted, the organization has the capability to kill both Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş in Iraq within in 24 hours.

The bond of companionship is very important in the organization. So, anyone who betrays this bond, would definitely pay in the end. In 2003, one of the guerillas killed his comrade and fled to Barzani, the Peshmerga force in northern Iraq. The organization did not go looking for him, but, when the Peshmerga forces would not deliver him, they were given a large amount of money, which convinced them to turn him over to the organization. That guerilla was taken to the camp and executed in front of three battalions of guerillas. Normally, the organization would never carry out executions in front of the guerillas, but as a lesson to everyone, the management made that decision. The guerillas were given a message. “If you betray your friend, you will ultimately pay for it.”

If someone wanted to leave the organization voluntarily, and if he or she had not harmed his comrades or the organization, then they were free to go, and the organization would not hurt them or their family members. The organization would never forcibly make guerillas stay. One can leave whenever he or she wants, and that system has been the same ever since PKK was established.



## ALIZA MARCUS AND HELIN

One thing I cannot abide is when people casually slander someone else without having any actual knowledge of what really happened. There is this issue of the former guerilla Helin. She had made a speech in support of the book written by American journalist Aliza Marcus. She said, “We live hand-to-mouth in the mountains, sometimes we suffer terrible hunger, sometimes we are forced to walk barefoot, and all the while Apo lives the life of comfort in luxury homes.” She also claimed that everything done by the organization was in adulation of Apo. That when Apo spoke, everyone would stay silent. No one would dare raise any objections against him...

What she said is partially right, partially wrong. She is right about the life of luxury he enjoys. The organization had five villas in Syria in those days. Mostly female militants stay in these villas. They would be trained in these houses for future political functions in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Helin was one of them. I stayed in one of those villas, too. Living there was completely different than the standard of living in the countryside, specifically from the mountainous areas. Guerillas in the countryside cannot eat the same quality of food that the inhabitants of these houses eat every day. However, this is due to the challenging conditions they live in, in the countryside. Do guerrillas in Damascus have to live in poverty just because their fellow comrades are living in hardship in the mountains? You cannot use this logic. Let's imagine you live in the countryside of Garzan or Diyarbakır. Sometimes you cannot find bread and sometimes you have run out of tea. So, should people in Damascus not eat anything, although they have plenty of food? Also, the people coming to Damascus are there to learn ideological training. Again, you are making them ready for a new future process. These people could not be made ready for the future under conditions such as the regular guerilla usually

endures. After all, in that case, would they be able to give their attention to the tough conditions or to the ideological training?

Helin's statements were also inconsistent. If someone objected to a lifestyle, it is hypocritical if they do same thing as that to which they so vocally objected. Ask Helin how many years she had lived the pampered life in these houses, before her hypocritical complaints began. I stayed there together with Cemil Bayik, Duran Kalkan, or Murat Karayılan at various times throughout my career with the organization. I never witnessed a bodyguard or lower-ranking guerrilla wash these high-ranking officials' clothes. Put that "luxurious" label aside. These men washed their own clothes. Well, with one exception. Once, Cemil Bayik became so incapacitated because of a slipped disc in his back that we guerrillas washed his clothes for him during his recovery.

Helin, herself, was not a member of the presidency council, nor was she a member of the council of command. She was just an ordinary central committee member. Maybe you will not believe this, but even Helin's socks were being washed by her bodyguards. Everyone in the organization knows it. But let's say everything was just like she had claimed. Let's say that Apo and Cemil Bayik were dictators. These men had served the organization for as long as Helin had been alive, without shouldering nearly the same weight of responsibility. Helin was, nonetheless, quick to accept all the same privileges that they had earned, though in all ways, she was not even close to their level.

So, it was no surprise that no one in the organization liked Helin. She was also jailed by us, not once, but twice. Why did not she mention those things? When Apo was in Italy in 1999, Helin was in prison during the Second Extraordinary Congress of the PKK. She was thrown into jail along with Doc. Suleiman. They were in a relationship. From this date to 2003, she

remained imprisoned. Did Helin mention any of this in her speeches? Of course not! While Helin was staying in the “luxurious” villas in Damascus for years, did she object to this lifestyle even once? From the inside, did she make any suggestion for change? Did she write any reports about how unfair her privileges were? On the contrary, she always wanted more and more.

I did not want to interfere in these incidents, so I did not say anything at the time. But they were ridiculous. For instance, on May 14th, 1997, there was a vast military operation to the south: the Sandwich operation. Helin was the headquarters commander of the female force back then. She had had a swimming pool built at the academy and was giving the young women swimming lessons. In August, 1997, before this protracted strike against us, Helin had gathered 50 young women between the ages of 13 and 18 for a swimming lesson. Many comrades in the headquarters, both male and female, objected to this. We were in the middle of a battle, and she was teaching them how to swim! The men especially got so angry they said, “If the Turkish military brings their attack here, we swear we will not lift a finger to save you.”

And indeed, the attack came to that pool. Helin did not know what to do with all these young, defenseless women. At the sound of gunfire, she suddenly decided to move them all to Gari Compound from Zap, under the command of a central committee member. Well, they got caught up in a tank ambush en route, in Amediye (which is connected to Dohuk) while crossing to Gari, and 17 of these young women were killed. Now, this same woman was up giving speeches, slandering people. But why did not Helin talk about her own failings; her own stupidity as a part of all of this?

Naturally, while I have been talking to you, I had not spoken about the bad sides of our members or revealed the deficits of the organization. This was because, if one thing was done by anyone in the organization, anyone could say it was the style of the entire organization. Yes,

there had been individual conspiracies, extra-judicial killings, and conniving in the organization. Dozens of high-ranking commanders and other important names in the organization were eliminated by extra-judicial killings. However, I know for sure that those murders were not committed by order of the management of the organization. Rather, powerful individuals performed these executions in order to protect or advance their own interests. I cannot blame the organization for these incidents, because I know for a fact that the organization did not promote such a culture as this.

This did not stop Aliza Marcus from claiming something similar in her book—for instance, that no one was allowed to watch TV when Apo was arrested, since seeing him with handcuffs, under the Turkish flag would have caused all this comrades to quit their duties. This is simply not true. When there were such news reports on the TV, the organization would turn off the TV then but for a very different reason.

It was because these images caused such a serious hatred in the organization against the government. For example, one company commander who had watched these images went to the ammunition warehouse and collected as much cyanide as possible. He wanted to kill the Turkish soldiers with it...all the Turkish soldiers! And this was not just an ordinary guerilla, either. He was a mature commander, who had been trained on self-discipline for a long time, who could control his feelings. He was somebody who would never normally act on emotion alone. But, if this event of watching our leader get imprisoned could cause even a high-ranking guerrilla to be overpowered by his feelings, how could we expect self-control from the ordinary guerrillas? Every member of the organization, from the lowest foot guerillas to Apo's cabinet, became so angry that we had to turn off the TVs in order to prevent these guerillas from performing any mission against the Turkish public in revenge. If the organization allowed the whole complex to

continue to watch these insulting images, the camp location would have become a ticking bomb. Then, if the result were dozens of self-sacrifice missions and hundreds of Turkish casualties, would the Turkish state ever enter a peace process with the PKK again? No!

So, the main reason to shut off the TV's was not the advertised worry about an exodus of guerillas from the organization, as Aliza said. The reason was to prevent the guerilla from losing his self-discipline and performing individual missions that ultimately would harm our collective reputation. There were people who had given all their years to the organization. They were sincerely committed to Apo, personally. They had devoted their entire lives to him. When these people watched images of Apo's capture, would they have left his the organization? No. On the contrary, they would fight to the death for revenge.

Why does not anyone mention the fact that the organization forbade the use of the word "War" from 1999 to 2002? Apo deliberately would not allow anyone to use insulting or offensive language like "Fascist Turkish Government", when referring to the state. At one point, Nizamettin Taş even met with us. "Old comrades," he warned us, "you will either honestly change your outlook, or at the very least, you will adapt yourself to this new, political way of continuing our cause. By this I mean, that one way or another you will support the organization's efforts to achieve peace through political discourse, instead of fighting. Otherwise, we will open a prison camp just for you, like Mahmur camp in Iraq." For three years, this was how strongly they emphasized the concept of peace through peaceful means. On the other hand, this was how forceful they had to be in order to overwrite us guerillas' inclination towards war and revenge.

During this time, the approach was dominant that we were going to settle our disputes with Turkey through politics. All of us underwent training in this direction. I was one of the

first ones who objected to the peace process then. I asserted, “Comrade! You were the very one who instructed me for years on the tactics of war! Now, how can you be the one to ask me to change completely, all of a sudden? I cannot shuck my armor and wear the necktie of politics instead, in such a short time.”

### **DRUG COMMERCE, TURKISH STATE, AND THE PKK**

Another issue, which had frequently been used to slander the PKK, was our so-called drug production. But in actuality it was not the PKK which produced all the drugs but the state itself. The military’s own helicopters would take heroin from Gabar and transfer it to other locations. Hakkari had been the center of drug trade until 1995. Hakkari was the initial storage stop for all heroin arriving from Iran or Afghanistan. From Hakkari, it was then distributed to the west of Turkey and from there to Europe. The PKK were not responsible for this. We just were not powerful enough to disrupt this entrenched process. So, all we did was institute a tax on everyone else who was participating in this business. This dirty drug business still continues, although it is not done as vastly as it once was.

Again, the PKK never messed with this drug business. Most of the news in the media was wrong. Among our own, the PKK even gave harsh punishments to those who got involved in this business. If the state had just said the word, it would have taken the PKK such a short period of time to destroy the entire system of drug production and shipping in this region. We could have dismantled it in six months! But would the state allow this? No, because the state, itself, was in the drug business.

In the organization, only three crimes were never forgiven. The first crime was to intentionally kill your comrade. The second one was to harm the organization financially. The

last one was to get into the drug business. If you had been issued a sentence for one of these crimes, the organization would definitely take its revenge once it found you, no matter how many years had passed.

In 2006, the organization detected that a comrade who was in charge of the guerilla arsenal in our camps in Iraq had sold some of our ammo to the smugglers. This man had served the organization for a very long time. The organization always sought to prevent rumors whenever possible, so when it had decided to perform an execution they would inform the family of the offender ahead of time. The organization called this man's family directly. The crimes of this keeper of the arsenal were read aloud in front of his family and an audience of other guerillas. Then, his family was asked if they approved of the execution of their son. All the members of the family approved the execution. Listen carefully. This person was executed with the full approval of his entire family.

I witnessed punishments for these drug-trade issues in person. For instance, a Kurdish farmer in a region in Çukurca planted marijuana, in an area connected to the city of Hakkari, which was close to the Turkey-Iraq border. Our comrades, there on foot patrol, discovered this field and informed our headquarters. We went there as a unit and destroyed the field. Then, we found out that that farmer was the father of a guerilla. No tolerance was shown to him. He was warned very harshly regardless of his affiliation with us. We let him know in no uncertain terms that we would execute him if he tried something like this again. The man must have had direct contact with the security forces and some other groups in the marijuana business. This drug was not grown in the mountainous regions. It required a flat valley. Therefore, marijuana was planted on the same areas tactically ideal for the military, so these fields were always grown close to military stations.

The organization thought that the Turkish state was deliberately and intentionally allowing drug-related activities in this region, where we Kurds also lived. This was because a drug-addicted Kurd would be no good for the organization. Even if those addicted Kurds did manage to join the organization, the harm they would cause would far outweigh any benefit they would provide. Therefore, some state men planned to get a majority of the Kurdish youth in the region addicted and tried to eliminate the PKK this way. But their plan did not work, because the organization destroyed those fields wherever they saw one. Far from engaging in the drug business, the organization did not even let any of its members drink alcohol. You never saw any guerilla with so much as a beer bottle in the organization.

Despite promoting the drug trade, the security forces in Turkey do sometimes conduct operations against drug farmers just for show. For example, in 2014, they staged some operations on those fields of cannabis. On both sides of the road, going to the military station in Lice, there are cannabis fields. Ever since I could remember, cannabis has been planted in these fields. Now, I am asking you, why did not the Turkish state touch those fields for all those years? After protecting them for so long, then why did they stage an operation there all of a sudden? Because they did not know about it? No. Everyone knew it very well. Just to sweeten their image and deceive the Turkish public, they performed this 2014 operation. Combat aircrafts and armed vehicles destroyed those fields, one by one. Why? What changed their thinking after years?

There were some certain Kurds in the east, who had been planting marijuana for a very long time. One man had always grown it in his field of 92000 m<sup>2</sup>. The security officials had been allowing it, in order to get their own share in this business. The only work of the marijuana farmers was to grow it and store it. They had no other source of income, so they absolutely had



to contact the security forces if they wanted to transport the dried marijuana in July and August, without having it confiscated by the military. During the transfer, one third of the income from the dried marijuana was given to the senior military authorities and police officials to prevent the shipment from being captured by the state authorities. Maybe even half of the income. The amount of the protection payout could change, depending on the local conditions.

## CHAPTER 13

### THE CHAOTIC SITUATION AT CENTRAL HEADQUARTERS COMMAND

We had been in the camp for two months when the traitors' court started. In front of an assemblage of 180 people, a three-person tribunal—comprised of Cemil Bayık, Halil Ataç and a female guerilla—conducted their investigation. This investigation took place across both the Turkish school and the Kurdish school. The hearing of Şemdin, alone, lasted almost three days. First, Şemdin read his own defense. Then, the audiences, as a unit, uttered their criticism about him. Almost every single person stood up and evaluated him. I asked for permission to speak, and demanded to know, “How could you talk to a province commander as you did on the radio and use such insulting words?” Although Şemdin denied it at first, Cemil Bayık would have none of it. “Do not lie,” he warned. “We have the recorded tapes of that conversation. We went back and heard what you said.”

After Cemil said that, I asked another question. “Do you accept the legality of this investigation commission?” Şemdin asked me why I would ask him such a question. I told him that he once had said that no one in this organization was fit to judge him. He looked at me and, smiling, he said, “Comrade, you ask a very good question. I am a direct man. You're right. If Cuma were not here, I would not suffer either of those two tribunal members to sit in judgment of me. Cuma has always been honest. That's why I respect him a great deal. I do not take anyone in this organization seriously, besides Cuma,” he said. While Şemdin was continuing his speech, Cemil Bayık cut him off. “You are lying in front of these 200 guerillas. Was not it you who took my weapon back the first chance you got? Were not you the one who put me in prison, Şemdin?” he demanded. Şemdin replied, “Back then there was a standing order, and I had to obey it.” Cemil was enraged. “You knew that the order was wrong, and you knew how

everything had developed to that point. If you had really wanted, you could have cancelled the order. But you did not do it!”

The incident Cemil Bayık was talking about happened in 1986. After Mahsun Korkmaz died, someone called K r Cemal was appointed as the leader of the Botan province. Although K r Cemal was very good militarily, he did not have the capacity to understand the ideology and policy of the organization, but he was being mentored by someone intelligent—a comrade named Sahin Bali . They were planning to overthrow the organization by eliminating Cemil Bayık in the field, and Apo in Damascus.  ahin Bali  assured K r Cemal, “Leave Apo to me, I will take care of him. You deal with Cemil Bayık.” Of course the team assisting him was the same: Sarı Baran, K r Cemal, Hogir (Cemil I ık), Mehmet  ener,  ahin Bali .

K r Cemal had thought that if he could disarm Cemil Bayık, he could find some way to execute him while he was defenseless. By giving false information to  emdin Sakık, he had actually managed to disarm Cemil Bayık with unfounded accusations. Meantime, with Cemil Bayık in jail,  ahin Bali  went to Damascus to assassinate Apo. He was thinking that he could execute Apo there at training camp. But, in 1987, the organization had K r Cemal killed by Ebubekir (Halil Ata ) as soon as they learned of this plan. Metin ( ahin Bali ) was obliged to postpone his mission as the result of the sudden death of his accomplice. Sahin Bali  kept silent for a while after K r Cemal was executed. But, two years later in 1989, he again approached Apo in an assassination attempt. His team acted more cleverly this time. Now, their strategy was to eliminate those around Apo and then Apo himself, after he was unprotected. They figured that the organization would maintain its integrity from the force of Apo’s personality, even though each of his officers would be dying one by one. They planned to kill Apo last and then take the control of the organization.

It was in support of this plan that Hasan Bindal, Apo's best friend since childhood, was shot and killed in 1990, while Şahin Baliç was giving a guerilla training in the Damascus School. Şahin Baliç himself shot Hasan Bindal with his M-16 "by mistake." Sahin Balic's inner circle was quick to close around him and calm the environment by claiming that this was a normal training accident and such things were bound to happen.

However, Apo and the other senior executives were well aware that the killing of Hasan Bindal was not anything normal. The organization had already figured out that Sarı Baran, Cemil Işık, and Şahin Baliç had something to do with Kör Cemal's plan. But as they had no proof, they could not do anything. However, after the death of Hasan Bindal, it became obvious that this team clearly was a threat to be taken seriously. So, Şahin Baliç was immediately sentenced with the death penalty. Then, Şemdin Sakık was imprisoned. Because of all his previous atrocities, Hogir (Cemil Işık) fled the area. Mehmet Şener and Sarı Baran also ran away so as to avoid execution.

The result of this current investigation was a unanimous vote in favor of executing Şemdin. All the other officers, who had been arrested along with him, were ordered to be excommunicated from the organization. Apo came to the Turkish school, while they were imprisoned and met with the guerillas who had decided on this sentence and, to their surprise, he told them he was against their decision, because of their own incompetence. "You were not principled as a command echelon. If you had put your shoulders to the wheel, if you had done everything you could have done to protect the organization from the beginning, this man would not have harmed the organization that much. Şemdin has had a free hand until now, because up until now, all of you simply have done nothing. Some of you were scared of Şemdin and some of you just turned your backs and pretended you did not see what was going on. As a result, the

damages to our organization have already occurred. What sense does it make to execute Şemdin at this late date? Where were the region commanders during all of this? Where were the province commanders while he was acting like a traitor? It is easy to punish him with execution now. You act from the poor logic that Apo will approve the death sentence no matter what and he will bear all the responsibility. Well, I refuse to do your work for you now, since you failed to do your own before! I do not approve this death penalty!” he said. Everyone was shocked. No one was expecting such a harsh reaction from Apo. He even said, while looking directly at Cemil Bayık, “You haven’t even performed some of the executions I have already approved.” (You’ll remember that Apo had wanted his brother to be executed before, and Cemil Bayık had cancelled this decision.)

“This is why I do not approve this man’s execution now. Take all of these men out of the prison now. They will join the training cohort again, from day one. If they get their acts together, if they recover their former utility, by undergoing all the trainings again, then I have no problem with them. We shall forgive them and reincorporate them. At that point, it will be just to give their duties back; they will have earned the right. But if they go back to acting from the same twisted logic, then we will not have any mercy. They will all be executed without further trial. This is my suggestion about those people. I am leaving now. You had better talk and discuss among yourselves and evaluate my suggestion. Then, tell me what you have decided regarding my decision.”

Although the command structure and foot soldier level guerillas definitely did not want this, they accepted Apo’s suggestion. All those arrested, including Şemdin, were taken out of the jail and began training again. Şemdin Sakık was even tapped, by the direct request of Apo, to teach the class on “War and the army,” and Ali Haydar Kaytan took over teaching “the History

of the Party.” The guerillas were still a bit disappointed by the fact that these people were lecturing them. Some guerillas even filed formal complaints, to the effect that, “These people were imprisoned up until yesterday and now they are lecturing us?” Şemdin was even then appointed as the commander general of Amanoses Field. That is to say, Apo not only spared Şemdin’s life, but, in his mercy he also appointed him to an important post.

After Şemdin was arrested, Murat Karayılan and Duran Kalkan were appointed to Botan command, with Duran selected as commander. Unfortunately, Duran Kalkan could not cope with the problems with which he was confronted at headquarters. While Şemdin had been in charge, control and discipline at headquarters had largely deteriorated. It was such a chaotic environment that it was nearly impossible to quickly reestablish order. Also, because Duran had been given such a lofty position, some commanders of rank felt there may be favoritism within the organization. The officials at Damascus were not properly assigning people of merit to these critical positions, but were instead, empowering those people they liked. Rumors began to spread. For example: “If this is how the party is going to act, then they cannot be trusted anymore.”

Beyond that, there were even more issues. Some of these handpicked commanders withdrew from their regular duties. The organization, thinking their preferred commanders were going to do what they were supposed to do, assigned them with important missions. However, these belligerent commanders rejected their orders and did not complete their duties. Even more than that, they began to treat the southern Kurds in Iraq in a callous manner. Many of the Kurdish villagers were executed when they were falsely accused of being members of the KDP.

Because of the chaos found at headquarters, Apo decided to appoint Cemil Bayık as headquarters commander. This allowed Cemil to pick up the pieces and iron out the chaos, as

soon as Şemdin Sakık's trial was complete. Many reports, written directly to Apo, concerning those problems began to arrive while I was training in Damascus. They said the leadership at headquarters could not control the situation, and the officials in Damascus must step in before disaster struck.

Apo, who was very ill back then, had kept Cemil Bayık at his side. Cemil had undergone two different ineffective operations to repair a slipped disc in his waist, and had yet to recover. However, even with his condition, there was no one else who could be trusted to put an end to the chaotic situation and restore order at headquarters. Although the guerillas suggested that either Murat Karayılan or Ebubekir should have gotten the command and fixed the ongoing problems, Apo did not accept these suggestions. Apo argued that neither man possessed the capability or the experience to do the job. In a speech to all those assembled in Damascus at the time, Apo addressed Cemil Bayık, "Cemil, I do not necessarily want you to go, since you have ongoing health issues, but you know the situation as well as I, and there is not another viable solution. I give you all the authority necessary to do what you must, so as to ensure the dominance and policies of the organization there." After this speech, Cemil Bayık was promoted and sent to headquarters. This was in December of 1996.

When Cemil Bayık finally arrived at headquarters, he first discharged everyone within the management structure. Realizing that simply releasing some officers from duty was not effective enough, Cemil decided to teach them a harsh lesson. He executed 17 ranked guerillas, whom he deemed to be part of the root of the problem. It is important to note that these executions were performed without the approval of Apo, but Bayık was quick to find the corruption within the command structure, and once he found them, he executed them on the spot.

After the executions, many guerillas sent complaint reports to Damascus, stating that Cemil Bayık was executing high-ranking commanders without the approval of President Apo. When the correspondence arrived, there was a day I remember quite well. Apo came to school to give a lecture about party history, but he cancelled it. Instead, he talked to those within the academy about what had transpired at headquarters. “You’ve all witnessed it,” he said. “When I sent Cuma there, did I not tell him that he had my full authority to organize the party by whatever means necessary? What can you glean from that?”

At the time, there were 11 people from the PKK’s central committee assembly at the academy. Turning to them, Apo repeated the question. Two of them stood and said, “Yes, you gave Cuma the authority to do anything in order to bring order to headquarters.” So Apo replied, “then why is there any criticism? I said to everyone at headquarters that Cemil Bayık will not ask for my approval for any of his decisions or actions. This allowed him to do what must be done. Why are they sending these reports to me? One of you should stand up and explain it! If Cuma had to execute 17 people, it shows that our organization was in great danger. I have known Cuma for many years and he never executed as many people as I wanted. These 17 executions show that there are not many people who properly follow the policies within our organization.” Finishing this pronouncement, he left the room. After this incident with the executions, order was slowly restored to central headquarters. There was now a fear amongst the guerillas, because they saw that executions could be carried out, without Apo’s direct approval.

After completing his training, Şemdin was sent to Amanoses to be commander, but he continued to make mistake after mistake. Before he even reached his new post, he was giving speeches to the media. He said things such as: “My forces will turn Amanoses into Vietnam, and the Turkish security forces will not even dare enter the city.” Naturally, this drew the attention



of all the Turkish military, and they headed for that region. Şemdin's forces became targets and were subjected to repetitive operations from the security forces. They were getting hit so hard that Şemdin had to relocate the province headquarters from Amanoses to Syria. During this period, the organization suffered many grave losses, all because of Şemdin's poor decisions.

This was the last straw. Apo did not want to give Şemdin another chance. "I do not want to see him anymore. Take him to headquarters and sit in judgment of him there. I will not object to any decisions you make." But, before Apo even gave those instructions, Şemdin had already been arrested and taken to Zap headquarters in the south. After the trial, Şemdin, commander of Amanoses, was lowered to the rank of a regular guerilla. But, there was a problem. Neither the headquarters officials nor members of the military council wanted Şemdin to join them. It was not until later that we heard Cemil Bayık had been kind enough to accept him.

During this time, I had been training in the camp at Damascus for almost nine months. We knew that training would soon be over, and we would all be assigned to different Zones. At the beginning of April, 1997, we received intelligence that there was going to be a huge military operation against our camps located in the south (Iraq and Syria). Barzani and Talabani, the Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq, were going to ally with the Turkish soldiers in this operation against us.

Because of this unexpected attack, the officials at the training camp started to assign everyone to their new locations, even before training was complete. A group of 27 or 28 people, including myself, were the first to be organized, so that we could quickly make our way south. Before we left for Turkey, Apo spoke face to face with each commander. He asked each person to stand up, one after another, and tell him into which field they would like to go. His final decision would only be made after receiving the opinions of the others who were present at the

meeting. Out of respect, not a one of us volunteered to be appointed to a specific field. We said that we would go anywhere the organization wanted us to go. When it came my turn, I answered the same as everyone else.

Once he heard my response, he asked the commanders in the committee where I should be assigned. Halil Ataç (Ebubekir) said, “He can go to Botan!” Dr. Ali said, “He should go to Amed!” There were two women on the committee, and they both replied, “Deniz came here from Garzan so he should be assigned to Garzan.” After listening to each of them, Apo said, “I also want you to go to Garzan. However, Cemil Bayık will make the final decision. Now, go down south and meet with Comrade Cemil and you will report to the place that he deems most appropriate for you.”

So, it was that we set off in a group of 28 people. From Damascus, we first went to the city of Halep and then traveled from Halep to the region of Zap. Cuma said, “I want you all to stay with me for now. I will transfer you later to Garzan, with a battalion of guerillas.” It was while we were there, that I was given command of a squad that used heavy weapons. In May of 1997, the field commanders and headquarters leadership decided to send Cemil Bayık (Cuma) out of the Zap camp to a safer place, because the main part of the operation was going to take place in the Zap region. This made it too risky for a senior officer to stay there. He accepted their judgment, and went to Gari region in northern Iraq.

The media and press used their influence to create a fallacious atmosphere among the Turkish public. This made people begin to think that when the security forces went into Zap, the organization would be completely destroyed.

The operation began on May 14th, 1997. It was vast, extending all the way into the Haftanin region in Iraq. According to the plan, Turkish security forces were going to bomb us

from the air with fighter jets, and the Peshmerga forces of Barzani were going to attack on the ground. If the plan worked accordingly, our forces would be crushed between them. This is why the assault was named “Sandwich operation.” For the first five or six days, there were fights on both fronts. We were stuck in the middle, just as planned, but the Turkish soldiers and the Peshmerga, under the control of Barzani, never left their positions to move toward us.

On the sixth day of the assault, Apo contacted us, via radio, and criticized our frontal defense tactics. He gave us instructions. “Our guerillas cannot endure very long in a fight such as this. The Turkish security forces have come in such large numbers that they are able to use more extensive military techniques. If you continue to stay positioned, as you have been, then you will lose many in this battle, because you are crowded together. Rather than staying bunched up like that, leave a few troops there, then have the rest of your forces go to Gari or Hakurke!”

The Turkish soldiers and Peshmerga saw our comrades leave their position and thought that we guerillas must be running away. It was under this pretense that they foolhardily came forward, thinking it was now safe to do so. I was part of a force of 200 to 300 people that were left scattered around the field. We did not fire at the security forces while they were coming towards us. Instead, we silently waited for them to come close to where we were hiding. As soon as they were close enough, a platoon of guerillas circled behind them and they found themselves completely surrounded by our forces. With this final tactic, we attacked the Peshmerga and Turkish soldiers, killing most of them.

During this battle, we were able to shoot down a Turkish attack helicopter using Russian missiles—a first in the history of our struggle against the Turkish security forces. In fact, the operation was temporarily ceased after the helicopter was shot down. With the Turkish soldiers

not able to attack us using helicopters anymore, we had the advantage and were able to start a true offense against the enemy lines.

I remember quite well a hill in the Zap region. When the Turkish security forces captured it, they planted their flag as a sign of victory. They acted as if the Zap region was actually under their control, and that all of the guerillas had been killed. They even invited the Turkish TV channels there to do a live broadcast. Apo was furious and immediately made a counter statement to a news outlet in the Middle East, saying, “Okay, I accept that you were able to enter into our liberated zone within the Zap region. However, I wonder if your soldiers will be alive when they leave Zap.”

Only one day after this live broadcast, the superior officers that provided the Turkish troops’ command and control procedures were killed. All of these high-ranking generals boarded a Skorsky type helicopter and flew over the area of the clash to inspect the casualties that had been inflicted on their enemy. For security reasons, the Skorsky was accompanied by four Cobra-type attack helicopters. While they were surveying the battlefield, a squadron of guerillas was getting ready to ambush the security forces with missiles. They hid in an area that was close to the Turkish border. When they heard the helicopters, they checked the area with binoculars and saw the Skorsky and the four Cobra attack helicopters.

With this new knowledge, the guerillas immediately informed their senior leadership and were instructed: “Use all of your missiles to destroy that Skorsky, and do not target the Cobras.” Because of their experience, the senior management immediately realized that the Skorsky was carrying some important commanders and the Cobras must be accompanying it for security. As instructed, our comrades targeted the Skorsky and were able to destroy it.

The destruction of the Skorsky put an immediate halt to the operation and a hush fell over the battlefield. It was as if there were no battle or soldiers on the field. We found out later, from listening to their radio communications, that the low-ranking commanders had panicked when all of the high-ranking commanders had been killed, and the Turkish soldiers were all asking one another whether they should continue to attack or just withdraw from the area.

Since there was no high-ranked commander left to lead the operation, the Turkish troops withdrew. With this turn of events, our guerillas headed in full force toward Barzani and his Peshmerga. Barzani, himself, led his troops onto the battlefield. Apo had given us strict orders to kill every single Peshmerga soldier who participated in this operation; therefore, Barzani was immediately taken out of the fight, because we guerillas were heading toward them with might and main.

Almost all the Peshmerga we had encircled were killed. We only spared the lives of the ones who directly surrendered themselves to us. Of course, it was very hard for us to slow down, because of our hatred for these Kurdish people who would fight against us. Many of these same Peshmerga soldiers had hidden in military posts within the cities under Barzani's control. Meanwhile, the YNK, led by Talabani, were fighting with us against the Barzani forces. In 1996, Barzani had made an agreement with the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. Using the tanks of the Iraqi military, they invaded Erbil and defeated the YNK forces there. Talabani's wife was taken captive during the invasion. Apo intervened, and said to Barzani, "You will either set the woman free, or we will fight against you," and with this threat, he was able to save Talabani's wife. The YNK were very grateful for the help and supported us guerillas in the fight of 1997, by engaging the KDP forces. We guerillas laid siege to all the cities and military posts that belonged to Barzani. As we were destroying his forces, Barzani sent someone called Davud

Bağistani to the senior management of the PKK as a mediator. He said that he would accept all of our conditions, if the PKK would declare a ceasefire.

The organization was much more cautious about a proposal of peace this time. Senior PKK officials told Barzani as much when they responded to his mediator. “Barzani, last year you accepted all of our peace terms and conditions, but then at the very first opportunity you broke our agreement.” Barzani replied back: “I accept anything you include within the agreement, no strings attached. Do not give me even one more chance, if I violate it again.” However, while Barzani was making these peace talks with us, he also communicated with the Turkish officials. “Help me as soon as possible. My forces and I will have to surrender to the PKK if you are too slow to aid us. There will be nothing left of what once was called Barzani’s regional government.”

With this call for help from Barzani, the Turkish military forces entered northern Iraq with nearly 100 tanks. Some of these tanks were placed between Zaho and Dohuk, on the border. Others were placed in several towns, and in the city of Dohuk itself. Basically, this meant there were two or three Turkish military tanks positioned in almost every town in northern Iraq. In addition to that, ten more Turkish tanks were delivered to the areas that had been invaded by the YNK forces. These extra tanks were added because five of the towns that were originally controlled by Barzani had been invaded by the combined force of the PKK, and the YNK during the battle and were now under our control. In a very short time, the organization had appointed all of the mayors, the district governors, and all other administrators to various public institutions. We were just about to invade Erbil when these Turkish tanks arrived to help Barzani and his forces. This unexpected aid completely changed the course of the battle.

Besides the tanks, the Turkish military helped Barzani forces with fighter jets and the Cobra-style attack helicopters from the air.

One of our original goals during this battle was to imprison Barzani when operations ceased, but these sudden developments prevented this from happening. Barzani's position at the negotiation table had strengthened, and he quickly dismissed all of his previous promises to the organization made before the Turkish aid. We ended up having to return control of all the military posts and districts we had taken. In return for those areas, we were officially handed control of the fields of Gari, Hakurke, Kandil, and Hiraniye (all in northern Iraq). Today there are still more than 400 villages in the region of Kandil that are governed by the organization. All of these municipalities belong to the organization.

The ceasefire agreement was reached, but it did not last long. Many of the tribal leaders, that had previously lived under the Barzani regime, objected to the transfer of their administration to the PKK. Therefore, fights began again.

Ten guerillas, including myself, headed up to the region of Gari for reconnaissance, so that we could begin planning a mission to annihilate the tribal leaders. During the night, we surveyed and explored the area where they were staying, and then rested under a tree when morning came. I do not like to rest or sleep in a group because there were always those people who disturb others by talking. That was why I moved ten meters away from the rest of the group and laid under another large tree. I had a small Walkman cassette player on me, and I fell asleep while listening to it.

It had not been very long when my comrades quietly called out my name. I initially thought that the Peshmerga forces had surrounded us while I slept, but I realized that there was a heaviness on my chest. I opened my eyes and looked towards my comrades. They were all

giving me signals to stay still, and that is when I turned my eyes to the heaviness I had felt on my chest. There was a huge black snake stretched out from one end of my chest to the other and I could feel its head brushing against my head. I had never before been so terrified in my life and I felt that my heart would fail me, because it was such a frightening situation. One of my comrades quietly called out to me, “Deniz, switch off the Walkman if you can.” I had to move one of my arms to switch it off and I was worried that if I did, the snake may bite me. I waited, immobilized for almost ten minutes. While I remained still, one side of the cassette in the player finished and the Walkman stopped by itself. As soon as it stopped playing music, the snake crawled down my chest and slithered into the bushes. I had witnessed many terrifying things in my life, including the risk of death, but I had never been so frightened as that before.

### **DEFEATING THE TURKISH TANKS**

As I said, the Turkish tanks reached Barzani in no time, completely changing the course of the fight. To win, we were going to have to destroy those tanks, one way or another. For the first time in the history of the struggle of our organization, our comrades who had been trained in explosives, were able to destroy three Turkish tanks with bombs they had buried underground. It was also during this time that the organization began to use remote controlled explosives. We activated these explosives using signals from our radios. At that time, we were not yet aware of the more advanced techniques of activating bombs, such as using vehicle remote controllers or other kinds of technical equipment. We simply used our hand radios to activate our bombs.

We became so good at using explosives that no matter which of our bombing tactics were countered by the Turkish security forces, the organization was able to acquire new techniques, using its advanced explosive development laboratories and bomb experts. Day and night, this



group of experts manufactured advanced explosives in our laboratories, thus negating the preventive steps taken by the Turkish security forces. There was a group of almost 25 dedicated people working in these laboratories, with each one specialized in a specific field. There were some who worked on the construction of circuits for the bombs; some developed remote control; some supplied the explosives. Others trained the guerillas on the use of the bombs. Every three months, a new group of eager guerillas would be sent to the laboratories to be trained in the proper use of explosives.

The use of remote controlled bombs opened a new way for the organization to utilize new tactics in its future attacks. After the introduction of this new, effective technique, the organization would not base its missions merely on raids and attacks against Turkish military posts as it once had. Suicide and bombing missions conducted by remote controlled explosives were not only more effective but also less risky for the guerillas in comparison to missions carried out through raids and attacks.

At this time, the Turkish security forces began to lose their bearings and were unable to figure out how we were destroying their tanks, one by one. When they realized we were blowing up their tanks with signals from radio activated explosives, they would not even patrol those areas for a while. This was because they did not know what kind of precautions to take against our new destructive technique. There's a device called a jammer, which was invented for jamming radars and for signal deception, but it had not yet been acquired by the Turkish military. Once the security forces acquired these things from the United States, we were not able to conduct bombing missions again for a long while.

The organization established a special group at headquarters that trained guerillas on the proper use of explosive goods. Special explosive production laboratories were established

within Syria and Iraq. Hundreds of experiments were conducted by our bomb experts in order to develop new explosives and to stop the effects of jammers. By getting in touch with the explosive manufacturers in Europe and Russia, higher quality substances were obtained to produce bombs that were even more destructive. Although these high-quality explosive substances were expensive, they were not affected by jammers.

### **THE WAR AT THE MUSUL-DUHOK LINE**

After the ceasefire, I was placed among four battalions, who were assigned to the area where Barzani's family lived. Our goal was to drive Barzani's family and relatives out, so that he would be forced to sit at the negotiation table yet again. We executed attacks on the areas where they lived until the end of July. At the beginning of August, I was called back to headquarters in the Zap region. When I arrived, I found that the leadership at headquarters had established two mobile battalions. One of the commanders of these battalions approached me with a proposition: "Deniz, I want you to be a company commander within my battalion. Will you accept such a duty?" I decided to do so.

After I was assigned, we left the headquarters in Zap and travelled to where Cemil Bayık was staying at the field of Gari, within Iraq. Because there were already three battalion forces with Bayık, there was no need for our battalion to be stationed there. Despite the fact that negotiations had begun with Barzani once again, Bayık told us, "We are seriously at a stalemate with this man. He has another opportunity to stab us in the back yet again, because he can get help from the tank forces that have been deployed by Turkey. With this in mind, I want you to take two of these battalion forces along with you to the Soran line, so you can cut off any reinforcements from Barzani."

We knew that everything would be much easier if we could rid ourselves of the Peshmerga forces first. Many of the villages within the Soran district contained Peshmerga military posts, so we decided to raid each village as we passed. During this process, we almost completely destroyed five of these military posts. Rather than fight back against us, many of the Peshmerga forces ran away. With these victories, the Gari area was brought under the control of the organization. We actually had had an unofficial dominance in this area before, but the Peshmerga always caused us trouble. Whenever we ran across them, they would say, “What are you doing here? You can stay in Haftanin, Metina, Zap, and Zagros, but you should know that Gari is our land. The PKK cannot conduct any political or military activity here.”

Even with their exasperation, the new agreement with Barzani officially delivered control of the Gari region to the organization. It was very important that we had this area, because it was in a strategic location. The cities of Zaho, Erbil, and Suleimaniye were located right in the middle of Gari, and it was also very close to the city of Mosul. Besides the importance of its location, the Turkish security forces had no right to fly over or attack the Gari region, since there were thousands of local peasants living there. On top of that, any kind of Turkish attack in Gari would be considered hostile by the Iraqi government.

I had had a bad experience while fighting to capture and control Gari that would have potentially affected my future commanding career. The Peshmerga had completely emptied a village of its inhabitants and were using it as military base. With that knowledge, we decided to raid this village and either kill or push back the Peshmerga forces. Before we began our mission, we received an order from the headquarters leadership. “If the Peshmerga forces are willing to surrender, do not kill them but take them all captive!”

Two weeks before our mission, I participated in a reconnaissance of the village to make sure it was full of Peshmerga forces. Our scouting showed that there were no civilians left inside the village. This would make our raid much easier, because we would not have to worry about the tactics or techniques that we would use during the attack. Even more importantly was the fact that we would not have to worry about the risk of killing civilians by mistake. As soon as our mission began, I heard the screams of women coming from one of the houses in the village. I immediately contacted the other guerillas on the radio and said, "Do not attack this house, there are probably civilians hiding inside." After we killed all the Peshmerga who were holed up in the other houses in the village, we encircled that one remaining home. Six women and six Peshmerga soldiers came out and surrendered. We found, to our surprise that these women served the Peshmerga soldiers by cooking meals and washing dishes and clothes.

When our commander had instructed us to bring back whomever we took captive, I do not think he thought there may be a possibility of civilian women in the village. In fact, we could not have guessed we would encounter such a complicated situation. So, because of our original instructions, we took the six women, with the captured soldiers, to our camp. When he saw the captive women, the company commander got angry. "Who the hell are they, Deniz? Why did you bring these women here?" I replied, "Comrade, they were hiding in the same village as the Peshmerga forces and they surrendered. You ordered me to bring all the captives, and I have done so."

He did not like my answer and said, "Comrade, have you lost your mind? Why did not you contact me over the radio and tell me about these women? The entire world will be against us now. All of the TV channels that speak for Barzani will say, 'The PKK have kidnapped our women, our wives.'" Honestly, it had not occurred to me that this could be a problem for the

organization. Unfortunately, the exact thing that the commander feared came to pass. Almost all of the local television channels produced segments with false information, saying the PKK had killed all of the male soldiers and then had kidnapped and raped the women in the village. Of course, these channels did not mention that this village was being used as a base for Peshmerga forces. This incident was broadcast as if the PKK had purposefully attacked a village that had nothing but civilians inside.

Because of the media and the psychological pressure put on us, we had to set our captives free. We also had to prove that the women we captured had not been raped, and that we had let them go. If we had not released them, the Kurdish people under Barzani would have begun to think badly about our organization (i.e., that we were rapists). Also, any sympathy the Kurdish people might have had for the organization would suddenly vanish. In fact, the only real reason for the organization to keep captives was to have them used as a bargaining chip to swap for captured PKK members. We might have been able to trade up to twenty PKK captives for those six Peshmerga soldiers, but it did not work out, because we released them all.

Despite all we did to alleviate the situation, that village continued to nurse a deep hatred for the organization. They took very strict defensive measures that would not even allow our guerillas get within a single kilometer of the village. Since the village was located on the route leading to Mosul, we had to destroy it somehow, and, if we were successful, many areas would automatically come under our control.

Barzani's forces had placed Dookhas on top of almost all of the houses in the village and howitzers all around as well. This made it almost impossible to make raids. With that weaponry they had the advantage and could easily destroy us as soon as they knew we'd arrived. As a final

solution, we decided to block all the roads into the village. If we did not let any vehicle go that direction, they would eventually have to abandon the village when their supplies ran out.

Our plan began with one squad of guerilla laying an ambush on the road between the city of Dohuk and the village. A defense team that was composed of a squad of guerillas was also placed in a nearby area during the darkness of the night. After the ambush team raided the cars coming out, the defense team would shoot the target from a distance so that the ambush team could withdraw and escape. While we were waiting in the ambush area, I saw two trucks begin to drive out of the village. At first I thought that we would not be able to destroy them with only a single squad because there were only eight of us at the ambush site. It was very risky, but I changed my mind and told the guerilla next to me: “No matter what happens, we will shoot these cars. There is no other way out!” We were very lucky and were able to kill all thirteen Peshmerga in the trucks before they were able to make a counterattack.

When our comrades went up to the trucks to take weapons and important documents, they found Russian-made Dragunov SVD assassination weapons on the Peshmerga. After taking all of these trophies, we returned to our camp. Seeing all of the Dragunovs made me think the people we just killed could not be regular Peshmerga soldiers, because these types of weapons are only carried by high-ranking commanders. One day later, while we were waiting in the camp, the hillers came to us and said, “Comrades, the village that you attacked yesterday is being evacuated. About twenty trucks arrived and are taking the villagers away.” I responded, “Comrade, are you completely sure? That was not a village to give up a fight so easily!”

A few days later we got good news: those people who were travelling in the two trucks had been the senior Peshmerga commanders in that village. They left only the platoon commanders there and were driving to the city of Erbil for a meeting at Peshmerga headquarters.

Since there was no senior commander left alive, the rest of the villagers had given up and abandoned the place. We were fortunate because we had been trying to empty that village for years, but had never been able to. It came down to one simple and easy ambush in a single day to do what could not be done. With this obstacle out of the way, the roads from Mosul to Dohuk were open for the organization.

Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq, did not intervene when our organization settled in the area that had been previously controlled by Barzani, because he was using a balanced policy between the forces that were present in the region. The PKK was a threat to the YNK and KDP in the region. But on the other hand, the YNK was allied with Iran. So, perhaps Saddam Hussein believed that the PKK could be used against both the YNK and the KDP whenever necessary.

After these challenging battles and struggles, the organization was able to establish its full authority within the Gari region. Soon after we had taken control, the organization relocated all of its critical institutions like the media, healthcare, ammunition warehouses, etc. into the region.

### **EXPERIENCE WITH TREATMENTS ON THE BATTLEFIELD**

It is probably quite obvious, but we did struggle a lot. We were not always lucky and many of our comrades became disabled or martyred. For instance, on November 27, 1997 we created a plan to destroy a Peshmerga village which had been causing us trouble for many years. In fact, Duran Kalkan personally joined the coordination of the mission because he wanted to be present, as it got underway. It was the first time we had ever tried to raid this particular village,

and we wanted it to be successful since it would also be carried out on the anniversary of the organization.

The Peshmerga forces had settled in this village, and they never left it unprotected. This circumstance made it very hard for us to attack because of the risk of killing civilians. If the Peshmerga forces left the village from time to time, then there was a possibility that we could lay down an ambush and kill them all outside of the village. But the opportunity never presented itself, and we instead had to sneak into the village after dark. On the night of November 27th, we were able to approach very close to the village. We were just about to lay siege when suddenly the sound of explosions crashed through the darkness. This was the unfortunate way that we found out that mines had been set around the perimeter. Five of our comrades had their legs, ankles, and feet injured from the explosions and pieces of shell fragments. We were completely demoralized by the serious injuries that befell them. The mission was automatically cancelled because of this unexpected failure.

An even worse circumstance was that there was only one doctor present in our battalion. He was also a newbie and had only recently graduated from a medical school in Turkey. He appeared to be both scared of the situation and inexperienced with these types of major injuries. He had an assistant with him who seemed to be just as inexperienced as the doctor was because he was not able to treat the wounded parts of the legs and feet. Our comrades were all groaning out in pain and the assistant was actually instructing the doctor how and where to fix the wounds, but the doctor could not dare to try. It was a chaotic environment as everyone in our battalion was suffering from the shock of the incident.

Mine explosions are probably the most common threat we guerillas experience in our lives. I had gotten quite familiar with the cutting operations for wounds to the extremities,



because I had witnessed so many of them throughout my time as a guerilla. There was one particular time back in 1995 that I remember just like it was yesterday. The Turkish security forces had handed us a huge loss in one of the battles, and we had to retreat from the area. When we came back to that same area after a couple months, we found out the hard way that the area was littered with land mines. Many comrades lost their lives by stepping on those mines. The expert doctor in the battalion had introduced us to how to cut feet after a mine explosion, and I participated in an operation. The doctor said, "Comrades, watch me very carefully. You might need to use this procedure in the future, because there may not be doctors around." Step by step, he showed us how and where to cut the feet, how to stitch wounds, and other things that we needed to be aware of for these kind of incidents. Thanks to what I had learned by watching this doctor, I was able to successfully treat the wounded feet of a comrade.

During the aftermath of the explosion in 1997, neither the doctor nor his assistant were correctly treating our wounded comrades, so I intervened. "Move aside and just assist me!" I said. "Look doctor, you cannot treat feet in that way. Before you amputate, you need to find the main arteries that go through the inside and tie them off with medical cords. If you do not tie off these veins they will pull themselves further inside and you will not be able to find them again."

I went to the comrade whose condition was the worst and began helping the doctors with him. Using a knife, I first pulled up the flesh near the exposed part of the foot that needed to be amputated so I could find the main arteries. I was able to find them tie them off. As I mentioned before, when the foot is amputated, those veins automatically pull themselves inside if you do not tie them off. If that happens, the chance of finding those veins is low. This means that the blood will continue to drain from the body and the patient will die.

There is also an important detail that the operating person must take into account: if the wounded person is young then the bones of the foot should be cut a little above where the same cut would be made for an older wounded person. This is simply because the leg bones of a younger person will still grow until around the age of thirty. If you cut the bone to the proper length, there is a possibility that you may see the tibia and fibula emerge a couple of centimeters out of the flesh later on. You must cut the bone a couple centimeters into the inner part of the flesh, so even if the bone increases in length it will still stay inside.

There was no need to use anesthetic on our comrades, because the mines had already ruptured their legs and they were already under an extreme amount of pain. They would not even know that they were going through an amputation. We used Swiss-made saw blades to conduct these operations. When I was working on my comrades, I first revealed the three main arteries under the flesh and then tied them off. It is not possible to tie off the capillaries one by one, but it is essential that you tie off the crucial ones.

I had not noticed, but Duran Kalkan had been watching over my shoulder while I was giving instructions to the doctor on how to properly operate on our wounded. He said, "Comrade, just a word of advice to you. If you are already an expert on this, why are you wasting time instructing him? Start doing it yourself and none of our wounded will die."

Following his advice, I started to amputate the legs of our comrades one by one. I would first cut the flesh horizontally up to a point and then open the flesh on the sides to find the main arteries inside. After tying off the veins with a cord, I cut the flap three centimeters below the level of the tied veins and threw it away. After this procedure, the bone and the flesh surrounding it was left behind. Using one of our Swiss-made saw blades, I was able to cut the bones in the leg in only about fifteen minutes.

You learn a lot of things through experiencing them. With what I learned from that doctor in 1995, I saved the lives of five comrades in 1997. In 2002, I came across some of those friends in Iraqi camp and they were all doing well. They never had to go through any other surgeries. After the treatment I gave them, they had been sent to hospitals in Damascus and Iraq. However, the professional doctors did not have to do anything other than what I had already been able to do.

I frequently encountered these kinds of incidents in my time with the organization and thus became more experienced on the various kinds of treatments and operations that we had to do. I learned how to treat a bullet wound, how to do first aid on deadly injuries, how to remove a bullet from the body, etc. Having learned these things, I was able to use my experience to support our doctors and other health professionals when they were either inexperienced or there were not enough of them when needed.

This mission was heavily criticized by our headquarters leadership. Aside from being unsuccessful in its purpose, the organization also criticized us for not conducting enough reconnaissance before the mission. In addition to our five comrades being seriously wounded before the mission began, the incident also left much of the group demoralized to an extent. It is upsetting to see your formerly healthy comrades become amputees, and one begins to wonder if the same thing might happen to you one day. This also leaves our disabled comrades unable to fight as guerillas anymore. Their options are to either be employed behind the front lines in passive work within the camps or to be transferred to European countries and employed to our political organizations to handle relations with the European states.

## SLANDER

Winter camp preparations in the south were never as tough as our preparations in the north had to be. Because we were already in a safe region, we did not need to bother ourselves with building hidden underground bunkers. We also were able to carry the food we bought from Iraqi villagers to our camp, using vehicles and mules. On top of that, we were able to organize festivals during the winter camp period. Bands would come and play music which increased our morale. For example, a band named Koma Berxedan had once come from Europe to our camp in Iraq. Groups like this would visit all of the guerilla camps in the region.

In February 1998, I came across a big problem while staying in the winter camp. A female guerilla reported to one of our company commanders that: "Deniz and I love each other." I did not even know that this woman was staying in our camp. Our battalion commander had been temporarily assigned to Zap back then, and so he was not in the camp, but there was another company commander present. They listened to the slander from the female guerilla and then met with the other company commander, telling him everything.

One morning, I was having breakfast when a guerilla came and informed me that there was a meeting. This made me angry, and I responded as such: "If there was a meeting arranged for now then why am I just being informed of it? What in the hell is this?" Anyway, I went and sat down in the meeting room. The company commander who was temporarily assigned to be our battalion commander asked me, "Deniz, do not you know that a relationship with a female guerilla is forbidden in our organization?" I was shocked and replied, "What relationship are you talking about?" He said, "I heard that you were in a relationship with a woman in the organization!" Still angry I said, "You are full of shit. I am not in a relationship with anyone here." He said the name of this woman and asked if we loved each other. The woman guerilla

replied, “Yes sir, I love Deniz.” Then he asked her again if she loved me. This time she bent her head down as if shamed and stayed silent. I was surprised, because clearly someone was trying to cook my goose, and yet I could not figure out why they would do this.

It did not take me long to figure it out. Our normal battalion commander was also the commander of the mobile battalion at Zap field. That meant that he was superior to the temporarily assigned battalion commander in terms of both power and initiative. This man was planning to sweep aside and eliminate the powerful commanders who supported our battalion commander while he was absent and he had decided to start with me. Once he was rid of me, this despicable man would be able to spread rumors like: “You see? Our battalion commander let immoral incidents happen even though it is forbidden by our organization.” This would weaken our commander and allow this dishonest one to take his place.

They asked: “Deniz, do you plead guilty?” I was given the right to answer, but I was also angry and said, “I neither accept the existence of this so-called relationship nor the legitimacy of this meeting!” And then I left the meeting room. In my absence, the committee sentenced me to jail time. One of the platoon commanders came to me and said, “They have reached a verdict about your guilt. You will be incarcerated, hand me your weapons.” I said, “Okay, you can incarcerate me. However, I will not prepare my written defense until the battalion commander returns.”

This company commander was devious. He did not keep me in the camp near my own guerilla force but instead extradited me to another region. Apo’s nephew was the company commander in the region where I was transferred. I was good friends with him, and when he first saw me, he thought that I was there for a visit. While we were chatting, the temporarily

assigned battalion commander told him via radio: “Put Deniz in jail immediately. I will provide you with the background information later.”

I had been incarcerated for nearly a week when, on the seventh day, two guerillas came to me with a draft of fifteen questions related to my prosecution. There were questions in the draft that I had nothing to do with. I said, “Leave me alone now. I will give you my responses when I finish writing them.” I was trying to delay things so I could gain time. While I was putting things off, I noticed one particular night that everyone was in a hurry as if getting ready for something. This gave me the sense there must be something going on within the region. I found out, to my surprise, that our battalion commander and Cemil Bayık were visiting the camp in which I was incarcerated. The region commander informed our battalion commander about what happened with me: “The temporary battalion commander jailed Deniz.” Our battalion commander got angry when he heard this and was even angrier when the region commander told him that Deniz supposedly had a relationship with a woman. Cemil Bayık was listening and his curiosity was piqued, and he asked our battalion commander: “Comrade, what is going on here?” The battalion commander said, “We will need to visit the battalion in which Deniz is jailed to find out the truth.”

Two days after they arrived at the camp where I was jailed, I was finally instructed to meet the battalion commander. When I left my cell the guerillas tried to return my weapons, but I told them, “I am not taking them back because I am still under arrest. You are going to have to carry them.” As soon as we entered the battalion headquarters, we immediately went to where Comrade Cuma was staying. I was embarrassed of course, because he already knew that I loved someone else. “Deniz, what the hell is this? Why has such a bad thing happened?” he asked.

“Comrade, I honestly did not even know that this woman was staying in our winter camp. I think that there is some kind of scam going on, but I do not know why.” Our battalion commander was present during this talk as well, and he said, “I am the target Deniz. That devious commander is planning to pull me down by first targeting my closest friends. When you are prosecuted, I will be put under investigation for allowing such a relationship to go on inside my battalion. Even though this is a scam built upon lies, it will taint both of our reputations.”

“How are you two going to handle this situation?” Comrade Cuma asked. The battalion commander said, “Deniz will go in front of the organization for prosecution, and I will take care of the rest.” At that time, Şemdin was still hanging around Cuma because of the disaster at Amanoses and, since we knew each other from before, Şemdin approached me and asked, “Why did you place yourself in such a bad situation, Deniz?” And I replied: “It’s not a big deal, Şemdin. Tomorrow, the truth will shed light on the situation, and all the lies will be made known.”

The battalion commander summoned me around seven in the morning before the prosecution was set to begin. He said, “Deniz, when you go in there I want you to be in front of the organization while holding your weapon.” I replied, “Comrade, I am already considered guilty as it is. I do not know that it would be wise to push the issue.” He said, “If you seriously respect my authority, please take your weapon with you. Do you still not understand what the real problem is? This is a sneaky game being played against me, not you. Comrade Cuma and I are going to be present at the prosecution process to show support for you. We feel that it is important that you face your accusers with your weapon with you. Please take it back.” His insistence worked on me, and I decided to take my weapon back.

The prosecution began at around 8:00 am. I made a statement: “I do not know this woman and I have not had a relationship with her. If I had, I would not withhold the truth from you, but instead I would accept any kind of punishment honestly and with no argument. However, I do not even know this woman, yet she says she loves me. This so-called love is unrequited because there are not any feelings between us. How can there be a love if only one member of a couple knows about it? Here you are, just now prosecuting me for this situation, yet you already had reached a decision and jailed me before even listening to my defense. Even if I am acquitted at the end of this trial, I will not serve this battalion any longer. You now know the truth, now reach a verdict!”

When the guerillas listened to my side of the story, they made a suggestion to the discharge the temporary battalion commander who had wrongfully accused me. The request went through, and he was discharged for falsely representing the facts and was exiled to Zagros. This ended the trial, and I was reassigned to my company as a commander. Yet even with this promotion, the incident had hurt my pride. “I will not work in this battalion anymore. I will do whatever the organization asks me to do, but I will not do it here!” I said. Cemil Bayık said, “Okay Deniz, I understand. But, let’s stay here and celebrate March 8th, Women’s Day, and then we will transfer you to another location.”

### **THE RESIGNATION OF CEMIL BAYIK**

On the afternoon of March 13, one of the men who guarded Cemil Bayık came rushing to me and asked whether I had seen Şemdin. He had not been seen in the last three hours. The guards thought that perhaps he had been with me since Şemdin would sometimes visit me to have a chat. I had not seen him, but not a half hour later, I visited the guards and asked whether



they had yet to find Şemdin or not. No one had seen him, and Cemil Bayık did not even know about his disappearance yet.

The battalion commander and I finally visited Cuma to inform him of what was going on. Cemil Bayık seemed to be very sad when he heard the news and said, “Do not bother yourself and just let him escape! No one will go after him. He should stew in his own juices for now.” In truth, it would have been easy to catch Şemdin because there was only one escape route from our camp area to the other regions. We could have had these places guarded before Şemdin reached them, but no matter how we insisted, Cemil Bayık did not want anyone to go and catch him.

A few days passed and the organization had not yet informed the press about Şemdin’s escape. We learned that Şemdin had headed to the KDP and was under the protection of Barzani. As soon as Cemil Bayık learned about this, he gave a speech to BBC radio saying that Şemdin had no relationship with the PKK anymore. In response, Şemdin delivered a short speech with the BBC saying that he had quit the PKK. He even said, “I left the PKK, but I am still loyal to the values of Kurdish patriotism”.

Şemdin’s escape put Comrade Cuma in a tight spot. This was not the first escape to happen while Cuma was in charge. Three other senior executives had run away while they were in jail under Cemil Bayık’s watch. For example, the brother of one of our founders, Baki Kara, had run away while being held by Cemil Bayık. Being held by Cemil Bayık was a great opportunity for the prisoners. If either Baki Kara or Şemdin had been imprisoned under some other senior commander, they would have either been executed or imprisoned without a means of escape. The only thing that Cemil Bayık would do is appropriate their weapons, after that they could walk freely around the place where Cemil Bayık stayed.

On top of that, these prisoners knew Cemil Bayık would not harm them. So, many prisoners abused the freedom they were given by him and ran away. Because of these escapes, people in the organization started to criticize Cemil Bayık saying, “Enough is enough. Why do these people always escape while they are under the watch of Cemil Bayık? Why does he treat them with such a soft attitude even though they are our prisoners?” Cuma was already depressed because of the executions he had to perform at headquarters between the years of 1996 and 1997. When Şemdin ran away, Cemil Bayık resigned from his duty as headquarters commander. Can you believe that? The most significant person in the organization next to President Apo himself had resigned.

In April 1998, we guerillas heard an instruction on the radio that came straight from Damascus: “Comrade Cuma, turn on your satellite phone on this specific day, at this specific time so that our leader, Apo, can address to you!” Cemil Bayık turned his satellite phone at the appropriate time and Apo began talking to him in an angry manner without letting him get a word in edgewise. He even said some things that disturbed us all: “Are you selling out our organization, Cuma? If you are, then to whom? What did I instruct you before I made you headquarters commander? You had the full authority to do anything. I transferred my own authority to you. Now there have been some incidents, and you are resigning without even letting me know first. I entrusted much to you and now you are giving up on it just because of some criticism. There are many traitors who already want you to quit the organization, and now you are making them happy by acting upon their wishes. I reject your decision to resign. Return to headquarters in Zap immediately and establish your authority once again. Do whatever it takes, appoint whomever to wherever you need them and do not ever attempt to resign again as long as I am alive!” After he said these things, he abruptly hung up.

After he had been admonished, Cuma returned to Zap. Before he left, he told us, “When the guerilla council meeting is held in May, I want you to send two people.” Normally, our battalion commander was the one who was supposed to participate in that meeting, but because of the unfortunate incidents we had just experienced, he did not want to leave the battalion. He wanted me to go in his stead.

I went to the guerilla council meeting in May, and Comrade Cuma was not there. At the time, I did not know why. Instead, Ebubekir came from Damascus to lead the meeting. Later, we heard that Cemil Bayık had been sent to Iran; however, we did not know the reason for his visit. We guessed that it might have something to do with tensions in our diplomatic relations with Iran, and since Cemil Bayık had been the one controlling the organization’s relations there, it made sense that he would need to go to fix any problem that arose. He would never have to leave headquarters to go there unless there was a serious problem. We actually were told later that Cemil Bayık’s slipped disc in his lower back had deteriorated and he had to be taken to Tehran for surgery. That was why he had delegated his duty to Ebubekir. After that we did not see Cuma for quite some time.

### **THE CHILDREN OF THE ORGANIZATION**

In the spring of 1998, the members of the organization that were in command were going to travel to Zagros from Metina for a military meeting. We set off for the meeting in the night and had a lot of ground to cover before sunrise. During our trip, I noticed two of our female guerillas falling behind all the time. Because they were dropping back, the rest of the group had to stop until they caught up. Since the group had to stop frequently because of these two women,

I told the other commander: “Comrade, you can lead the rest of the group. I am going to go and talk to these stragglers.”

When I got to them, I saw that one of them was unable to walk without the help of the other. I first thought that she must be sick. I said, “Comrade is there a problem? Why are you falling behind repeatedly?” They replied, “No, there is nothing is wrong. We will catch up with you.” They reached the rest of the group again, and even before ten minutes had passed, I realized that they had fallen behind yet again. I told the group: “You all continue on. I will stay with the stragglers and meet you at our destination.”

I went to those two again and said, “Comrade, what is your problem? Are you sick? Or is your load too heavy? If you hand your bag over to me, I can carry it. You are disturbing the rest of the group.” No matter how much I insisted, she would not give me her bag. The other woman finally whispered in my ear: “Deniz, I will tell you something but mum is the word. This comrade is pregnant, and that is why she is having such a hard time walking.”

I was very surprised because that was the first time I had heard something like that in my entire time with the organization. “Do any of the commanders know about this?” I asked. “No, only a few other female guerillas know, that is all,” she replied. I insisted further and took her rucksack, weapon, and other things she had been carrying and carried them myself.

Until the PKK’s fifth congress, which was held in 1994, the standard punishment in the organization for having sexual intercourse was execution. Nevertheless, this rule had been abolished by a direct order from Apo during the fifth congress. This woman had been impregnated by Dr. Suleiman, the brother of Selim Çürükkaya. Back then, Dr. Suleiman was a member of the PKK central committee. Because of the sexual intercourse, he was arrested when

the Zagros meeting was over. We were all very curious because we did not know how he was going to be punished.

The pregnant guerilla was immediately transferred to the Maxmur camp within Iraq. In 2000, two years after the incident, I saw a little girl in a village that was thirty minutes from the Şehit Harun camp. The village was under the control of the YNK, Talabani. She was around two years old and was crying while holding one of her feet at the entrance to the village. I figured that she must be the daughter of a peasant or something. I decided to approach her and asked, "Why are you crying sweet girl? What is wrong?" She was young and so could not speak properly yet, but she was pointing at her foot. I saw there were nutlets from a *tribulus terrestris* (known as devil's thorn) stuck into the bottom of her foot. I had her lay down so I could carefully take the nutlets out. She finally stopped crying when the nutlets were removed. I held her hand and asked her, "Sweetie, can you show me where your house is?" I realized that she was pointing to the camp of my comrades. There were Kurdish peasants staying in that camp who used to live in Turkey, but they had run away from the oppression they faced from the Turkish security forces. I thought that she could be the daughter of one of those villagers.

I picked her up and carried her on my shoulders toward the camp. When we arrived at the entrance, someone asked, "Comrade, where did you find her? We have been searching for her since this morning." I told him the story, and then asked, "She is so cute. Whose child is she?" "She is our child, comrade, not the villagers'," he answered. To my surprise, she turned out to be Dr. Suleiman's daughter.

I was curious and so asked, "Comrade, why did you call her our child, then?" He said, "That is on the order of the organization. She is no longer Dr. Suleiman's daughter, but the organization's. The organization has assumed full responsibility of raising her." She was such a

lovely child. I took her to the grocery store in the village and told her she could buy whatever she wants. She took whatever she saw: chocolate, biscuits, etc. It ended up costing me quite a bit. When we returned to the camp, I asked the guards where her mother was, and they told me that her mother was staying in the Maxmur camp. I asked them why the child was staying here if her mother was not here. "Comrade, the child is under our protection. We take care of her needs," they responded. That seemed strange to me, and I said to myself, "Life is full of surprises! I had carried her mother's rucksack when she was pregnant and here I was now carrying that baby on my shoulders."

There is an important fact about the organization, which I have said repeatedly: they cannot follow everyone around all the time. These forbidden love affairs can sometimes result in the impregnation of female guerillas. Later on in my time with the organization, I came across many other children like her. If necessary, the organization will raise and take care of them. There were children in Damascus whose parents were murdered by security forces and Apo was taking care of them personally. He would also visit orphan asylums at least three or four times a week and would play with the children for hours.

When I once visited the orphanage, I found that there were about fifteen children there. Even though the organization did no longer execute those who had sexual intercourse, they were not allowed to raise their children. They were all considered to be children of the organization, and the parents were allowed to see them from time to time.

## CHAPTER 14

### THE WOMEN GUERILLAS OF THE ORGANIZATION

There used to be a more male-dominated family structure in the Kurdish communities, where the men were always superior to the women. The organization had a difficult time in its struggle to increase the social status of Kurdish women, but they finally achieved it, and it was difficult for Kurdish men to accept women being equal. This was mostly due to the fact that they had not seen anything like that from their parents as they grew up in the household. Similarly, women had difficulty adapting to their new status as well. There were less of them in the organization—at most only one or two female guerillas per squad.

All of the easiest tasks would be given to women. For example, there were items like pans, glasses, spoons, teapots, forks, knives, pots, etc. in each squad. In the beginning of the organization, only the female guerillas were responsible for the transport of those things, but that changed as the years went on. Also, the male guerillas used to have a much different standpoint, regarding women. They felt that the women could not fight like them, could not endure the hardships of mountain life, and did not have the same stamina as the men. Those opinions changed dramatically after the year 1996.

Zeynep Kınacı's suicide mission changed men's opinion of female guerillas, because it was the first time in its history that someone had sacrificed themselves for the organization. Until then, no male guerilla ever dared strap explosives on themselves in order to perform such a mission. Since a woman was the first to carry out this act, the male guerillas naturally changed their stance and had more respect for the women. After her bravery, women began to participate in important missions, like raids, attacks, and ambushes. Nowadays, if an attack team consists of ten guerillas, at least four of them are chosen from among the female guerillas.

The women seemed to think they had to try harder in order to prove themselves. They would sometimes throw themselves into deadly situations before the men did. I witnessed this many times. Mostly, men would carry a load of about 25 kilograms in their rucksacks, but some women would carry close to 50 kilograms, just to stop the stereotype that they were weak, fragile, and useless.

Apo gave a lot of effort to achieve equality among men and women in Kurdish society, because he truly cared about women. For instance, in every single letter that he sent from prison, he would always say, "Send my greetings and respect to the women guerilla forces." He did not always mention the same thing for the men, but he never forgot the women. When he was first captured by security forces, the women guerillas became quite anxious for him. They would say, "We had a great protector, but now he has been arrested. What will happen to us? Will the new executives of the organization treat us with the same respect and care as Apo?" But, since Apo had laid such a strong foundation of equality, embraced by every member, the women continued to be treated with the same degree of respect and care as they always had.

Whether man or woman, though, criminals would still suffer the same consequences. No one had any special privilege when it came to those matters. I mentioned before that around 1999 or 2000, soon after Apo had been arrested, a female force travelled to Tehran to meet with Iranian officials, and 17 of the women were arrested when they returned. The organization never tolerated or ignored such treachery.

Despite all of the facts, most of the propaganda created about the PKK had to do with women. Our enemies always claimed that Kurdish peasant girls were being abducted by the organization and forced to have sexual intercourse with the guerillas. This was all slander and lies. There had definitely never been anything like that in the culture of our organization. How



could we rape Kurdish peasants, if we could not even have intercourse with the one we love? Neither female nor male guerillas could bear the consequences of such a thing. Not a chance. If something like that had happened in the organization, they would not only have been executed, but afterwards they would have been smashed into pieces.

The rules of the organization even forbade the kissing of the woman you loved. Sometimes, women made an appearance on TV and in the newspapers, claiming they were rape victims who had been able to escape the organization. These accusations were all unsubstantiated. The organization had accused me of being in relationships with seven different women, never mind sexual intercourse. I swear to God that I only kissed one of them. Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule, and some guerillas do have voluntary sexual intercourse. Those relationships could result in situations like Dr. Suleiman's, whose child was being raised by the organization.

The organization was very strict on their ban of sexual relationships. Had it been allowed, many female guerillas would have become pregnant, and how could they raise their children while living a guerilla lifestyle in the wilderness and in the mountains? If you did end up having a child, then you would be separated from them. You, your wife, and your child would all be transferred to different regions. If everyone had the freedom of having intercourse with women everywhere they were deployed, then no one would ever know whose child was whose, causing degeneracy and immorality to flourish throughout the organization.

The libel and slander on this subject was the biggest reason for my anger toward the police and military forces in Turkey. They reported that we raped women and abducted girls. Those were all fabricated lies, created to defame the organization. The Turkish people came to regard the PKK, and its guerillas, as violent cannibals who even rape their own girls.

Had these slanders been true, the organization would not have the large support and participation that it has today. Also, there would not be nearly as many Kurdish people trying to join the organization. I swear, I once witnessed a peasant deliver his own daughter to the organization.

We would sometimes stay in the villages while we patrolled the countryside, and we were trusted so much that often the peasants would leave their houses and provide security for us, just so we might sleep more comfortably. If we were to lose that trust and confidence, it would be impossible to stay with those peasants anymore. If the public did not support us, the organization would have eventually burned out, but security and honor were two of the key things that the Kurdish public expected from the organization. We occasionally stayed in the mountain homes, and there were even times when a peasant would need to go to the city and he left without worry, because he could trust his daughter and wife with us. The people openly said, “I do not need to worry about my family, because they are in good hands.”

The Turkish press would report that Cemil Bayık had six female guards whom he kept like a harem, and that he slept with those women every night. They had a photograph that supposedly proved this and showed it when they slandered him. But, actually, Mehmet Şener was the first one in the organization to have female guards, and later there were two other commanders that had them as well. One of them was Şemdin Sakık, and the other one was Osman Öcalan. Other than those two, no one else had female guards.

Actually, Cemil Bayık had two different types of guards—one being a platoon of guerillas that consisted of only men. They were all experienced and were often members from the beginning of the organization. In addition to this, he had a team of special forces that provided his close protection, and it, too, consisted of only male guerillas. Beyond never having

female guards, he would not even talk to a woman alone. A regular male battalion commander or a male Member from PKK headquarters could summon a female guerilla and speak with her alone, but I have personally seen Cemil go out of his way to only speak to women when someone else was present.

No one, especially anyone from the top of the organization, would dare engage in that kind of relationship. It was because if the senior members did, it would automatically trickle down until everyone else was doing it as well. This was the main reason I abstained from higher levels of appointment. The higher your rank, the less interaction you have with the women in the organization. At those levels, you could not chat with them for socialization or play sports with them in your free time. But as a regular guerilla, you had more opportunities to be around them and able to play volleyball and soccer together, as well as join in other social activities.

There was not any sexuality, but rather, a sincere friendship in these men's and women's mixed activities. We males would sometimes even sleep in the same room with the females for a couple of nights. Believe me, neither the women nor the men would even think about engaging in sexual intercourse during those times. I explained this to both the police and senior military commanders. "You make fools of yourselves by listening to those unfounded claims. None of the Kurds in the east would believe in those lies. Only Turks in the western parts of the country would fall for such fiction." Turkish officials had presented the organization to the Turkish public via media in such a bad light that now many Turks think the PKK guerillas live a degenerate life, though none of those things reflect the truth.

On the subject of Cemil Bayık's alleged infidelities, let's say a woman had some sort of problem and needed to talk with Comrade Cuma regarding it. Again, he would never meet with this woman alone. A couple of other male and female guerillas would accompany the woman

when she visited with him. I am quite confident that the picture of Cuma surrounded by seven or eight girls, shown in the Turkish media, is just him with a women's youth group. It is the type of photo that might be taken at the end of those meetings. The girls thought of Cemil Bayık as a father.

Even a battalion commander had many opportunities to be around women if he wanted. He could be alone with a woman, chat with her, and could also have sexual intercourse, but only if that woman desired to as well. Even with those possibilities, something like that would never happen in the organization. No one would risk their position on the possibility of such rumors.

There was also the fact that the organization had thousands of members in the south, within Iran, Syria, and Iraq, and also the north, in Turkey. These thousands of guerillas could not be watched at all times, so there will, of course, be some outliers. However, those exceptions did not mean that the rules did not matter; these kinds of relationships were strictly prohibited. You cannot blame the whole organization for mistakes made by individuals. Take the Turkish state, as an example. Can we, as an organization, blame every single Turk for mistakes made by only one or two members of their security forces?

The women in the organization have always been a step ahead of the men. Many of the rights given to women, have not yet been granted to men. Sometimes, male comrade guerillas joke with one another saying, "I wish I had been born a woman." Let's say there were a bunch of men watching TV in the ward, and later a woman joined them. Believe me, none of the men could watch TV in a relaxed position by stretching their legs or getting comfortable when a woman was present, even if they were a superior of that woman. We were more relaxed toward one another, when there was not a woman among us. The same thing also went for the women.

They were more comfortable in how they acted when they were together. Also, you could make jokes to a man, but never to a woman!

No matter what is said, Kurdish women are more free and autonomous today, because of the initiatives that Apo and the PKK created and enforced. The organization attached a great importance to women. They had private schools that were completely separate from the men's. One of those schools was located in the Kandil region of Iraq, and they got special training while they were there. While the women were being trained at those schools, the men undertook all the chores, such as cooking, washing, and cleaning. There was such great responsibility given to women guerillas within the organization.

### **THE BETRAYAL OF ŞEMDIN SAKIK**

Now, back to where I left off. As I mentioned previously, we were going to begin our military council meeting without Comrade Cuma, because he was in Iran. Unfortunately, the Turkish military started a land operation against us even before we began the meeting. This campaign was similar to the one in 1997. The Turkish army would bombard us from the north, while the Peshmerga did the same from the south. They believed they would inflict a heavy blow to the PKK with this tactic, but luck was with us. The Peshmerga had learned its lesson from the recent defeat we had handed them and had not dared to join this military operation with the Turkish army. At the same time, the Turkish security forces had received a major blow from us in the Zagros and Metina Fields. When they reached Metina, they realized that the Peshmerga forces were not positioned to fight, but they had withdrawn instead. The only Peshmerga forces in the area had been positioned on top of hills nearby. Barzani had done this, so as to not offend Turkey. They did not even fight against us. As soon as the Turkish military realized how the

situation was, they also withdrew. The organization's military council had been scattered to different regions before this operation was started, because of how risky it was to keep them all in the same place during battle. Around the beginning of June, the operation had failed, the troops were withdrawn, and our council members were able to come together again in Metina.

The meetings normally lasted around 15 days, but this time it was longer. They started in the mornings every day, and lasted until the evening. However, that year our meeting times coincided with the FIFA World Cup, and the guerillas wanted to watch the games. Because many of the games were played both during the morning and the afternoon, no one was able to concentrate on the issues that were being discussed. As a result, the senior officials postponed the meeting for fifteen days. They said, "Okay, watch the games, but you will be staying here longer than expected." Everyone agreed with the schedule change. Once the games and meeting were over, I was assigned to a region located between the Haftanin region and Cudi Mountain.

As I stated before, Barzani first promised to side with Turkey against the PKK in the operation that took place in 1998, but later did not keep that promise. Due to this betrayal, Turkey had an issue of trust with Barzani's management in Iraq. To fix the trust issues, Barzani handed Şemdin Sakık over to the Turkish security forces. His actions were smart, since by handing over Şemdin to Turkey, he fixed both his relations with the country and rescued himself from the pressure that was coming from the organization concerning Şemdin's extradition. The Turkish media outlets broadcasted this as "Şemdin Sakık was captured by the Turkish security forces." They even said, "Special forces caught Şemdin after tracking him by helicopters, while he was travelling from one region to another." There was not an iota of truth to that story.

Şemdin had revealed many secret details about the organization. He told them where Apo was hiding, how the camp field was being protected, etc. His statements to the security

forces were not only limited to that information, but he also provided the details about the number of camps the organization had, where they were located, how many guerillas were staying in those camps, and which paths the guerillas were using to cross the border from Iraq to Turkey. These were not just speculation. His official statements were delivered to the organization, but I do not know by what means they were delivered. However, this often happened. About a week after a runaway was captured by security forces, the organization would obtain the statements they had given. I cannot say for sure whether the informant was a police officer, prosecutor, or judge, but we definitely obtained these statements somehow. Turkish security forces were able to force Apo to leave Syria, after the statements Şemdin Sakik had provided.

In his statement to security forces, Sakik said, “Even if you were able to destroy every single guerilla in Turkey, Apo will recruit new ones. This will continue as long he stays in his safe haven at Damascus.” He had even used such a phrase as, “Apo is so good at persuading and influencing that he could make guerillas out of stone if you killed all of his fighters. Therefore, your main target needs to be where he stays in Damascus. Once you clear him from there, you should target Botan, because the inner circle of the organization stays there. Although the military headquarters is located in Zap, the Administration of the guerillas in the northern provinces are controlled from Botan, which can be compared to a power distribution unit. If you want to dismantle the organization, head toward those two areas with both barrels.”

It was not long after Semdin’s statements that the Turkish military began focusing on our units at Botan. This was proof that Şemdin had given up many secretive details about the organization. When this was realized, Comrade Cemal (Murat Karayilan) was transferred to

another region and Bahoz Erdal was assigned to Botan, to lead the organization's fight against the Turkish military instead. I was in the Haftanin region back then.

As soon as Apo was forced out of Damascus, the Turkish military started vast land and air attacks against our forces at Botan, just as Şemdin had suggested. This was no ordinary military operation. Most of these operations would last ten to 15 days, but this time, they did indeed come to destroy us. The campaign lasted for fifty days and they used heavy operational tactics; simultaneously attacking from the air and the land with frequent bombardments.

It was very obvious that Şemdin had provided them with the coordinates of strategic locations, because their fighter jets were bombing locations where our commanders were hiding. For example, the place where Comrade Cemal was staying was hit first by fighter jets, and then sieged by Turkish land forces. The soldiers would never be able to conduct such pinpoint attacks, if the details had not been provided by the traitor Şemdin.

During this battle, we lost 17 comrades, but the Turkish security forces had also suffered heavy losses. Our comrades had managed to gather some cryptographic radios from the Turkish soldiers we had killed. Using these radios, they were able to listen to the conversations of the enemy commanders, and learn their tactics and plans about the operation. During these talks, some of the Turkish generals even suggested using chemical weapons to kill Murat Karayılan and his guerillas. The generals were arguing about using chemical bombs, because the person who would determine the fate of the organization, after Apo, was Murat Karayılan, and he was trapped there. After a long discussion, they ended up not carrying out this plan, because some of the generals objected due to the risks associated with chemical warfare.

Retrieving the radios from the soldiers' bodies had been a real boon. We now knew most every single detail about their tactics; where the Turkish army would be attacking; which areas



did not have many soldiers, etc. Once the risks were weighed, the guerillas found a possible escape route from the hill where the Turkish commanders had positioned themselves. Indeed, using this route, Murat Karayılan and the guerillas were able to make their escape. When the security forces figured out that our forces had gotten passed them, they began to track them with helicopters and picked up their trail in the foothills near Hereko Mountain.

Knowing that Murat and his guerillas were in the area, they deployed all their soldiers and rangers. During this clash, five personal bodyguards of Murat Karayılan were martyred. Because he had lost his guards, Murat Karayılan began to fight directly with the enemy himself. During the fight, two rangers shot and severely wound him. As soon as the other guerillas noticed that Murat had been wounded, they positioned themselves around him and used their own bodies to guard him from the bullets coming from the rangers. In the end, Murat Karayılan was taken out of the area of battle, but was badly wounded.

Murat's guerillas immediately informed the other units in the region that Cemal was seriously wounded, and must be taken out of the area at all costs. One platoon of guerillas then engaged in a suicide/self-sacrifice mission. They had attacked the perimeter of the siege by directly going over the soldiers and rangers, and some of them were able to reach our force inside, but most of them lost their lives. Nearly ninety percent of our comrades lost their lives during this mission. But they were able to demoralize the Turkish soldiers who had become anxious because of the suicide mission, and so lifted the siege. In the end, our brave comrades were able to rescue Karayılan from the enemy, and from death.

## **APO LEAVES SYRIA**

It was either September or October of 1998 when Apo delivered a speech over the radio. “My comrades, be prepared against our enemies. There are tough and stressful days ahead of us.” Back then, we listened to the cryptographic radio broadcasts of the Turkish security forces and found they had deployed thousands of Turkish soldiers to the Turkey-Syrian border. These Turkish soldiers were positioned within the cities of Hatay, Antep, and Mardin. In addition to that, Ankara was conducting intense diplomatic negotiations with the authorities of many foreign countries. So, both the warning given by Apo over the radio and the deployment of Turkish soldiers along the Syrian border caused us to acknowledge that trouble was soon coming. But we were never certain whether or not Turkey would run the risk of attacking Bashar Assad in Syria.

However, Syria could not handle the pressure for very long, because Turkey had the backing of international powers, and Syria did not have the strength to counteract the international consortium alone. Russia and Iran were the only two countries that supported Syria back then, and Russia was in a chaotic situation because of its economic crisis. So, Russia was not even in a position to raise its voice against the international consortium and, in fact, ended up turning a blind eye to Syria, for its own sake.

While we prepared ourselves for the worst possible outcome, we heard that Apo left Damascus on October 8th. This was the first time we had encountered such a problem. Of course, Apo had left Damascus many times to visit several European countries to establish diplomatic relationships. During 1987 and 1988, he began a tour in Greece and traveled from there to many other European countries in order to conduct interviews with senior officials. However, this time, on October 8, 1998, we all knew that he was leaving Syria for good. The

guerillas in the region were notified by the senior officials that, “We will prepare ourselves for war against those enemies!”

Because the Greek Parliament had officially invited Apo to stay in Greece, it was the first place he went after Syria. As soon as word got out that Apo was in Greece, the United States began to put pressure on the Greeks to extradite him to the Turks. The Greeks could not take the pressure for long. In the meantime, the Russian Duma Assembly made a decision to harbor Apo inside Russia, so he was transferred there by Greek intelligence.

Now, the U.S. put pressure on Russia to extradite Apo. Madeleine Albright was the head of the State Department back then. In 1998, Russia was suffering from a serious economic problem. The United States, taking advantage of the situation Russia found itself in, made an agreement (most probably economic) with Russia in return for Apo’s deportation. Russia cracked under the pressure, and he was transferred to Italy. After that, Germany asked to have Apo transferred from Italy, because there was a warrant issued by the German courts. The Italians had actually asked the Germans to take Apo, but the German government was not interested in him at all. Because of this, Apo was stuck in Italy for a long while and applied for political asylum there. Even though he remained in Italy, he was still in contact with other governments. On top of that, our administration in Iraq, and representatives in Europe, were visiting Apo regularly. The Italians allocated a house for Apo in Rome and personally provided his security.

During that time, Apo declared a ceasefire. He addressed both the Europeans and the Turks. “You have always asked for a solution through negotiation and dialogue. Now, here I am in Europe. Our organization is ready for a solution through negotiation. We are ready to lay down our weapons. Let’s solve this problem around the table.” No one had taken Apo’s efforts

for peace seriously, during at that time, but meanwhile, the senior executives of the organization were preparing our upper-level commanders for the worst-case scenario. They informed us that, by the end of the process, Apo was going to be extradited to the Turks. Unsurprisingly, that was exactly what happened. After staying in Italy for a while, he was sent to the Netherlands. Dutch officials sent him back to Greece from there. In Greece, Apo was not even allowed to leave the plane at first, because the Greeks were fearful of the pressure that would come from the United States. So, he was forced to go yet to another country. After spending a couple days in Athens, Apo was sent to Kenya and was housed in the Greek Embassy in Nairobi. From there, the next step of the plan was for him to be transferred to Nelson Mandela's country, South Africa. In the end, though, he was arrested in Kenya and delivered to Turkey.

As soon as they heard Apo had been arrested, the senior officials, Murat Karayılan, Duran Kalkan, and Osman Öcalan, went to Cemil Bayık and said, "Comrade, the management of our organization should not be handed over to new comrades. Our situation is too dire!" They wanted Cemil to take control of the organization in Apo's absence. It was for this reason that Cemil Bayık was appointed president of the council of the 6th congress.

The 6th congress placed the blame of Apo's arrest on the European representatives of the PKK, because they had mapped out the plans before he had even left Damascus. Supposedly, our representatives had met with European officials and arranged political asylum for Apo. Through their agreement, Apo would supposedly be able to stay in Europe without any problems. When Apo did encounter problems in Europe, we soon realized that nothing had been arranged properly. Therefore, the congress decided to arrest the European management of the organization. New members of a European management team were quickly appointed. Murat Karayılan even travelled to Europe to meet with these newly appointed officials and even

conducted parleys with state authorities in Germany, England, France, Italy, and the Netherlands. He also visited other extensions of the PKK in Europe. The political structure of the organization was not at all like that of the guerillas. They were seriously demoralized and despaired over Apo's arrest. They did not have the proper mentality but bemoaned, "Apo has been arrested. Our struggle is over, and now the organization will soon fall apart." While Murat Karayılan was visiting in Europe, he was able to motivate these brokenhearted, patriotic Kurds.

Iran was the first foreign power that tried to take advantage of the chaos within the organization. Iran had connections and political relations with the senior management until that time, and the organization was in regular contact with Iranian officials. But when Apo was arrested, those officials communicated directly with the commander of the female forces of the organization, without the permission of headquarters. Iran was a sneaky and dangerous state. They knew the structure and hierarchy of the organization, even better than Turkey did, and they prepared quite an intelligent plan. By infiltrating the commanders of the female forces, they were trying to capture the attention of one of the controlling structures in the organization. The female force was the most important force in the PKK, and that is why Iran wanted to contact them directly. They were going to try and take control of the organization by buying off the senior members of the female force.

Unfortunately, some senior officials of the female forces accepted their heinous invitation, and traveled to Tehran to meet with those people. In the meeting that took place before they went on the trip to Iran, the female guerillas argued, "We are only committed to Apo. No one except him can tell us what to do, and with whom to speak." Somehow, the information regarding the Iranian invitation was leaked to Cemil Bayık, and he became frustrated when he was told that Iran wanted to get in contact with our female force, without first letting the

organization know about it. He immediately sent a representative to Iran to deliver a harsh response. “This organization has senior management. If you want to ask something of the PKK, you can only ask us. Do not ask the members in the lower echelons of the organization!”

Because our organization was struggling back then, the female guerillas who visited Iran were not punished. Nevertheless, we knew that at the first opportunity, Cuma would make them pay for what they had done.

Some people argued that the fight between the Turks and the Kurds would have ended after Apo’s arrest, if he had broadcast a message through the media saying, “Our armed struggle is at an end, and from now on, we will only continue to defend the rights of Kurdish people through political means.” As I mentioned before, once Apo was incarcerated, he continued to deliver instructions to our senior officials through the connection that was provided by the Americans. All of his instructions were implemented, word for word, even though a few were not welcomed by some of the guerillas. For example, during this term, nearly 80 percent of the PKK guerillas were withdrawn from Turkish territories, because Apo had ordered it. I remember his orders very well. It was August 2, 1999 and the guerilla forces in Turkey were ordered to leave their positions and retreat to the camps inside Iraq and Syria. The dialogue between Turkey and the PKK had begun the previous June. I do not know what kind of assurances were given to the PKK. All I knew was that our forces were supposed to leave the Turkish territories immediately.

Once these instructions were received, some of the guerillas raised their voices against the senior management of the organization. “If we are withdrawing from Turkey, have any of you heard what kind of assurances we will get in return for what we are doing?” They were right for worrying, because it is very difficult to recapture areas, once you withdraw.

Although there was some discontentment with this order, almost all of the provinces and regions obeyed it, and withdrew their forces to the south. The organization and Turkey had signed some sort of pact. According to this pact, the Turkish security forces would not attack the PKK forces as they withdrew from Turkey. The organization implemented this decision, despite resistance from some groups within the guerillas. The Turkish security forces ended up not even complying with the rules of the ceasefire to which they had agreed. While the guerilla forces were withdrawing from Turkey, they were trapped in tank ambushes, and almost four hundred militants were martyred. Even with this atrocity, the organization did not allow any missions to be conducted against the military forces in retaliation.

The forces in the north were directed to the southern line in Iraq. There was another problem in the south, awaiting the guerillas. An intensive force had been amassed there. After Apo had been arrested, hundreds of Syrian Kurds, Iranian Kurds, and our forces from Turkey had come to this spot. The camp capacity was not sufficient for such a large amount of people, and we had to spread into the fields of Barzani and the YNK, who, at first, said nothing against us being there. There was a place called Karadağ between the YNK and Iran, and we set up new camps there as well.

### **THE EMERGENCE OF SELF-SACRIFICE (SUICIDE) TEAMS**

The commander of Botan Field, Bahoz Erdal, now visited our region of Haftanin in February of 1999. Apo had not yet been arrested at that time, but the senior officials of the organization were expecting it to happen soon. Bahoz was meeting with the guerillas and providing political and ideological training. We left our winter camps in March, because spring comes earlier to the south than it does to the north.

One day, a comrade was watching the news around 4:30 a.m. and saw that Apo had been arrested and was being flown to Turkey. He came directly to my room and informed me of what he had heard. I asked him, “Comrade, did you hear correctly?” He said all the TV channels were broadcasting the story. I began to watch the news, and around 8:00 a.m., Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit arranged a press briefing and declared to the world that Apo had, in fact, been arrested.

When the rest of the guerillas saw the news story, the camp became chaotic. The senior members, including myself, were not able to calm down everyone. It made the regular guerillas wonder about the future of the organization but panic did not spread to the members of the higher leadership. They remained calm because even though Apo was incarcerated, there was a Presidency Council that would take over decision-making.

The Presidency Council had been put into place before Apo left Damascus. It was created to lead the organization in his absence. It appeared that he had thought about all the possible probabilities, including his own arrest. The council was composed of Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, Murat Karayılan, Nizamettin Taş, and a few female guerillas.

Although the commanders had prepared themselves for the possibility of Apo’s extradition to Turkey, the regular guerillas were completely blindsided by the news. Mid-level commanders, like myself, had been told regularly, “Our leader could be caught at any time, so be prepared for such a situation!” None of these possibilities were reflected to the ground guerillas, which was a mistake, because they were so upset when they heard that he’d been arrested.

Bahoz Erdal was staying in our company during that period, and he played an active role in pacifying the disgruntled guerillas. He organized three to four different meetings daily to meet and talk with them about the situation. The ground guerillas were not very convinced,



though, no matter what he said or did. Most of them openly indicated that they wanted to conduct suicide missions. Almost everyone was writing reports, trying to prove why he or she was the best to engage in a self-sacrifice mission. The atmosphere was very tense. Two guerillas from my battalion even set themselves on fire by pouring oil over their bodies. They did this simply because I would not allow them to cross into Turkey for a self-sacrifice mission. They gave the commanders a serious message. “If you do not let us engage in self-sacrifice missions, we will all burn ourselves alive.” First aid was provided immediately, and, thankfully, they did not die but had serious burns all over their bodies.

We were expecting to receive a message from leadership regarding what to do about the out of control guerillas. As I said before, neither the ideology nor the policies of the organization encouraged us to target Turkish civilians. We had one target at which to discriminately aim, which was the system and the management within the security forces. With Apo’s incarceration, the guerillas began to criticize the PKK’s peaceful policies toward the Turkish public. They began openly saying, “We should kill every single Turk we see, whether civilian or not. We Kurds cannot dream living under one state as the brothers of Turks any longer.” The situation became very severe, and the Presidency Council members at headquarters were delivering speeches, via radio, to two or three regions a day just, to try and calm down the guerillas. “No one should act on their own! Control your emotions and dull your hunger for vengeance until we instruct you on what to do!”

I remember Cemil Bayık telling the press, “The whole world should know that we will not act according to the normal rules of war anymore. We no longer recognize any of the world’s rules on the matter.” The reason for our distrust for the world came from the fact that many countries were involved in Apo’s arrest, including Israel, Russia, Greece, Kenya, and the

United States, all playing a part in it. Only the Prime Minister of Italy, Massimo D'alema, tried to protect Apo. When the request was made to hand over Apo, Massimo tried to resist, but over time he had no strength left to resist. Even Russia and Germany would not dare keep Apo in their countries. That is why Cuma made the statement, "Now that you all have stabbed us in the back, do not complain about us applying terrorists' tactics. Sooner or later, whatever country had something to do with Apo's arrest will suffer the consequences."

After this press release, the professional suicide (self-sacrifice) units were established for the first time in the history of the organization. Many comrades voluntarily submitted applications to be part of the suicide missions. The organization only accepted three hundred applicants out of thousands of applications. These soon-to-be suicide mission members were all from the higher ranks, and experienced guerillas. Although the selections were complete, the organization did not want to carry out these missions but rather wanted to continue planning and carefully preparing.

Meanwhile, the Kurds living in Europe and Turkey were protesting Apo's incarceration. There were those who set themselves on fire; who set the institutions of the state on fire, and who damaged public property. These civilian Kurds were acting on their own without any kind of guidance or instruction from the organization, which did not react through emotion. Our senior management cold-bloodedly drafted several plans to carry out against Turkey. The organization was doing two things at once: training new self-sacrifice mission candidates, and deploying the guerilla squads who were already prepared to perform missions against the security forces within Turkey.

There were forces ready to conduct missions in the Dersim and Amed regions. These forces were instructed to not start their mission until the self-sacrifice teams were trained. Soon,

many guerilla missions began to occur across Turkey again. The organization's first suicide attack, against the senior executives of the KDP in Dohuk, Iraq, was performed during this period, because the KDP also took part in the consortium that aided in the arrest of Apo.

In March of 1999, another force of three hundred guerillas, gathered in central headquarters for training to perform missions in foreign countries. Around the middle of April, the groups began to be transferred to their final destinations. The plan called for them to be spread through several countries. There would be a group traveling to Kenya, a group sent to Israel, one sent to Greece, one to Russia, and another group sent to the United States. These guerillas were instructed to conduct missions against the elected officials, rather than the police or the military, within their destination countries. Moreover, they were specifically instructed to target the heads of state and the heads of state departments as much as possible. It was still not clear what sort of mission was to be carried out against Turkey, since Ankara had not yet declared how to approach the situation with Apo. We were not yet sure if the death penalty or a life sentence was going to be given to Apo.

Many of the suicide squad members arrived at their final destinations within Greece, Russia, and several European countries and waited for orders that told them to carry out their missions. There were three countries that were top priority targets: Israel, Greece, and Kenya. Israel was our first target since the MOSSAD had provided the instant intelligence about Apo's location. They knew even before the CIA. Greece was high on the list because they had promised the organization to grant political asylum to Apo but did not keep their promise. Even worse, they forcefully sent Apo to Kenya. These things made Greece our second priority target. Kenya had used its SWAT team to conduct a raid at the Greek Embassy, while Apo was staying

there, and their goal was to kill Apo during the clash. They knew that the people who were protecting Apo were armed, and that a firefight could result in his death.

The Kenyans main plan was to break into the embassy, agitate the people with their weapons, and then kill Apo and his bodyguards, during the ensuing argument. Apo had foreseen this, and ordered his bodyguards and the Greek intelligence service officers, to not fire when the SWAT teams entered the embassy building. He said, "They have something else on their minds. Do not be provoked by whatever it is that they say." Because of Kenya's heinous plot, they were our third target.

Even though we were going to get even with those three countries first, the United States was still a primary target. America had not backstabbed us quite like Israel had. Rather than providing intelligence information to the Turkish security forces, the United States put political pressure on the countries that were harboring Apo. Some European states also had a part in this scheme, and the organization had not forgotten this, but our priorities were already determined.

Meanwhile, a radical perspective began to develop with some members of the organization. There were many senior executives that began to say things like, "If Turkey set its mind on the complete destruction of our organization, then we should use whatever means necessary and available to counteract them." Even the idea of using chemical weapons against military posts and civilian crowds within big metropolises began to be heard regularly. There were also plans to poison the drinking water of military posts located in the countryside by putting poison into the pipelines. The senior leadership of the organization rejected these ideas. "Comrades! We told you that we would not obey the rules of war from now on. The situation is not that far out of control yet, but if the Turks go further and show a willingness to annihilate us, we may have to look at those sorts of tactics."

While Apo was in prison, he contacted the organization around the end of May, and ordered, “Do not execute any of the missions that you have been planning so far!” Once again the Americans provided the means of communication. This news reached us when there were many suicide attacks occurring within Turkey. On top of that, the Iranian Kurds had rebelled and were sending messages to us. “If the organization gives us the green light, we will cross the Turkish border and occupy the city of Van!” Apo’s incarceration had also angered the Syrian Kurds, and they, too, began rebelling. Under Apo’s instructions, the organization suspended all of its planned missions, including the ones that were supposed to be carried out by the self-sacrifice teams sent to foreign countries.

Many of the self-sacrifice units had already carefully chosen who their target would be: president, prime minister, deputies, etc. They were only waiting for the final approval of the organization. Also, many groups of guerillas had been placed within Turkey to carry out other missions. While we formally had to be discriminate about our targets; being allowed to target only security forces, we were finally granted the right to kill anyone working with any kind of state institution. Basically, we were able to kill anyone working for the Turkish state but no civilians. It could be a teacher, bank accountant, deputy, or mayor. In the end, it did not matter, because we had to cancel the operations and planned attacks, according to Apo’s instructions.

Some of the self-sacrifice units, who had been sent abroad, were arrested on their way back to Iraq. In fact, some of the groups that were returning from Russia are still incarcerated within Armenian prisons. Because of these arrests, the management of the organization informed the other units positioned inside Europe and in the United States, to not return, but live normal lives as sleeper cells. These guerillas were not going to engage in any kind of armed

action but instead would live like normal citizens until they received new orders from the organization.

Because of the new contact with Apo, the organizational leadership and guerillas finally calmed down a bit. Turkey's approach with Apo had become quite clear. They were going to keep him, but they were not going to apply capital punishment. The Americans had guaranteed Apo's safety to the organization.

The Turks thought an internal struggle for power would ensue upon Apo's arrest. They felt that many senior commanders would race for leadership and would end up fighting each other. In the end, they thought the organization would be vanquished by its own internal clashes. When the Turkish officials decided to keep Apo, they had not considered the level of outcry and protests that came from the Kurds in Turkey and abroad. In fact, even the head of the state Department of the United States made a statement that said, "We were not expecting this much reaction to Apo's arrest." This suggests that even the Americans had not considered the potential "fall out." According to their way of thinking, the Kurds had already been divided into four different sections—Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria—and thought of these four parts as having their own leaders.

What they had not expected was the power of Apo and the organization within those four areas. The Kurds in Iran were initially under the control of the KDP; however, the KDP began to lose its power over the Iranian Kurds in the middle of the 1980s. The Kurds in Iran embraced the control and authority of the PKK as a whole. Similarly, the KDP also had controlled the Kurds inside Syria. This situation changed over time, until the organization's status had grown to the point that the Kurds showed more commitment to Apo and the PKK than even the Kurds in Turkey.

After Apo was arrested, hundreds of Syrian and Iranian Kurds rushed to our camps in Iraq to volunteer for the self-sacrifice missions. Turkey and America were surprised at the support but no more than the organization, which had no idea that the Kurds would show such a reaction against Apo's incarceration.

Topal Nasir was the commander of the self-sacrifice teams. Under Nasir's command, these teams performed many missions within Turkey and inside territories controlled by the KDP. Apo was informed about the existence of these units while he was in prison and became extremely angry, saying, "These missions do not align with the policies of our organization. Why was such a force created?" Topal Nasir lashed out against Apo's criticism, and during one of the Presidency Council meetings he had said, "You tricked me into doing this, so as to get rid of me. You established this unit yourselves, and then appointed me as commander. You even made use of me and my men for the missions that were to be conducted against Turkey and north Iraq, and now you want to get rid of me! The only reason you have for arresting me is because of Apo's criticism against the creation of the unit!" After this speech, Topal Nasir was incarcerated.

### **THE CASE OF SLAV AND RUBAR**

I was still staying in the Haftanin camp when all of these things happened. A month and a half before Apo was arrested, two incarcerated guerillas, a man and a woman, escaped from a Turkish prison and reached our camp's location....with a baby! The female guerilla said the baby was hers, and she had given birth while she was in prison. I did not know her real name, but her nickname was Slav. She had joined the organization in 1989. The nickname of the male guerilla was Rubar.

Since they were experienced comrades, we were happy to see them among us again. But, even though we were pleased that they were able to escape, we put them under preliminary investigation, to find out the truth of the matter, and make certain that they really had escaped from prison and were not simply released by security agents to work as informants. No matter how many investigations to which they were subjected, they did not appear to be hiding anything, and this led us all to believe they really were prison escapees.

They told us that they had gotten married while in the prison. We asked them, “How did you make this child? The male and female cells were located in different places.” They replied, “Comrades, we accompanied the security forces for months and were always out in the field to assist them in finding guerilla routes into Turkey, the locations of our ammunition dumps, and other similar topics. Sometimes, they left the two of us alone, and that is how we managed to have the child.”

Because Apo’s incarceration had taken such high priority, the investigation into Slav and Rubar was completed earlier than it normally would have been. We believed that what they told us was the truth. Also, Turkey seemed to act more professionally back then. There was news being broadcast that two PKK prisoners had escaped from Şırnak Prison, and the military were searching for them everywhere. However, these news stories were part of the game being played by the Turkish intelligence agencies.

After the investigation, Slav and Rubar were assigned to two different regions. Long after this incident, I visited Slav’s company, I believe, in the month of March. The baby she claimed was hers was constantly crying. The noise bothered me, and I was unable to get any work done, so I asked one of the female guerillas to take the baby to her mother to be breastfed. Slav took the baby about twenty meters away and began breastfeeding her, but the baby



continued to cry. This constant distraction made me angry, and I said, “Why is she still crying even though she’s being breastfed?” It was about this time that I began to be suspicious about their story. I seriously wondered whether the baby really was hers or not. Also, another thought struck me while I was at that camp. The baby seemed calmer when she was around the other women guerillas, more so than when she was around her supposed mother. The baby actually cried when she was being held by Slav, and I could not make sense of this strange occurrence.

In April of 1999, the Turkish military raided our camp’s location in the Haftanin region, while we were still there. Before they attacked us, these soldiers had attacked our camps in the Cudi region. I did not know it back at the then, but Slav’s husband, Rubar, martyred two of our comrades and ran away before this operation even started. He went to the security forces and informed them about the other camp locations within the region.

I confronted Slav as soon as the news of her husband’s betrayal reached us. We asked her, “Comrade, your husband surrendered himself to the security forces. Were you ever suspicious of his behaviors while the two of you were in prison?” She responded, “No, I was not, comrade. I do not understand why he would do something like that!” At this point, we were yet to be suspicious of Slav.

The soldiers reached the place where our female comrades were staying, but there was not a serious threat yet. It was then that Slav took the baby that she claimed was her own and strangled it to death. When the other female guerillas noticed what she had done, they asked her why she did it. She said, “The soldiers will be here soon. If she cries, they will easily find our location. I sacrificed my own flesh just to protect you, comrades! I could not take the risk of you all being killed because of my baby.”

The female guerillas were gullible and believed what Slav said. In fact, they all hugged and told her, “Comrade! What a devoted guerilla you are! You killed your baby with your own hand just to protect the organization. Not every one of us could do that!” I was in the male guerilla campground when this happened, and my suspicion of Slav grew as soon as I heard of this incident. I met with the battalion commander and requested that there be an immediate investigation of the incident. The battalion commander rejected my request, because Slav was being hailed a great hero by just about everyone, for what she had done. “What’s going on, Deniz? Are you aware of something that we are not?” I insisted and barely convinced him. “Comrade, create an investigation committee, and it will find the truth of the matter!”

Two female guerillas and I were appointed as members of the investigation committee. In fact, one of the females was Sozdar Avesta, who is currently the president of the KCK Executive Council. We had Slav transferred from her company to ours and placed her in jail. I immediately cut to the chase, saying, “Slav, you and your husband did not escape from the prison. Admit it! Do not waste our time!” We were in quite a stressful dilemma during our investigation. Slav was from Şırnak, Uludere, and there were probably dozens of her family and relatives serving the organization, and now we were accusing her with a serious crime.

No matter how hard I tried, she would not admit to anything. I went to the female company and asked their commander if there were any female guerillas that had raised children before joining the organization. We checked all the CV’s and found that there were two. I called both of them, saying, “I want to ask you something personal, but please do not get the wrong idea! You were both married and had children before joining our struggle, right?” One of them said that she had two children. I said perfect! “Comrade, let’s say there is a mom that breastfeeds her baby and the baby dies. Would the milk in the breasts bother the woman because

it is not being used?” She replied, “There is not a woman who would be able to endure such pain. The milk has to be removed from the breasts.” I thanked them and immediately headed back to the investigation room.

When I arrived back where the investigation was going on I said, “Slav, I am going to ask you something, and you must tell the truth this time. How many days has it been since you sacrificed your baby?” She replied, “It has been six days, comrade.” I again asked, “Slav, except for the emotional trauma of killing your own baby, did you have any physical problems?” She said, “Comrade, I have been emotionally devastated, but I do not have any sickness, I am fine!” I said, “Slav, you are lying to us.” I then asked one of the female commission members to take Slav into one of the empty rooms and check if she had milk in her breasts. Sozdar was moon-eyed from shock and asked me: “What kind of question is this, Deniz? What does it have to do with the investigation?” I told her just to be patient.

The female guerilla checked Slav’s breasts and returned to the investigation area. She told us, “Comrade, there is nothing coming out of her breasts and, in fact, her body does not even have signs that she gave birth.” Sozdar looked at me and started to laugh. “How do you know such things about women?” she asked. I replied, “I did what you were supposed to. I consulted the female comrades, and they told me to check the breasts to verify what she was saying.”

In my life, I had never raised my hands against a woman before, but when the truth was revealed, I beat Slav badly. “You will either tell us the truth or I will beat you until you are dead. Whose child was she? Are you an informant? Who sent you here? What is your duty among us? You will tell us everything, Slav!” I said. Of course, she was very scared. She had never thought we would suspect her, especially after she sacrificed the baby.

After my severe beatings, she confessed that the baby actually belonged to a peasant family in one of the villages outside the city of Şırnak. The father was not at home when they had kidnapped the baby. Slav, Rubar, and a couple of Turkish agents broke into the house, killed the mother and the grandfather, and then left the house with the child. After that, they created the story of being married and running away from the prison. The security forces mentally prepared Rubar and Slav before their release. They prepared a list of answers to investigation questions that they may face when they reached our camps. They were professionally trained before they came back to us, and that is why we could not discover anything from the initial investigations.

“Slav, so you are an agent working for the security forces, and you were able to infiltrate us, but why did you kill that innocent baby?” Sick from fear, she replied, “Rubar ran away much earlier than planned. Some of my comrades began to think that I would run away like he had by killing a couple of them so I had to gain their trust back somehow. I thought killing the baby would help me do that.”

I said, “What was your duty? Why did the military send you here? Give me a concrete answer and do not tell me that you are just here to collect information about the organization. With such professional planning, you must have been tasked with something quite important.”

She gave me the names of two senior PKK members. One of them was her own uncle, an experienced comrade with the rank of commander. The other one was a deputy of the PKK Assembly who was later martyred in a clash in Gabar in 2008, by the name of Serif. Both of them were staying in Botan, and they were weak in an ideological sense, but they were good fighters. Slav said, “My duty was to kill them.” I was surprised and asked her: “Why did they want you to kill these two people, since there are many other senior officials and battalion

commanders present in this region? Did they explain why they chose those two?” She told me, “Comrade, I honestly do not know the reason. The Turks gave us two small tubes of cyanide to poison the company with whom we were staying, if those two could not be killed. They told us to mix the cyanide with the company’s food, and then to run away.” I asked, “Where is the poison now?” “Comrade, Rubar had it with him. He was going to give one of them to me, but we did not have an opportunity to meet after we were assigned to different regions.”

“Slav, the security forces must have given you a few other targets to destroy. Tell me what the others were.” She said, “Comrade, there was also the peasant Kurds at the Maxmur camp. Our last resort was to go to that camp with the baby and settle there. Once we were accepted by the group, we were going to convince them to return to Turkey.”

This made everything crystal clear, and the organization was probably going to execute Slav. I thought a quick death would be too good for her. In my mind she needed to suffer for a long time, because of what she had done. I was still tearing my hair over the fact that she had strangled the baby, so I asked her again, “Tell me Slav, how did you kill the baby?” “Comrade, I strangled her with a scarf,” she replied, crying. “Which of your hands did you use to kill her?” I asked. She indicated her right hand and said, “I pressed the scarf on her mouth with this hand.” “Slav, stop crying and put your right hand on that rock!” I said. The female comrades that were part of the investigation council panicked, and asked me: “Comrade, what are you going to do?” I replied, “Just be patient.”

I always carried a walking stick with me back then and on the bottom edge of the stick there was sharp piece of iron. We called this stick a “seke.” As soon as Slav laid her hand on the rock, I hit her hand with that sharp piece of iron with all my strength. I think that a few of the metacarpals were broken by my swing, and she began to weep. “Do not be upset about your

broken hand, Slav. You'll be dead in a few days anyway. Even though it's bad, I can understand how you could kill the mother and grandfather, but how could you kill that little baby? I wish you had killed one of us, instead of her. How could you be that cruel? Do you not have a conscience?" I asked while she cried in pain. The baby was so sweet. She had just started to stand up, and the first word she had learned was "Comrade," not even "mama" or "papa." I was so saddened by the tragedy of the situation, that I beat Slav a lot that day.

We prepared a written report of the trial and sent it to the headquarters. She was sentenced to death, and all our comrades were expecting her to be executed quite quickly. But not even a month had passed when headquarters informed us that Slav had been forgiven! I was completely shocked when I heard that.

The last time I saw Slav was either in 2004 or 2005. She was participating in an HPG Conference. Can you imagine that? She was there as a squad commander. I argued with myself that the organization had handled her too gently. She had infiltrated our organization as an agent for the Turks and committed many atrocities while doing their bidding. On top of that, she was forgiven and raised to commander! "What's going on, Slav? What are you doing at this Conference?" I asked. "Hello, comrade Deniz! I came here to see my uncle," she said. I was even more shocked by this. Her uncle was the one that the security forces had sent her to kill.

As this is being written, it is 2015, and ten years have passed. Slav could possibly be a member of the PKK leadership. Can you imagine that? One of us runs away from the organization and surrenders to the security forces, and then is sent back to us as an insider. She does unimaginable things; causes a lot of damage, and then is forgiven by the organization. This is someone whose own family would have wanted her executed, because of what she had done.

Her parents and family immigrated to the Maxmur Camp between the years of 1993 and 1994 to escape the oppression of the Turkish security forces. That family had at least ten members who had been martyred since the organization had begun. They had informed headquarters that they wanted to see their daughter dead, as soon as they heard about what she had done. "Execute her immediately! She is not our daughter anymore." Up until this point, the organization had a more professional policy than what the Turkish officials followed. By pardoning Slav, they inadvertently promoted a message of hope to old dissenters. "The organization will always welcome you back as long as you're honest."

### **THE RADICAL CHANGE IN ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY**

On August 17, 1999, a catastrophic earthquake occurred in Turkey. Thousands of people lost their lives while they were sleeping in their beds, and the survivors were under extreme hardship. When this happened, the organization made both a verbal and written statement, announcing a cease-fire so that we could help the people in the area of the earthquake. Unfortunately, the Turkish officials rejected our offer. I mentioned before that the organization never considered the civilian Turkish public as enemies. In fact, helping each other after the earthquake would have been a great opportunity, for both the organization and the Turks, to put away their long-standing hatred toward one another. We were even ready to transfer thousands of our people to take part in search and rescue activities.

During this time, we were evacuating our camps in the south, along the Turkey/Iraq border, to make space for groups that would arrive from the north, because winter was on the way. There was no possibility that the guerillas of Amed would be able to travel all the way down to our camps at Kandil and Hakurki in the inner parts of Iraq, so the organization decided

to relocate the forces that were already settled at the border to the camps located in Kandil. This would allow the forces coming from Turkey to easily settle in the emptied camps. It was during this time that my company was also relocated to Kandil.

Near the end of 1999, the organization called for an extraordinary congress. We heard that there was going to be a radical change in the strategy we used in our struggle. The guerilla forces were going to be abolished and the armed struggle was going to stop. This also, initially, called for us to retreat from regions we controlled within Turkey. Some of the comrades seriously objected to this withdrawal order. They wanted to know what was promised by Turkey in exchange for this retreat. They also had a legitimate worry about how to recapture the emptied territories, if the Turks, as they had in the past, did not keep their promises. However, that was not all. Apart from these two risks, there was also the potential that the regions the guerillas left could come under the influence of different political and ideological organizations. For example, a Dersim Field commander rejected the order of withdrawal by arguing that, "If my forces retreat now, the TIKKO or other similar Leftist organizations would capture these places." He was correct in his worries. If the PKK left the region, then TIKKO and others would gain the sympathy of the local public there, thinking, "Look, the PKK has left you alone, but we are still here to protect you against oppressors." These reasons were why the Dersim Field commander and the Erzurum State commander refused to withdraw their forces. While the rest of our forces in Turkey retreated, these two commanders stubbornly stayed where they were and ignored all the warnings that came from headquarters.

The attitudes of both commanders in Dersim and Erzurum had a negative effect on some senior executives in the south. Guerillas from our leadership gathered and declared that Apo had handed the organization over to the Turks, so they were going to establish a separate



organization to continue the fight for Kurdish rights. “Now that our organization has stopped its armed struggle, we will break away and continue the fight!” they said.

It was impossible for this group to establish an organization that was as professional as the PKK, and they knew it. However, there were people aligned with that group that could make the separation from the PKK more significant. Dr. Suleiman, Küçük Zeki, and Yılmaz were several well-known members who joined the separatists. These people had also been members of the committee at the organization’s headquarters. They had a lot of control over the guerillas in the north, since they had worked there before. They were also loved and respected by many within the organization.

There was already a competitive division between the northern forces and the southern forces. Those in the north (the guerillas who were fighting inside the borders of Turkey) were supporting each other, while those in the south (those that were fighting in Iran, Syria, and Iraq) were taking sides with one another. The three commanders that I mentioned were planning to join up with the forces in the north and then establish a new organization under a different name.

While this was happening, the organization prepared a camp in Zagros and two other camps in Hinere, for the guerillas that were retreating back south. Many of the forces in the south had already been relocated to different camps before the arrival of the northern force. The organization did not want these two forces to meet, because the southern troops had already adapted to the new process through countless meetings and ideological trainings. The northern forces were not aware of the changes yet and were just following an order. Chances were good that they would cause trouble when they learned about the radical changes in the organization’s policies. So, rather than have the southern forces be influenced by the northern ones, they had to be relocated to other camps.

My company was sent, by the organization, to the Kandil region before the northern forces arrived, because of the same reasoning. We set off from Haftanin as a whole company. However, even before we arrived at Metina, we were caught up in a tank ambush. Those were the same tanks that were placed in northern Iraq by the Turkish military in 1997. They also had built up military bases in the fields of Kanimasi, Bamerne, and Batufa. Their base in Bamerne was larger when compared to other places. There were around forty-five tanks there. The Turks placed their tanks in a line expanding between Zaho, Dohuk and Erbil. It was in this very line of tanks that we were caught up in an ambush. Eight comrades were martyred, and 13 were heavily injured. We were able to carry out all of our injured comrades, but we had to leave the martyred comrades there due to the frequent bombings by the tanks. The local guerilla forces in that region told us to continue on our trip, because they would bury our fallen comrades, when they were able.

It was a long journey, and we continued moving forward. A young man, probably in his late twenties, came up to our company as we were about to pass a point close to the Çukurca province of Hakkari. “Who are you, and where are you going?” I asked him. “Northward, to Turkey,” he replied. “Then you are going the wrong way, and mustn’t continue on this route!” I said.

We set off down the road again, and after about three hours of walking, we had a cigarette break somewhere in Iraq. I noticed that same young man had been following us all this time. I took my assistants with me, and told the rest of the company to continue walking. When he reached us, where we had waited for him, I asked, “You told us that you were going to Turkey. Why are you following us?” He replied, “I changed my mind and want to join your group instead.” I replied, “If that is true, then go find our comrades located in your region, and

they will tell you how to join us.” He insisted on joining up with us. I told flatly, “Look, we still have a long way ahead of us. We’re going to Iran, and cannot take you with us.” This did not deter him a bit, and he continued arguing with me. Since it appeared impossible to convince him to go back, I told him that I would shoot him if he did not leave. My goal was to scare him into leaving us alone, but he suddenly turned belligerent, and told me, “Who the hell are you? Do you have the heart to shoot a man?” I replied, “Do you have a death wish? Get out of here and do not ever follow us again!” I then turned and walked back to the rest of the company.

When I looked again, I saw that this crazy person was still following us, and hollered back to him, “Look, I am going to close my eyes and count to ten, and you are to get out of my sight. If you are still there when I open my eyes, I will shoot you.” I closed my eyes and started to count. I was holding an M-16, but that must not have bothered him, because when I opened my eyes, he was still looking at us from the same spot. “Did not I just tell you that I would kill you?” I angrily yelled. He replied dryly, “Who the hell are you? No one can kill me!” I was angry, and looked at the squad commander next to me. He said, “Comrade Deniz, let me kill him.” I answered, “Comrade, do not let this crazy man get to you!” After that, we set off once again.

We began moving ahead, while he laughed out loudly, saying, “If you are not a real man, then do you carrying that gun with you?” When I heard this, I got crazy, and thought, this was the last straw. In a quick instant, I turned back and shot him in the head. He fell to the ground, and I told those around me to go check to see if he were still alive. They went up to him and told me that yes, he was still alive. I said, “Raise him up, and each of you hold one of his arms!” When they had him held up, I shot him in the head one more time, and said, “Search his clothes well, and take whatever he has on him.” Following this incident, we continued our trip.

It was nearly December when we finally reached Zagros. There were two different routes that go to Kandil from Zagros. One of them went over the Zagros Mountains, and the other went through Desta Hayati (Hayat Valley), a region that was under the control of the KDP. Since it was risky to use a road that was under Barzani's control, we decided to use the route that went through the Zagros Mountains. Unfortunately, by the time we got to the foothills near the mountains, it was snowing heavily. The snow reached one-meter-high in a very short time, and it would no doubt have taken us forever to travel over the mountain, with the storm and heavy snow. To make matters worse, the organization had already banned the use of this route when it was snowing—a ban of which I was unaware at that time.

When we finally made it up the mountain, four of our comrades had frostbite on their feet. We wore thick socks and boots, but if you walk in the snow for a long time you have to be very careful, for, as moisture gets into your footwear, you must change it immediately. If you do not change into dry shoes, but continue to walk in the snow, your feet will get frostbitten. It is a very insidious injury. Unless you check your feet regularly during your travels, sometimes, you do not even know you have it until you reach a warmer spot. If you have frostbite, you might even be able to walk for nine hours, or even an entire day and not feel any pain, because of the numbness in your feet. But you will find out as soon as you enter a warmer environment, because of the pain and discomfort in your feet.

We set off at 7:00 a.m. that day, with two local pathfinder comrades, and walked until sunset. The two pathfinders were very familiar with the area, but it did not help, because of how much snow was falling. As the sunset, it became apparent that we had been travelling in a circle since morning. About that time was when our four comrades informed us of their frostbite. None of them realized that water had slowly seeped into their shoes.

We headed directly toward the guerilla company that was located in Hinere, in the Zagros Mountain, so that our comrades could be treated as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, all of them had to have their feet amputated at the ankles. To these comrades, and the ones who had been wounded in the tank ambush, I ordered, “Stay in the Hinere camp until spring. You will all join us when you have been properly treated, and your wounds have healed.” Interestingly, even though they had good reason to remain with this local group, because of their wounds, none of them wanted to do that. Since we got lost in the Zagros Mountain, our only option was to go to Kandil through Iran. This meant we had a much longer distance to travel and carrying the wounded comrades would have slowed down the rest of the group.

While our company was still at the Hinere camp, some senior officials visited. One of them was Nizamettin Taş, nicknamed Botan. I do not know the real names of the others, but their nicknames were Serhat, Küçük Zeki, and Ekrem. (Ekrem had been the person who killed the well-known torturer and Turkish military captain, Esat Okay, on a bus in Istanbul in 1988.) Botan got angry with me because we were in the Zagros Mountains during the snowy season. “Have you lost your mind, Deniz? How could you drag such a large company through the Zagros mountains during a snowstorm?” he asked. I replied, “We had two options: climb up the Zagros Mountains or go through the Hayat Plain. Not only were our pathfinders not familiar with the road that goes through the Hayat Plain, but we also did not want to encounter Barzani’s forces there. Besides that, we had a strict order to somehow get to Kandil, because there were forces coming from the north to stay where we had been located. If we stayed in our camp until winter was over, the northerners would have been left out in the cold.”

Botan ordered me, “We are traveling to Kandil now. I want you and your company to be there in a week at the most by using the path that goes beside the river.” Following these orders,

meant that they still expected us to travel on foot, despite the fact that we had so many injured comrades, and it was still snowing. I asked the guerillas in Hinere how many days it should take us to reach Kandil. They informed me that it would take at least four or five days. When I accounted for all the disadvantages we had; the injured, the weather conditions, and the length of the way, I realized that it would be impossible to take the company to Kandil on foot and, therefore, took that option off the table. Once I had that settled that in my mind, I found the person who dealt with purchasing in the Hinere camp. This comrade lived somewhere between Iran and Iraq, where most smugglers lived, and he was responsible for providing the physical needs of the camp.

I went to him and asked if he could arrange for us to have vehicles. He asked me, “What are you going to do with vehicles here?” “We need to drive to Kandil Mountain as fast as we can,” I replied. He was surprised. “Well, comrade, the organization banned the use of vehicles for transportation of guerillas! Did not you know that?” I responded with, “Never mind the ban. Just tell me whether or not you can arrange it.” When he answered that he could, I told him, “Get me fifteen trucks, and I will pay you cash now!” He got confused when he heard the number, and asked what was I going to do with that many vehicles. I explained, “I have a company with me, and we need at least fifteen trucks.” He apologized, “Comrade, if you were two or three people, then perhaps it could be arranged; I could get you a car. However, if the organization heard that I arranged fifteen trucks for you, they would most likely execute me. You’d also have to drive through Iran. If you got noticed, and then arrested by the Iranian security forces, that would cause a huge crisis for the organization.” I pleaded, “You just have to arrange the vehicles. Do not bother yourself with the risk.” He did not appear convinced at first, but after a time of thinking he said, “Okay, but I have one condition. If you get caught, or if

somebody complains, you will never say I was involved!” I assured him with, “I promise!” and then gave him ten thousand dollars to arrange for the vehicles.

I do not remember the exact number, but I think he arranged for fourteen cars and two small trucks. I had all of our troops get into the vehicles at 10:00 p.m., during the darkness of night. We hired three Iranian guides, because we did not know which roads to drive inside Iran. We needed to go through two big Iranian cities, Piranşehir and Urmiye, before we reached our final destination in Kandil.

All sixteen vehicles were driving as a convoy. Even though we sometimes passed by Iranian military posts, none of them stopped us. Nevertheless, there was an Iranian border control post, just before reaching Kandil. As we passed by this station, the Iranian soldiers stopped the first car in the convoy, so, we all had to stop while they inquired as who we were. The Iranian guides were our means of communication in this situation, and I told them to tell the soldiers, openly, that we were PKK guerillas and we were heading to Kandil. The Iranian soldiers harshly told them that we could not use the road, since it was forbidden. I looked at our Iranian guide and asked him at most how many Iranian soldiers would be present at the station. “Well comrade, at most there would be 25 soldiers,” he answered. I then said, “Tell this dump that they will either let us go, or we will take them all to Kandil as our captives.”

I do not know exactly how my words were translated by our guide, but the Iranian soldiers could not even raise their voice to my threat. Once it was settled, all of our vehicles set off again. Before we reached Kandil, there was yet another guerilla camp on our route. When we approached this small camp, we got out of the vehicles and continued the rest of the journey on foot. It was around 5:00 a.m. when we arrived there. When the commander of the camp asked from where we were coming, I said, “Hinere!” He responded with, “If you had truly come

from Hinere, then you would have entered the camp from the other side. I wonder, did you all use vehicles to get here?" I replied, "Yes, we did." He was moon-eyed and asked, "Did not you have problems with the Iranians?" I told him, "Comrade, we traveled carefully." But I did not mention the stop at the Iranian border post, of course.

I was planning to reach Kandil after letting my company have a rest for a few days. However, on the morning of the second day, the commander came to me and said, "I have received word that you and your guerillas must make your way immediately to Kandil. You must set off as soon as possible." Hearing this, we left immediately and walked all day with almost no rest.

Our wards had been prepared before we even arrived in Kandil. The camp was organized professionally, with everything clearly determined in advance, including who was going to stay where and with whom. There was a huge training academy right in the middle of the camp. Nizamettin Taş and Topal Nasır arrived in Kandil three days after we did. They were surprised to see us. "You set off one day later than we, so how could you arrive here earlier, with all the injured and wounded guerillas?" they asked. I had warned the others to remain silent, so that I could explain. "Comrade, we traveled here by cars through Iran." Nizamettin got irritated with my answer. "How could you take such a risk?" I replied, "Well, comrade, I thought going through Iran was less risky than the road you asked us to use. I already had many comrades with frostbite, and I could not risk others getting frostbite also." He admonished, "As an organization, we have banned the use of cars. If we absolutely must use them, then we use only two cars at the most, at the same time. We never use that many vehicles with such a crowded group. What will happen if Iran makes trouble because of what you did?" I did not answer. Nizamettin Taş



harshly said, “You will immediately give a defense in writing; not only for going through Iran with vehicles, but also for the comrades who lost their lives during the tank ambush.”

As I went under investigation, I hid the fact that I was sent as a regional representative for the congress. I was just about to leave the meeting room when Botan asked, “Has anyone been sent from your region as a representative for the congress?” I replied, “No!” Botan got even angrier. “Why has no one been sent? We asked every region to send someone to represent them in the congress.”

Botan went to the area where the congress was going to take place. The camp was very crowded, although it had not yet begun, since all the groups had not arrived. As I said, some commanders in the north had objected to the changes in the organization’s Policy for Battle. The people in Kandil were divided into different groups of thought, regarding the change in party policy. Each group held secret meetings with the people who followed their ideals. Most of them, especially the representatives of the northern provinces, were planning to establish a new organization with the goal of continuing the armed fight against the Turks. Some people even claimed that the approach Apo had insisted upon, was nothing but surrender to the Turkish republic, and he should not be regarded as the leader of the organization any longer.

One day after our arrival, I went to the congressional area to see my old comrades, including Cuma, who had come from other regions. He called out to me as soon as he recognized who I was. We greeted each other and began talking as we drank our tea. “Comrade Deniz, I want to ask you something, and you must tell me the truth. Did you kill a peasant in between Haftanin and Kandil?” I told him that I had, and he asked how many. I said only one and he asked again, “Are you sure that you killed only one?” I responded rather harshly, “Comrade, I killed only one person. If I had killed three, I would say so, but I killed only one.”

He then asked me where I had killed him, and I responded, “Just across from the town of Metina, in the Kaşura region, near the border of Çukurca.” He asked me why had I killed him, and I explained to him exactly what happened.

Cemil Bayık paused for a while, and I thought he looked confused, but then he said, “Comrade Deniz, I have different information regarding what you just told me, and it indicates that you killed four peasants before you crossed over the border. The local force of that region informed headquarters of the killings.” I was shocked. “Comrade, I would definitely know if something like that happened, but I am telling you, only one person was killed, and I am the one that killed him, not the guerillas in my company. I am ready to be punished for it, if you think I am guilty. But, if the guerilla force of that region executed those peasants and are trying to place the blame on us, then you need to conduct a more comprehensive investigation.” Cemil Bayık replied, “Comrade Deniz, you did yourself a disfavor. I wish you had not killed anyone.”

I told him about the incident again: “The man was from the south and he first told us that he was travelling to the north. I showed him the way, but he did not go and began following us, saying that he wanted join our force. No matter how hard I tried, I could not convince him to leave us alone. He continued to provoke us and make jokes, until I shot him. My comrades searched his body and found a paper full of numbers belonging to Erbil and Suleimaniye. None of these numbers belonged where we were in the Dohuk or Zaho areas. What was he doing there with these numbers from Erbil and Suleimaniye on him? I do not know what his task was, or with whom he was working, but he did not appear to be an innocent person, comrade.”

Cemil Bayık then asked again, why we did not have anyone representing the congress for our region. “Comrade, I was actually the representative sent from our region. However, when I was put under investigation by Botan, I thought that it would not be ethical to take part in the

congress since I was facing imprisonment. If I were to get incarcerated at the end of this trial, some guerillas might complain about how a guilty person participated in the congress as a representative,” I explained. He insisted that I participate as a representative, and said, “We will define the borders of the organization’s new strategy during this congress, and you should represent your region. The trial is not a concern for now, it can be handled later.” This congress was extremely important, because Apo’s verbal instructions were going to be written down as official rules.

I prepared my written defense statements for both of the incidents and presented them to the officials before the congress in Kandil was over. The trial commission acquitted me on both incidents. Because of all this going on, I became worn out physically and emotionally. Also, the guerillas that came from Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran had to be given political trainings, regarding the operation of the new policy. As a result, almost all of the ranked guerillas had to serve on the political training commissions. I had no knowledge of politics and was not good at ideological issues. It definitely would not look good if someone asked a question during a training session that I was leading, and I could not provide a satisfactory answer. It was for that main reason that fifteen days after reaching Kandil, I resigned from my position as company commander. Although my resignation was initially rejected by management, they eventually accepted it.

As I mentioned before, there were diverse groups among the senior officials during this congress. Some of them wanted to establish a new party; some others insisted on not leaving the north and establishing a new party with the goal of armed struggle. Then, there were those who wanted to arrest the current commanders and elect a new president.

Meanwhile, Jalal Talabani was pressuring the organization to elect a new president in place of Apo. The organization was aware that this request was actually coming from foreign forces and that Talabani was only a puppet in this scheme. Cemil Bayık was put under great stress during these talks and said, “Apo has been arrested and can no longer physically serve as president. Unfortunately, it is time to forget about him and elect a new president for the future of the organization.” And some others in leadership roles began to support those ungrateful views. They believed that Apo’s leadership was physically over, and that the organization needed to continue its fights with a new leader. Cuma resisted those vicious tendencies, as strongly as he could, and explicitly stated that no one else should lead the organization as long as Apo was alive.

When Cemil Bayık became tough on the subject, people who had openly spoken against Apo withdrew themselves. After all, even though Apo was not among us, the organization was still regularly receiving notes from him. The interviews Apo had with his lawyers were being delivered to the guerillas as brochures and booklets. Everyone was reading them, and discussing his writings during the trainings. Apo often sent notes regarding the new policy of the organization, and according to this new restructuring plan, the name of the guerilla force would be changed to the HPG (Public Defense forces.) On the administrative side, a new political party named public movement would be established, and this party was going to represent our organization in Ankara.

When these radical changes were implemented, some in the party began to say, “We want big changes in our party’s policy, so why do not we also change the name of the organization?” Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, and Murat Karayılan harshly objected to the suggestion of a name change. They said that the PKK was not going to be abolished, even though they were

implementing radical changes. At the end of this congress, the guerilla force and the political structure were now completely separate from one another, in terms of management. Back then, we did not have political parties in Iran, Iraq, and Syria. However, there were separate committees in the Kandil camp, representing the organization's political relations with these three countries. One committee represented us in Iran, another in Syria, and also another in Iraq. Serhat (aka Osman Ocalan) was the leader of these three political committees. The guerilla force also underwent a radical change with the decisions made during this congress. Our fight was going to be conducted by small, professional units, rather than large, crowded groups of guerillas. This new guerilla force was to be put under the command of Nizamettin Taş.

The organization managed to get all of the guerillas to embrace and adopt this new strategy by January of 2000. The guerilla commander of Erzurum province, who rejected the order to withdraw, was killed in a clash by Turkish security forces. The organization sent a guerilla force from the south to arrest the Dersim province commander, Hamili Yıldırım. When Hamili Yıldırım found out how serious the situation was, he gave up his stubborn attitudes and retreated with his forces to Iraq. The organization finally established its old dominance on its members again. The middle echelon of command—which was made up mostly of battalion, company, platoon, and squad commanders—began to side with Apo and his new strategy. This change in attitude strengthened the hands of senior executives like Cemil Bayık and Murat Karayılan, because they had always followed Apo's reasoning.

Before the congress ended, seventeen of the senior female commanders who had met with Iranian officials, without permission from headquarters, were arrested. As I said, the organization never forgets about being double crossed. The punishment was only delayed during extreme situations. In addition to these women, the people who had adopted an attitude against

Apo, were also arrested at this same congress. Not one of these separatists thought that Cemil Bayık would be able to establish his authority in the absence of Apo. Seeing how people were being arrested, including senior members, made those who had wanted to establish a new organization suddenly shut their mouths.

### **IN PURSUIT OF THE SEPARATISTS**

After the congress ended, a group of twenty-three people who had wanted to establish a new organization, fled from the Kandil Camp, and set up a new camp within Iran, in order to lay down the fundamentals of their formation. I was a regular guerilla in a battalion back then, and before the group fled, their attitudes and behaviors set off red flags with the senior executives. There was thinking among the group that perhaps they were up to something, but no one knew exactly what it was. While this was going on, our camp was being led by Ebubekir (Halil Ataç). One day, he told me that he was assigning me to a special task. When I asked about the details of this task, Ebubekir said, “Deniz, you are close friends with most of the people within that group, correct?” I replied, “Yes!” and he said, “Okay! Get even closer to those people. Hang out with them. They must be up to something, but we just do not know what it is. Learn as many details as you can! Who is their leader, what do they want to do, and what is their purpose?”

With all that in mind, I began to spend time with the group more frequently. I joined in their meetings and chats, so I would be considered one of them. While I was with them, they would consult a senior executive, but I could not figure out who he was. One evening, while we three company commanders were chatting, one of them turned to me and said, “We are going

somewhere outside the camp tonight, and you are coming too!” When I asked where we were going, they said, “To Dole Koke (the congress area in Kandil). Be ready at around 10:00 p.m.”

We arrived at the congress field around that time. I came across a bout of good luck. There was a female comrade there whom I knew very well. The comrades with whom I had come left us, and I chatted with this woman for a while. She said, “Sevin is here as well. I can go and let her know you’re here, if you want me to!” I replied, “No, I have a meeting now and will see her later.” After our conversation, I realized that I had lost the other comrades. I searched inside some of the tents, but I could not find any of them, so I sat on a stone in an open field and waited for them. They finally found me at around 2:00 a.m. I asked, “Where the hell were you? I lost you!” They replied, “We were meeting with some comrades and it was too risky to leave the meeting and bring you inside. Next time!” I asked again, “With whom did you meet?” They said, “Selim Çürökkaya’s brother Dr. Suleiman, Küçük Zeki, and Yılmaz.” All of the men they named were members of the PKK’s executive council. I thought those seniors must be the leaders of these separatists.

The following day, I met directly with Ebubekir when we returned to camp. There were a total of four training schools in the camp—three of them taught in Turkish, and one of them in Kurdish. These schools were located far from each another. Ebubekir was lecturing the students in one of the Turkish schools. As soon as I met with him, I said, “Comrade, there are three seniors from our organization leading these separatists!” Ebubekir was pleased that I had been able to uncover the names of the leaders. He said, “Good! Continue infiltrating their camp. Let us know immediately if you learn something new!” I said, “Comrade, I cannot often come visit you, it will begin to look too suspicious.” He responded, “Then, we will give you a radio and you’ll be able to communicate with me that way.” I said, “Comrade, you cannot do that! I am

not a commander anymore. Why would a regular guerilla carry a radio? Those who see it would want to know why I have a radio.” He got angry when I replied and said, “You carry a bag. Cannot you just hide a small radio in it? Whenever you need to, just leave the camp field, contact us, and hide it again.” I could not really say anything against his harsh response, so I just took the radio.

I remember quite well that it had not been a week after that conversation when on the night of May 19th, I was lying in my bed, and the duty officer came to see whether I was in the ward or not. I learned that the nine separatists had fled the camp that very night. Since I was frequently with them, the battalion commander had told him: “Go and check if Deniz is still here, or if he has fled with them.” As soon as I heard about this, I took my radio and left the camp to try and contact Ebubekir. His assistant, who knew of the situation, answered my call. I told him that the separatists had fled the camp area, and that they must take the necessary precautions.

In the time it took for our commanders to decide what to do, this separatist group had already reached a safe location between Iran and Iraq. The organization deployed many small, three-man units to detect the separatists’ exact location. I was with one of these small groups. We searched for a few days in the countryside and were able to detect their exact location after following their traces and consulting with local peasants. They had stopped by a village on their way to Iran and asked for supplies, including oil, sugar, a pickaxe, a shovel, and some nylon. This made it clear to us that they were setting up a camp up in a nearby area. Duran Kalkan was immediately notified of the situation, and said, “Do not harm the regular guerilla runaways, but kill the three members of the headquarters committee wherever you find them.”

We fought the separatists with a force of three battalions. Since we were ordered to not harm the majority of the group, we first asked them to surrender peacefully. But, rather than



doing so, they used the negotiations of their surrender as a way to stall us until the darkness of night. They were the guerillas who had fought in the north for years and were able to flee the battle by taking advantage of the cover of darkness. They did leave two representatives behind to talk to us. I spoke with these two in order to understand the goals of the separatists. They said, “We’re not giving up the fight for the Kurdish struggle. We will continue the armed struggle that the PKK has decided to forget.”

The organization tasked me and another comrade with the duty of finding the locations of these runaways, within the cities of Iraq. We dressed as casual citizens and took only one small gun, one hand grenade, and the radio. We heard that the group was heading toward the city of Suleimaniye. On our way there, we stopped in a village to refill our supplies. The villagers treated us extraordinarily well and offered us food and tea. In the evening, just as we were getting ready to leave, they said, “Comrades, what is your hurry? Stay and rest. You can leave later,” and kept us waiting there. Whenever we suggested leaving, they told us to wait a little bit longer. This made me realize that something was amiss. We stood up to head toward an exit, and the peasants made a circle around us. One of the elder peasants said, “We are not going to let you leave, because we do not know whether you are enemies or friends. The Peshmerga is on the way. You will have to wait until they arrive!”

We had no option but to wait. The two of us had no chance against twenty people. The Peshmerga arrived in two cars at around 2:00 a.m. I told them, “We are your comrades heading to the city Suleimaniye.” Of course, they did not believe us. Back then, the relationship between the YNK and the PKK was negative. The YNK brought its forces and positioned them in a camp just across from our area. This behavior made the organization very uncomfortable.

While we were travelling with the YNK forces, I tried to contact our camp in Kandil via radio. I could not establish a connection, because the distance between Suleimaniye and Kandil was too great. “Take us to the district in Suleimaniye. There are PKK members there to whom you can deliver us,” I said. Back then, the organization had offices, representatives, and hospitals in some of the districts that were under the control of the YNK. I was unable to understand what they could say to each other, since they spoke Sorani Kurdish. There was a translator with us, so that the conversation between us and their forces could be understood. Luckily, the other comrade knew how to speak Sorani. I warned him immediately, “Do not let them figure out that you know Sorani. Pretend that you do not understand what they’re saying. If they figure out that you know the language, they will not talk in front of us.”

The commander of the YNK forces was sitting on my right in the car. When we first set out, they asked us to surrender our weapons, but we had resisted. They also never searched us, so still did not know that we had hand grenades. At one point, the driver and the YNK commander were having a conversation and I asked my comrade to translate what they were saying. “They are planning on putting us in jail. They aren’t taking us to our comrades in the YNK provinces,” he said. I asked if he were sure, and he confirmed what he was. As soon as we arrived in Suleimaniye, I told the YNK translator to tell them to take us to our organization’s hospital. They answered that they were already taking us there. Of course, I knew that the commander was actually telling the driver, “We are going directly to the military post, not to the hospital.”

I turned to my comrade and said, “It is time to teach them a lesson they will never forget.” I took my tobacco box from my pocket, rolled a cigarette, and offered it to the YNK commander sitting next to me. He waved his hand in a dismissive gesture, indicating that he did

not want it. I pretended to take the lighter from my pocket, but pulled the hand grenade from where it was tied at my waist, and said, “Here is a kumbara for you!” (In the Sorani language, kumbara means bomb.) As soon as he saw the hand grenade in his face, he started to scream. Two other Peshmerga that had been riding in the back were trying to open the back door of the jeep so they could jump out; however, they could not even find the door handle in their panic and horror. I began to speak to them with my comrade simultaneously translating my speech into Sorani. “Everybody, calm down and stay quiet. Now, close the door. The car is already going 80 km an hour. If you jump out of the car at that speed, you will die anyway. There is no need for me to activate the grenade.”

I turned to the commander and said, “Look, I know you have been lying to us from the very beginning. We told you to take us to the PKK hospital. However, you are taking us to a military post. Now, you will take us to the hospital immediately.” He was still shaking from fear and replied, “Comrade, we will take you wherever you want.” Despite this, they took us to a place that looked like military Barracks. I knew that the hospital’s security was provided by PKK guerillas, and yet there were Peshmerga soldiers waiting at the gates into this place. I turned to the commander and asked, “Is this our hospital?” He said, “Yes it is, comrade! This is the main entrance; the hospital is in there.” I asked them to call the director of the hospital outside. An overweight man in his 60s, wearing casual clothing came out. He definitely did not seem to be one of us. When he started toward the driver’s side, I called him to come to where I was sitting in the vehicle instead. He was just about to look inside the car when the man next to me said, “Do not come in! There is a kumbara.” When he was about to run back, I targeted him with my weapon and forced him to get in the car. To our surprise, he was the director of the prison, not a hospital. Because of his fear of my grenade, he told us certain facts. We had been

brought to a military post and prison, located in the province of Qela Dize in the city of Suleimaniye.

During my exchange with the prison director, the Peshmerga soldiers had pointed the muzzles of their weapons at us and were waiting for an order to begin shooting. They thought that the pin of the hand grenade had already been pulled, and so they were afraid to shoot. When the commander ordered them to put their weapons down, they obeyed.

After that incident, we finally headed to what was, in fact, the hospital. I wanted to be sure, so I asked them to call a doctor outside before I released the captives in our vehicle. A doctor came out and welcomed us with polite Turkish. I asked him who he was and he told us that he was a doctor from Dersim. I said, “Do not take this the wrong way, but you do not look like one of us. Is there anyone else inside?” He appeared disappointed, but asked, “Who do you want me to call out?” I said, “Tell me the names of those inside, and I will tell you which to call on.” While listing to the names, he said the name Medea. I recognized the name as a German national who could speak Turkish and Kurdish fluently, and had joined the organization back in 1992. Because I had met her once, I chose her to be called out, so I could make sure.

Soon Medea and the director of the hospital came out, and I recognized her, so we all got out of the car. The hospital director was surprised when he saw the commander of the YNK post. He asked what the commander was doing with us, and so I told him exactly what had happened. He got angry with me. “Comrade, why did you do this? This captive of yours is not an ordinary person. You can believe that he is going to cause us trouble as soon as he is freed.” I replied, “Well, I do not care if he were the Assistant of Talabani. He lied to us several times, and I decided to punish him!” The director of the hospital had no response to what I said. “Okay, let them go now,” he said.

We were saying goodbye to our captives by shaking their hands, when my comrade said, “I will play a trick on our captives, Deniz.” The commander was standing at the end of the line wearing a loose, white shirt. My comrade dropped his grenade into the man’s shirt, when he was leaving. The commander jumped about two meters high in fear and fell down unconscious. I was afraid that something serious might have happened to him, because of the stupid joke. I got angry with my comrade and severely criticized his behavior.

We stayed in the hospital that night. Initially, the hospital staff treated us well, since we were guests. However, without letting us know, the director of the hospital had informed the commander of a camp in the countryside, telling him, “There are two guerillas that were brought here by Peshmerga forces.” The commander of the camp, Kani Yılmaz, thought that we were from the separatists who had fled from Kandil, and he had told the director, “Let them stay there tonight, and I will have our forces bring them here tomorrow morning.”

After breakfast the next morning, the director of the hospital asked us where we were headed next. I said, “We are going to Suleimaniye. Could you arrange a car for us?” He asked, “Why are the two of you going to Suleimaniye?” I got a little upset with him. “Arrange the car, and do not bother yourself with the rest. It’s none of your business!”

When we left the hospital, four guerillas approached, holding their weapons on us, forcing us into a car. They did not respond, when I asked them who they were. I kept insisting they tell us who they were, as they drove us into the countryside. At last, one of them said that we were being taken to the Şehit Harun camp. While we were still on the way, I took out my radio on a high hill and instructed the communication officers to connect me with Ebubekir, who got quite angry, when he learned that we had been arrested and were being forcefully taken to the Kani Yılmaz camp. He flew into a rage and immediately began addressing him on the radio.

“Who the hell are you Kani? How can you behave in such a disrespectful manner? How can you arrest members of the organization, without letting us know first?” Everyone in the car was listening to this conversation. Ebubekir spoke directly to me again and said, “Tell the driver to take you wherever you want to go!”

We drove back to Suleimaniye, and while back in the city, we got some intelligence that Dr. Süleyman and his supporters were hiding in a camp under control of Talabani in Iraq. I contacted Ebubekir immediately, and told him that in order for us to arrest the separatists, we were first going to have to kill the Peshmerga forces in the camp. I said, “Comrade, if you can afford a war with the YNK, send me only a single company of guerillas, and I will destroy this camp, with everyone hiding inside.” After thoroughly discussing the issue with his assistant, Celal, Ebubekir ordered me to destroy the YNK camp. (As I’ve mentioned before, there is a tradition in the organization, that, if someone says, “I cannot do it. I cannot live the life of a guerilla,” no one will oppose their decision and you’ll be let go. On the other hand, if someone leaves the organization, taking some supporters for an ill reason, like separation, then no one would allow or approve of such a thing.)

Dr. Süleyman had gone too far. He was making insulting propaganda saying, “Apo had surrendered himself to the Turkish security forces, and now he is forcing the organization to surrender itself, as a whole.” Because of these derogatory statements, Cemal said, “We will do whatever is necessary to kill these separatists. We will even run the risk of waging a war against Talabani, if we must.”

After the decision was made, it did not take us long to begin forming our attack plans. Headquarters sent me a force of eighty people to command. They were well armed, with

howitzers, anti-aircraft weapons, bazookas, bixi, and other heavy weapons. Negotiation was not an option at this point; we were going to destroy the camp.

While we were planning to annihilate the YNK camp, our enemy, Jalal Talabani, was planning to deal a major blow to the organization, with the help of the separatists, Dr. Süleyman, Küçük Zeki, and Yılmaz. Dr. Süleyman told Talabani, “The organization isn’t ready for a fight. The guerillas are still in shock over the incarceration of Apo. Besides that, the guerilla forces in Turkey had been required to withdraw from their positions, and many of them were not happy with that. These things had caused conflict amongst them, and so they are not in a position to win a battle against your army. If you attack them now, I am certain many of them will just surrender.”

Beyond that, Iranian officials were encouraging Talabani by saying, “You attack them from there, and we will close the border with thousands of Iranian soldiers over here. Our two forces will squeeze the PKK guerillas in the steep areas of Kandil Mountain and then destroy them by bombing them on both sides. Not to mention, it is winter and many of them may die from the cold and snowstorms if we can sweep them up toward the top of Kandil Mountain.” Finally, Turkey also wanted to take part in this war. Turkish officials informed Talabani that, “You start the fight, and we will drop bombs on the PKK camps with our fighter jets.” Turkey even sent many high-ranking military officers to Iraq to assist Talabani in the coordination of this final blow against the PKK. Talabani had established some YNK camps right across from our PKK camps and his troops began causing trouble for our guerillas that were staying in those camps. “You cannot go down to the city center, and you cannot pass from this area to another area. This is your border and you are all going to have to stay there.” All of these things

combined, turned into a problem that was even bigger than we thought, and it was not about to get any better.



## CHAPTER 15

### THE WAR AGAINST THE YNK

Before we performed a raid on the YNK camp in Iraq, Murat Karayılan returned from his trip in Europe, and Comrade Cuma was in Syria at this point. Murat Karayılan became so angry when he saw the Peshmerga had taken position just across from the PKK camps. “How could you put yourself in such a ridiculous position, and let these men set up a military camp in front of you? Has the world ever witnessed two enemy troops drinking water from the same fountain? How did it come to be that our guerilla forces and the Peshmerga are staying in the same area?” The questions came like gunfire! “We will send them packing!” He declared

The guerillas were surprised to hear this from Murat Karayılan, because since Apo had been arrested, they had been trained in negotiation and dialogue rather than combat. Karayılan deployed all the guerillas that were gathered in the camps into the fields of their previous duties and reordered them back into military units of companies, battalions, and platoons. Easy camp living was suddenly at an end, and we began to take positions along the border that belonged to the YNK forces. Once they realized that we were getting ready to attack their border units, they executed a raid on one of our camps and killed 12 of our comrades. Even worse, the comrades that fled from this raid were taken captive by Iranian authorities. Iran handed all of them over to Talabani for execution, causing more tension in the organization.

The changes in the YNK’s attitude toward the guerillas confused them greatly. They began asking Duran Kalkan questions. “Why has the YNK changed their attitude toward us now and begun placing forces at our positions? Why is Iran dispatching weapons and soldiers towards the border, and we are remaining silent with all of this?” Duran Kalkan responded by saying, “We were curious as to how you would react in this situation and that’s why we gave

some concessions to the YNK and Iranian forces. Otherwise, the YNK would position itself just across from our forces and we would turn a blind eye to it. That would be an impossible situation! We could not let their approach against us make us crazy, but we had to let them do it so we understood your attitudes!”

Most of the people in the meeting were the ranks of team, company, battalion, and headquarters commander. At that very meeting, by unanimous vote, the organization decided to wage war against the YNK. One of the commanders even stated, “Although we had diverse opinions about some issues within the organization, in such a situation as this, we must not turn against one another, and we need to forget our diversities. Go and get an official declaration of war. We will prepare and motivate our guerillas for battle. How dare Talabani’s YNK rise against us? In the old days, Turkey, the KDP, and the YNK would unite their forces against us, but not be able to stand against the organization. If they now have the courage to fight us, then it clearly shows that we are in a miserable situation.” I remember this important meeting very well with Duran Kalkan leaving the meeting hall laughing loudly. When one of the comrades asked him where he was going, he replied, “To start a war!”

During Murat Karayılan’s presidency of the presidency council, the organization declared war against Talabani. Cemil Bayık approved this decision as well. Now the only problem in front of us was Iran. We were going to fight against the YNK, but we did not know whether Iran would join the fight or not, and without that knowledge we had to take extra precautions. Murat Karayılan stated, “If we want to keep Iran out of the war, our first act against the YNK must be very devastating. Iranian officials are smart and would never intervene in a war if they witness the YNK getting badly beaten. On the contrary, if they see us weakened by Talabani, they would fight alongside him with all of their forces.” In order to ensure that we would cause a serious

blow to Talabani, Murat Karayılan visited each company and battalion to arrange meetings with the guerillas to increase their motivation.

### **THE DILEMMA OF ADOPTING THE NEW OR THE OLD POLICY**

After our forces withdrew from Turkey in 1999, many guerillas that had gone from the north to the south resigned their positions. Some of them started gardening within the battalion; growing tomatoes, peppers, and other vegetables. A comrade was in charge of the field in Amanoses, and when he went south, he became the logistician of a battalion. He was in charge of supplying the needs of the battalions, such as food, clothing, etc. Imagine! The commander, who led our fights in Amanoses just a short time ago was now dealing with camp logistics. There were some rumors, which ran rampant within the organization, reporting that the old leadership could not adapt to this new period within the organization. Many people argued that a guerilla that had long been a true fighter would not be able to engage in politics and dialogue. According to these people, even if he did acclimate, he would never truly be successful.

One evening, Nizamettin Taş visited us and led a meeting. He used this exact statement as he addressed us: “You will either adapt to this political process, the process of peace, or we will establish a prison camp like Maxmur and lock up all of you there. Your actions are demoralizing the newbies among you. Leave them alone, so that they aren’t spoiled by your stories.” While the new cadre was getting prepared for the new process, the old cadre began to criticize the attitude of the organization, saying, “Why is the organization now treating us like this?” They even explicitly said, “We have fought for the organization for years, and it this reason that the necessity of armed struggle occupies our minds. You cannot simply discard us

because the strategy has changed.” Also, during this period of change, many commanders from the old cadre, including myself, resigned from duty.

It was during one of these meetings, I stood up and criticized Nizamettin Taş. “Are the changes you are trying to impose upon us, the policy of the organization, or are they your personal views? You cannot impose these ideas on us, because you and the organization have trained us for violence, all these years. You trained us to understand that a good guerilla must have certain qualifications, of strong discipline, etc. You trained us how to fight. Now, because the strategy has changed, you cannot expect us to easily adapt in just a month. It’s not as simple as changing clothes. We’ve been trained for years to become warriors and killers and now we are just supposed to forget about everything that belongs to the old ways? You need be a bit rational about this and give us time, if you want us to undertake such a change. If the organization is serious about this new approach, it will only happen with the help and support of the old members. You’re making distinctions between the two groups, by claiming the old cadre is more prone to fighting, and the new one, to dialogue, is a poor tactic to use on us. If peace is to be with the Turks, and the new strategy is to be successful, you can only make it happen with the help of the old cadre! If you disregard their efforts and experience, your chances of being successful are very small.”

When Murat Karayılan arrived from Europe, the attitude toward the older commanders changed completely. Karayılan gathered the management together, and said, “How could you push aside these experienced people, who have devoted their years to the organization? It is thanks to them, that the organization is where it is now. We cannot turn a blind eye to these people, just because we have changed our strategy. That’s a bad approach, for even if we are turning a new page, we must do so, including the old cadre!” I’ll never forget the sentence that

Murat Karayılan used at the end of his speech. “No one should fool themselves. The logic that the political process is different from the military process is very wrong. The main factor that provides and sustains peace is the existence of guerillas. A person who has never been in a fight, nor has any experience in killing, cannot be successful in politics and thus cannot pursue what is best for the organization, politically. Whoever pushed out the old guerillas will certainly pay for it one day.”

These changes happened during Nizamettin Taş’s (Botan) period. After these meetings, Botan was already discharged, and Murat Karayılan was appointed to take his position. Botan was assigned as the head of a passive new institution, which was named the political public movement. He was told by senior commanders that, “Since you are so strong for politics, resign from your duties in the guerilla forces, and lead this political institution.” After that, all of the old commanders were reappointed to their old duties before we waged war against the YNK.

### **APE HUS WARRIOR TEAMS**

Initially, the organization plotted revenge against the YNK, posted near our camp located at Karadağ. We were offended that the YNK would raid this particular camp. It would have been part of battle if they had attacked a normal guerilla camp. But at the camp in Karadag, the organization was hosting newbies before they were sent to other camps, as well as people who had tasks of a more neutral nature, like tailoring, healthcare, and media. Ape Hus (Kadri Çelik) was arranging guerilla squads to be the instruments of our revenge. Ape Hus had served the Turkish army as a lieutenant in the past and was one of our best guerilla trainers. He arranged four squads, each consisting of twelve people. I was assigned as assistant to a squad commander of one of those squads. Each group was assigned to fight in a specific area. The purpose of

these special squads was to assist local guerilla forces in the regions to which they were assigned. There were some military posts and heavy weapon positions on the hills, which would be difficult for the local guerillas to defeat. This meant that our task was to destroy those outposts so that the local forces could advance within the inner parts of the enemy lines.

These squads were chosen purely from specially trained guerillas, so we were extra careful about not incurring any losses. It would have been considered normal if five or six of our comrades from a regular local force were martyred during a clash. Guerillas often said, "We are at war, so of course we will occasionally lose our comrades." However, if three or four of our comrades from these specially selected squads were martyred, it would be considered equal to losing a whole battalion of regular guerilla forces. Because of this, we were ordered to retreat after the destruction of the YNK positions. The local forces would finish the job by going behind enemy lines.

Before starting our mission, the squad would prepare a fight schedule within the group. On the first night, the plan in my group was: six of us were going out to attack, while the rest of the group, six other guerillas, would stay behind and only fight if reinforcements were needed. The next night, we would stay behind, and those who remained behind the night before would attack the hills. As I had mentioned, our squad was responsible for destroying the Peshmerga fronts located on strategic hills.

One night, we had approximately two thousand guerillas placed in positions at specific intervals across the 150 km border with Talabani's area of control. Just before 11:00 p.m., my squad took advantage of the cover of darkness and managed to sneak as close as 50 meters to an YNK position on a nearby hill. After we moved into position, the large group of guerillas on the border began their missions simultaneously. One way or another, we were going to have to kill

the Peshmerga positioned on that hill, and, if not, we would be killed when the YNK noticed our presence there.

We attacked in unison with the main force. The YNK was caught off guard, and it certainly did not expect such a large group of guerillas to attack. My team was able to capture the hill and began shooting the Peshmerga located on other hills and on the front lines with their own Soviet-made DShK 1938 heavy machine guns. When they realized that we had overrun one of their own strategic locations, the Peshmerga forces, on top of other hills, left their positions and ran away. They suffered many losses as they fled, and on that specific hill, my team killed 18 Peshmerga, and took three of them captive.

The next morning, we collected all the weapons and ammunition from the positions vacated by the Talabani forces and began planning the details of the new attack, which we would carry out later that night. Murat Karayılan ordered, “We will carry out raids again tonight, and strike another blow before they recover from the shock last night’s attack!”

That night, it was our team commander’s turn to raid the Peshmerga positions with his five guerillas. The target was yet another strategic hill, that was being held by Talabani forces. I communicated with the local guerilla forces and told them, “A squad of special guerilla forces will raid that hill. So, do not shoot at that location with heavy weapons!” The attack that night was going to begin at the same time as the previous night, and all the guerilla units had taken their positions as scheduled, except for our team commander and his troop who had not yet made it to the hill. We all waited, since the mission could not begin until that group snuck onto the hill.

I communicated to them over the radio. “Tell me your exact position!” The team commander replied, “Comrade, it is so dark, and I think we are lost. We are crossing a flat field,

and we see no hill around us.” I said, “Do not panic, you’re on the right path. You will reach the edge of the hill if you walk another three hundred meters.” I contacted him again 15 minutes later, and he informed me that the squad was still positioned in the same place. This upset me. I was not aware that Duran Kalkan had been listening to our conversation and heard me give the squad commander a very hard time, with comments such as, “What kind of commander are you? There are two thousand guerillas waiting for you. Either you get to the hill, or you return here immediately!” This time he replied, “We cannot go back, the Peshmerga are in the field with us.” At this point, I realized he was frightened and was not about to come back to us or move forward to the hill. Since he was obviously incompetent, I asked him to give the radio to someone else in the squad, and he gave it to a female guerilla. As soon as I heard a female’s voice on the other end of the radio, I said, “I do not want you, give the radio to one of your male comrades.”

She became angry and harshly responded, “You want to speak to a male guerilla, but if we had a proper male leading us, all of these things would not have occurred.” I did not want to talk with her, because she was as bold as brass and would no doubt risk death to climb up to the hill directly. That is why I had to speak with someone who was better at careful planning. I knew there was someone named Mahir in the squad, and I asked the female guerilla to hand the radio to him. I told Mahir how they could reach the hill by providing him with more details and also told him, “Comrade, all the other guerillas are waiting for you, climb up the hill as soon as possible!”

With Mahir’s leadership, the squad were not only able to destroy the targets on that hill but were also able to capture the YNK headquarters commander’s assistant. Later, I heard that the squad commander whom I had scolded fought bravely in the front and even broke his arm in



the clash. That night, after the mission was over, I contacted him. “You were not like that before the attack, and we both know you did not get lost. Why did not you take the squad to the hill?” He said, “Comrade, I could not take responsibility of so many specially trained guerillas. It was a risky task. If you had sent me to the hill alone, I would have run up there in the front, but I could not take responsibility for all of those comrades.” Angrily, I replied, “Are you an idiot? Was the organization not aware there could potentially be some losses during such a risky task?”

During my upbraiding of the commander, Duran Kalkan heard what I said and asked me to communicate with him via another channel on the radio. “Stop being so hard on him: it is obvious that he could not have taken the risk.” I answered, “What else could I do? I guess I will discharge him.” He said, “All right, discharge him, but do not drive him into a corner where he may harm himself.”

The amount of losses for the YNK during the two nights of attacks were large. They lost hundreds of Peshmerga, and since the organization had to fight in such a vast area, we lost 105 comrades. On the third day of our attacks, Murat Karayilan ordered, “Rather than attacking the Peshmerga from the front, beginning today, we will directly target and kill the commanders that are positioned behind the line.” That day, he personally led three battalions of guerillas in an invasion of their military headquarters, where the coordination of the war took place. We captured vehicles, bombs, weapons, and some DShK 1938s. In short, we gained a lot of ammo that could sustain us for a couple of years. To top it off, we captured 50 high-ranking YNK commanders.

By the time we caused Talabani such a great defeat, it was nearly winter. During that time of the year, Kandil is very cold and snowy. We were just about to close ourselves off

within our winter camps, when the YNK began an attack. Once again, it was Peshmerga forces, but this time they were being coordinated by Turkish lieutenants. They attacked our camps with heavy weapons and howitzers. We lost almost 100 comrades during this unexpected attack. As I said, it was very cold and we were unable to complete a counterattack. Instead, we withdrew our forces from the Kandil Mountains to a much more secure area within Iraq.

During these skirmishes, Comrade Cuma had been staying in Syria. Cuma was going to travel through Iranian territories and visit our forces there, because we thought that the war in Kandil had ended, and it was safe for him to do so. During that time, there was news on Turkish media that claimed that Cemil Bayık and Halil Ataç were arrested in Iran. Because of our position within the organization, we knew that Cemil Bayık was still staying in Syria. Hearing the lies that were being broadcast by Turkey made us anxious. There was definitely something behind this deceptive news.

Two or three days later, four attack helicopters approached the area where we were hiding in Kandil. The helicopters all landed somewhere close to the border. Shortly after that, a convoy of vehicles entered our camp. We were informed later that these helicopters were Iranian Air force helicopters that had transported Cemil Bayık from Syria to Kandil. Iranian officials made plans and said, “Turkey had Apo in its hands. If we somehow gain the trust of Cemil Bayık and ally with him, then we can increase our control on the organization.” As I mentioned before, Iranian officials always carried out two-faced policies. Although they entered the war on the side of the YNK, they immediately switched sides to try and collaborate with the organization since the YNK had experienced such a serious blow from us. Even with this, they continued to be seen as supporting Talabani, but in fact started to support the organization in many ways behind the scenes. Welcome to the Middle East...It has always been like this.

For two months, YNK forces continued to attack the inner parts of the plains where we were located. During this two-month period, 210 guerillas were martyred. I was injured myself during the fighting in this period, being shot in my left hand. Two of my fingers are still dysfunctional because of that injury. I was actually advised to cross into Iran, to be treated by professional doctors, and decided I should go. I was first transported to a small healthcare facility that was operated by the organization at the Iran-Iraq border. The guides were to pick me up there and take me into Iran.

It was at this facility that I encountered a close friend of mine who had also been sent to Iran for treatment. He was a platoon commander, fighting on the same front as my squad during our fight against the YNK. The Iranian doctors had to amputate one of his legs. Unfortunately, amputation had not originally been necessary, since there was only a piece of shrapnel stuck under his patella that needed removing. The Iranian doctors initially removed the shrapnel but did not use proper disinfectant, and the wound became infected. It was then his leg had to be amputated because of the spread of infection in his body. This friend of mine had warned me not to travel to Iran when he heard that I was going there for treatment and had already informed the organization that he suspected the Iranian doctors were working with the Iranian intelligence service and deliberately disabling high ranking guerillas. In fact, this problem had previously been noted by others. It could not be a coincidence that regular guerillas were being properly treated, but the ranked ones had often experienced disability after being treated there. So, after speaking with my friend, I decided not to go to Iran.

Our war with the YNK stopped completely around February of 2001. Iran and the YNK sent a group of five people for negotiations. The spokesperson for this group was someone in charge of the Iranian Intelligence Service and was assigned as commander of the Revolutionary

Guard in Iran. Osman Öcalan joined the meeting as our representative of the organization. We did not know it at the time, but the organization told Osman, “Accept whatever they say, because it is winter now, and we have no chance to win a fight.” The YNK were in a similar situation themselves, after suffering many losses. As a precondition of peace, they asked the organization once again to withdraw its forces from the inner parts of Iraq, to the outskirts of the Kandil Mountains. We returned control of the areas to the YNK and positioned ourselves in the Kandil Mountains, just as they asked. Our goal was to spend the winter uneventfully, and let the already exhausted guerillas rest until spring.

### **BREAK-UP WITH SEVIN**

While we were fighting the YNK, someone brought me a note from Sevin, the woman with whom I was in love. It was a short letter, reading, “Do whatever is necessary to stay alive until I see you again. I just need to talk with you one more time, and after that, I do not care what happens to you.” I figured that something was not right. It seemed that she had heard about the bogus love affair, which had occurred in Gari back in 1997. Even though it was a setup, Sevin may have believed it had been real, and as soon as the war with the YNK ended, she visited our camp. Before we even greeted each other, she asked me directly, “What did I tell you when we left each other in Damascus?” I replied, “You told me many things, can you be more specific?” She was mad as hell. “How many times have I told you that I never wanted to hear your name mentioned with another woman, Deniz?” I replied, “I have always been committed to my promise to you. What have you heard?”

She went directly to the point. My guess had been correct, and she had heard about the incident that took place in 1997. I said, “Sevin, if that so-called love affair was real, do you

think the organization would assign me as a commander again?” No matter what I said, she was not convinced. “If it were not real, it would not still be talked about among the guerillas. You are lying to me, Deniz. This is your last chance. I will kill you if I hear something like this again.” I replied, “Do you think the organization will spare your life, if you kill me?” She answered, “I’m not stupid. I would tell everyone that it was an accident,” and she was serious. “Okay, I will be more careful, but what if a woman guerilla claims she had a relationship with me, just like the previous incident that occurred in 1997. In such a situation, you will kill me directly, so I am no longer safe,” I reasoned. I was frightened, because she was like a devil and had an authoritarian personality and would do most anything, based only on a whim.

“Do you really love me, Deniz?” she asked. I said, “I do. I would sacrifice myself for you, Sevin. But, if it costs me our struggle for Kurdish rights, then I would even sacrifice our love.” She started laughing loudly. “I like your answer, Deniz.” In this way I was able to mend fences with Sevin, but at the end of 2000, we were once again assigned to different fields, and I did not see her again until 2003. We would, occasionally send letters to one another. I sent mine with groups that traveled from our region to Syria, while she sent hers with groups who were traveling back to Iraq.

I did not realize just how many letters she was writing, since I was always traveling from one field to another, and did not receive many of the letters she had written. One day, I got one from her, and she was very angry. “I have sent you many letters, but you are not even writing me a reply.” At the end of 2002, a female force came to the officers’ school in Damascus from the female headquarters. They had a separate congress that was independent from the men’s. It was evening, and I saw Sevin among them. The next day, she visited me in my ward. I had not known at the time, but she had become a member of the congress and thus had a female guard

with her. She came into the ward and said, “Comrades, sorry, but could you please excuse Deniz and myself for a few minutes?” After everyone left, we started to argue, as we had previously, and by the end of it, she was very irate. “You are now free of me. Do whatever you want!” she said, and we broke up. I never saw her again, but I received a few letters asking how I was.

### **THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH IRAN AT KARADAĞ CAMP**

Beginning in March of 2001, our forces began marching again toward the inner parts of the Territories controlled by the YNK. We once again took control of the places we had given back to Talabani after our signed agreement. When the YNK realized what was happening, they immediately notified Iran. In May, the same peace committee that had been sent to our camp, returned. This time, the organization sent Murat Karayılan as our spokesperson. During the negotiations, I was responsible for the meeting room security in Kandil and was able to hear everything they discussed.

One thing that astounded me during this meeting was that the Iranian Intelligence officials were speaking fluent Turkish. When the meeting began, Murat Karayılan immediately said, “What the hell is this? We are fighting against the YNK, but we are negotiating with Iran? This does not make any sense to me!” Of course, the Iranians were not expecting a reaction quite like that, and one of them said, “You did not care when they were Iranian officials at the first meeting, so why do you care now? Nevertheless, it is not a problem. We will go and bring back an YNK representative.” Murat Karayılan then said, “Actually, we do not need a representative from the YNK here. Our organization fought against Iran in that battle as well. It’s just that those YNK idiots let themselves be used by you Iranians!”

The spokesperson of the Iranian committee replied, "I admit, we had not expected such resistance from you during those battles. Also, for the first time in their history, the Turks retreated from the area without fighting, and this unfortunate development spoiled our plans. Now, it is your time to answer my questions. Why did you break the peace agreement that was signed before winter?" Murat Karayılan replied, "We did not recognize the legitimacy of that agreement!" The spokesman replied in surprise, "How could you not recognize it? The PKK legitimately signed it! Here are the signatures by both parties!" When he heard this Murat, Karayılan calmly said, "Well, I do not recognize it. Go and discuss that matter with whomever signed it. I do not give a shit about it, because my guerillas and I fought against you there. You should have discussed the conditions of peace with me! My force will stay where they are positioned now. Go and tell Talabani and the YNK that we will continue to stay there. If they are not happy with this decision, then we will fight with them again!"

The Iranian official was really pissed off. "What kind of man are you? You do not even use a proper tone to discuss official matters!" Karayılan laughed and said, "Who told you that I'm a diplomat? I'm a guerilla, not a politician. I cannot speak as well as they. I speak directly and openly! Now listen to me carefully! I am going to tell you of our new conditions. Go and tell the YNK that if they accept these conditions, it will be well. If they do not, then they better prepare their forces for a new fight."

At his words, the Iranians went off the deep end. "This is not the style of the PKK that I know. If the PKK promises something, it is known that they keep their promise forever. That's what I know about your organization!" Karayılan answered, "You will either accept our conditions or pay the price! The Karadağ camp will be immediately emptied and controlled by the PKK. Our forces will continue to patrol in the buffer zone in the plains of northern Iraq, and

the YNK forces will not enter this Buffer Zone, without first notifying us. Also, the PKK will control all of the districts and villages that are located within that area. The YNK will never again appoint mayors or district governors within this zone. And finally, you, the state of Iran, will vacate the stations that were previously empty.”

When the Iranian commander heard the last condition, he said, “There is a possibility that the YNK might accept these conditions. However, the state of Iran will never accept such insulting conditions.” Karayılan replied, “I do not care. Your country was the brains behind the scheme that resulted in war against the YNK. Although it was the YNK that appeared to fight against us, it was you who mentored them. You will pay the price for what you did, so that you will not dare to play games against us. Ever again!”

On May 20, 2011, the organization was officially informed that both Iran and the YNK had accepted the conditions of peace without any strings attached. Iran had only a small caveat with the agreement, and the organization had no problem with accommodating them. Tehran just wanted to be notified when guerilla forces crossed into Iran. This is why senior members of the organization first travel to Tehran when they visit European countries for diplomatic reasons.

There was an unusual problem encountered during this period. When the YNK delivered control of the more than 300 villages that were part of the peace accord, the PKK had a hard time meeting the needs of the villagers. The biggest problem was the absence of power lines and electricity. One of the first things the organization did, was allocate a large amount of money from its annual budget in order to build two dams in the region. In fact, the initial cost of the building was not as high as first thought, because many of the workers on the sites were guerillas.



The two dams would increase the quality of life for the people there, because they would have the capacity to meet the electricity needs of all the villages in the region. When they began operating, the organization not only provided electricity to the peasants, but also did not charge them for the use of the service. As a result, the peasants happily welcomed the other services offered by the organization. The second thing the organization accomplished was to establish committees within each village. The committees consisted of six or seven people to handle problems that would crop up among the peasants. These committees were authorized to make final decisions, regarding their conflicts and problems. Of course, if the peasants thought that the committee was unfair in its decisions, they were given the right to send an appeal to headquarters.

Once the potential threat of the YNK and Iran had been negated by the peace process, the organization was able to set its sights on peace with Turkey. Murat Karayılan was disappointed with Turkey's attitude toward the organization. On several occasions, he openly criticized Turkey, by saying, "We are trying to peacefully settle our differences with Turkey. Why then do they betray us by dispatching military officers to aid the YNK forces? Why are they still trying to stab us in the back?" This was still during the period when the organization was implementing Apo's orders for our troops. In fact, there were less than 500 guerillas left inside Turkey's borders. In some of the provinces, like Erzurum and Garzan, we did not leave a single guerilla behind. On top of that, the organization had sent nine of its senior members back to Turkey in order to show its sincerity for the peace process. This group surrendered themselves to the Turkish security forces in the Şemzinan (Şemdinli) District of the city of Hakkari. The organization sent them to Turkey as a goodwill gesture, and our trust was abused when our comrades were incarcerated. It has been 17 years, and these comrades are still in the Turkish

prisons. One of them even died of a heart attack three months ago in the Diyarbakır E-Type prison.

At this juncture, the organization was wholeheartedly pursuing peace. As I mentioned before, the guerillas were only being trained in ways to promote the peace efforts. In fact, we guerillas were not given any battle training until the end of 2003. This was a difficult process for the organization. Iran was offering excessive incentives to continue fighting Turkey. “If you begin fighting against the Turks again, we will supply all your ammunitions and weapons free of charge! You will no longer have to worry yourselves over finding money for access to weapons!”

There was a very strange incident that developed between Iran and the organization in 1999 during our peace negotiations with Turkey. I am sure the Turkish Intelligence officials might know of it. When Apo was first arrested, the organization prepared itself for a final conflict. This was going to be our life or death struggle in which we would attack with all our forces and weapons. For this last battle, we purchased expensive quality missiles from Europe. When they were on their way, they were first transported to Iran in carrier planes. Iran seized all of these missiles when Apo publicly declared that the organization was going to make peace with the state of Turkey. Iranian officials openly told senior members of our organization that, “You will either continue to fight against Turkey, or we will seize your missiles.” On top of that, they made us an offer. “If you continue your armed struggle against Turkey, we will provide you with five times more of these weapons for free. Also, your guerillas will be allowed to use the Iranian side of the Turkish-Iranian border to conduct missions against Turkish military posts and then come into Iran to prevent potential losses from their retaliations.”

Despite these incentives, the organization decided to continue its peace process with Turkey. It was not only Iran that was disturbed with this process but Syria as well. Syrian officials even arrested 50 mid-level organization members and handed them over to the Turkish security forces. It was very odd, since Syria had never handed over a single ground guerilla to Turkey before. It seemed as if Iraq were the only country that did not oppose the peace process, although there was also Barzani, who supported the peace process even though the organization had warred with him in the past.

The situation we were in at that point held many similarities to the guerilla struggles that had occurred in many other countries around the world being a reality of these things. The guerilla force were disregarded if they waved the white flag of peace, and ignored the armed struggle. If this ambivalence lasted for a long period, the guerillas lost their motivation to fight, and this was a potential risk of which the organization was well aware. In that context, the war that we had with the YNK was almost like a treat for the guerillas. We had not fought against the Turkish security forces for almost three years and had been camping in Iraq and Syria during the peace process, which was making us sluggish. Everyone was occupied with mundane chores, like gardening, the raising of animals, and things of that nature. Our war with the YNK and Iran had served as a way for us to pull together.

We waited until the very end of 2004 for an answer from the Turkish officials. There were very few preconditions for which the organization had asked, so a final ceasefire was possible to be achieved. For example, the organization did not ask for local PKK forces to be assigned to help with security in cities within Turkey that were mostly composed of Kurds. However, according to the current peace agreement between Turkey and the PKK, the establishment of local Kurdish security forces was an indispensable term of continued peace. At

the time, Turkish officials were constantly putting pressure on the organization to lay down their arms and dissolve the guerilla forces. It is quite sad that the Turkish officials were not as familiar with the PKK as was Iran. Can you imagine that you would fight against a group for the forty years, and you still did not understand its goals and internal dynamics? Our organization was not only there to protect the welfare of the Kurds in Turkey, but also the Kurds in Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Let's assume that we achieved peace with the state of Turkey. If that happened, who would defend the rights of the Kurds in those countries I just mentioned? Today, the Kurdish regimes, established in northern Iraq by Talabani (YNK) and Barzani (KDP,) are not working for the welfare of the Kurds there. They are both extremely feudal at the management level. The PKK should be out there protecting the Kurds in the short-term and changing the feudal systems into more socialist ones in the long-term. Also, the Turkish officials' insistence on the annihilation of the Guerrilla forces was pointless, because the organization had already brought its Armed forces out of Turkey into the camps in Iraq and Syria. The accuracy of this information could be checked from Turkish Intelligence resources. The ARGK retreated completely, and in its stead the organization established the HPG (Kurdish Public Defense Force).

### **THE SEPARATION OF THE GUERRILLA FORCES AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE**

The HPG organized its first conference in 2001. Until this conference, the guerilla force was above any other institution within the organization's leadership Hierarchy. Every other institution acted in line with the prime authority of the headquarters commander. However, with the decisions that were made during the 7th congress, the guerilla forces and political forces were

separated from one another and began acting as two independent institutions under the authority of the presidency council. One part of the change was that Duran Kalkan, Cemil Bayık, and Murat Karayılan served only with the guerilla forces. On the political side, Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş were both assigned to the top two positions. Nizamettin Taş and his team said to their supporters, “the war with the Turks is over, which now means the guerilla force is useless. The Kurdish Public Defense Forces have already replaced them in the major Kurdish cities in Turkey. A new era has begun, where situational control will be in the hands of the political elite. comrades, if we secure our uniformity, then we will have more control over the organization as a whole.”

Nizamettin Taş was supposed to be present during this first conference of the HPG, because he had to answer for the losses the guerillas had incurred when they withdrew from Turkey. As I mentioned before, the Turkish security forces laid an ambush at various locations and martyred many of our comrades, and Murat Karayılan was angry about this double-cross. “If the Turks did not keep their promise, then why were our troops withdrawn from Turkey? Why did you not at least attack them in retaliation to this backstab?” Comrade Murat heavily criticized Nizamettin Taş in his absence.

After this congress, I was assigned commander to a company at headquarters. The group consisted of guerillas who were discharged for various reasons, or who recently joined the organization. It was September of 2001, and I was playing volleyball in the headquarters’ backyard, when one of my comrades was running toward us shouting, “They hit America! Go and watch the news!” The attack was live on the TV, and we saw that the Twin Towers were in flames.

In the days after the attack, we talked a lot about the incident. We watched the news coming from the United States and were sure that the U.S. was going to attack Afghanistan, and then Iraq. Our organization was normally listed as a terrorist group under the U.S. Department of State's terrorist organizations list. We wondered whether America would only target the radical Islamic groups in Iraq, or would they also target us. There were some among us who argued that if the U.S. was successful in its invasion of Iraq, the American forces would be able to harm organizations and groups within the cities but would not be able reach out and attack groups like the PKK that operate in the countryside, at steep elevations. Also, although American officials were part of the reason for Apo's incarceration, the American military had never targeted the organization directly. Likewise, the organization had never targeted an American citizen directly. The majority of us thought that the U.S. would never come after us, even though they invaded Iraq.

With the founding of the HPG (The Kurdish Public Defense Forces), the guerillas' confusion, over lack of purpose, largely vanished. Everyone knew that there was nothing like the resolve of the guerilla forces, even though we were no longer fighting against Turkey. Also, the organization had made up its mind that if Ankara would take concrete steps toward peace, we would not leave a single guerilla in Turkey. Nevertheless, the guerilla force would still function until the welfare of the Kurds in Syria, Iraq, and, Iran was assured.

Around the end of 2001, the organization began doubting Turkey's sincerity. In almost three years, Ankara had not taken a single step toward peace. There were no decrees or efforts to make necessary changes to the constitution, by the Turkish Parliament. Also, Turkish officials were still planning to marginalize the guerilla forces by wasting their time with lies, and then annihilating them when they were weakened. So when the organization realized their scheme, it

began to pay more attention to guerilla training activities. The trainings were strict and continued day and night. Around this same time, the first book that Apo wrote in prison reached us in the camps. It was titled, *From the Sumerian Divine State to the Democratic Republic*. We began to use this book during the guerillas' political training. It generally consisted of information regarding the vital steps toward a peaceful solution between the Turks and Kurds.

The guerilla force's composition was completely restructured when the HPG was formed. The units were decreased in number, but the quality of the guerillas fighting in these small units increased dramatically. Our guerilla force consisted of only three thousand quality soldiers, as opposed to the seven or eight thousand it had once been. In addition, the trainers were hired from a more professional group. For example, when I was staying at headquarters, the organization recruited a highly qualified trainer, who had learned professional military tactics in Russia, Armenia, and Greece, and knew many details about weapons and explosives. When he first visited my company for training, he said, "For this entire week I will train you on how to use a Dragunov sniper rifle." We criticized him saying, "We have been using this weapon for years now. What more can you teach us that we do not already know?" Even with our doubts, the man taught us things that we had never considered before; factors we should consider during shooting, such as how the wind, rain, and snow affect bullets. Also, how we could shoot a moving patrol car, or how we could shoot down a helicopter, as well as other advanced level trainings.

When we finished these weapons training sessions, we trained with poisons and chemical gasses. There were sixty-three mid-level commanders present at the training school back then, and this chemical gas training was given to only thirteen of us, including myself. Before we were dispatched, the organization strictly warned each of us to not share our knowledge of

poisons and chemical gasses with other guerillas. This meant the training stayed strictly with us. Where we would normally share our newfound knowledge with our comrades, this was one instance when we could not do so and were even required to swear that we would not use the skills acquired from that training without the knowledge of the organization. The punishment for breaking this oath was severe.

When we completed all that training, we were dispatched to other regions to train ground guerillas in everything except the poisons. The reason was because it was very risky to use but quite easy to obtain the substances needed to create them. Actually, some poisons were acquired from certain poisonous reptiles. First, you would kill them, and let them dry out under the sun, and when dry as paper, you pulverized them. Congratulations, you would now have poison strong enough to kill a human being.

The other method to create poison was just as simple. I do not remember exactly, but there were two main substances involved, with one of them able to be found in pharmacies and the other one in jewelry stores. When sulfuric acid or nitric acid was mixed with gold water, an extremely poisonous gas was formed. We were putting these two liquid substances into different cups, and then placing them in the space located at the front of the rockets. When those rockets hit the target and blew up, the two substances would interact with each other and kill every living thing around. Of course, the distance, speed, and direction of the wind were crucial when using such tactics. You would have to be at least five hundred meters away from the target otherwise you would also be affected by the gas. Because of the ease of procurement, and the high rate of fatality, the organization did not want everyone trained in the use of poisons. That responsibility was given only to the people whom they deeply trusted.



While we were going through our intensive training, the former senior commanders and members of the Presidency Council gathered to create a new name for the organization. As I said, the organization underwent a wide scale structural change. The guerilla forces and the political groups were now completely independent from one another. This gathering resulted in a new name: KADEK (Kurdistan Peace and Democracy Congress.) The guerilla forces rejected this change from the very beginning. Their commanders informed the Presidency Council that they did not recognize the name KADEK and would never use it. The guerillas said, “We were born with, grew up with, and will die with the PKK.” The organization initially thought that only the military force objected to the title change, but it soon became apparent that even the Kurdish public were disappointed in it. At the beginning of 2003, the organization changed from KADEK to KONGRA-GEL (Public Congress.) The guerillas also rejected this change. The senior executives tried convincing the guerilla force by saying, “This title change will be a fresh start for the image of the PKK in the world, since we are now considered a Terrorist organization by some states. This way, we would turn the page, and start anew in our struggle.” The senior officials figured that since we were at peace then, it would be better to completely get rid of the name PKK.

Also, Duran Kalkan visited the school back then, and said to us, “My comrades, to be honest, I also cannot get my head around this title change. However, as an organization, we are undergoing a huge structural and policy change. Look, I am one of those who laid out the foundations of the PKK, and we are not going change its name voluntarily, but we must do it to refresh our image with some countries.”

## TRAGIC DEATHS

In 2002, when I was still in the guerilla officer training school, a shooting tournament was organized. A female guerilla and I made it to the finals, among sixty people. As finalists, we were to first shoot a cartridge case at a hundred meters and then an empty tomato paste can at a distance of three hundred meters. The winner would be determined after completion of the two shooting stages. That was the day I had ended my relationship with Sevin, and my mind was in a shambles, which made me unable to concentrate on the tournament. It was impossible to hit a bull's eye when your mind was busy elsewhere. On one occasion, I was able to pause my breathing, but I was not able to adjust the pressure on the trigger, which needed to be smooth and even. On another occasion, I was able to adjust the pressure correctly, but I was not able to control my breathing. It seemed impossible for me to do both of these essential things at the same time. Therefore, I asked the tournament committee to postpone the Final for two days, and my request was accepted.

A shooter's psychological and emotional state is very important when shooting a gun, and if you are on an assassination mission, it is even more important. If you had had an argument or were upset before an assassination mission, the organization would never send you on the mission. As an assassin, you are monitored very closely by the organization. A team would examine you from all angles; your behavior, attitude, psychological state, etc. Only after you have been thoroughly vetted would they decide whether or not you were ready.

Three days later, I left early and went to where the tournament final was to be held. I visited the ammunition warehouse and carefully selected the bullets that I would use, because the quality of your bullets can change the outcome. Most of the time, they are made in the same factory and are the same type, but if you join a tournament it is wise to check the serial numbers

on the bullets simply because bullet factories might change their type of gunpowder based on different batches of bullets. This means that even though they can be the same type and size of bullet, they may not contain the same type of gunpowder. Using bullets with differing powders makes it harder to be accurate, so choosing bullets that had been made in the same batch ensures that problem is negated. And so, with that in mind, I chose five bullets with consecutive serial numbers.

Although I was now ready for the tournament, I still had some concerns that I could possibly lose to a newbie female guerilla, and that would be a disgrace. Being an older guerilla and having a chance of being beaten by a newcomer was upsetting to me. It could happen, because she was quite accurate at shooting targets. Because she had never smoked, she could easily control her breathing muscles and pause her breathe properly. Whatever the consequences, I had to do something to limp this newbie out of the tournament.

One by one, I completed my shots. Four out of five hit their target. Since it was a tournament, we both had to use the same weapon. After I finished, I slightly displaced the scope of the rifle before giving her the weapon. She filled her bullets into it and began shooting. She could not hit the target on her first or second try. The bullets were moving toward the same place, but not hitting the target. Because she had already missed two shots, she was automatically eliminated from the tournament. She seemed to dwell on it for a second but could not understand why she had missed. During all of this, I was watching quietly from a distance. The whole officer school was present at the competition field.

I was about to be announced as the winner of the competition but was struck with a guilty conscience. I went to the training commission and confessed to what I had done. The commission announced her name and informed her that she was the winner! “Deniz has just

confessed that he played with the accuracy of the scope.” They told her. She looked me in the eyes, and then turned to the commission, replying, “No, Deniz is the winner. It was my fault. I should have checked the accuracy of the scope before I attempted my shots. Despite the fact that Deniz played a trick on me, I am at fault since I ignored one of the essential rules of shooting. So, he is the winner.”

She was right. Controlling your weapon was an essential rule that is strictly enforced by the organization. Even if you receive a weapon from someone whom you trust (even if this person is your father), you must check it before shooting. You can never say, “This gun is from someone I trust, and I do not need to check it.”

In 2002, we actually experienced a very tragic incident related to this issue. Eight or nine new female guerillas joined our battalion. They had been trained before they were sent to us. However, their company commander wanted to give them one more drill to make sure they were ready.

It was raining heavily that day, and I was lecturing on theoretical issues to my guerillas in the company. Around 2:00 p.m., a guard headed toward me shouting, “The women’s company commander is severely wounded! Hurry, she needs help!”

Upon hearing his cry, I immediately headed to where I knew she had been giving drills. When I arrived, she was still alive, but unfortunately the bullet had hit her carotid artery. An ice bag had been placed on the wound before we arrived. When I removed the bag, blood began gushing from the wounded artery. I replaced the bag to stop the bleeding and asked the commanders to send out all the newbies. When battalion commanders were all that were left in the room, I turned to them and said, “She’s been shot in her carotid artery and only has a few minutes more to live.”

She died from the loss of blood, and I left the scene to meet with the newbies that had been present and asked how it had happened. The youngest woman in the group was still weeping and inconsolable. Then, one of the others spoke up, “There were initially seven people present at the training, and another of our comrades joined the us late. We were all holding weapons, but none of them were loaded. We knew they were not loaded, because the company commander had checked them, one by one, before giving them to us. Our comrade who arrived late asked our commander what she could do, and the commander told her to get a weapon and join the rest of the trainees. But the commander had not checked to see whether the weapon was loaded or not, like she had with the rest of us. We all lined up in front of her, and she ordered us to target her with our weapons. The training session was about learning how to pause our breath and have proper trigger control. She first lectured us on how to apply these two rules when shooting in theory. After that, she asked us to apply these techniques while holding our weapons toward her and then pulling the trigger. Apparently, the late-comer’s gun was loaded, and when she pulled the trigger, she unknowingly hit our commander in the neck.” She indicated that the girl who had been late was the sixteen-year-old who was crying.

It was a very tragic incident. In fact, after this incident, the organization banned company and battalion commanders from delivering weapon trainings like this. After 2002, professionally trained weapon instructors began to visit the battalions, one by one, to train the guerillas.

It was an awful time for the organization back then, experiencing tragic incidents one after another. Not even a week after the death of the female company commander, the weather was rainy again, and it was as if the heavens themselves had opened up. The rain gave me a very bad feeling, so I followed the instincts of my gut, radioed the battalion commander, and ordered him, “Take the hillers down. We will not have guards on that hill tonight.” He asked why, and I

replied, “The hill is high and they have radios. A lightning strike could hit them because of their radios.”

(As an aside, that is a well-known historical hill. According to legend, even Alexander the Great could not get his troops over it.) Anyway, while I was still talking to the company commander on the radio, a lightning strike hit the top of that very hill. We immediately tried to contact the Hiller, via the radio, but there was no answer. Even though it was the middle of the night, my assistant and I climbed up there in the heavy rain. When we arrived, the view we encountered was horrific. They had all been martyred. The death of those comrades and the female company commander within that very same week affected all of us psychologically.

In 2004, while I was staying in Hakurki, a note arrived indicating that the organization, after so many years of peace, was going to begin warring against Turkey again. The guerilla force staying in the south had to be trained immediately in guerilla war tactics, because many of them were newbies. My company was dispatched to Metina, the same year for that very purpose. In only two months, I was to give accelerated guerilla training to these newbies.

I quickly prepared a list of supplies that were necessary to train them: 100,000 AK-47 bullets, 10,000 bixi bullets, 250 hand bombs, 100 rocket launcher, 50 kg’s of TNT, 50 kg’s of C4, etc. I listed every single item that was essential for their training and asked the Metina Field officials to get them for me.

It was a normal occurrence for our comrades be accidentally wounded or even die during these trainings. The organization considers a casualty rate of three percent (three deaths for every hundred trainees) to be normal. During the training I gave in Metina, four guerillas in our battalion were wounded. There was an accidental detonation of a mine, and one of our comrades lost his eyes and another one’s leg was torn apart. In one of the sabotage trainings the students

were instructed to prepare their own mines. One of the comrades had been late for the training that day and so had not been present when the mine substances were distributed to other trainees. The trainer told him to go to the warehouse and get the proper substances himself. Normally, the trainer should have accompanied him and given him the substances by weighing them first. Since the trainee did not know how much he was supposed to take, he took five times more of the explosive than was required.

The training plan called for the mines that were prepared by the trainees to be buried underground in the training field. They would not kill anyone, even if someone stepped on them, because they did not contain enough of the explosive substance. At the most, there would only be a loud disturbing noise. Of course, the other comrades in the battalion were not aware of this. They were supposed to walk over them during the morning muster. The comrade who had been late to training that day, buried his mine at the spot where I usually greet my company in the morning. (Incidentally, I did not join in the morning muster that day, as I had watched a political show on TV late into the night and informed my guards not to wake me up in the morning.)

That morning, while I was sleeping, there was such a loud noise that I woke up and directly rushed to the assembly area. There were three comrades wounded, lying on the ground. A female guerilla had stepped on the mine while passing from our zone to hers. Every single area of her body was hit by shell fragments, from her head to her toes. She lost both eyes in this incident. As I applied first aid to her, and while cleaning the wounds on her head, I realized that one of her eye sockets was empty. The eye had probably been displaced by shell fragments. The other one was still in the eye socket but it had been hit by a fragment.

Everyone panicked wondering who may have planned such a plot. Everything was revealed once the investigation was complete. The trainee who was late for the training had in

fact prepared a real mine. On top of that, the ground where he buried the mine was filled with pebble stones. These small pieces of rock were propelled by the explosion like pieces of iron. I immediately called the Instructor and asked him why he had given such an amount of explosive substance to that trainee. After thinking for a while, he remembered him and said that he had not given him the substances, but rather the trainee had gotten them himself. I could not put this trainer under investigation, since he was working as a part of the special forces. Despite this, I immediately had him arrested. He was sent back to special forces command after a few days of incarceration in my company.

After the incident, we delivered the seriously wounded comrades to a hospital in Dohuk, Iraq. One of them was treated there, but the comrade who lost her eyes was transferred from Iraq to a better treatment facility in Russia. Russia was quite professional in the realm of eye surgery, and in fact, the Russian doctors were able to treat the eye that was hit by a shrapnel fragment. We also transferred some our wounded comrades to Germany. German doctors were good at treatment as well.



## CHAPTER 16

### INTERNAL CONFLICT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

In July of 2002, I was dispatched to Hakurki from the Kandil region. Hakurki is a guerilla camp located in the triangle of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. When I arrived at the Hakurki camp, I found the organization had decided to relocate to our previously abandoned camps within the borders of Turkey. We were going to recapture the fronts we had deserted in 1999, because of the peace agreement. The organization was doing this simply because Ankara had not taken any concrete steps toward peace during this time frame. Some senior officials argued that the organization was going to be put into a state of war yet again. Apo harshly objected to this decision by sending a letter from his prison through his attorneys. "There has been a coalition government in Ankara, and they could not take the vital steps necessary for peace, because of their ideological fights. Nevertheless, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) has now come to power alone without the support of a coalition partner. We have to give it some time before we can say it has failed. Dispatch the guerillas to their old fronts within Turkey, but do not carry out any missions against the Turkish security forces. We should first wait and see whether there will be any progress toward the effort of peace."

In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq, and at the same time the organization had a split among the senior officials yet again. One faction argued the necessity of fighting against the American forces, while another faction defended the idea that it would be beneficial for the organization to ally with the American forces against Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army. If we allied with them, we would be able to gain the trust of the U.S. government. In the long run, this partnership would help the organization in its fight against Turkey. During this period, the

diplomatic relations between Ankara and Washington DC were already strained. Ankara, a strong ally of Washington D.C., did not let the American forces use the military bases within Turkey during the war. It would be very advantageous for the organization to ally with the United States right away. I do not know if they actually signed an agreement with the U.S. government, but the American forces left us alone even though they destroyed many other organizations within Iraq.

We received intelligence that Nizamettin Taş and Osman Öcalan, the political elites of the organization, were secretly meeting with the American officials. Those two idiots were not aware that they were being used. It turned out that the Americans were aiming to attract them and then kill the rest of the seniors so they could take full control of the PKK. In 2003, when the danger became readily apparent, the organization gathered in a new congress. During those types of congresses, a committee inspects the budget reports of both the guerilla forces and the political wings. A 30 thousand-dollar deficit was found in the political wing's financial report. Cemil Bayık and Murat Karayılan made hay while the sun shone and gave a hard time to Nizamettin Taş. Although it was not a significant amount of deficit, it was a good opportunity to press Nizamettin Taş, since Bayık and Karayılan were seriously disturbed by his secret meetings with the U.S. officials.

Beyond this, the political side of the organization had gone too far in other matters, as well. I mentioned previously, that when Kongra-Gel was first formed, Nizamettin Taş and Osman Ocalan were planning to take control of the organization. In their minds, after they captured control during this congress, they were going to appoint their own men to leadership positions in the guerilla forces and get rid of both Murat Karayılan and Cemil Bayık. When the other senior officials noticed their plan, comrade Cuma made a smart offer to counteract their

plans, declaring, “In this congress, the senior leadership should not volunteer to any position at the management level. We should rest for a while and let some new faces into the administration of our organization. Do you all agree with me?” In this way, Cuma and Cemil sacrificed their positions at the administration level in order to prevent the potential harm that might be done by Nizamettin and Osman.

Osman Öcalan and Nizamettin Taş also developed their own plans before the start of this congress. Using their influence over the committee members, they made a pronouncement that everyone who had been invited to attend the congress must leave their weapons outside. This proclamation was all part of a bigger scam. If they were unable to win the coveted leadership roles through a legitimate election, then they were going to do it through a coup, and they knew it would be easier to arrest the guerillas if they were unarmed.

Murat Karayılan and Duran Kalkan were both surprised when asked to leave their arms at the main entrance of the congress hall. They said, “We are not leaving our weapons behind. We are guerillas, not political appointees like you. We will enter the hall with our guns, whether this is a congress or a conference.” When their request was rejected, all the delegates of the military force withdrew from the congress. Cemil Bayık tried to ease the tension with Murat Karayılan by saying, “Hide an armed unit nearby, but make sure that the political Wing does not know about it. If they try to stage a coup, the armed force will arrest every single one of them. After you arrange this, come back to the congress hall, hand over your weapons, and participate in the congress.”

Cemil Bayık delivered the opening speech of the congress, informing the participants of the news that the senior officials were not going to be candidates for administrative level positions. Then, he let everyone know that he would not be volunteering for a position at the

management level. Duran Kalkan and Murat Karayılan also said the same thing and reiterated that it was high time for the newbies to prove themselves. When the senior officials of the guerilla forces finished their speeches, the senior officials of the political wing began to speak. Nizamettin Taş went up to the podium first and caused eyebrows to rise when he declared that he was a candidate for the presidency of the congress. Similarly, Osman Öcalan also declared that he was a candidate.

When the congress took a recess, Cemil Bayik and Murat Karayılan went over to Botan and Osman Öcalan and asked them why they had not been loyal to their promises. Botan said, “Come on Cemal, we cannot give control over to the newbies. We, as an organization, cannot take such a large risk. There has to be at least a few of us among them, to guide them in their decisions. That is why we declared our candidacy.” Cemil Bayik got annoyed with this reasoning, and asked, “Then, why the hell did you not inform us of this concern of yours?” Osman Ocalan and Botan stayed silent in response to his question.

The delegates in the congress were mostly from the political movement. The number of delegates from the guerilla force was not as large as it had previously been. Much of the decrease in numbers, was a result of the fact that the guerilla women had their own distinct group and management, differing from the men’s. Even their headquarters was located in a different place. Also, the female forces were subject to the control of the political wing for many concerns, except for issues involving battle. Osman and Botan were going to capture control of the organization by siding with the female force, and Cemil Bayik visited their leader and warned her not to be used by the political wing. She retorted to Cuma, “We will not take your side or theirs. We will use Apo’s previous decisions for the basis of what we decide.”

Since Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, and Murat Karayılan had already gone in front of everyone and declared that they were not going to be candidates for any position, they would not now backtrack and announce that they would be candidates. That kind of reversal was unacceptable to the culture of the organization. With that option already crossed out, they sat together and argued the other potential options. “If Botan and Osman capture the congress, they would be powerless, without the control of the guerilla force. Therefore, one way or another, we have to prevent them from capturing the control of the guerillas, and there is only one way to achieve that. We will establish a new institution that will be a connection between the guerilla force and the Presidency Council. In terms of the hierarchal state, the new institution will be above the guerilla force but below the Presidency Council. If we can appoint our men to this new institution, then it would not be important whether or not they appoint their own men to the guerilla force leadership.”

Zübeyir Aydar was elected president of the congress. Nizamettin Taş and Osman Öcalan were both elected as members of the congress, and when the congress members began arguing about the changes that needed to be made to the guerilla force, Cemil Bayık stood and suggested the establishment of a new institute, named the defense committee. The defense committee would more easily establish relations between the political wing and the guerilla forces. Of course, everyone accepted the proposal, since it came from Cuma. Just then, a comrade of ours stood up and said, “We should appoint Murat Karayılan as the leader of the defense committee. After all, he is the most experienced among us.” What that man suggested came to pass. At the end of the voting process, Murat Karayılan was elected to lead the defense committee.

Once Karayılan was elected, he informed everyone that he was personally going to decide where anyone was assigned within the guerilla force. Because of this unexpected defeat,

Botan and Öcalan were incapable of accomplishing their plan to capture control of the organization. Verbal threats began between the two sides, and Murat Karayılan sent word to the forces waiting outside to lay siege of the field of congress, and no one was to be allowed to leave. The weapons on Botan and Ferhat's guards were collected one by one. Botan and Ferhat then declared that they were sorry for what they had done, and they would respect the decisions made by the organization from then on. However, as soon as the organization lifted the ban on traveling outside the congressional field, Botan, Ferhat, and 15 other senior leaders fled and took refuge with Jalal Talabani. The organization asked Talabani to hand over the runaways, but he rejected their request, saying that he would not fulfill such a demand since American authorities were backing the group.

#### **ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON COMRADE CEMAL (MURAT KARAYILAN)**

The first thing on Murat Karayılan's list, as head of the defense committee, was reorganizing the guerilla forces. Within this new structure, the HPG was not going to carry out attacks against the Turkish military posts as it had before. Instead, using small groups of men, it would predominantly perform assassinations and carry out sabotages. For example, the organization used to have 1,000 guerillas within the Amed region. With Comrade Cemal's changes, we would have at most 150 guerillas there. This number of guerillas was not going to be increased under any circumstance; however, the smaller unit of guerillas was expected to do the work that 1,000 guerillas had done in previous years. This was because the war technology that was being used by the Turks had greatly advanced. If we had continued to attack with large forces, we would lose many of our comrades, because of advanced war weaponry, such as fighter

jets, attack helicopters, and tanks. Therefore, the organization decreased the number of guerillas fighting within Turkey, and began dispatching only the best ones there.

As a company commander in the Hakurki region, I was sent a battalion that was led by a particular female battalion commander with whom I was acquainted. Because of my prior knowledge, I knew that she was not qualified to lead the battalion, so I contacted headquarters and informed them, “You dispatched me here as a commander, but my superior officer is heavy-handed. Do not accuse me, if there is a crisis here in the near future.” In fact, this woman was not trained well enough to properly lead three companies. After a short while, headquarters sent me a note that said, “Comrade Deniz, we assigned you there for the very reason you mentioned. You will help her in every aspect and guide her when necessary. Make her feel as if she is doing everything but go behind her and make sure that everything is in order.” Even though I replied to them that I would do whatever I could, I was disturbed by this response. If it ever came out in the future, it might be said that I treated the battalion commander like dirt by seizing her initiative, and I could have been prosecuted for my actions.

In the beginning of 2004, while in Hakurki, I was first tasked with the responsibility of overseeing the construction of a monument for one of our fallen comrade, named Mahsun Korkmaz. His statue was to be placed in the park there. The United States had already invaded Iraq, which helped us a great deal. The organization had some construction vehicles before the invasion of Iraq, but their numbers were limited, since they were so expensive to keep. When the U.S. invaded, almost every battalion had passenger cars and heavy-duty machines. The company commanders had Hummers as staff cars. I do not know why, but at the time, Hummers were named Monica in Iraq, and we could easily buy a Monica for five thousand dollars. In addition to that, there were also German-made Mercedes-brand giant armored trucks, and we

could buy one of those for fifteen thousand dollars. I do not know how accurate the information was, but it was said that those trucks had battle-tank engines. Apart from those, we could easily find crawler excavators, diggers, crawler dozers, and many other heavy-duty machines. Thanks to the coalition forces, almost every battalion had a few of those vehicles.

We needed many bricks and stones in order to build the park, and thanks to the machines, we were able to easily transport the necessary items to the park from hardware stores in Iraq. The construction was completed in two weeks. Normally, without the machines, it would have taken at least three months. The statue of Mahsun Korkmaz had to be built by a company located in Iran, and our comrades used one of the big trucks to bring the statute to Hakurki. The park was quite nice, and the organization would show it off to official committees from Europe when they visited. There was even a visitors' book they could sign. You would be amazed at the well-known local and foreign names who had written something in this book.

We had a magnificent opening ceremony planned for the park on August 15th when a tragic incident occurred in Kandil. The assistant to the headquarters commander was martyred. Our comrades had organized a theatre play for the opening, and during one of the rehearsals, the actors were given training bullets to make it more realistic and exciting. However, while Murat Karayilan and other senior members were watching the rehearsal, someone used a real bullet and shot the comrade sitting right next to Murat.

Since the shooting happened during rehearsal, at first no one noticed anything was wrong, but then this comrade fell lifelessly to the ground. Besides him, two other comrades were seriously wounded. Because of this incident, all celebrations that had been scheduled that year were canceled. The headquarters assistant, Erdal, was a deeply respected and loved person. In fact, the organization built a statue of him in the Pazarcık district of Elbistan, in Turkey.



The female guerilla that had used real bullets was detected by close inspection of video camera recordings. We initially thought that she had planned this heinous plot, but we were wrong. The female guerilla had not known that her gun was loaded with real bullets, and the real culprit had run away while we were interrogating her.

We figured out who it was and discovered that he had been incarcerated in Iraq for six years. The organization had tasked him with a very important job there in 1994, and he was cautioned that, “If you get caught, you should never tell them that you work for us!” The same thing was told to anyone who was sent out for an important mission. This person was supposed to kill someone with the nickname of Kemal, who was previously employed in the senior ranks of the organization. When the PYD was first established in Syria, Kemal had nominated himself as leader. As I mentioned before, this type of behavior does not go along with the organization’s culture. One cannot just ask for a position. The organization rejected his nomination, and Kemal began working for the Iraqi intelligence service. His information and actions resulted in the incarceration of many guerillas in Iraq.

The man that killed the assistant of the headquarters commander had been commissioned to kill Kemal—as soon as it was found that he had been feeding information to Iraqi Intelligence—but he’d been caught before he was able carry out his assassination mission. He had not been able to endure torture at the hands of Iraqi officials and confessed everything. In fact, when he confessed to the Iraqis that he was a member of the PKK, the organization’s diplomatic relations with Iraq became tense. The senior members of the organization were disappointed by this, since he had been cautioned several times that, in case of his arrest, he was not to reveal his ties with the organization. Because of this betrayal, the organization had not helped him while he was incarcerated.

After six years of confinement, he was released. We were able to learn the details after the organization was able to capture him. He returned to the organization just to take revenge for the six years he had spent in jail. He rationalized his mission to kill Murat Karayilan by thinking, "In 1994 I volunteered to carry out that mission for the organization, but they threw me under the bus. I was going to take revenge for my lost time by killing an important person like Murat Karayilan." I do not know whether the organization executed him or not.

### **THE STOLEN MULE**

Sometime in 2003 or 2004, while I was staying in a camp close to the park we had built, our comrades found a baby bear and a pig. Because they knew how much I loved animals, they brought them directly to me.

One day during their watch, the hillers noticed a big bear approaching the park area. They worried that it may attack our comrades and so killed it. Only after killing her, they noticed that it had been a mother bear and her cub. The pig, on the other hand, had been found during patrols. The baby bear was fine, but the pig turned out to be a troublemaker, and I was unable to cope with it. In the end, I gave it to another guerilla force, who probably ate it. That pig would go everywhere, and traipse through the meeting and training zones; even entering the wards to hide in our sleeping bags. He was always able to find me in the darkness by checking every sleeping guerilla, one by one. I think he found me by smell, and he would touch my face with its nose to waken me, so that I could give him some space in my bed. He was a real devil. He also stole food from the bear. Their plates were normally in different places, but it did not matter. The pig would always swiftly finish his food and rush over to the bear's plate to eat again. The bear would usually protect her food with one of her paws, trying to keep the pig

away by pushing him with her other paw. If the pig still insisted on eating from the bear's plate, then the bear would attack him with her claws, which convinced the pig to leave.

The baby bear was not nearly as naughty as the pig. I have never in my life seen another animal as smart as that bear. The first rule of looking after a bear is that you should not play around with it while it is hungry, because it could seriously harm you. However, after feeding it, you can play with it as you like. I fed milk to the bear for a while, and then she began to eat pure tomato sauce, which she loved. If you would let her, she would eat two cans of tomato sauce in one sitting. She was such an interesting creature; sometimes sitting in a chair just like a human being would do, and I would tickle her paws. If I tickled too hard, she would hold both of my hands very tightly and would sometimes even slap me in the face to stop the tickling. Other times, she would sit next to me and put her hand on my shoulder. She was such a cute animal.

One day, a comrade's father traveled all the way from Turkey, to our camp in Iraq, to visit his son. He wanted to take my bear back with him to Turkey. She was already grown up and, although I was sure she would never harm me, she might have harmed the other comrades. Also, I knew that I would soon be assigned to a new region, and it would be impossible to take her with me when I left. Therefore, I decided to give her to the comrade's father, but only after he promised me that he would never harm her.

Hakurki was where I reported for my next duty. In Hakurki there were no restrictions for ranked guerillas to have animals, so when I was dispatched there, the peasants gave me an almost two-year-old foal as a present, and he and I became very close. He loved to eat sugar cubes. Since he was old enough, I would sometimes take him with me when I visited other battalions. I could have ridden him during my journeys, but I did not have the heart for that, because he was more of a friend to me than an animal of burden. For example, let's say the distance to another

battalion was four hours. I would ride him for thirty minutes at most and then walk the rest of the way. Some of my comrades would occasionally say in jest, “Comrade Deniz, you feed this horse every day. It’s best to use him for riding, but you do not ride him or let us ride! Why then do you keep him with you all the time?”

While training in the winter camp of 2004, three teams from the southern province’s logistics unit came along with sixty mules. Some of their loads had fallen into the water—some of their possessions had been damaged from the water, and two of their mules had drowned. We hosted them that night and saw them off the next day with their mules loaded again. I was not aware at the time, but someone from our battalion had shot and killed one of their mules, because it was making too much noise during the night. Mules are stubborn animals, whom you cannot force to move a single step once they have a fit of obstinacy.

It was not until later that the logisticians realized that one of their mules was missing. Of course, since they could not explain this loss to their superiors, they simply put the blame on us. “We stayed with Comrade Deniz’s battalion last night, and someone from there most likely stole the mule from our herd.” At the time of this incident, we had four mules of our own, which did not include the one for which they were looking.

In June of 2005, I was chatting with the comrades in the battalion, when three senior executives from the logisticians’ battalion showed up unexpectedly—two women and a man. They told me, “Comrade Deniz, we want to tell you something, but we do not know exactly how to say it.” I assured them they were free to tell me whatever it was they needed to express. “Comrade, we came here to put you under investigation on the charge of theft.” Of course, I was surprised and asked them to give me more detail about this accusation. “While our caravan rested here, you and your region commander stole a mule that belonged to us.” I was so

surprised upon hearing this ridiculous accusation that I could not even reply for a while. The accusation was not yet finished. Not only had we stolen the mule, but also we had sent it to another region's commander, and that regional commander was going to be investigated next when they were through with the investigation against me and my battalion.

After finally taking all this in, I burst out in anger, "Are you out of your minds? You're saying that three highly ranked guerilla commanders would go and steal a mule, as if we did not have anything else to do? Do you even believe what you are accusing us of committing? They replied in a kind tone, "Comrade, the Supreme Discipline Committee tasked us to investigate these claims. If you want to object to the claims, then make an appeal to the High Guerilla Court." Our region commander then intervened, "Are you crazy? Who is making these claims about us? Do you have any solid proof in your hands? Are you aware of whom you are accusing with this bullshit?" No matter how angry we were, the committee began their formal investigation process.

They first checked out the mules in our battalion. I was making fun of the situation they had put themselves in, and asked, "Do you guys have a picture of the mule that was lost? How are you going to figure out that it's your mule, among ours?" They did not bother with a reply. The region commander and I were just about to give our official verbal statements regarding this incident when the guerilla that killed the mule, came to us and confessed his crime. "I killed that mule, and its carcass is lying behind those trees. You can go and check, if you do not believe me." The committee members did, in fact, go to the described location and inspected the carcass of the mule.

After we were cleared of any wrongdoing, I began to press the members of the investigation committee, one by one, and then sued them for mental anguish. I accused the

members of the Supreme Discipline Committee of insulting senior commanders without further elaborating on details of the false claims. Because of this insult and mental anguish, I asked the judge to compensate my battalion with two new mules. The trial lasted for six months.

While the trial was ongoing, I visited the command ranks of the logisticians that had placed the blame on us and asked them, “What kind of people are you? Why did not you come to us first, and talk about it before taking it to the Supreme Discipline Committee?” They all blushed. I added, “Do not ever come near our battalion again, not even to visit! We would not even help you if you were suffering at the hands of our enemies.”

One day, central headquarters command sent me a note to withdraw my case. Initially I rejected it, but the senior members insisted, so finally I relinquished. “Okay, I will drop the case. However, those three members of the discipline committee will apologize to me in front of my guerillas. This ugly slander had not only defamed me, but also the reputation of my battalion. That’s why these comrades will come here and abase themselves in front of everyone.” They did in fact visit our battalion and did what I requested of them, and only then did I withdraw my lawsuit.

## **HOW TO DESTROY AN ARMORED MILITARY VEHICLE**

Before we began to fight against Turkey in 2004, the guerilla force was already trained on explosive substances. As I mentioned previously, to stay in line with new guerilla strategy, we were not going to carry out raids against military posts any longer. Instead, we would use more developed techniques, with reduced numbers of guerillas, and, therefore, advancing our knowledge on explosives was crucial. It was a consistent and grueling training. We had to invent new ways of activating bombs, since the Turkish security forces had figured out our

tactics. For instance, we began using remote controlled explosives, and when the Turks took measures to disable them, we began using small hand radios to activate our bombs. You know those Motorola brand walky-talkies that children used for fun? We used them to send activation signals to our bombs. Of course, the Turks soon figured out this tactic also and then imported devices called jammers.

The organization then began to use car remotes to counteract the influence of jammers. Many people do not know, but the remote that opens the trunk of a car sends a very powerful signal, and this signal can be effective for up to six kilometers. So, you can activate a bomb by hiding in a place that is six kilometers away from the detonation spot. The only thing that you should consider is that there should not be anything between you and the bomb that would potentially affect the signal, meaning that the bomb should be visible to the person who is detonating it. We used this method for a long time, because it made it nearly impossible to be caught. When the security forces found out we were using car remotes, they bought even more advanced jammers to deactivate them. Then, to counteract this, we had to buy more expensive and more effective gadgets from Europe. These new gadgets were effective even from longer distances. And since they were not using FM waves, we did not need to see the target to activate the bomb. These new tools were very expensive, but after a while the organization was able to manufacture them in its explosives development lab in Iraq.

We had a team of about thirty professionals in that lab, whose duty it was to develop those kinds of explosives to be used by the guerillas. The raw materials for the bombs were supplied from European countries. I remember one time the organization had a large shipment of electronic parts that were to be used in explosives. Unfortunately, our comrade transporting the items was caught in Germany, just before he headed into Iraq. Because of the money and

work we had put into it, we lost almost two hundred thousand dollars. The German security officials interrogated our comrade in order to learn what he was planning to do with the electronic parts. He refused to answer any of the questions, so they seized the parts and let him go.

Those parts had been really important to us, because they were used for a small box-shaped device to disable the jammers. There were no circuits on these disablers. You simply buried it under the ground in the middle of the road. The most significant issue was identifying the vehicle in which the ranked soldiers were traveling, when a military convoy drove by. The soldiers of high rank usually traveled in armed vehicles called ZPTs. Then, while the convoy passed, we could easily destroy the armored military vehicles with our highly advanced box-shaped devices. This whole process was cyclical, since the guerillas and the soldiers were continuously counteracting one another's' tactics.

There was a mission carried out by the organization in Lice-Diyarbakir in 2009. An armored vehicle, purchased for a million dollars by the Turkish military was destroyed. The Chief of General Staff, Ilker Başbuğ, made the statement saying, "We could not quite figure out what kind of explosive the organization used in this mission." Actually, the organization had used propane gas tanks for that mission. Specifically, we used the empty propane tanks that were kept for our winter camps. We carefully cut the tanks into two equal parts along the welded line on their sides. The tank was then filled with explosives and welded back together with the detonator cap on the outside. When those bombs exploded, they made such an unbelievable impact. The more pressure that was inside the bomb, the greater the explosion was going to be.



All these bombing tactics were developed in 2004. The Turkish security forces had been under the delusion that, “The organization had not been fighting for the last four to five years, and thus had probably fallen from power and been marginalized until now. They could not fight against us, even though they wanted.” They were completely wrong in their thinking. Not only had we not weakened, but we actually progressed in many ways, including explosive manufacturing!

### **AMBUSH BY AL-QAEDA MEMBERS**

The Americans were going to elect a new president in the fall of 2004. One of my comrades asked whether I was supporting the Democrats or the Republican Bush. I said that it would be better if Bush were elected as the president. This comrade got a somewhat annoyed, and said, “You are a guerilla fighter, and you are supporting a Republican candidate? That is unbelievable!” I reminded him about the incident in 1999. “Was it not the U.S. that struck a major blow to our organization [C.I.A. handed over Apo to Turkey]?” He confirmed that it was, and I asked, “Was not this huge blow carried out during the tenure of a Democrat president?” With a red face, he answered, “Yes!” I said, “Comrade, look! The Republicans are at least frank about their intentions. If they are our enemies, they will say so openly. However, the Democrats are not like that. They pretend to be your ally when they hold a grudge against you, and they always use insidious politics. It is better for the organization if the Americans elect a Republican president. At least then we would know how they would approach us.”

This is the same for the Democrats and Republicans within Turkey. You may find it strange, but no one in the organization would easily get annoyed with the supporters of the MHP (Nationalistic Movement Party) because they explicitly say what they think about people and

organizations, such as, “I do not recognize the Kurds. I do not recognize the PKK, and the only potential solution is the complete surrender of the PKK.” MHP supporters openly expose their feelings of hate. Then, there were the other groups. For example, there was the AKP. They pretended to be handling the peace process between Turkey and the Kurds, but at the same time, at every opportunity, they dispatched security forces to kill us. This was quite obviously an insidious policy they follow. MHP supporters explicitly say that they are nationalists and represent only the Turks. The Democrats claim that they represent every single ethnic and minority group within Turkey. They say they are the voices of the Lazes, the Kurds, the Alevis, the Cherkesses, the Arabs, the Sunnis, and the Shi’ites within Turkey. However, they do nothing when it comes to the basic rights of these groups. They are just crooks wearing the sympathetic mask of a friend.

Let’s turn back to the Republicans and Democrats in the United States. George Bush was heavily criticized for things such as invading Afghanistan, invading Iraq, and putting the U.S. at war with the world. Obama, on the other hand, withdrew those American soldiers from Iraq and gained the love of many in the U.S. Now, go and look at the situation in Iraq. Who controls the state of Iraq today? Iran, a country which was the number one enemy of the United States. How many Sunnis are repressed and have suffered at the hands of Iranian-backed Shia Government in Iraq? Hundreds of thousands! When did Al-Qaeda manage to infiltrate into Iraq? When did ISIS appear on TV with the well-known beheadings? All of these things happened after Obama withdrew the American forces from Iraq. When one does not follow the politics of the world, they can be easily fooled. Many say that the Democrats act more humanely by recognizing and protecting universal human rights. That is nothing but a huge lie.

On November 27, 2004, we were preparing to celebrate the PKK's anniversary when disheartening news came from Iraq. Al-Qaeda, which was now operating under the name ISIS, martyred six of our comrades. Four of the six fallen comrades served in high positions at the management level. Since the incident took place in the KDP region, we first pressed the KDP forces on whether they had anything to do with what had happened. Barzani, himself, personally informed the organization that they had no prior knowledge regarding the plot. Later, the organization found out that the mission had been performed by one of the religious groups operating under Al-Qaeda. Our comrades were ambushed while they were traveling in a Toyota truck. The Al-Qaeda fighters broke the truck into pieces by shooting it with a long-barreled weapon. Afterward, the truck had been set on fire. The organization was bursting with anger because of this atrocity. It was hard to understand why Al-Qaeda had suddenly carried out such an attack against the organization, because we had never had a problem with them before.

It was learned later, that the ambush had been organized by someone who used to work for the organization. After discovering that, we knew that one way or another, we would take our revenge. A company commander, who had been acquainted with the man, was tasked with killing him. The defector had not only caused the death of our comrades but also leaked sensitive information to Al-Qaeda.

The company commander went to the territories controlled by Al-Qaeda, as if he had deserted the organization. Just to make his story look more realistic, the organization even disseminated an official order, saying that the company commander was a runaway, and was to be killed by guerillas, on sight. When he reached the Al-Qaeda camps under the guise of a PKK deserter, they introduced him directly to the former PKK member who had killed six of our comrades. Since they already knew each other, they were assigned to the same unit within Al-

Qaeda. Our comrade worked with this defector for about a year and purposefully delayed his mission for revenge. He had remained there because, he was not only able to gain the defector's trust but also was able to provide intelligence regarding Al-Qaeda's operations. Around the end of 2005, he placed the explosives acquired from the organization in the defector's vehicle. Before carrying out the mission, he notified guerilla headquarters, "We will travel to another Al-Qaeda camp in the morning. During the trip, I will stop the car at a gas station and get out of the car under the pretense of filling the tank. Then the vehicle will blow up and I will take our revenge!" Unfortunately, he had been unable to accurately set the activation time of the explosive. We heard later that the vehicle blew up before it reached the gas station. Everyone in the vehicle died including the company commander. We finally had our revenge but at the cost of another comrade's life.

Immediately after this dramatic event, Al-Qaeda communicated with the organization and, in a way, apologized to us, "Last year, we killed your comrades due to incorrect intelligence. We were told that those six PKK guerillas were travelling in our region for an assassination mission, and that's why we killed them." They apologized, but the explanations were not very convincing. So the organization criticized them saying, "If you were unsure about the accuracy of the intelligence, then why did you even carry out this atrocity?" After the argument, the relationship between Al-Qaeda and the PKK broke down completely. There had already been tension between the two groups. Al-Qaeda blamed the organization for creating an atheist group, and, besides that, they were displeased with the authority and dominance the PKK exerted on many of the other organizations operating in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.

Let me give you an epiphany. In 2002, there appeared a very extreme and radical organization in Iran. It was a religious organization, working for Iran, which also had ties with

Al-Qaeda in Iraq. In fact, it would be better to call it a gang, as it had no real command structure. It had close to thirty people in it. The members of the group would kidnap and rape women, especially from the areas where the Kurds lived and then would later leave these rape victims on the streets. These bandits were satisfying their sexual desires through “Muta marriage,” a temporary form of marriage which is common in Iran, and then would abandon these poor girls. Hundreds of rape incidents like this occurred.

In the winter of 2002, the organization notified Iranian officials about these immoral incidents. We specifically asked them to arrest the members of this group, but the Iranian officials refuted the existence of rape cases by a gang within the Kurdish areas in Iran. They simply ignored our warnings. As a last resort, Murat Karayılan declared a harsh statement, “You will either extinguish this group or we will kill them all within Iran!” Iran still did not respond to our warnings. However, we had already finished our reconnaissance on this group within Iran. While they were in a meeting, we attacked the thirty Iranians that had been organizing this rape scheme in Iran and killed every single one of them. Both Iran and Al-Qaeda were very angry with our intervention against these so-called religious bandits within the territory of Iran. Nevertheless, after this mission, the Kurds in Iran declared their loyalty to the organization as a whole.

### **LIVING JUST FOR DYING**

At the beginning of February, sometime in that same period, my battalion commander asked me to dispatch my company to a place located close to the borders of Turkey nine hours away from our camp. Because of the time of year, snow covered everything, and, normally, a guerrilla force would not be allowed to travel during that time of the year. I suspected that

something very important must have been going on and asked the battalion commander about the context of our task, but he refused to give me any details. Because we were again officially at war with Turkey, we were not allowed to travel by car. We had to walk all the way north, under the darkness of night during this cold season.

Three comrades from headquarters management welcomed us at our designated destination. There were many dilapidated dorms and a couple of meeting halls. It was very clear that the place had been deserted for a long period of time, and we were ordered to rebuild all of the structures. I was curious about the situation and asked, “Comrade, we will rebuild them all, but who will come here in the snowy season? Can you explain to me the reason that we are doing all of these preparations?” One of them whispered in my ear, “We will hold the guerilla forces’ conference here on February 15. No one can know about it.” That was strange, for the organization would never schedule a conference during the winter period. I later discovered that the goal was to throw the Turkish security forces off the scent, since they knew that we would normally never organize a conference in winter, and would not survey that region. Despite the fact we would not do winter reconnaissance there, we still took extra measures to ensure our safety. Everyone who participated in the conference was to turn their satellite phones off before they left their regions. Upon arrival, we collected everyone’s satellite phones and sent them to a distant location.

The other reason for the organization to schedule a conference in winter was that the water level of the rivers in the region would get too high in the spring. You could not easily dispatch the Zagros guerilla force to headquarters in the spring, because the rivers in their region always overflowed. Of course, we normally had helper lines on most of the rivers, but security

forces would destroy them as soon as they noticed them. So, scheduling the conference in February would also allow the representatives from Zagros to join us.

From those ruined buildings, we were able to build a dormitory, with a maximum occupancy of 230 guerillas, in just 20 days. The conference was larger than normal, because we expected representatives from Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq. As soon as we were done with the construction work, I was assigned as a member of the conference preparation committee. The group was made up of seven guerillas, with the lowest rank being a headquarters committee member. Bahoz Erdal led the committee. We were going to examine all of the organization's regulations and discuss the points to be changed.

They had included me in the committee because of my experience in the field of guerilla life. They frequently consulted me on the evaluation of rules and regulations related to the daily lives of guerillas in the countryside. I remember it quite well. During one of those meetings, a headquarters committee member said, "Let's delete all the rules regarding the chain of command, and order from the regulations. We are an organization that consists of voluntary guerillas, and there cannot be a chain of command and order among voluntary fighters!" Bahoz Erdal and I strongly objected to this suggestion. I was given the floor and said, "This suggestion does not make any sense to me. If we do what you are suggesting, then we would have nothing but chaos. There will be a lot of confusion regarding what to do and when to do it. Guerillas will start to act on their own initiative, and no one would be held responsible for their mischief. Many different groups would emerge within the organization, and in the end we would perish." Bahoz Erdal agreed with me, saying, "It is not even appropriate to discuss such issues. We will highlight the points that need to be updated, however, what you are suggesting cannot even be discussed. Everything has a limit, and we have no authority to discuss such an issue."

When the conference began, the regulations we had worked on as a committee were up for a vote. Some rules that were not approved by the participants were crossed out, but most of them were accepted with only slight revisions. We also informed the participants of the issues that had been discussed but not included in the updated regulations. We even told them of the suggestion to abolish the chain of command, and every single one objected to the suggestion. Many guerillas even asked for the name of the person that had offered such a ridiculous suggestion.

Two of the people who offered the suggestion, one of whom was Dr. Ali, later left the organization. They had adopted a different fighting strategy within the organization and were saying, "Let's behave like the Tamil Tigers! It would be more than enough if we could carry out one or two large-scale missions every year, until we reached our goals. There is no need for the continuous planning of raids, sabotages, and ambushes." They were suggesting significant changes, not only on guerilla missions but also on the lifestyles of the guerillas. They adopted some dangerous ideas, such as the liberation of sexual intercourse among men and women guerillas and the abolishment of the hierarchy system. Changes at those levels would potentially destroy the order within the organization. Despite the fact that the guerrilla movement is completely voluntary, it requires some level of discipline and hierarchy among its members. The organization did not even allow those defectors to open those subjects up for discussion. In fact, Dr. Ali fled to Europe after this conference.

In May 2005, toward the end of the conference, the name Kongra-Gel was removed, and the organization again began using PKK. Another significant decision made during that conference was the ban on the use of mobile and satellite phones. On February 15, 2005 all of our computers, except the ones used by the HPG, were hacked by Turkish security forces, and



had only black screens that displayed the date. Until this incident, we were allowed to use satellite phones and frequently surf the internet. However, the organization's decision at this conference banned the use of the internet, satellite phones, and mobile phones. In retaliation, the organization paid a large sum of money to a hacker group in Europe to hack the computers of the Turkish General Staff and the Ministry of National Defense.

When the conference ended, the senior members came together to decide whom to assign and to where. One of them called me in and said, "Comrade, we have decided on the location of your new duty, and you will not reject it." When he said that, I realized that I was not being sent to northern zone, to Turkey, although being dispatched to a field in Turkey was a great honor, no matter how high the risk of death. Not everyone was sent there, even though he or she may desire it. Only the best among us were sent. When I replied to this senior commander that I would not reject their decision, he said, "We heard that you rejected another assignment when you graduated from the guerilla officer's school, and that is why I wanted to warn you beforehand!"

The organization kept personal files on every single guerilla. These files contained information about their CV, reports, previous duty locations, achievements, failures, and disciplinary investigations. When he said what he did, I realized he had read my personal file. "You will go to Hakkari, Çukurca as a battalion commander." I responded, "All right, I will not object to it, but you will send me north at an appropriate time later." He asked, "Why are you so eager to be assigned to the north?" I replied, "I got tired of the ridiculous situation in the south, and there is a tight bond of friendship in the north. Many of the southern guerillas have yet to join a single clash, and so do not know the psychology of war. They often fight amongst themselves for mundane reasons. However, just to protect you, a comrade in the north would

sacrifice himself without hesitation. You will not find friendship ties like that in the south, because guerillas here only think about their comfort, whereas there is loyalty, sincerity, and fellowship in the north, and that's why I want to go to there.”

For many of us, even though life as a guerilla meant knowing that you would die sooner or later, you still want to go to the north. It was very difficult to establish discipline and order in a place that was so far from the war zone. In the north, if you ordered your guerillas to remain still all day long, all of them will do it without exceptions, and they would not even question why they were ordered to do so. However, you cannot achieve this discipline in the south, because guerillas are too fond of their comfort there. You would be criticized for making them stand still and wait. The environment in the south simply was not suitable for guerilla training, even though the guerillas stationed there are trained throughout the year. The guerillas in the north are only trained in winter, when they stay in underground bunkers, but they have the opportunity to apply what they have learned during clashes that occur in the summer and spring months. In other words, a single clash against the Turks in the north was more instructive than a whole year of training in the south.

### **MANUFACTURING MINE IGNITERS WITH ANIMAL BONES**

When the guerilla conference ended, I went to Çukurca as I had been instructed. The region to which I was going was considered a large security risk, and we had a hard time patrolling the area because mines had been planted everywhere. Since it was located at the cross-section of the Turkish-Iraqi border, there were mines planted by Saddam Hussein, the Turkish security forces, and by us to protect ourselves from those two enemies. It seemed as if wherever we stepped, a mine explosion occurred. I immediately requested a mine detector from

headquarters management. For approximately four months, we tried clearing the mines in an area between our battalion's campground and a nearby hill. It was crucial to detect and defuse the mines on the road that went to that hill for the safety of the entire battalion. Two of our comrades stepped on a mine and lost their legs, while we were building the underground bunkers for winter. We were able to properly treat them, but they would not be able to fight on the frontlines anymore.

We patrolled the area a couple of times in order to make sure that there was not a single mine left. I was told that the guerilla force that used to stay in that region had slightly modified the mines that were planted in the field for the safety of the campground. They replaced the metal mine igniters with sharp animal bones. With this innovation, the Turkish security forces would be unable to detect the mines since there were no metal parts, just TNT and a sharp bone. It ended up being just as bad for us, though! It was not Turkish soldiers, but our own comrades who had stepped on these hard to detect mines. At least four comrades lost their feet because of the mines' animal bone modification.

Furthermore, Turkish fighter jets had dropped barrel bombs on the surface of the field and many of them had never exploded. If you take a barrel bomb and hold it still, never turning it up or down, you can carry it for as long as you want. These bombs did not explode on contact, because they must roll for a couple meters for the igniter to activate. For example, there was a place in the south called Hell Hill. The Turkish security forces named it that because they could never take control of it. There were hundreds of barrel bombs that were dropped on that hill that dated back as far as 1992. Most of them were rusted, and you could not even activate their igniters even if you kicked them. Nevertheless, you still had to be careful when messing with that kind of stuff. One of our comrades had been playing with one of those rusted barrel bombs,

and it exploded, severing his hand at the wrist. He thought it would not explode, since it was so badly rusted.

Since our camp perimeter was surrounded by mines, our visitors had to wait at a far distance so a guide from the battalion could lead them safely across. If they came to us alone, they had a chance of stepping on a mine. In a strange way, the situation was advantageous because it increased our security. No one would dare come close to the camp area without first notifying us.

Peasants from Turkey would visit us every day to deliver newspapers. Since taxes were so high in Turkey, these peasants would also go into Iraq and acquire various kinds of products and then carry them back into Turkey to sell them in large cities, basically making a living on smuggling. Anyone who smuggled goods into Turkey from either Iran or Iraq was required to pay a tax to the organization. The amount of taxation was set according to the kind of items being smuggled. For example, taxation for weapon smuggling was very high. With the invasion of Iraq by the Americans, there was a great abundance of different kinds of weaponry in the region, because the Americans left a lot of them behind. There was a small town, located between Iraq and Iran, and in this town were the weapons left by the Americans. They were being sold for one hundred to one hundred fifty dollars. The weapons were so abundant, that the price of some guns was so low they were worthless. You could even buy a weapon for twenty dollars. The weapons left by the Iraqi army (Kalashnikovs) were especially worthless, because they were manufactured with old technology, and so, sometimes, were even cheaper than a toy gun.

There was an American company called Blackhawk, which played a large role in the marketing and selling of those weapons that were used during the invasion of Iraq. Blackhawk

was a very brutal and inhumane force that I think was one of those special military units. At one stage during the Iraqi war, the media broadcasted news saying, “Iraqi soldiers killed civilians while deserting the Iraqi army.” There was not a shred of truth to that report. It was not Iraqi soldiers but members of the Blackhawk Company who had killed those innocent Iraqi civilians. America conducted most of its dirty business in Iraq, through this company. I can confidently state that ninety percent of the civilian massacres in Iraq were conducted by Blackhawk. However, the cost was knocked back to the U.S. government. Those people who suffered at the hands of Blackhawk; who lost a loved one—a child, a wife, or a husband—will make the U.S. pay in the future.

As an organization, we decided to target Blackhawk members several times but were afraid the U.S. army would attack our bases and people in northern Iraq. Ultimately, Blackhawk was the mercenary for the United States. Those executions were not being performed without the knowledge of U.S. officials. The organization captured many images and videos, proving the atrocities that were committed by Blackhawk—murdered children, raped women, and tortured elderly people. I hope that the senior members of the organization will deliver the evidence to the Human Right Courts in Europe when the time is ripe. There were such terrifying tortures in those Iraqi prisons that one does not even dare talk about it, let alone watch it. Saddam’s civilian supporters and army members were subject to unbelievable torture. After viewing the torture, we, as members of what had been labeled a terrorist group, were not even able to comprehend how a human being could be so cruel.

Although they did not conduct their business openly, the weapon market in Iraq was under the control of Blackhawk, and they sold thousands of weapons in the region via their local agents. In April 2005, I bought a weapon from them myself for only one thousand one hundred

dollars. The same weapon was normally sold for seven thousand dollars in Turkey. Besides the price difference, the weapon also came with free extras, which included a scope, laser, and thermal camera. The organization bought such advanced weaponry from Blackhawk that I am sure even the Turkish security forces did not have them. One of our comrades bought a rifle from the Americans (I do not remember the brand) but this rifle was capable of shooting seven to eight full magazines without overheating. That was amazing!

It was not only the guerillas who needed those advanced weapons, but also the Turkish civilian public. Since my battalion was located at the border, we would witness smugglers crossing in and out of Iraq, with their mules, at least three times a week and would tax their loads, one by one. We really did not know how they were distributing those weapons within Turkey, or to whom they were selling these items. The only thing that was clear was the size of the demand for those killing machines. The Peshmerga forces were also aware of the weapon smuggling business. No peasant can smuggle even a single weapon from Iraq without bribing them first.

Those weapons were sometimes transported into Turkey directly from the Habur Border Checkpoint. I do not know if the Turkish customs officers were also bribed, but I know that sometimes several trucks loaded with weaponry would pass through these checkpoints without any trouble. For example, using the Habur Checkpoint just twice, the commander of our region was able to transport hundreds of weapons, five hundred rockets, and fifty thousand bullets into Turkey with a truck licensed in Turkey. On its third trip, from Iraq to Turkey, Turkish security forces confiscated seventeen Dragunov assassination rifles from this same truck. They thought this was such a serious blow to the organization that the story of the confiscation was broadcast on the news, and was really quite funny. While the Turkish security forces were happy they had

captured these seventeen rifles, our comrades already had transported ammunition and weapons that we would use in our fights in Turkey for the next two years. On top of that, these weapons had been transported through Turkey's official checkpoint.

In spring of 2005, we reduced the three company guerilla forces down to two, because of the abundance of the mines in the field. Meanwhile, the organization delivered to us twelve anti-aircraft guns and three missiles. We were going to use those weapons against the Turkish fighter jets if they flew toward organization headquarters in Iraq. Our camp's primary responsibility was to provide security against the Turks for guerilla headquarters in Iraq. We did not know how to use those missiles and anti-aircraft guns, so we were provided with professional technical support from Iraq. The maintenance and storage of the fuses was highly sensitive and had to be kept immobile at all times. On the head of the missiles was an eye like a lens, and if it was subjected to vibration for a long period of time, it would lose its ability to properly hit a target.

### **HEADING RIGHT INTO TURKISH SOLDIERS**

In 2005, the organization was preparing a spectacular party for August 15. We were going to travel from Çukurca to Metina in Iraq to take part in this celebration as well. Even Duran Kalkan was to travel to Metina for it, on behalf of the defense committee. At the time of the party, the headquarters music group was staying in my battalion, and it was our responsibility to safely transport them and their musical instruments to Metina. Unfortunately, the group's load was huge, because of the speakers and many instruments, and we would not be able to reach Metina, even with two full nights of walking, because we had to carry all their equipment.

First, I sent a small group from our battalion on foot to Metina. Then, I took five guerillas, and the music group players with me, and we drove off to Iraq in trucks. On our route

to Metina, there was a hill on the border of northern Iraq under the control of Turkish security forces. This road passed twenty meters downhill from where the Turkish soldiers were settled with eight tanks. In those days, the Turks had such freedom of control in northern Iraq. They were not subjected to any restrictions as far as patrolling in that area. They could send their military forces anywhere, at any time, without the permission of local Kurdish authorities, or the Iraqi Government. This situation changed when the U.S. invaded Iraq. Not only were they not able to patrol as they had previously, but the Turks also had to inform the local Kurdish authorities before they even left their military post on the hill. On top of that, whenever they had to leave the hill, the Turkish soldiers were escorted by Peshmerga forces. The Turks's old authority and supremacy in northern Iraq had ended with the invasion of Iraq.

While passing by the hill, we saw Turkish soldiers wandering around the road. They even walked around our trucks. The vehicles were moving slowly, because there was a car that had broken down directly in front of the hill, which slowed the traffic flow. We were all dressed in our guerilla uniforms and we were armed. One of the Turkish soldiers approached my side of the car and knocked on the window, to speak to me. The passenger windows of the truck were tinted so he could not see inside. I did not roll down the window so he walked to the driver's side. The driver opened the window halfway and began to talk with the soldier, and he informed the driver that the road was blocked, and that we needed to return and use one of the alternate routes to Metina.

Our driver said, "Okay!" and we left. There were two female guerillas in our vehicle who had never seen a Turkish soldier before. One of them asked, "Comrade Deniz, are those Turkish soldiers?" I said, "Yes!" She asked, "Will not there be a clash if they see us?" I answered, "No, comrade. This territory is under the control of Barzani, and they cannot directly



fight against us as they did in the old days. Relax.” Nevertheless, until we moved away from the hill, the women were still nervous, no matter what I told them. “Look, when we arrive in Metina, you will not tell anyone that we encountered Turkish soldiers on our route, understood?”

As soon as we reached Metina, we saw Duran Kalkan. Comrade Duran asked these two women, “How was your journey? Did you travel comfortably?” One of them said, “Comrade, a Turkish soldier stopped us.” Duran Kalkan was confused, and asked “What soldiers? What are you talking about?” She then gave a more detailed answer: “Comrade, we were stopped by Turkish soldiers, and they even talked to our driver!” Duran Kalkan looked me directly in the eye and said, “Which route did you use? How did you encounter Turkish soldiers?” I replied, “Comrade, we were just passing by when a car broke down in front of the hill that the Turks used as a military post. They were wandering around the road to check what was going on. We encountered one of them, but they did not realize who we were.”

Duran Kalkan got really angry with me, yelling, “Do not ever show such impudence again! This is northern Iraq, where we do not kill them, and they do not kill us. But if that soldier had acted indifferently to the rules—I mean if he had acted emotionally and had shot one of you—what would happen then, Deniz? Never take such a huge risk again!”

It was such a weird situation in northern Iraq, because while we were killing each other within Turkey, we did not interfere with each other in Iraq. We sometimes positioned ourselves right across the hill from where they were staying. They would have been able to kill all of us with a single artillery barrage, but really they could not because we had four battalions of guerillas in that region. If we had wanted, we could have destroyed that hill in a single night, and confiscated everything; tanks, howitzers, weapons, and ammunition. However, something on that scale would have spoiled our diplomatic relations with Barzani.

In fact, Turkey tried to trick the organization a few times, on that very issue. The purpose of the Turkish military posts in northern Iraq was to protect Barzani. In 2008, Yaşar Büyükanıt, the former Chief of General Staff of Turkey, wanted to use the units in the south against the PKK. In a district called Bamerli, in northern Iraq, there were fifty Turkish tanks. The tanks in that district were originally deployed there for Barzani's security but were going to be used to destroy the PKK camps in Iraq. It was unimaginable, but the Kurdish people in Bamerli actually laid down in front of the tanks and did not let them leave the district to destroy the PKK camps.

### **DR. ALI AND HIS DANGEROUS IDEAS**

I had many difficulties toward the end of 2005, because I had been promoted to the rank of battalion commander for the first time in my life. Serving as a battalion commander was completely different than serving as a company commander. Both have important responsibilities, but battalion commanders have even more. I was more relaxed when I was a company commander, because there was a superior above me. Even if I were to fail, he or she would fix any problems. However, at this point, I was the one who had to solve a problem when it emerged. As a company commander, I was responsible for only forty to fifty guerillas, all of which were male. When I was promoted to battalion commander, not only did the number of guerillas under my responsibility increase, but I also had to deal with women guerillas from then on.

It was the first time I had ever had women in my force, and the responsibility associated with them was much greater than it was for the men. Females were very sensitive, emotional, and could be easily discouraged by a simple verbal warning, but the male guerillas were not like that. It was also really daunting when women guerillas had a problem, because they would never

accept responsibility for their mistakes. Female guerillas also made me shy, and so I would not be as harsh with them about their faults. On the other hand, when a man committed a mistake, I could easily warn him or even harshly criticize him for that mistake. So, I had a real difficult time dealing with women and their problems. I asked headquarters for a change to my battalion, which may have been the first time anyone had requested that in the history organization. I said, "I do not want a female company in my battalion." Of course, the senior members rejected it. It was not possible and also not in line with the policy of the organization.

I would make no compromises when it came to discipline, but I was not nearly as jittery and harsh as the other commanders were. I would take part in social activities with the ground guerillas, talk to them, and get to know them by their names. However, I would also keep my distance from them when it was time for official works.

In November 2005, two comrades and I travelled to a place in Zagros, close to the Tigris River, to represent our region at a guerilla conference. It was an extraordinary conference, because it was the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic that someone at the highest level of the country was admitting that, "The Kurdish problem is our issue. We will end this problem. We put aside our guns and end this vicious cycle of violence, through dialogue and negotiation."

After this speech, given by Prime Minister Erdoğan, the organization wanted to schedule an extraordinary guerilla conference to discuss what kind of reaction we should give to Turkey. With the head of Turkey approaching the organization with peace messages, we thought we should act in accordance with their manner as well. On one hand, we were slowly getting ready to declare a ceasefire; on the other, we were worrying whether the government was sincere, determined, and serious in its desire to start such a peace initiative.

There were almost a hundred participants at the conference. Dr. Ali was there as the assistant to headquarters management. He still held the same old, ill thoughts. It was around that time that he had gathered enough support to raise his voice against the organization. He was all about there being more flexibility within the rigid lifestyle of the organization. He said, “We are so restrictive in terms of men and women’s sexual lives. We should be more flexible on this now. Similarly, we expect the local peasants to be disciplined as much as the guerillas. This is wrong. It is also wrong that we constantly plan and carry out guerilla missions, but, rather, we should take the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka as an example and perform a mission once or twice a year at most. We should carry out war tactics only to open the path for political negotiations. The guerilla force should simply be symbolic and used only occasionally.”

Dr. Ali and his friends not only opposed the lifestyles of the organization, but also rejected some of Apo’s views. They were specifically against Apo’s “Democratic republic thesis.” In this thesis, Apo said, “In this republic, the Turks and Kurds will live together. The argument of separation from Turkey is beside the point. In return, the Turkish government will officially recognize the existence of Kurds within Turkey and also grant the Kurds their basic rights, including education in their mother tongue, and regional management.” Apo had always been sincere on his views regarding the Turks. Nevertheless, Dr. Ali and his friends rejected this view. They argued that, “We have fought against the Turks for many years. Have we lost so many comrades only to make peace with the Turkish government?”

Nizamettin Taş and Osman Öcalan had the same opinion. They supported a separate Kurdish state that was totally independent of Turkey. The difference between Dr. Ali and his group from the entity that was established in 2003 by Nizamettin Taş and Osman Ocalan was that they held a greater dominance over the guerilla force. There were hundreds of mid-level

commanders who were loyal to Dr. Ali, which is why this opposition posed such a serious danger for the unity of the organization. This large amount of support for Dr. Ali made him overconfident. They explicitly threatened the senior members of the organization, by saying, “Do not confuse us with Osman or Nizamettin. We have a lot of support within the guerilla force. You must pay attention to us and our views!”

The PKK central headquarters had to intervene at this conference, because of the split in opinion. We did not initially hear about those developments. Dr. Ali had planned everything in advance and was aiming to procure acceptance through members at the conference. However, he did not expect that the senior executives of the PKK would also attend the meeting. It seemed headquarters management had received many complaint reports from Dr. Ali’s guerillas, regarding his behaviors and attitudes. Those letters had many details, such as how Dr. Ali carried himself as a guerilla, how he ignored Apo’s views and opinions, and how he freed the men and women’s relationships within his force. Dr. Ali was thinking that he would be too far from headquarters, and that the seniors of the PKK would not hear about his plans. But he had not realized they already found out everything through the information in the complaint reports.

Because the PKK’s processes of communication are so strongly rooted, Dr. Ali’s plan was easily exposed. I mentioned before that each guerilla has to write a report to central headquarters, once every six months, and to PKK central management, once every year, and there is no limitation on how many reports one can send. If necessary, you could even write fifteen reports a year. Through these reports, the organization noticed the existence of the growing separation, before it grew too large.

In this conference, senior officials explained how those misguided thoughts would detrimentally affect the organization. In the end, everyone had to suffer through some self-

criticism, since those thoughts were embraced by so many of the guerillas. In fact, Cemil Bayık said, “Even the ground guerillas have noticed the problem, because many of them reported it to us. How could you commanders be unaware of such a situation within your units? Each of you will make some self-criticism, and at the end of the meeting, you will pick a side!” Basically we were to either come to our senses, or the PKK was going to change the whole command structure that served across the region. There were hundreds of other people within the PKK that could be appointed in our places. We were not irreplaceable.

The issue was even larger than our leaders realized, since some of the senior members of the organization had adopted this new way of thinking. For instance, the headquarters management assistant and the commander of the Botan Field opposed the old rules engraved by Apo, and those commanders had a large area of influence. Unless the organization took precautions against this, those commanders could quickly influence the guerillas under their command. To help curb these problems, the organization discharged Dr. Ali from his duties at headquarters and appointed him as commander of the Botan Field. Rubar was removed from the Botan Field and assigned to Zagros. In short, both were removed from headquarters. The organization even appointed a very qualified and well-known female commander as Rubar’s assistant. She was not there as an ordinary female guerilla, but her appointment as an assistant to Rubar was to pacify him.

There were many such qualified females in the organization, and when you looked at the positions that females held in other organizations around the world, you would see that not many of them were assigned to senior positions. However, there might be a couple exceptions. There were such talented female commanders in the PKK that they would have the men wrapped around their fingers. They were smart, had a good command of the situation, and were

authoritative. These women in the PKK's higher ranks were so well regarded; that even the most rigid of men keep their mouths shut around them, let alone raise their voices against them.

When this female comrade was assigned as an assistant, Rubar directly resigned his position at Zagros, saying, "I want to resign from all my duties and rest for a couple of years." That was not the real reason behind resignation, but he figured that he could not have free reign, while that female commander was his assistant. He could not command his forces as he wished anymore, because he would have to consult this woman for every single decision that he would make.

### **MEHMET AGAR AND THE EXPLOSION AT THE UMUT BOOKSTORE**

An interesting decision was made at this guerilla force meeting in November 2005. For the first time in the history of the organization, electronic devices were not accepted in the meeting area for security reasons. As I previously mentioned, cell phones had already been banned. But from then on, there would not be any kind of electronic devices, such as TVs, microwaves, radios, or watches present in the meeting rooms. Murat Karayılan informed us that our meetings were going to be carried out through handwriting, and we would no longer be allowed to talk at the gatherings. To communicate, we had to write our comments on a piece of paper and hand it to others during the meetings. The idea behind this was generated because the organization had been warned that Turkish intelligence agencies eavesdropped on our meetings. I am not sure whether Turkey had technology that was capable of that, but we were warned to be more cautious about electronic gadgets. Also, from then on, all communication over the radio would be carried out using coded language, even in the south. Nothing was going to be said explicitly anymore.

After the Dr. Ali problem was settled, participants began to discuss the issue of the negotiations about peace with Turkey. While our discussions were going on, there was a bloody mission carried out in a town called Şemdinli in the city of Hakkari. Şemdinli was so small that there was only one open market. A vehicle was loaded with explosives, set there, and exploded, destroying the place. There had been a strict order from the organization since the year 2000 to not carry out any missions in Kurdistan cities. Therefore, we were all shocked. It definitely could not be one of our forces.

The region commander of Şemdinli had been present at this guerilla conference. He remarked, “The vehicle had been prepared to explode in the west, in one of the major Turkish cities. However, we cancelled the mission, because the organization was going through the peace process again. I honestly have no idea who organized this explosion, and why it was carried out in Şemdinli.” The militants, who were supposed to deliver this car to the Turkish city that was targeted, had disappeared. No one died in the explosion, but the financial costs were very high. Beyond that, the car exploded somewhere very close to where Turkish police officers were located.

Only a week later, while the organization was investigating the details of the incident, another explosion occurred in the same open market, but this time in front of a bookstore. Some local people, who were present near the explosion, caught two suspicious people, who had potentially organized the explosion. We learned from the news that these two people were, in fact, noncommissioned officers in the Turkish military. The local Kurds found many documents and weapons from the trunk of those officers’ car. All of those documents were sent directly to the organization.



Now, because of the timeline, it was clear that both of the explosions had to be related to one another. The Chief of General staff, Yaşar Büyükanıt, went out of his way to protect those two officers. The public delivered them to the police, but at the time we did not know how the trial process went forward. In fact, the organization was later informed that the military officers had asked for help, directly from a specific person, who was neither a member of the police nor a military official. They had called Mehmet Ağar and said, “Boss, please help us as soon as possible! We are stuck in a very difficult situation.” Mehmet Ağar was the person who was the mastermind of both massacres conducted in the East against the Kurds, and the assassinations carried out against the rich Kurdish businessmen, between the years of 1992 and 1995. As an organization, we became very nervous about why those two officers did not seek help from the police or the head of General Staff, but instead, from Mehmet Ağar. At the time, he was only a deputy in the Turkish National Assembly. We began to think that he was planning something even bigger.

In fact, Mehmet Ağar’s CV had a mile-long criminal record against the organization. He had engaged in monstrous crimes, while he served as a deputy, as a police chief, and while he worked with the Turkish Ministry of Interior Affairs. The organization figured out that dark plans were being mobilized to spoil the peace attempts, without the knowledge of the Turkish state officials. Those bombings were not propagated by the Turkish state. An unknown power was in action, trying to sow discontent between the Turks and the Kurds once again.

The AKP government is presently telling us they had gotten rid of all the Gulen movement supporters, within the ranks of the state. Well, they told us basically the same thing back then. They said they had gotten rid of the JITEM members; the people who had carried out

extra judicial killings in the old days, as well as the dark powers. There was an atmosphere created that seemed to indicate the AKP would not allow such dark days to return to Turkey.

Those explosions occurred while the AKP thought that everything was under their control, but this was proof that there were definitely some groups within Turkey, acting outside the AKP. You know how people occasionally argue the existence of a shadow government or a deep state within the state? I think that it is true. I mean, there was, in fact, such a power in Turkey. No matter what the state officials did, they could not get rid of this deep-rooted, shadowy structure within the state. The seniors within the organization would often say, “If Turkey really wants to get rid of those shadowy powers, and if the officials really want to figure out who is in control, then they have to interrogate Süleyman Demirel (a former president and prime minister), Mehmet Ağar (a former interior minister and police chief), Tansu Çiller (a former prime minister), Ünal Erkan (a former state of emergency governor in eastern Anatolia) and Hayri Kozakçıoğlu (a former governor and police chief). Those were the names that were at the center of the aforementioned shadowy incidents. They were the viruses that had infiltrated Turkey.”

The drug trafficking from Gabar, via military helicopters, took place while Mehmet Ağar was in power. He was very much aware of this trafficking, and, in fact, high-ranking military officials, guerillas who deserted the organization, as well as special units (including JITEM) established by Mehmet Ağar, were all involved in this dark business. This team of crooks was involved in countless dirty dealings back then. Tansu Çiller, Doğan Güreş, Mehmet Ağar were all part of the same shadowy team.

Right after that explosion, Erdoğan visited the city of Hakkari, and gave a speech to the local Kurds, who were there to celebrate his visit. His speech made us both annoyed but also

happy. Erdoğan said this, “You, the Kurds of Hakkari, will either love this country or you will walk away from these territories.” In fact, after this threatening speech, the state of Turkey began to lose the hearts and minds of the people of Hakkari. The local Kurds stopped siding with the state and a majority of them began to take sides with the PKK. There were many village protection guards (rangers) working for the state security officials in the city of Hakkari, especially in the countryside. All of these rangers resigned from their duties upon hearing this speech delivered by Erdogan. Of course, none of this was on paper. They contacted the PKK representatives in the region to inform them that they would work for the PKK from then on. Until that speech, the ANAP, the DYP, and almost all other political parties had some level of constituents in the city of Hakkari. But Erdogan’s threatening speech was the last straw for the people of Hakkari. In fact, it broke the Kurds’s emotional ties with the state of Turkey.

With Erdogan’s speech, the organization negated the ceasefire. We even began carrying out more guerilla missions than we had originally planned. As I mentioned, we were using the smaller, more professional teams as opposed to larger groups as in the old days, and this tactic proved itself effective. The Chief of General Staff blamed the AKP government because of the organization’s success. They blamed the government for not constructing asphalt roads in the towns and villages of eastern Anatolia, since it was easier for the organization (according to them) to plant mines under earth roads. After they blamed each other, we figured out that the soldiers were having a hard time taking precautions against our deadly missions. They were facing a new and unexpected tactic from us guerillas. While there used to be a guerilla force of a thousand troops in a province earlier, those numbers had dwindled to less than seventy.

## CHAPTER 17

### THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE!

When the training policy in the organization changed, you could no longer request to be assigned to a field in the north as you formally could. First, each battalion would select the best candidates, having the potential to work in the north. Those people would then undergo a month of grueling physical and ideological training. During this second stage, the unqualified ones were eliminated. Guerillas had to pass a total of six training sessions, similar to the second one, so they would be eligible to fight in the north of Turkey.

In November 2005, during the guerilla conference at Zagros, I notified my superiors that I would like to fight as a ground guerilla within Turkey. I was, however, assigned to Çukurca, due to some health issues relating to shell fragments that were still in my knees from an explosion occurring in 1994. Because of them, I was unable to walk smoothly, and, even occasionally, used a cane.

It was the summer of 1994 when seven guerillas and I were reconnoitering a military post between the towns of Sirvan and Hizan. The village from which we were collecting reconnaissance was within the perimeter the rangers patrolled, so we had to be extra cautious. If we were noticed by either the peasants or the security forces, it was nearly impossible to flee and survive. Bahtiyar, one of my comrades, left his binoculars on a rock facing the sun after he completed his part of the reconnaissance. The lenses in the binoculars gave off a reflection, which allowed the soldiers, at their post, to notice us.

Of course, we were not initially aware of this situation. It was around one or two o'clock in the afternoon when I was checking the radio stations used by the soldiers in their military posts, close by. I noticed they were preparing for something and was sure that they had

dispatched a force to the field—and were trying to sneak up on us. I finally realized that what I heard was coming from the military post that we had just surveyed, because we had a list indicating which military post was using what numerical code in their radio communications.

I told my comrades that we needed to leave the field immediately. I was just a squad commander back then, and the company commander asked, “Why are we leaving now? We have not even completed our reconnaissance.” I replied, “Comrade, I believe the soldiers have seen us and are currently advancing in the field and, most likely, heading toward us.” Upon hearing this, the company commander scanned the area with his binoculars and said to me, “Deniz, I do not see any movement around us. It looks safe. We should finish what we have started!” This time I replied, a bit angrily, “Listen to me! They are advancing with three squads and will lay siege somewhere.” In the meantime, the soldiers on the radio were describing a strategic spot to one another, saying, “If we hold that area, they cannot run away. We will kill them all.” I looked around and saw a high hill behind us. “Comrade, I am now certain that the soldiers are advancing to that hill over there, and will hold the hill in order to kill us all.”

While I was still trying to convince my company commander, one of our comrades saw, with his binoculars, the soldiers in the field. They were still quite a distance from us, but there was something of which we were unaware: one of the military squads had already climbed up the hill! The soldiers began firing on us from above. I told the comrades, “Run to the other side of the hill, and I will stall them with cover fire.” There was just one comrade and myself left behind, while the others climbed safely up the other side of the hill. Then, we heard gunshots coming from their position at the top. Bad luck! There were already two squads of enemy soldiers positioned on top, and now our comrades were in a gunfight. While that was going on, we also climbed the hill in order to support our comrades. The skirmish was within spitting

distance of them. It was 2:00 p.m., and the weather was so hot that, because of the heat, we were not able run even a hundred meters.

Our company commander said we should position ourselves behind the rocks and fight the soldiers, but I objected. We were only eight guerillas, and we would not be able to protect ourselves for the five hours before darkness fell. I told him that we should leave that area as soon as possible, but he insisted, “No, there are good hiding spots on this hill. We can stay and fight them from here.” No matter how hard I tried to convince him otherwise, he was the commander, and so his word was final. We stayed and continued to fight, positioning ourselves at ten-meter intervals. Approximately 30 minutes later, one of our fronts fell. The comrades, fighting there had to flee their positions, because they came under intense fire from an M72 LAW (Light anti-tank weapon.) One comrade and I were the only ones left at the position, fighting against the soldiers. I communicated, via radio, with the rest of team and said, “If you hurry as fast as you can, you’ll be able to defend us from nearby, so that we can also retreat.” And they answered, “Okay!”

In the meantime, we were not aware that the soldiers had gotten so close to us. There was only a distance of six meters between us. My comrade had a chance of running away, because there were large rocks that he would hide him while running. However, I did not have the same terrain. I had only two large rocks behind which to hide, on a flat field. I thought about running over to my comrade, but it was too risky. I would no doubt have gotten shot. But what other option did I have? The answer was, none. I had to run to where he was; otherwise, the soldiers were going to kill me. I told my comrade, “You move further away, and I will take your place.” He moved to where there was now almost 20 meters between us. I was just about to run to where he had been when the soldiers showed up right at that spot, at which point, I was just

waiting between those two rocks. There appeared to be nothing left that I could do to save my life. In that moment, for the first time in my life, I told myself that I was at the end of the road. It was going to be impossible for me to leave alive. I was going to die. I was then on the radio, talking with the company commander, and he asked, “What can we do for you, Comrade Deniz?” I said, “Comrade, there is nothing you can do to save me. You and the men run as far as you can to save your own lives. I will stall them until I am out of ammunition.”

“Okay. But if you have any documents or other secretive information on you, destroy them immediately. Do not let the soldiers capture them,” he said. That was already on my mind. In my pockets, I had the communication codes that we used on the radio, some money, and some crucial documents that belonged to the organization. I took all of them out and set them on fire. While I was doing this, I heard the sound of a hand grenade primer. I was very well acquainted with this sound, since I had used primers many times. The sound meant that a bomb had been thrown, but I did not know from which way it was coming. I was still covered on both sides by the large rocks. As soon as I heard the sound of the primer, I knelt down and covered my head and eyes with both of my arms. The grenade fell five meters in front of me. Believe me, in that moment, my life passed before my eye, like a movie. I told myself, “Deniz, that’s all she wrote!”

When you hear the sound of the primer you know the bomb will explode in five or six seconds. The duration is not standard, because Russian-made and NATO standard bombs differ from each other. When the bomb exploded, the shell fragments hit my knees, elbows, and cheeks. I still have shell fragments in my cheeks. I did not want them to be removed, because the doctors would have had to cut through my cheeks to get them. I was told that three points on my face would need to be cut to take remove the pieces, but I did not want to have scars on my

face. To this day, when I shave, it hurts me when the razor touches those fragments. My knees were badly wounded.

The soldiers began to chase my comrades and so did not even come close to check on whether I was dead or alive. I guess they thought that I was already dead.

There was no one left on the hill. I was in extreme pain, and my knees were bleeding. I wrapped them with a piece of cloth, took my weapon, and started to slowly crawl. The trouble was that I had broken my radio, and I had set the codes and money on fire. I had nothing left on me with which to communicate with my comrades. I was there all alone.

A positive thing was I knew where the guerillas would normally hang out. As soon as I reached a wooded area, I laid down among the bushes. I wanted to rest until it was dark. Since I no longer had a radio, I really could not walk in daylight. It would be too risky, since I could not track the location of the soldiers.

During the darkness of night, I once again began walk. All of my comrades probably thought I had been martyred. The other comrade, who had been twenty meters away, would have known what that sound from the hand grenade meant and would have told the others that I had died. With that news, they would not have come back to search for me.

I had been brought this close to death, because of the negligence of one of my comrades, Bahtiyar. In the later years, I had to fire Bahtiyar from the organization. Both the guerillas and the senior executives were highly disturbed by his irresponsible behaviors. Near the winter of 1997, we had to relocate to another area to dig out our underground bunkers. Everyone carried something, and we set off for camp. Bahtiyar was also with us. He weighed around eighty to ninety kilogram and was almost two meters tall. When it came to eating, he could eat as much as six normal people would eat. However, when it came to work, he would always have an excuse



of being ill, was too tired, or was working on something else. It became such a common pitch from him that everyone began to hate him for it. I just did not know what to do with him.

We were advancing toward our new field one night. Since my knees had been wounded, I was carrying the least heavy load. It was an oil can, which weighed about 18 kilograms. In the meantime, Bahtiyar was walking freely. He had neither been wounded in battle nor had a physical handicap. The company commander called me in the middle of the night, “Deniz, neither the management nor I want to see Bahtiyar any longer. Do whatever is necessary to get rid of him. Everyone is complaining about him.” That let me know that the situation was more serious than I thought.

A female platoon commander and I headed toward the very end of the line to talk with Bahtiyar. It was three o’clock in the morning. This comrade asked me what I was planning to do with him, and I replied that I was going to send him away. She asked me, to where specifically, and I said he could go wherever he wanted—even go to hell!

When we got to Bahtiyar, I spoke to him, saying, “Put down your weapons!” At that moment, we were walking close to the Silk Road, and I pointed out two clusters of lights—one on the right being a military post, and the other was a village. “You can see both of them, right? Now, get out of here, Bahtiyar. No one wants to see you around here any longer. It’s your call. You can go either to the military post or to the village. Do whatever you want, but never come back to us!” He suddenly began to cry, and I could not calm him. “Look Bahtiyar, I am trying to help you. The company commander may even kill you if he sees you around tomorrow. I’m saving your life! If you have a half brain, you will leave now!”

In the morning, the company commander said, “I have not seen Bahtiyar so far today. Where is he?” I replied, “You will not see him anymore, comrade. I sent him away!” He

appeared annoyed, “What? Are you out of your mind? I told you that I did not want to see him. Why did you send him away?” I calmly replied again, “He has been demoralizing to the rest of the force, and he was not able to get accustomed to life in the mountains. The best option for him was to go away. I offered him two choices. He could either surrender to security forces, or he could go to the village we passed by last night and continue his life as a normal Kurdish peasant!” The company commander remained silent for a while and finally said, “Indeed, you did well Deniz. No one will complain about him again!”

With his body structure, Bahtiyar was capable of carrying me if he had wanted. However, like a parasite living on animals, he had gotten used to living off the backs of other guerillas. Our region commander became very angry when he heard about what had happened, and said, “Who the hell do you think you are, firing someone from the organization? Is Bahtiyar your commodity? How dare you fire him?” He was specifically shouting at the company commander and myself. Finally, I could not take the scolding any longer, and replied, to him, “I am okay with whatever punishment you would impose. But just so you know, I do not take your criticism of me, regarding Bahtiyar, seriously!” Upon hearing this, the region commander lost his cool. “How dare you ignore my warnings? Who the hell do you think you are?” I replied again, “Go and ask the guerillas in the battalion. Find out if even one of them was content with Bahtiyar’s presence!” Not a single guerilla, out of 60 that were asked, said that Bahtiyar was a good comrade. On top of that, a couple of them reiterated the necessity of Bahtiyar’s dismissal from the battalion. The region commander could no longer complain to me upon hearing these confirmations.

Because of this Bahtiyar’s negligence in 1994, I occasionally had to use a cane. Before I left, there were hundreds of comrades in the organization who walked with the help of a cane.

There were also some who were using a cane, even though he or she had never been wounded. It is strange, but when you get used to the comfort of a cane, you feel as if you cannot walk without one. If you have never used one before, you do not know how comfortable it is. At night in the mountains, while resting, comrades would leave their canes and weapons on the ground. When they awoke and began travelling once again, many of them would take up their cane, but forgot their weapon on the ground, and would not realize they had left it behind until they had been walking for some time. They then would have to go back and retrieve it. The cane was like that. When you become used to it, it is like a natural part of your body. You might forget your weapon, but never the cane!

I only fully understood the damage through which my body had gone in all the battles when I asked to be reassigned in the north. In 1993, I was wounded in an ambush in the Siirt Valley. A hand grenade had exploded in front of me in 1994, and, in 1996, I nearly died from a bullet that had stripped my skull. Since these injuries occurred one after another and had done such damage to my body, the headquarters commander told me, “Go see a doctor and provide us with a medical report that gives a detailed examination of your condition. After examining the report, I will decide whether you are eligible to fight in the north again or not.”

I visited a hospital in Zaho, Iraq, to obtain my medical report. The doctor there told me, “I am not licensed to provide you with such a report. However, I can refer you to a doctor in Dohuk, Iraq who can give you that report.” So, I went to Dohuk. We had some guides in Iraqi cities that would help us with these kinds of things. They would drive us to the hospitals and be our means of communication with the Arab doctors. The organization even had lodging facilities in these cities in case a guerilla had to stay for an extended period of time.

I was acquainted with a young man in his mid-twenties from Barzani's family in Dohuk. Before I visited the doctor, I made a call to him. "I must go to the hospital to get a medical report. Can you come with me? I do not want the doctor to make trouble." He said he would. At one time, he had wanted to join the organization, and I had been his intermediary. Headquarters management did not approve his request to join, because Barzani did not want his family members joining the organization. He had once written a letter to the PKK which said, "True, there are many PKK participants from my region, but do not ever allow my family members and relatives to join you." This young man was Barzani's nephew. It would look bad to Barzani if we enrolled him in the organization, and it may have even caused diplomatic tension with Barzani. Therefore, the organization said, "Tell him that there are other opportunities to serve the PKK. He does not need to be with the guerilla forces. He can better serve our struggle in the political arena."

I visited the hospital with the man, and the doctor examined me several times, causing me to remain in Dohuk for three days. In the hospital, the doctor ordered x-rays of my head and knees and, after checking the results, told me, "In order for us to remove those shell fragments, you'll need to undergo a risky surgery that carries a 60 percent chance of paralysis. If you doubt me, take these x-rays to the best physicians in Europe. You'll find that no one would easily take the risk of performing such a surgery." In fact, the physicians in Syria I visited in 1996 told me the same thing. It was then that I knew for sure that it would be impossible to gain a complete recovery.

I brought the reports directly to central headquarters, and gave them to Bahoz Erdal. He was the commander and also a doctor. He read them carefully, looked me in the eye, and said, "Comrade Deniz, you cannot even cross the Turkish border with these legs, let alone be assigned

to the north.” I was very upset when I heard those words. I could not stay in other fields anymore, and I missed life in the north so much! For instance, in 2005, the organization tried to assign me to a political position in Germany. I told them that I would never go there. How could I? I had fought as a guerilla for years. I did not even want to stay in the southern guerilla forces, let alone in Germany. The north was different. I knew I would be closer to death there but living there was so exciting!

I also stayed in Damascus, Syria for six months, which felt like six years to me. I could not get used to life there. It seemed impossible for me to leave the lifestyle I was used to in the mountains. Can you believe that in 16 days, it will be six years that I have been in this prison? You know, even though it has been six years, I still cannot sleep on a mattress. Because I was so used to sleeping on the bare ground outdoors, I could not get used to sleeping on those beds. I removed the mattress, set it aside, and slept on the hardwood. It was the same when we visited the city centers in Iraq or Syria for various reasons. The families who hosted us would prepare very comfortable beds, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not sleep on them. I would often roll up the woolen beds and just sleep on the bare ground. Over time, the hardships you encounter in guerilla life penetrate your personality, and that’s why I did not want to stay in the south.

There was a constant risk of death, so people in the north were not troubled by small things, as was the case in the south. And as I mentioned several times before, the ties of fellowship were amazingly tight in the north, with large differences between the north and south in terms of comradeship and cohesion, because in the north you had no family or relatives other than your commander and guerilla comrades! Everything you had, as far as your brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, and friends, were your guerilla comrades! You had no one else than

them. It was not like that in the south, where they were so into their own conveniences. For example, in the south, if you were not content with your commander, you just wrote a report asking to be assigned to another company. Similarly, let's say you are in the south and become angry with the comrades in your company. You did not have to reconcile with them, because there were thousands of comrades in the south. You could simply go and make new friends. This was not the case for guerillas in the north. There, the guerilla units were small in numbers and, at most, would have five guerillas together. That was it. If two out of five got angry with the others, the situation would demoralize everyone within the unit as well. So, no one allowed such things to occur in the north. This helps to explain the gap between the south and north.

After seeing those x-rays, Bahoz Erdal ended up rejecting my request for a northern assignment. He explicitly said, "You will never go north, Deniz." But I had already set my mind on fighting in the north, no matter what he decided. Bahoz Erdal was severally criticized during that guerilla conference and was still down in the dumps, so I did not want to cause more angst. If I had pushed him a bit harder, he may have permanently destroyed my hopes. Besides, my continued insistence regarding the north could make him suspicious. Suspicions were sometimes raised within the organization if you insisted on being transferred to a particular place. The organization would get concerned about it, so I stopped bothering him at that time. Nevertheless, it was etched in my mind that I was going to make the same suggestion again at a more convenient time.

### **TALKING TO MY PARENTS AFTER FOURTEEN YEARS**

The years of 2005 to 2007 were the beginning of a troubling time for us. We were forbidden to watch TV, use mobile phones, or any other electronic device, because they could

potentially transmit unwanted signals. Radios were the only exception to this ban. We would often establish connections with headquarters through radio channels. The organization owned a radio channel that operated from Sweden into the rest of the world. If we wanted to send important news to headquarters, we would use our satellite phones to call the channel in Sweden. When our call was received there, we would tell them we needed to speak with someone from technical services. This was the code phrase to speak with someone who could deliver our message to headquarters in Iraq. Once it was clear that we were speaking with the right person, we would tell them our unit's numerical code, and then give them the message we wanted to send. If the message we were sending contained time-sensitive information on an emerging situation, the radio would do a live broadcast using a predetermined statement when it aired. There was a team of guerillas who were tasked with listening to this Swiss radio channel day and night, 24/7. As soon as the guerillas heard the predetermined message, they would call Sweden to learn the deeper details of what was going on. Everything aired on that channel was recorded, so the guerillas would never miss a message.

Turkish security forces had the ability to listen to our conversations and track our locations through phones. This forced us to take these sorts of precautions when communicating with headquarters. While we used to call headquarters with our cell phones, the sudden raids by security forces on our highly secretive posts—and the speech of Abdulkadir Aksu, the Interior Minister of Turkey, on a live TV broadcast—forced us to use alternative methods. Part of his speech went, “If we do not listen to the guerillas in Gabar on a regular basis, the metropolitan cities in Turkey would run red with blood.” Each region had at least one satellite and mobile phone, but they almost never used them to communicate with one another. We would always

take the batteries and the SIM cards out of the phones when we were not using them to prevent our locations from being tracked.

It was in 2005 that I saw a comrade using a satellite phone to talk to his family in Turkey. A communication officer approached me and asked, “Comrade Deniz, do not you have any family still alive back in Turkey? I have never seen you call anyone.” I said, “Comrade, it has been almost 14 years since I last spoke with my family. I’m sure they think that I am dead. Even if I call them now, what can I say to them? I do not even remember my siblings’ faces.”

Between the years of 1992 and 2005, I had never spoken to my family. Not face to face or on the phone. I had no idea what they had been doing for those thirteen years, and I was not even curious. I had too much responsibility within the organization to have time for them. In fact, most of the time, I did not even have the necessary devices to reach them. Besides, I had a new and larger family within the organization. I viewed my superiors as my father and mother. The guerillas that fought in my battalion were also part of my family, and I viewed them as my blood brothers and sisters. Similarly, they also viewed me as their elder brother or even a father, in some cases. I was all they had. They would come to see me if they were hungry or in need of new uniforms, if they were sick, or if they were stressed, and I would take care of all their worries. Thus, I had become part of a larger family. I just did not have the time to think of my birth family.

On the other hand, one part of the culture of the organization was such that if a guerilla said that he or she wanted to talk to their family, the commander usually let them talk on the phone, assuming that, “The poor girl must be missing her parents.” However, it was totally not acceptable for a commander to talk to his or her parents on a regular basis. This was because, then every single guerrilla would want to communicate with their parents if their commanders



did so. Frequent contact with parents could have the potential to spoil the discipline in the guerilla force, because the guerillas would not be able to concentrate on their trainings. Once a year, some parents would even come to the guerilla campground in the south and spend one or two weeks with their children—no matter how much we commanders disapproved of it.

Anyway, this communication officer insisted that I should call my parents. I said, “Comrade, I do not even know any of their phone numbers. What number would I call, even if I wanted to?” He replied, “That’s not a big deal. Just tell me their names and surnames.” I gave him my father’s first and last name. There was a service in Turkey to find registered phone users by dialing 118. He did so and found three different telephone numbers registered to my father’s name in the city of Batman, Turkey.

We dialed the first number and a female answered. I soon learned that she was my elder brother’s wife. I told her my father’s name and asked if I could talk to him, but, when I would not tell her who I was, she hung up on me.

We then called the second number. This time I recognized the voice as belonging to my uncle’s wife. As had been the case with my brother’s wife, she was about to hang up, when I said, “Do not hang up, aunt. I want to talk to my uncle.” She handed the phone to him. “Uncle, how are you? Do you remember me? I am Deniz.” He kept silent for a while, and then said, “Impossible. Who are you, my son? Tell me the truth! It has been years since Deniz died.” I said, “Uncle, believe me. I’m Deniz!” He was not yet convinced, so I asked him to tell me my father’s phone number, because I realized he was not going to believe me. He provided me with a mobile number saying, “My son, please do not lie to us. Do not joke with us! We are all old people.”

To my surprise, my parents had moved to Istanbul. We called this third number, provided by my uncle, and my father picked up the phone. I suddenly remembered his voice. In Kurdish, he asked, "Who are you? What do you want?" I said, "Dad, it is I, Deniz, your son." I think he was shocked, because he could not speak for two minutes. It had been fourteen years since they had last seen me. In that time, they had not even heard from me, so he did not initially accept that I was his son. "You are not my son. Please, do not make fun of us," he said, and I replied, "How can I convince you, father?" He said, "I do not know who you are, but you cannot convince me. Deniz died many years ago. We heard it from his friends." He was just about to hang up on me when I said, "Daddy, please do not hang up. Ask me something from my childhood. Ask me a question about a memory, an incident when we were together. Then, hang up if I cannot tell you the correct answer!" He kept silent for a while and finally asked, "Do you smoke?" I said, "Yes, I do." Then he asked me how I started smoking. I said, "You taught me how to smoke. You would always ask me to roll a cigarette when I was young. I would roll it, light it, and hand it over to you. I got used to it since, I took a drag each time I lit one." He suddenly began to sob and through his tears said, "My dear son, where have you been for so long? Please tell me where you are and I will come and get you right away." I replied, "Dad, do not worry about where I am. Where is my mother? I would like to talk to her, too,"

My mother was just as shocked and cried so much. She said, "Son, it has been many years. Why did not you call us? Where are you? Tell us where you are! We will come and get you now!" I said, "Mom, do not worry. I am okay. Now, stop asking questions and tell me how you are. Is everything alright with the family?" She was stubborn, still trying to learn where I was. "Son, please tell me where you are. I will come right away," she said, and for the first time, I felt very sad.

After that, I talked to my siblings, one by one. The youngest of them was only a year old when I deserted my parents, and I did not witness her growing up. When my mother handed the phone to her, she did not want to talk to me at first. I heard her saying, “I do not have such a brother. I do not even know him. Why do you want me to talk with him now?” I did not cry while talking to my parents and other siblings, but I was moved to tears when I heard her reject me. My mother forcefully gave the phone to her. I was just about in tears.

My male siblings begged me to come back home. “Brother, please come back home. We are up against a wall because of you. We had to relocate to Istanbul!” When a family member joined the organization, the security forces would put leverage on the rest of the family, as punishment. Local Kurds were scared by security forces, the police, and the military. Unaccounted murders by the security forces were common. My parents were also subjected to this same cruel treatment. They left everything behind in Batman and began a new life from scratch in the city of Istanbul, because of the pressure from the security forces. Istanbul was a large city, and they had never been there before. They had no jobs or skills to obtain a job. On top of that, they had no money left in their pockets. They had lived in extreme poverty for a long time. My youngest sibling even said, “Brother, we have been through this pain because of you. Leave the organization and come back to us!”

My poor mother said, “Who do you have there, son? Who takes care of you there? Who cooks for you?” Of course, she did not know the internal dynamics of the organization. I said, “Mom, do not worry about me. I have 80 children here who take care of me so well.” I, of course, was referring to the guerillas in the battalion. My mother got confused at first, but later laughed a lot when she figured out my humor.

I talked to my father again before ending the phone call and said, “Father, can you give me my uncle’s phone number?” I had an uncle who was very keen and clever. Of course, I had told my father to call my uncle before I called him, so I would not have to convince him that I was, in fact, Deniz. When I did call, I said, “Uncle, I will tell you where I am staying but you must never tell my parents, okay?” He said, “Okay!” I said, “Look, I am staying “here.” Visit me at your earliest convenience.” My parents would definitely want to visit me if they heard that my uncle was going to visit. If I allowed my parents to visit, then the foot guerillas would want the same from their parents. At that point, it would have become a tradition, which would make it difficult to prevent in the future. The guerillas would begin to see it as a given right, and would want their parents to visit them each year. I told my uncle, “Go to this hotel in Zaho, within Iraq, and tell the front desk assistant that you want to see me. They will drive you to our camp field.”

The organization would actually get angry if a guerilla did not speak to his or her parents for an extended period of time. Indeed, if the seniors recognized such a situation, they would even force those guerillas to immediately contact their parents and keep them posted about where they were staying, and how they were doing.

That night, one of the region commanders heavily criticized me. “Comrade Deniz, what kind of human being are you? How could someone keep himself from his family for fourteen years?” I could not answer him. That night, in a haphazard manner and through the insistence of that communication officer, I spoke with my parents for the first time in fourteen years. After that incident, I thought of a comrade whom I knew that had not spoken to his parents for close to ten years. He had no heart to call them, but I forced him to do so. His parents were not as far from the culture of the organization as my parents were. In fact, to some degree, they were

acquainted with the goals of our struggle. His father even told him, “Son, whenever the organization needs us, we are ready to serve. Just let us know! Your mother, siblings, and I are ready to serve your guerillas there! Just let us know. It does not matter if we have to relocate to Iraq, Syria, or even somewhere within Turkey.” We were deeply affected when we heard this conversation between a father and son. Not all Kurds, including my parents, were so devoted to the organization’s struggle.

I have a very funny memory regarding the patriotic attitudes of a Kurdish parent. We had a comrade who acted in a movie that was produced by the organization, between the years of 2005 and 2006. He had a role as one of the leading actors. This comrade’s father got very angry when he saw his son in that movie and contacted headquarters saying, “I sent this crook to you in order to become a guerilla, but you guys are using him as an actor in a movie! I cannot accept this! Send him to the mountains as soon as possible to fight as a guerilla!” We laughed a lot when we heard this.

The next day, I received a call on my radio from Zaho. “Deniz, you have a guest and he says that he is your uncle. Do you know him?” I said, “That is true, comrade. Keep him there for a while, and I will come and talk to him soon.” I was caught totally unprepared and had not thought that my uncle would come to visit me only one day after I asked him. It was ill luck, because that day I had four guests from PKK headquarters in my battalion. I was in a meeting with them when I got another call from Zaho. It had not even been two hours since their first call. “Comrade, your guest is very angry and is asking us why you cannot see him now.” Then, my uncle grabbed the radio and spoke to me directly, “My nephew, I came here to see you, but you are ignoring me!” I said, “Uncle, I will see you, but I have to see my guests off first.” My uncle was not familiar with the culture of the organization. He responded harshly, “Buster, I

came this far to see you, but look at you! You are not coming because you have other guests. I am your uncle. Why the hell are you not listening to me? You will come here right away!”

I had to explain the situation to my guests and ask for their forgiveness. I arranged a car to pick up my uncle from Zaho and bring him to Çukurca. As soon as he arrived, I introduced him to my comrades and invited him to my tent. He told me that he was hurrying because he was only excused from work for one day. We took pictures together, so that he could take them to my parents. My uncle told me that many of my friends from the neighborhood where I grew up had joined the organization. That was something of which I was unaware until then. Moreover, many of them who had joined after me had been martyred. My mother and father were very sad when their remains arrived back in the neighborhood. They figured I had died, since the new comrades had so quickly died. That was why they thought hope was lost on my return.

“Please do not ever tell my parents where I am staying, Uncle. I would be stuck in a difficult situation if they were to visit me here,” He said, “Okay, but let us know how you are doing and where you are. Call us from time to time. My nephew, look! We had not heard from you for almost fifteen years. Your parents were both sick over losing you.”

When I was on the phone with my uncle I told him, “When you come visit me in Iraq, bring any young women or men that you know from the families where you are.” I wanted to make them all PKK members, but, although there were many people that he could bring, he did not bring even a single one. The range from 15 to 20 years old is perfect in terms of our recruitment activities. I can say that people between the ages of 20 to 25 are also okay, but not as good as fifteen to 20. Anyone over 25 just requires too much work in terms of recruiting. Indeed, the organization does not even want to recruit anyone over 25 to join the organization,

because it is harder for them to adopt the lifestyles of the organization. We have wasted a lot of time trying to get people beyond that age to accept the organization's culture, lifestyle, traditions, and hardships.

Youths between the ages of 15 and 20 are not like that. They do not have prejudices regarding the organization or life in general. Let me explain it a better way using an example. We had a Kurdish patriot who joined the organization in his 30s. This man was fulfilling all of his religious obligations. He would pray five times a day, fast during Ramadan, and stay away from things banned by his religion. There were many people like him with us, and the organization never caused trouble for them regarding fulfillment of their religious activities. It even encouraged and provided an atmosphere in which everyone was free to believe in whatever they wanted. Despite that, people over the age of 30 never seemed to tolerate other religious beliefs in any way. They would openly criticize others as infidels, if they did not believe in God or did not fulfill their religious obligations. We repeatedly warned them saying, "Comrades! Let everyone be himself. Do not interfere in other religious beliefs or lifestyles. We are all free here!" No matter what we said, we often failed to persuade them to change their attitudes or behaviors toward others.

### **TURKISH INTELLIGENCE AGENTS IN IRAQ**

In the spring of 2006, one of the region commanders became very disabled, because of his back. The doctors in the camp were not able to treat him, so he was transferred to a professional medical facility as quickly as possible. Similar to many other comrades, he had a disk displaced at his waist, and we could see that he was in extreme pain. He could not sit or stand and was not able to endure the pain much longer.

I told him, “Comrade, I have connections in Iraq. Would you like to be treated there?” He gladly accepted my offer. So, we first notified headquarters about his transfer to Iraq. Bahoz Erdal was still the headquarters commander at the time, and he told me, “Deniz, only send him there if you really trust your connections. However, if there is even a tiny risk that he could be captured, then do not send him to Iraq. He is a senior commander, and it would be a serious problem for the organization if he were caught!”

I asked a close friend of mine, who was a battalion commander in the KPD Peshmerga forces, to help our region commander get proper treatment in Iraq. This was during a period of time when we did not have any problems with Barzani and the KDP. However, Turkish intelligence units would hang around the cities of Dohuk and Zaho in Iraq and would occasionally arrest our members who lived there. The organization inspected the locations of those Turkish intelligence agents in Iraq. We knew everything about their work there—where they were staying, whom they were seeing, etc. The organization actually had sent me to those Iraqi cities in 2005 for reconnaissance. I was tasked with finding PKK deserters and also identifying the lodging facilities and private houses where Turkish intelligence units were staying. As was the case in Turkey, the organization already had militants living in cities within Iraq, Syria, and Iran. These civilian militants collected information for the organization and would immediately contact us if they acquired sensitive information regarding our enemies. These civilian organization members helped me a lot when I was searching for the housing locations of these Turkish agents.

Although we knew all their addresses, we could do nothing, because they were staying in a region under Barzani’s control. If we killed those agents, Turkey would make Barzani pay for their deaths and ask him why he had not protected them. Barzani had large-scale trade



agreements with Turkey. The oil produced in northern Iraq is sold to the rest of the world through Turkey. Therefore, a scenario where the organization killed Turkish agents would seriously risk the agreements between Barzani and Turkey.

We saw the region commander off to Iraq as soon as the arrangements were made. Before he left, I asked him to communicate with us at least three times a day via his satellite phone, preferably in the morning, noon, and at night. For the first two days, we communicated with each other as planned. On the night of the third day, I was watching the news on a Turkish TV channel, ATV, when I heard that a senior PKK commander had been caught in Iraq. I began to panic and wondered if it were our region commander.

Of course, the people at central headquarters were also watching the news. They called me right afterwards, and asked if it were our region commander who had been caught. I said, "I'm not sure, since we haven't spoken since the afternoon. However, he is supposed to call me sometime around midnight." Bahoz Erdal got angry at this, and asked, "How could you not have an instantaneous source of communication with a region commander?" I said, "I will provide you with detailed information later." Then, I turned off the phone. It was around 11:00 p.m. I called the region commander perhaps ten times, but he never picked up his satellite phone. I thought it was highly likely that the news, broadcasted by the Turkish TV channels, had been referring to him. Then the wheels came off the bus! Barzani would be so angry with the Peshmerga if he discovered that some of his soldiers were assisting us in Iraq. I would also be in serious trouble if the region commander had been caught by Turkish agents and was at a complete loss on what to do.

I immediately called Barzani's nephew, the young man who had helped me during my hospital visits in Iraq. "Comrade, can you search to see if a senior PKK member had been

caught by the Turks in Iraq today? Please pay extra attention to the cities of Dohuk and Zaho.” He called me back, approximately two hours later, and said, “No, no members of the PKK were caught today.” I replied, “Are you sure? Turkish TV channels were broadcasting that a senior PKK executive was arrested in Iraq.” He said, “Comrade Deniz, that is impossible. The Turkish agents would definitely inform the KPD intelligence units, if they had caught a PKK member in our territories.” I was a bit relieved with his reply, but I was still nervous since the region commander had not yet contacted me.

It was around midnight, and my satellite phone rang. It was the region commander. I immediately asked, “Where have you been, comrade? I have been trying to communicate with you for hours! Why have you not answered my calls?” I told him that he was to return to the camp that same night, but he replied, “Comrade, I moved into a deep conversation with friends from the KDP and forgot to call you. The doctor has scheduled my treatment for tomorrow morning. I cannot return tonight!” I responded, “Comrade you have to return tonight. It is an order from headquarters management!”

We figured out that the news about a captured comrade was a scam. The Turkish intelligence units had probably gotten a bit of loose information about a senior PKK member visiting Iraq. They most probably knew that someone was coming but did not know to which city in Iraq he or she was going. Since the information was not fully accurate they used Turkish TV channels to broadcast false news, in order to create a panicked atmosphere within the organization. Indeed, they had been successful in making us nervous.

My close friend, who arranged the hospital visits, took the phone from the region commander and began to talk to me, “Comrade, why are you calling him back to Çukurca now? His treatment will start tomorrow.” I explained to him what had happened that night. “The

Turkish intelligence probably knows that he is in Iraq. We cannot take such a risk. Send him back tonight!” He replied, “Do not you trust me? This area is under Peshmerga’s control. I have a battalion of Peshmerga forces under my authority. If the Turks find where this comrade is staying, they would have to kill each one of us to take him.” This friend of mine was also a son of a well-known Kurdish tribe in northern Iraq. “Deniz, there is no need to be nervous. It would not just be the battalion. The Turks would have to kill every single member of my tribe if they tried to take our guest! Whatever happens, I will not surrender him to the Turks! Let him see the doctor tomorrow, and I will personally bring him back to your area!”

### **TRAITORS AMONG US**

I worked as a battalion commander in the Çukurca camp until the end of 2006. During that time, in April of the same year, selections were being made for new guerillas to be dispatched north. The selection process happened every year during the month of April. The new, dynamic guerrilla forces from the south were sent north while the worn out and fatigued guerillas, who had been fighting up there, would come south to rest. I went to Iraq to talk with the senior leadership as the new forces gathered there. I told them once again that I wanted to go north, but my suggestion was rejected, as it had been before.

There was a tragic incident that happened in July of 2006 that reminded me yet again that I needed to leave the crooked south and fight in the north with real comrades. A PKK committee member, with whom I was closely acquainted, was killed by an agent who infiltrated the organization. Sarı İbo, my dear friend, was murdered by this traitor. After the assassination, I knew there was no way I was going to stay in the south.

Sari İbo was one of the oldest members of the organization. He had been around so long, that he was one of the few original members who came up with the idea to fight in the guerilla style against Turkey. He personally organized the first guerilla units and began the first battles against the Turkish security forces in Amed, Garzan, and even in Amanoses. He was a very important figure to the organization. When I found out about his death, my entire world came crashing down around me. I could not stay in the south any longer.

The suspect was put through a deep and thorough investigation. He initially said that it had just been an accident, but, after interrogation, he confessed he had been working for a Turkish intelligence unit. He had been in close contact with the security forces since the first day he had infiltrated us. He also confessed that he was not alone, and provided us with the names of four other guerillas who were working for the Turks.

In 2004, the organization established a new unit within Turkey called “self-defense.” Sari İbo was the commander of this unit. Under normal conditions, it was difficult for our enemies to place their agents among us, because living in the mountains was quite strenuous, and it was not hard to figure out who was a real patriot and who was an agent. However, the living conditions of the self-defense committee members were not like that. They lived in the cities, as civilians. These five Kurdish traitors were placed in the self-defense committee by Turkish agents. The organization would initially send these people to either Iraq or Syria for a training session, which lasted only 45 days. The new self-defense committee members would be trained on basic military and ideological issues, and the agents had come to the south for that purpose. One of them figured out that Sari İbo was an important person within the PKK and thought he would be in the Turks’ good graces if he could kill him. He was going to make it appear as an

accident, so no one would suspect his real identity. He was a fool that underestimated the organization.

The other four guerillas, disclosed by the killer, were pardoned, but the traitor who was responsible for Sari's death was executed soon after the investigation. As I mentioned previously, the PKK banned capital punishment for all crimes except the crime of infiltrating the organization. Working for the enemy was unforgivable. Above all else, if you killed one of your comrades, without pity, there was zero chance you would be forgiven. Even if you deserted, the organization would never give up trying to find and execute you. Something similar to that happened in 2004. One of the guerillas killed a comrade and took refuge with Barzani. The organization offered the KDP a large sum of money to extradite him, and they took the offer. Once he was delivered to us, he was executed.

Sari Ibo's death affected me deeply. The day before it happened, we were together eating dinner and chatting happily about general things, and then, the next day he was gone. I was in a tough, unbearable emotional state. It was even more unbearable when you lost someone you loved, and Sari Ibo was loved by me. The PKK is what it is today, because of people like him. He was a humble person, who never asked to be promoted, and would always volunteer for the unglorified jobs no one else wanted.

We had grown accustomed to losing ground guerillas in a clash. It was a part of life and did not affect our emotions as much. However, when your commander dies, you feel as if you have lost every member of your family. A commander becomes everything you have. They are irreplaceable.

## THE NORTH AND BAHOZ ERDAL

In August of 2006, I visited the commander of my region and said, “Comrade, I want to ask you to write a report saying I am able to fight in the north. Headquarters is unwilling to employ me there, but I know you can convince them. Do not take this the wrong way, but if you do not write such a letter, I will not help with anything here. I will even leave for Amed by myself!” There were other ranked comrades, who desired to be dispatched north, but headquarters would not allow them to go, either. Because of that, I said to our region commander, “You can send me there or not, but I will form a group with them, and we will go anyway!” At this, the region commander became very angry, “If it were anyone other than I that you spoke to in this way, you’d be arrested. Do not ever abuse our friendship again, Deniz! How would you go to Amed without getting permission from the organization first?” He had gotten angry at my tone, but still wrote the letter that I needed.

Even with the letter from the region commander, I was rejected by headquarters yet again. The commander who wrote the letter for me, contacted them via radio and said, “Deniz insists that he must go. Cannot we do something for him?” They answered, “Tell him to come down here, and we will talk to him face to face.” I arrived at Zap headquarters after a one day’s journey on foot, and I was welcomed by Muşlu Kadri Çelik. Before joining us, Kadri had been a senior military officer in the Turkish army but resigned to join our struggle in Iraq. If I am not mistaken, his daughter was a politician in the HDP. He was one of the oldest members of the PKK, having joined in the 1980s. Everyone would call him Ape Hus, which meant Uncle Hüseyin. I asked Ape Hus to convince Bahoz Erdal to send me north. He said, “Deniz, why do you insist on this so much? You are not eligible to serve in the north because of your health’s condition.”

I told him all of the reasons why I wanted to go to the north so badly. “I cannot take the lifestyle in the south anymore! Look, if you guys force me to stay here, I will not work. I will resign from my duties, and be a regular guerrilla again.” Bahoz Erdal arrived at headquarters in the evening. Bahoz, a senior woman named Zaho, and Ape Hus called me to the meeting hall. Bahoz Erdal asked me why I wanted to go to the north so badly. Just as with Ape Hus, I explained everything to him. Of course, he was not satisfied with my reasoning and got upset. He said, “Be honest with us. You are simply running away from the problems, Deniz! You know there are structural difficulties in the south, and the guerillas are not disciplined well enough, which means you know that you have to work harder here. You simply want to run away because you do not want to help us fix the problems.” I was not expecting such harsh criticism, and I responded, “You are partly correct, comrade. The problems you listed are deeply rooted in the south, but you will not change them no matter what you do here. So, just let me go back north!” He asked again, “How will you go with those legs?” His comment humiliated me, and I replied, “These legs were wounded in 1994, and yet I have been fighting as a guerilla ever since. Did I not have these same injured legs when I took part in the YNK war as a commander of the special teams? Why did no one question them then? When I was needed, you never considered the condition of my legs. But when the conditions were suitable, you always created an excuse that I was not well enough, my health situation was not good, or I could not go because my legs would be a problem. Comrade, you will either give me permission or you will not, but I will go there!”

When I finished saying all of this, Bahoz Erdal was really pissed off. “Okay, if you are not going to listen to our advice, go wherever you want to go and do whatever you want to do, Deniz! However, be aware that we do not approve of it. I cannot forcefully hold you here, so I

do not care if you go on your own.” After delivering this message, he angrily left the room. I felt relieved when he said that I could go on my own. I asked Zaho and Ape Hus to notify PKK headquarters so there would not be a problem when I reached the forces in the north. Zaho also became angry. “You do not obey our orders, and to top it off, you dare ask us to explain the situation to headquarters? Hell no, I am not doing what you ask! Tomorrow, Comrade Abbas (Duran Kalkan) will be here. Talk to him, and if he agrees with your reasoning, you can go north. If you go there against our orders, I will ask all the guerillas in the region to incarcerate you as soon as they see you!” I then uttered my final words, “I will not stay here if you threaten me with death, let alone incarceration! You need to understand me. I cannot stay here anymore, but I also do not want to leave you like this! Make an exception for me!” Ape Hus and Zaho began to talk between themselves. “Okay, we will explain your unique situation to Comrade Abbas tomorrow. If he approves, then it is okay with us too.” I told them, “Look, I can convince Comrade Abbas, as long as you do not tell him that you do not approve of my dispatch to the north.”

Duran Kalkan and Ali Haydar, who were working for the defense committee, arrived at headquarters. Surprisingly, they both approved of my assignment to the north. Now, there was only one problem left to solve. I had to travel with a guerilla unit. Bahoz Erdal said, “There is a unit which is leaving for the north soon. The only way you can travel with them is if they accept you among them. You will not be able to go if they do not! Are you okay with this? You will stay here if they do not want you to travel with them?” I said, “It’s a deal!” Bahoz Erdal said, “Perfect. You may return to your battalion in Çukurca and prepare for the trip. Join us at our meeting next week, and you can go with them if they accept you.”



I took my dispatch to the north as a certainty. I said goodbye to the guerillas in my battalion and visited the other nearby battalions, to say goodbye, as well. I went back to headquarters a week later, but before I went to see Bahoz Erdal, I went directly to the group of 25 guerillas with whom I would be travelling, and said, “Comrades, some senior members are going to ask you if you’ll accept me travelling with you. My assignment in the north depends on what you say! I expect you’ll help me on this issue,” and with a single voice, they accepted me. It was almost evening when Bahoz Erdal entered the meeting hall. He was still angry with my insistence on leaving. I knew this from the way he looked at me. He then eyed the comrades, one by one, and said, “There is a runaway among you. Do you know who it is?” Everyone began to look at me and laugh.

The company commander raised his hand to get the floor. “Comrade, we are all okay with taking the runaway with us. We have no problem with it!” Bahoz Erdal said, “Think twice! His legs make him weak, and there are times when he cannot even walk. You all know that sometimes he can only walk with the help of a cane. On top of that, he might not even be able to carry his own load.” Bahoz Erdal was correct. I was not able to carry more than two cartridge clips on my waist, while most guerillas carried six. The company commander said, “Comrade, we accept him, even knowing all that you just mentioned. If necessary, we will carry him on our shoulders the whole way there.” Bahoz Erdal replied, “Okay, since you want him so much, then you can take him with you. It will not be I whom he’ll be bothering on the way up north!”

Before I could finally leave, Bahoz Erdal put one more condition in front of me. “Deniz, I am now okay with you leaving, but I am assigning you to work for the executive committee of the state of Amed.” Each state had an executive council consisting of three senior PKK

members. One of them was the state commander, and the other two were his or her assistants. I accepted this condition without a problem, just so long as I could go north!

There was one other thing I had to do before leaving. Each guerilla was required to explain their reason for going and to record their plans, projects, and goals for when they arrived in the north. You would basically stand in front of a camera and tell what benefit you would provide the organization on the Northern Front. All these speeches were recorded and then archived in your personal files. The organization could then bring charges against you if you did not follow through on your videotaped goals and projects. Everyone in the company with whom I was traveling had already given their speeches, but I still needed to do mine so I could finally leave.

### **TRAVELING TO THE NORTH**

It was August 2006 when we set off north. Bahoz Erdal asked if we had any money, and I said, "I left my money with someone in the battalion, because it was allocated for their expenses." He asked, "How much money will you need until you reach the northern front?" I said, "Well, we will be traveling from one region to another. Our needs can be met by the guerilla forces on our way, so I do not think we'll need very much." He handed me six thousand Euros.

We set off in the evening after a farewell party. We said goodbye to the administrators and guerillas at the guerilla officers' school, then went to the PKK headquarters to say goodbye to the people there. While we were there, I heard that Cemal (Murat Karayılan) was arriving there soon, and it made me nervous. Comrade Cemal would never send me if he learned that I was going north, so we finished our goodbyes and left immediately.

To our surprise, the commanders to the regions of Haftanin and Metina had met and were heading toward headquarters to welcome Comrade Cemal. We encountered them as we made our way and spoke with them for half an hour before continuing on our journey. There was one comrade among them, with whom I did not get along. We did not have a big problem between us, but we differed on some ideological issues. There were also seven female guerillas. Four of them were from our group, and the other three were from a nearby guerilla force, which had come to say goodbye to their friends. One of these females, whom I had known since 1996, was ranked as a battalion commander. The organization had produced a movie called “Beritan,” and she was the lead actress in it.

The comrade, with whom I had the problem, filed an official complaint against me with headquarters management, as soon as he arrived there. In his report, he said, “Deniz and Beritan were talking a distance away from the group and must be having a romantic relationship.” Management discussed whether something on that level could be true. Much of the reason for this accusation came from the fact that I had worked in the same unit as Beritan, for a long time. Besides that, my past records, involving women, were not so good.

The headquarters commander of the female force said, “Stop that talking now. What would we do if we call Deniz back here and put him under investigation only to find out there was nothing? He could potentially kill someone out of anger. We all know how sensitive he is on these issues.” On some matters, I was indeed extremely patient. Yet, on others, I would not listen to the organization or even a loved one. I would especially become angry if someone cast aspersions upon me. On the other hand, if I had done something wrong, I would inform my superiors before they found out. Since she knew me so well, the commander also said, “Deniz had a relationship before, but he did not hide it from us. Everyone knew about it. Why would he

hide it now? We should call Beritan here first and investigate her. She will tell us the truth. We will call Deniz back only if Beritan accepts the existence of such a love affair!”

After the decision, Beritan was invited to headquarters management for a preliminary hearing and became irritated as soon as she heard the false claims. “How could you think of something like that between Deniz and me? I have always regarded him as a comrade and as a friend. You are saying these things to me, but if you ask the same questions of Deniz, he will become angry.” Duran Kalkan also heard about it and became upset. “What you people have been discussing is disgusting. Deniz is on his way north now. Everything that you’re saying about Deniz having a romantic affair, is built on assumptions. What if you are mistaken? If this claim is a lie, then Deniz will fight neither in the north nor in the south. So, shut your mouths now! Also, despite the fact that Deniz’s past relationships with women looks bad, I deeply trust Beritan. She would never lie.”

Certainly, I was not aware of this claim and the subsequent hearings with me at their center. We were heading north in a group of 20 guerillas along with a special force consisting of five people. This special force was traveling there to manufacture explosives that could be used in our sabotage missions. Our first destination was the headquarters of this special guerilla force. Our group was intentionally travelling slowly, because we had heard that there were five other groups in Haftanin waiting to cross into Turkish territories. Groups were only allowed to cross into Turkey at certain intervals of time, because of security concerns. That is to say, we would have to wait in Haftanin, even if we arrived in a timely manner.

From Haftanin, you can cross into Turkey utilizing two different routes. The first one was through Botan, and the second one went through Iran. Our group was planning to use the road that went through Botan. When we finally reached Haftanin, it was the beginning of

September. The senior who was responsible for our passage into Turkey informed us, “Your group is too large. I cannot allow you to cross into Turkey together. We’ll have to divide you into two small groups for security reasons. It would be preferable if one group had twelve guerillas and the other, thirteen.” So, according to this new plan, one of the groups will move first and wait for the second group in the Garzan district within Turkey. We were introduced to our local guides, once the planning was complete. The guides informed us that the first group would set off that night. We were told to walk on foot until the Turkish-Iraqi border and then get on trucks to cross into Turkey.

Our guides were all peasants who were registered in the village protection system. As I mentioned before, the organization had not carried out any missions against the rangers since 1996. The organization had established close contact with each village that was registered in the protection system. Those Kurdish rangers were still serving the Turkish security forces but only on paper. Their weapons were from the Turks, but they were not using the weapons to raid us as they did in the old days but, in fact, had secretly begun working for the organization. Those rangers would inform us when the Turkish security forces were planning to carry out missions against us. The peasants would notify us about which regions would be affected by the mission, how many soldiers would take part, what kind of weapons would be used, and how long the operation would last. They would tell us every single detail. Thus, the organization no longer forced the ranger villages to stop what they were doing. In previous years, peasants who enrolled in this system would be considered traitors by the organization. This invaluable information would have been impossible without the help of the rangers. It was especially crucial for me and the guerillas that the border villages were enrolled in the ranger system. They

provided a great advantage on a regular basis and were a huge relief for the times we needed to cross into Turkey.

The first group was to cross into Turkey from Hakkari, on the Iranian side, and my group was to cross from Şırnak, on the Botan side. After the first group left, my group stayed in Haftanin for an entire week. The other groups that had been waiting in Haftanin, before our arrival, had been recently sent. As I said, there had to be a certain interval of time between the groups leaving for Turkey. More specifically, until the group that left from Haftanin reached Botan, the group waiting at Haftanin was not allowed to cross into Turkey. Similarly, when the group in Botan reached Gabar, another group waiting in Botan was allowed to move toward Gabar. The movement of the guerillas within Turkey followed this strict, systematic guideline.

While my group was waiting in Haftanin, Comrade Abbas (Duran Kalkan) informed us, “Deniz, your group might not be able to make it north in time. Winter is coming shortly, and you must prepare yourself for this scenario!” I was disappointed and told them that something like that was unacceptable. I would go north whatever it took. As soon as Duran Kalkan left Haftanin, I contacted the guides and told them that they would immediately guide us north. “Comrade, the other group hasn’t yet arrived in Botan. What you are asking us to do is against the rules of the organization. It is not only a risk but can also leave us in the lurch,” They said. I strongly insisted, and they were finally convinced. We all set off under the cover of darkness, without notifying the regional command.

I got a strange feeling while crossing the Turkish border. Because I had stayed in the south for a long time, my knowledge on how the security forces were positioned, which roads they were using, and where the road control posts were located was all outdated. The three local guides were with us to show us through these unfamiliar areas. It is hard to understand what I

am trying to say unless you have been to the Iraqi-Turkish border. The mountains are high and intertwined, and there is not even a single road. You can easily get lost if you are not careful. There were also some specific places, located near the cross sections of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey, where you could be in the three different countries within a matter of steps. There were some territories where no one was sure whether they were a part of Turkey, Iraq, or Iran. The comrades would sometimes make jokes. “I stood guard in the lands of three different states today.”

In addition to the difficulties of the terrain, there were many military posts across the border. We sometimes had to walk very close to these posts, since there was no alternative route. We were so close to them that the distance between the Turkish soldiers and ourselves would sometimes be less than 200 meters. Also, it was no longer like the old days. The soldiers now had projectors that would light everything up as bright as day, so we had to cross into Turkey before the soldiers turned them on, or we would have been easily noticed.

The Kurdish guides travelling with us were highly experienced, since they also worked with the Turkish soldiers as rangers. They knew what time the projectors were turned on, how many thermal cameras the military posts had, which direction the cameras would survey, and many other details. One of the guides was extremely knowledgeable on these issues. He had worked alongside the Turkish soldiers for quite some time, and even protected them from us at one time! Yet, here he was leading our group on this trip.

If I was not mistaken, we were just about to cross into Turkey at a point close to the Gülyazı Turkish military battalion (Roboski in Kurdish). Suddenly, it became very bright all around us. I turned to the experienced ranger and said, “Comrade, what are we going to do now? The soldiers will definitely notice us if we continue to walk under this light.” He replied, “Do

not worry, comrade. I will take care of it now.” He talked with the other rangers and then left me alone with the remaining 12 guerillas. We had a smoke break and before we even finished our second cigarette, all the projectors were turned off and it was again pitch black. The two remaining guides said, “Hurry up, we need to pass the military post as quickly as possible!” We walked right under the Gülyazı Military Post, and, since it was dark, none of the soldiers noticed us. We had not walked 500 meters from the place, when the projectors were turned on again.

To our luck, other local rangers were guarding those projectors. Our guide, who had left us during the cigarette break, visited those rangers and asked them to turn off the lights for ten minutes, so that we could pass unnoticed. The local ranger guards told the soldiers, “There was an electrical short on the electricity unit. Some of the breakers may have gone bad, and we will fix it soon.”

This is my personal view, meaning that I do not have concrete evidence to support what I am about to say from this specific incident, but I have heard similar things from other ranked comrades. The Turkish soldiers probably noticed we were passing through that area even with the lights off. However, they did not want to mess with us. Even if they did not notice us in the dark, they surely must have in the morning. We were walking on an earthen path when we passed under the military post, so our shoe prints must have been visible. Whether they noticed them or not, they never sent a team to track us down. I not only experienced this first hand, but also have heard it from many other comrades; it is probably not a coincidence. The fighting near the border posts were really just a sham. We had scratched the soldiers’ back, and they had scratched ours. This still goes on in the region.

In fact, turning a blind eye to one another was quite common between the years of 1994 and 1996. Each military post had a certain perimeter that was a border for their safety. It was



usually a circle with a 300-meter radius around the post, and we were fine as long as we did not cross into that circle. The soldiers would see us traveling with 100 guerillas, and they did nothing, as long as we kept outside of their perimeter. As a result, we were very cautious about it. There was a lie that the soldiers and guerillas fought with each other all the time. Not so. Both groups were sick of fighting, and that is why we tried to avoid contact, as much as possible.

Here is a story that I personally witnessed. While we were patrolling within our territory in Bitlis, in 1994, a Turkish military post commander from the Mutki district contacted us via radio. “Fellas, do not cross into my area, and I promise I will not carry out missions against you in the countryside. Do whatever you want in other areas. I do not care! But do not carry out any attack within the area under my responsibility.” One of our guerilla commanders replied to him, “Okay, we will not! However, you will withdraw your ambush teams back to your military post. We will never lay siege to your post, no matter how many soldiers you have there, as long as you do not carry out any mission against us!” The military commander accepted our terms. “It’s a deal! You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours!” Even back then, the soldiers were sick of fighting and losing their friends, just as we guerillas were. We also encountered a similar situation in Lice, Diyarbakir. The military squadron leader in Lice informed us, “I do not care what you do in other districts, but I will not touch you as long as you cause no trouble to me here!” The psychology has always been like that, and it will continue to stay the same.

Another thing that caught my attention was that we could not see a single Turkish soldier outside when the Turkish Supreme Military Council meetings were to take place. None of the military commanders would plan or carry out missions close to the months of August and December. The meetings were held twice a year to hand out new promotions and assignments. The guerillas would be greatly relaxed and free in the months of June, July, October, and

November because of those meetings. Military commanders were all aware that the smallest mistake during a mission carried out close to those months could affect their promotions and assignments to the higher positions. For example, let's assume that a commander carried out a mission against us in September 2015 and lost five soldiers in the battle. Since the Supreme Military Council would have already been held in August 2015, those losses would fall off the agenda until the next meeting. Nevertheless, if the same losses occurred in July 2015, that commander would be the main topic of discussion at the Supreme Military Council meeting, since it would be held shortly after the incident. The organization was well aware of those deficits. We knew we would have a free hand prior to these meetings. The military posts would not intervene during those months, even if they captured our image and found our location through their advanced techniques. The military commanders would never allow even the smallest risk, that could potentially spoil their career goals.

Interestingly, we had a similar situation within the organization. None of the guerilla commanders wanted to carry out missions close to when the Supreme Guerilla Conference was going to take place for the same reason as the Turkish military commanders. No one wanted to be the main topic of discussion at the meeting. If your failure became part of the agenda, the seniors would mark your copybook, and your future would be finished. You could even be taken out of the guerilla force and reassigned to mundane activities carried out by civilians. This was one of the heaviest punishments a guerilla could be sentenced. It would have been considered even worse than death.

As I said, the travel from the south to the north was very stressful for me. After we passed by Gülyazı military post, we continued on our walk until morning. Just before sunrise, we decided to rest at a place in the slopes of the Kel Mehmet Mountains. Since we had walked

all through the night, everyone fell asleep in the first spot they found. It was around nine in the morning when I heard the sounds of a helicopter and immediately switched my radio. I wondered if the soldiers were out in the field for a mission. There was not a single conversation to be heard on the channels used by the Turkish military. We certainly could not listen to the talks on the radio anymore, because of encryption, but there was a signal-level indicator on the screen that indicated whether there were any communications going on around you. Therefore, even though we could not listen to their conversations, we could look at the changes of the signal levels and figure out whether they were communicating with each other and whether they were close to us.

The noise was coming from far away, but I was still nervous. I was certain that it was a Skorsky, and not an attack helicopter, and after a while, I was finally able to see it with my binoculars. It was flying a very particular path, which made it seem as if it were looking for something specific. At this point, it was one o'clock in the afternoon and we were just about to have lunch when I noticed another helicopter. This time, it was a Cobra-type attack helicopter. This made me even more nervous, and I began to think that the Turks had probably noticed us sneak across the border and were trying to locate our position from the air. I went over to one of the guides and asked if they could find out what was going on. "Comrade, there is a road there that goes from the district of Uludere to Beytüşşebap. There is probably a military convoy passing by, and those helicopters are flying over it to provide security." I was incredibly relieved by this explanation. However, I also felt angry with the guide. "You Idiot. Why have you not said something about this before when you knew that there was a road over there? I thought they were carrying out an operation."

If I had been familiar with that area, I would not have worried so much about it, because if you have stayed in a place for any length of time, you should know every single detail about it—where the military posts are located, where the roads lead, and where you can safely hide. I had never been to the area between Uludere and Beytüşşebap before. I had only seen it on the videotapes that we were required to watch before setting off from headquarters on our journey. The organization had a tradition where each region in Turkey had a civilian camera crew that consisted of five people: a head cinematographer and his or her assistants. Disguised as tourists, these teams would go around their assigned regions to videotape and photograph the terrain—mountains, military posts, police districts, villages, lodging places, caves, and other places, in detail. This was really grueling work. It would take at least four to five months to completely videotape an entire region within Turkey. The crew had to be extra careful not to be noticed by the security forces, let alone doing the work for which they were there. All of these videotapes and photographs would be delivered to headquarters management to be used for training purposes. For example, let's say that a guerilla force of 50 was to be dispatched to Amed in Turkey in 2006. Every single member of this force must watch the tapes that pertain to the main routes of travel, alternative routes, and important points in the state where they were to be sent. Sometimes, it would take days to record notes and finish watching the tapes. As a guerilla, you had to learn everything about the area of your assignment before you were dispatched there. It was like a pre-reconnaissance.

## CHAPTER 18

### THE TRIP TO AMED

The organization and Turkey came to an agreement on the terms of a ceasefire on the day we reached the Botan Field. Winter was coming, and it rained every day. Dr. Ali was the Botan Field commander, and he wanted to see me personally. “Comrade Deniz, I would like you and your team to stay here for a couple days. There are things I want to discuss with you,” he said. I figured out that he wanted to learn what was going on at headquarters. More specifically, he wanted to know whether the seniors at headquarters were still complaining about him.

I explicitly said to him, “Comrade, as long as you do not revise or change your perspective on the essential points of the organization, you have no chance to survive among us. You will either desert us or change your own lifestyle.” He asked me to be more specific. I said, “For instance, issues regarding women.” (Dr. Ali was not a person of pure, genuine love. He would use a false love to satisfy his sexual desires. This was clear because he would find a new person to “love” wherever he was assigned. Real lovers cannot forget each other even though years pass. Beyond just himself, he was trying to impose these immoral ideals on everyone. He wanted everyone to have the freedom of sexual intercourse with any woman as long as both sides agreed.)

If a field commander, such as Dr. Ali, were having a sexual relationship with anyone at any time, what would you do if you were a guerilla under his command? Would not you want the same freedom and not be called to account for it since your commander was doing the exact same thing. A guerilla always mimics his or her commander. In fact, Dr. Ali was having his explicit affairs on purpose in order to try and normalize this behavior among his guerillas. This reason and others was why I told him that he was way off base. He asked, “Do they criticize me

for this at headquarters?” I said, “Comrade, to tell you the truth, you will be put under investigation either this year or next for this immoral behavior! If I were you, I would be more careful and stop that behavior altogether!”

Beyond his forbidden affairs with women, Dr. Ali’s skills as a commander were very poor. There had been heavy losses while he was commanding in the field of Botan. In 2006, a company commander was martyred along with his 25 guerillas. Besides that, he had not carried out a successful mission in Botan since he had been assigned there. In the north, all of the states (Erzurum, Garzan, Dersim, Amed, Serhad, and Amanoses) had been actively completing guerilla missions, while there had not even been a single mission carried out against the Turkish security forces in Botan, even though Botan had a guerilla force numbering 400, while the other states had forces numbering somewhere between 80 to 90 people. Additionally, all of the guerillas in Botan were from specially trained forces. There was a noticeable difference in the number of guerillas between the old times and after 2002. We used to have at least 4,000 guerillas in Botan between the years of 1992 and 1993. In line with that policy I mentioned before, the numbers were seriously decreased.

Dr. Ali also had a ridiculous notion that the organization did not need to carry out missions in order to achieve its goals. He thought we should only carry out missions when needed, similar to the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. This was a faulty approach, because the guerillas would weaken as fighters if they did not carry out missions over an extended period of time. They would get used to comfort and quickly forget about the hardships of the guerilla lifestyle. Once they became soft, they would surely begin to argue with each other over silly, mundane things.

I told all of these concerns of mine to Dr. Ali. “Be prepared, comrade! The organization will hold you accountable for incapacitating such a special force.” He replied, “I have a response for headquarters.” I said, “Comrade Ali, it is your call. I am warning you as a friend. You asked me, and I explained the concerns about you. This is how you are perceived at headquarters. I would be especially careful regarding your approach to women guerillas. Many of your guerillas have already sent complaint reports about your attitude toward women!”

While we were still waiting in Botan, Amed guerilla state management informed us that, “No more guerilla forces should come here this year! We cannot arrange lodging for any newcomers, and the guerilla groups are about to go into their bunkers.” It was disheartening news. I did not complain to them because they were right; it was just about to snow. We would leave traces in the snow as we traveled. Even though there was enough lodging capacity, we could not travel to those bunkers because security forces would find us by following our traces on the snow. We would have caused all of the guerillas in the Amed region to be discovered.

With this new development, we continued to stay at the Botan Field. Until new orders arrived, we did not know what to do. Then, when we began our extended stay, we heard that a mid-field commander, Nurettin Sofi, was being called back from the north to the south. Nurettin Sofi once served as headquarters commander, after Bahoz Erdal had been assigned to another duty. Later, we also heard that the Dersim Field commander, Sabri Tendürek, was also summoned back south. A guerilla conference had been scheduled. On their way back, the two high-ranking commanders were instructed to use different routes to increase their safety, even though they were setting off from relatively close locations. If something were to happen to one, the other should at least be saved. The organization had a strict rule: field commanders had to travel alone while they were in the north.

Despite this rule, those two commanders met in a rural area located in Amed. While they were there, they decided to travel together for the rest of the trip. They rationalized their behavior by arguing that they had enough guards around them in case something happened. I encountered them when they stopped in Botan to rest. Nurettin Sofi asked where I was going. “I was supposed to be assigned to Amed, but you said you did not want anyone else there,” I answered. He no doubt noticed from the tone of my voice that I was not happy with his decision. He said, “Comrade, we can make an exception for you!” Filled with excitement, I asked how he could make this happen. “You were told that we did not want a group there. Take two guerillas with you, for security purposes, and head there. We desperately need commander-level guerillas in Amed,” he said.

That same day, I chose two comrades and set off for Amed through Siirt. I mentioned earlier in my life story that there was a corridor on the Eruh-Pervari line which we opened by allying with Botan forces twelve years ago. It was still open and safe to travel for guerilla forces. It was so strange that the Turkish security forces had not yet returned to the military posts they deserted after our heavy bombardments. We were going to use this corridor first to travel to Garzan and then to Amed. When the three of us reached a point close to the city of Siirt, we got an order via radio to travel somewhere else, to a location in Garzan, where I had previously stayed, more than four years ago. Since it was fall, we traveled during the day, because it was mostly rainy and foggy, and there was no need to travel in the dark of night. It was highly unlikely that we would be noticed by the security forces.

Toward the end of October, we arrived in Şirvan. Nurettin Sofi delivered another order to us, via radio. “Deniz, you should stay where you are for now, because it is almost winter. Also, the command leadership of the Sirvan region is relatively new; all of them having been



assigned there in the middle of 2006. They do not know the area well, so you should stay and assist them whenever necessary, since you are familiar with that terrain. I promise that you will pass into Amed in the spring of 2007.” I said, “Okay. If I am going to stay here just for the winter, then there is no problem.” I was, in fact, very familiar with the area since I had previously worked for a long time there. The guerilla forces of Sirvan had been raided twice by the Turkish security forces during their last two winter camps. Since they had not dug their underground bunkers in safe locations, they left their camps and ran away in the middle of the cold winter season. This is why Nurettin Sofi asked me to stay there and train them finding a secure bunker location.

### **LIFE IN AN UNDERGROUND BUNKER**

The Sirvan region force consisted of 22 guerillas, and with the addition of the three of us, the number increased to 25. The north had sensitive rules regarding the structure and composition of underground winter camps. There could be a maximum of twelve guerillas living in a single underground bunker. Normally, eight is the ideal number, but no one would hold you accountable if you placed 12 guerillas in one. Due to this rule, I divided the group in half—one with 12 and the other with 13. Based on my past experiences regarding the Sirvan region, I decided on two locations for the bunkers. One was close to Bitlis, and the other was close to the city of Siirt. It was about a four, or five-day walk between the two locations.

Once my planned areas were laid out, a guerilla from the Sirvan force objected, saying, “Comrade Deniz, both of these locations are extremely dangerous and have potential risks. We cannot set up our winter camps there!” I asked, “Why do you think they are risky?” He replied, “The soldiers frequently carry out operations in those areas, making them not secure!” I laughed

at him and said, "That is why I am lodging you guys at those two spots. Have an open mind! Would a fighter, whether they are a soldier or guerilla, carefully patrol their immediate surroundings that they see every day? No! What do we guerillas do when we first climb a hill? Do we not carefully reconnoiter the distant location? The soldiers fight using the same mentality we do. Most of the time, they would never check their immediate surroundings, expecting that it always to be secure. They automatically assume that the guerillas are not stupid enough to dig underground bunkers under a military post. That is why we will lodge at those two locations, which are in close proximity to the military posts. It does not matter if they carry out missions, while we hide right next to them. We will sit quietly in our bunkers. Our goal is to survive the winter, not fight with them! We will keep our mouths shut and wait still!"

Soldiers often carried out missions trying to detect our bunkers and even sometimes walked just above us. We could easily hear their voices, but they were unaware of our presence. The underground bunkers were two and a half meters under ground level. We dug that deep for our own safety. After that, we would cover the top of the dug-out area with thick woodpiles. After that, we stretched a thick nylon canvas on top of the parallel wooden sticks to prevent water and snow from leaking into the bunker. This nylon canvas would then be covered with dirt and earth. After that we would put one layer of pebble stones on top of the earth and one more layer of dirt and earth on the pebble stones. All of those steps made it impossible to detect whether or not there was a bunker under that area. If you stepped on top of the bunker, and jumped as much as you wanted, you would not even feel a bit of movement. It just felt like normal terrain. That's why our bunkers were safe throughout the winter season. The artificial structure was so down to earth that no one could figure out if there were a bunker there.

If the amount of guerillas were at the maximum of twelve, then we built two sleeping quarters in the bunker. The twelve would be split between them. Say we built one of the sleeping quarters in a particular spot. We would then dig a tunnel five meters away from that quarter and build the second one in that spot. This allowed there be a tunnel between the two quarters. The sleeping quarters would also be used as classrooms. At the center of the first tunnel, we would dig yet another tunnel, but this one would be 20 meters long. The restroom and bathrooms would be built at the end of this longer tunnel. There would also be a secret exit door next to the restrooms. From one of the two sleeping quarters, we would dig another tunnel of 20 meters near the main entrance of the underground bunker, giving us at least two exit points per bunker.

Finally, from the other sleeping quarters, we would dig a tunnel of six meters, ending at our kitchen. There were two wood stoves in the kitchen. We would cook our meals and bake our bread using those stoves. The meals would only be cooked at night since the burning wood would produce smoke. The use of the stove was twofold. It spread warmth in the bunker, and we could cook our meals for the next day. Lunch for the following day would be cooked just before sunrise, and kept for that afternoon. During the daylight hours, we would heat our meals with propane gas powered burner stoves.

Life was hard in underground. We were definitely not allowed to use the wood stove to heat the bunkers unless there was rain, snow, or fog, because the security forces could detect our location from the smoke. During the 1990s, the number of guerilla forces in the north was quite large and they would not always stay in the bunkers throughout the entire winter. Every once in a while, we would go outside and train in the open air. Since our numbers were large, we would be able to fight the security forces if they detected us while we were outside. But, as I mentioned

several times before, the number of guerillas in the north was dramatically reduced after the year 2000. There were only ten to 12 guerillas per bunker. We would not dare leave the bunkers, since we could not fight against the security forces with only 12 guerillas. All of the organization's privacy rules had to be obeyed because of this lack of numbers, or we would have been sitting ducks for the Turks. Several times, we would see large numbers of Turkish security forces pass close to our bunker. If we had wanted to, we could abruptly kill them all without losing a single guerilla. However, our actions would reveal our bunker location to the security forces, so, no matter what happened, we would do nothing but wait quietly until winter was over.

Constructing an underground bunker was an artful work. If you were not experienced in understanding the essentials of building a bunker with things like ventilation, you would have a hard time living in that bunker during the winter. For instance, if the restrooms were built at the same level or lower, than the sleeping quarters, then you could not sleep because of the stinking odor. The restrooms had to be built higher than the other rooms, so the smell would rise away from our quarters. Besides that, the long tunnel of 20 meters that led to the restrooms should not be dug in a straight line. If you dug it in a zigzag pattern, then you would have neither the stinking odor nor any other discomfort. As I said, the inexperienced guerillas would often build their bunkers but disregard this small, but important detail. If they did build it incorrectly, they would sometimes have to build a new, higher restroom in the middle of the winter season.

Another significant detail that we had to take into account while constructing bunkers was the need for fresh water for the entire winter. There must be a fountain or fresh water source, no further than within a 300-meter perimeter of the underground bunker. We would supply our water needs from these water resources through pipes buried under the ground. The militants would supply the pipes from local cities and installing them underground benefited us

in two ways. The security forces would not notice them nor would the water freeze from the cold temperatures. If we had no choice but to build our bunkers in an area with no fresh water resource, then we had to supply our water needs by melting snow.

There were also two other stoves in each sleeping quarter in order to heat the rooms. Additionally, there was a TV in one of the quarters for training purposes. We used a Honda brand power generator for the TV, which was really useful, because it was fairly quiet and could easily supply our electricity needs throughout winter. Similar to the tunnel we built for the restrooms, we would build another tunnel of similar length for our power generator room. The only difference between a restroom and a power-generator room was the tiny window for air ventilation. The gas that came out of the generator was highly poisonous. If you forgot to leave an open space in the walls of the generator room, the gas could potentially leak into the sleeping quarters and perhaps kill the guerillas. We generally used the generators during the night. We did not need to use lights in the bunker during the day, since we had small windows the size of a coin, in the ceiling of each room, and the daylight would leak into our rooms through those tiny windows. When we noticed movement through the signal changes on our radio, one of us would immediately go out and close all those tiny windows, including the space left for power generator ventilation, with dirt and bushes.

A year later, during the 2007 to 2008 winter camp, we encountered a life-threatening situation regarding power generator use. One night, I was feeling very tired after training and told my comrades that I was going to bed early. They said, “Okay comrade, have a good rest. We are going to watch a movie tonight.” The women guerillas also came to the men’s sleeping quarters to watch the movie with them. Everyone was gathered in one quarter, and it was so loud

that I could not sleep. I decided to rest in the women's quarters until the movie was finished. I guess it was 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. when I left the men's quarters.

Before I left, I told the male comrades, "I'm going to sleep in the women's quarters until you're finished with the movie. Come and wake me so that the women can sleep in their quarters." The ventilation was good where the women stayed, and the fountain was right there as well. I woke up by myself around 11:30 p.m. and thought the movie was still playing, since no one had come to waken me yet. I stood and became dizzy. To my chagrin, the running generator had caused poisonous gas to spread throughout the bunker, and every room was filled with gas, because the generator's ventilation had been blocked by heavy snow.

After thoroughly washing my face, I went to the men's quarters to check on my comrades. All of them were lying quietly in front of the TV. I immediately turned off the power generator and cleared the snow that was piled in front of the ventilation areas. After that, I went to the kitchen and filled a large cup with water. Using a piece of cloth, I wiped all their faces. Two of them awoke and said that they were going outside to breathe fresh air. I said, "Do not you dare!" They were clearly novices and had never dealt with gas poisoning before. "If you go out now and expose yourself to fresh air, you will lose consciousness again, and this time it will last even longer! Just wait for a while. You will need to go out slowly."

While I was still taking care of the other comrades, one of them ignored my warnings and rushed outside the bunker through the emergency exit located at the restroom. He fainted as soon as went through the door and lay unconscious until morning. The next day, we did not carry out any training sessions. As you can see, those power generators could pose more of a risk to us than even the security forces, because gas poisoning was a very sneaky death! You

would not even feel it. Fortunately, I was experienced with these issues, since I had encountered similar incidents a couple of times before.

Back during the 2006 to 2007 winter period, we built two bunkers at those strategic locations I mentioned earlier. The camp where I was staying, was in the foothills. The Turkish security forces regularly carried out land operations in the months of December, January, February, March, and April. During these operations, they would regularly search the field to destroy underground bunkers. They had walked right above our bunker many times. I sometimes was even able to hear their conversations by turning my ear toward the ceiling. They would check everywhere during those search operations, but none of the soldiers thought to check under the very ground where they walked. As I said, even the soldiers did not suspect that we would have bunkers so close to their military posts. It made no sense to them that the guerillas would come and build bunkers right in the foothills, close to a military post. I am sure the soldiers would even deny that claim today, but it was true. As the well-known Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu once said, “Pretend inferiority and encourage your enemy’s arrogance.”

Now, you might wonder how we were able to build such complicated bunkers right under the foothills of a military post in the woods. You might ask, “Did anyone notice you?” No one noticed us because we only worked on the bunkers at night, and we were extremely quiet. We did not even use axes to cut the big trees for the roof of the bunkers but used handsaws instead. Besides that, the season to construct a bunker was extremely important. It had to be before the leaves fell out of the trees, since we needed cover.

Toward the middle November, 2006, we finished building our winter camp and carrying all of our things into the bunker. After that, we retreated to the mountainous areas, since it was still too early to stay there. We entered the bunker in the beginning of December, 2006, just

before it began snowing. Everything from shoes to clothes, and food to beverages was available in the bunker. There was rice, beans, wheat, cheeses, olives, tomato paste, oil, flour, honey, fried meat, various kinds of canned food, and even treats, such as chocolates, to supply us until spring. Each camp had one person who was in charge of provisions supply. He or she would prepare a list of supplies, before we entered into our winter camp. They would estimate the quantity of supplies according to the number of guerillas. After that, the provisions would be supplied by the civilian militants who lived nearby in the cities. We would pay special attention to the storage of two things in particular: sugar and salt. They were special because they could easily get spoiled by moisture. We kept them in large metal bowls to try and prevent that from happening. In some of the bunkers, we would also have a tailor. The tailor would sew two pairs of guerilla uniforms for each of our comrades throughout the winter season.

### **SUPPLY OF EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES**

During 2006 and 2007, when we arrived in the Sirvan region, I encountered a serious problem before we even entered our bunkers. The local guerilla forces of Sirvan had set landmines along every possible route that the Turkish security forces might use. They even insisted on planting mines around our underground bunker locations, but, no matter how hard they tried, I would not let them. If a mine exploded near our bunker, the security forces would easily figure out we were hiding close by.

I asked these local guerilla forces what kind of mines they used and where exactly they had planted them. They told me they acquired a type of fertilizer from a company. I was informed that this fertilizer was also used in the production of explosives, so TNT was no longer needed. This fertilizer was given to some construction companies with special permission from



the state for the purpose of preparing explosives. More specifically, the construction companies used this fertilizer to blow up rocks while building roads or tunnels in the area. It was red in color. According to the label on the packages, it stayed fresh for six months. If it were not used within six months, it would lose its explosive effect. Because of this time constraint, it was not as useful as TNT for the guerillas. I asked the Sirvan forces if they could figure out a method to solve the six-month expiration problem. They said, "Comrade, we can indeed fix the problem. It is simple! We just melt the fertilizer to keep the explosive substance active for more than six months. It actually lasts for years if you melt it and keep it in that form!" I asked them if they had tested that method or if they were just guessing. They said, "Yes, we have tested it before." They even showed it to me. One of them started a fire in the woods, placed a metal sheet on top of the fire, and then a can on the sheet. Before the can was heated, one of the guerillas poured the fertilizer into it, so that the fertilizer was never in direct contact with the fire. In less than ten minutes, the fertilizer completely melted and turned into a liquid form. The guerillas told me that they would either pour the liquid substance into a tomato sauce can or into a large oil can, depending on the size of the target they wanted to blow up.

During the demonstration, they poured it into a small can. In less than five minutes, the liquid turned into a solid that was as hard as concrete. During the hardening process, the guerillas placed a stick in the middle of the can to prepare a spot for the detonator igniter. One of the guerillas stirred the liquid continuously to prevent it from sticking in the middle of the hard mass. When the fertilizer finished solidifying, he pulled the stick out and placed a detonator igniter in the open spot. There you go! You now have an explosive as strong as TNT. I had never witnessed an explosive being made from fertilizer before. Of course, we had used another kind of fertilizer, ammonium nitrate, but it was not as powerful as TNT. I asked these guerillas

how many kilograms of that fertilizer they had in their capacity. They said, “We have around 300 kg.” I asked, “Why did you not acquire even more of it? We could have shipped it to other guerilla forces!” They replied, “Comrade, this company was not able to supply us with more, without the risk of being recognized by the security forces. It is a difficult to acquire substance, and is only sold with special permission. Besides, the security forces have to be present during its use to make sure that it is not being used for anything other than construction.”

The comrades had acquired the fertilizer from a construction company owned by a former mayor of the city of Siirt. I believe that back in 2003, he had even been a deputy but had resigned later. Because of his resignation, the general elections in the city of Siirt had to be repeated, and current President Erdoğan joined the Turkish General National Assembly as a deputy instead of him. If I am not mistaken, his name was Mervan Gül.

There was a high-quality, fresh-water resource in the city of Bitlis. Mervan Gül’s construction company had won the bidding, and they were going to use pipelines to transfer this water from Bitlis to the small district of Tillo, in Siirt. This district was the home of President Erdogan’s wife, Emine Erdogan. All of those pipes were laid down in a district that had less than a couple thousand people, just for the relatives of Emine Erdogan. The company knew very well that they had to pay taxes to the organization for this construction work. If they did not pay, we would not let them do the job. Before we went into our winter camp, I traveled to the construction site to see what was going on. There were concrete pipes that had a radius of at least two meters. I wanted to talk to someone in charge to figure out whether we could get more fertilizer from them. The son of Mervan Gul met me, and I asked, “Comrade, how and where can we get this fertilizer?”

“Comrade, I cannot really help you get more of it. Let’s say we bought a 100 kilograms of the fertilizer. We have to use that exact amount in the place that was indicated on the sales agreement. The security forces and the soldiers come and check the quantity before we use it. Also, we use the explosives under their control, and only after they make sure that it is used on its predetermined area.” I could not push him further on the issue. I said, “Okay, I understand. If you do come across some extra let us know. We will buy it from you!” The organization was supposed to receive taxes totaling one hundred and fifty thousand dollars from the construction work. I thought that we could reduce the amount if we could receive some fertilizer in return. It would be very profitable for us, because a single kilogram of TNT was ten times more expensive than the same amount of this fertilizer, even though they had the same explosive impact.

Before we arrived, the Sirvan guerilla forces had planted mines, using this fertilizer, at almost every point in the region. I wanted to see the exact locations of the mines before we entered our bunkers, and noticed that they had acted stupidly. They had planted mines on the road that had been built for the water pipeline project. I said, “Comrades, I can see the reason for planting mines on the routes that the soldiers use, but why did you put mines on the road used by the construction company?” One of them replied, “Comrade Deniz, we noticed that the soldiers accompany the workers when they use those explosives. We thought that we could carry out a mission against those soldiers in the future.” I replied, “Are you nuts? That will mean blowing up soldiers close to where you’re hiding! Will not they figure out that you are camping nearby? Go and remove the electric circuits from those mines immediately,” and they did as I ordered.

I was curious as to how much fertilizer they had used in the mine. They told me that they’d placed four large cans of mines, which equated to almost 80 kilograms. I grew angry when I heard that they had planted four cans at the same spot. “Are you idiots? Why did you

plant so much explosive for a single Ford Transit military vehicle? You will go out and remove those mines from the place where you put them. We can use them more efficiently in more than one mission! Do not waste them all for a single mission!” With such a large quantity of explosives, we could easily destroy two fully armored vehicles. The soldiers would actually often use a Ford Transit truck to travel from one spot to another, and that was not even an armored vehicle. We could easily destroy a Ford minibus with only seven kilograms of explosives. If the soldiers were traveling by car, then three kilograms of explosives would be more than enough. For a tank, a single anti-tank mine would be enough to kill the passengers. With a single large can containing 20 kilograms of fertilizer, we could easily prepare three anti-tank mines. So, the local forces of Sirvan had acted foolishly by planting 80 kilograms of mines at a single spot, despite the fact that the organization provided clear guidelines as to what kind of vehicle required how much explosive.

At this point, it was nearly the winter of 2006, and we entered our bunkers a couple days before it began snowing. We wanted to watch TV on the first night, but it had somehow gotten damaged. It seemed like some moisture had gotten to it under the ground. It was an old one with cathode ray tubes, and the screen went black as soon as we switched it on. It would be a terrible winter camp without a working TV. As I mentioned earlier, we camped close to the company that was building the water pipelines. It would take two hours on foot at most to reach their worksite. I asked the comrades, “Was there a TV at that worksite?” They said, “Yes. It was even bigger than ours!” Ours was a small one, of only 37 inches.

I said to three comrades, “Take this money with you and tell the company that they could either sell their TV to us or buy a new one from the city and give it to us.” The comrades talked to the manager of the company, and he said, “The workers here watch TV at night. If I take this

TV from their rest area and give it to you, some of the workers will wonder what is going on. Not all of the workers are aware that we are in contact with guerillas. But I understand that you are also in need of a TV. What do you suggest we do?" Our comrades told him directly, "Go and buy a new one from the city!" So, the manager went to Bitlis and bought a brand new TV. Early morning of the next day, those three comrades returned to our bunker with a brand new TV.

Besides entertainment, we also needed TV's in the bunkers in order to watch the CDs and tapes we received from headquarters. In the old days, we were also allowed to watch TV channels, but that changed after a tragic incident that occurred in 2006. A strict order was given about not watching any live TV channels in the bunkers, throughout the winter period. In 2006, 14 comrades had been martyred in a bunker located between the Kulp district of Diyarbakir and the city of Mus. After this incident, watching live TV channels was banned all over the northern states. Those comrades had hidden two satellite dishes, just outside their underground bunkers, to watch live TV channels during the camp period. One was a TURKSAT, which they needed to watch the Turkish TV channels, and the other was a HOTBIRD, which they needed so they could watch the organization's media outlets all over the world. Their bunker was located on the top of a hill just outside of the city of Mus. One night before the 2006 Nawroz celebrations, one of them walked outside the bunker to adjust the satellite dish positions, so they could acquire a better signal. When the guerilla did that, the soldiers noticed movement up on the hill. They carried out a mission the very same night and killed all of our comrades hiding in the bunker.

Similarly, although much more limited, mobile phones could be used in the northern provinces until the year 2006 when the guerillas were warned to not carry their own mobile phones anymore. The organization even issued a notice stating that those who were seen using a

mobile phone or a laptop were going to be prosecuted for being an agent of the enemy. We guerillas were certainly aware that the Turkish security forces could listen to our conversations and detect our location by tracking our smart phone. Indeed, the Interior Minister, during that time, made a public statement. His name was Abdulkadir Aksu, if I am not mistaken. He said during a live TV program, "If we did not listen to the guerillas in Gabar for a full day, the metropolitan cities in Turkey would turn into a pool of human blood." After that live TV broadcast, the organization figured out that the security forces were, in fact, listening to our conversations via smart phones and other electronic devices. Aksu had not used the name of Gabar randomly. Gabar was very important for the organization, since the deployment of the entire special guerrilla forces would be done through Gabar. Also, the guerillas that would be sent to the city centers would be dispatched from Gabar.

### **OUR BUNKER LOCATION REVEALED**

During the winter periods, we placed an antenna on the top of a nearby tree before we entered our bunkers. It was not a huge antenna but just a thin silver colored cable. We had very heavy radios, which weighed close to ten kilograms. Thanks to those radios and antennae, we were able to learn what was going on outside. During my spare daytimes, and especially at night, I would listen to the radio channels used by the Turkish soldiers. It was either the first or the second day of January, 2007, between 1:30 and 2:00 a.m., when I heard constant noise coming from a radio channel used by the Turks. Since the small radios had better signal coverage in the open air, I grabbed one and headed outside the bunker to figure out what was going on. Because of our experience from years of fighting, we guerillas knew that specific channels would be used by soldiers only when they were carrying out operations in the field. At

that time, I noticed that busy communication was happening across almost all of these operation channels. So, I was sure that the soldiers were somewhere close to us.

Even though we were unable to listen to the soldiers because they used encrypted radios, their commanders sometimes communicated with the local Kurdish rangers without encryption—and, so then, we were able to listen to them. Also, not every single member of a military squad had encrypted radios, which was a huge advantage to us, because we were able to figure out the positions and plans of the soldiers when a communication was going on between a commander and ranger or a ground guerilla.

I was certain the soldiers were carrying out an operation. Many of the comrades staying with me, were unfamiliar with the terrain of the Sirvan region, since they had only been dispatched here since the middle of 2006. Everyone abruptly became nervous. The guerillas were in a panic, discussing among themselves whether or not we should leave the shelter. I told them that we were all going to remain in the bunker and wait for the sunrise. Once the sun was up, I half-opened the emergency exit door and checked our surroundings with binoculars.

Soldiers were everywhere, looking high and low for something. While I was watching, one of the mines planted by the Sirvan local guerilla forces exploded. This made me very angry, because it was an extremely foolish idea to plant mines near the winter camp area. Luckily, the soldiers withdrew before finding our bunker location. It was a very stressful day for all of us.

At the beginning of February, 2006, the Turkish military carried out another land operation. Our fears had become real, and, this time, we might really have to leave our bunker. The soldiers were probably sure that there was an underground bunker close by, because of the mine detonation.

I was even more stressed because of some other information that had been delivered to me. I mentioned earlier that I had encountered Nurettin Sofi when I was waiting in the Botan region. There was a guerilla, a squad commander from Pervari, in Comrade Sufi's team of bodyguards. He was present wherever Nurettin Sofi went. When I was just about to leave from Sirvan for Amed, Nurettin Sofi communicated to me via radio, "Deniz, you should stay with the Sirvan force this winter. They are all newbies to the area, and you should help them whenever necessary!" During this conversation, Nurettin Sofi also asked me where I was going to build the underground bunkers for winter. I told him about the two places I already mentioned. I was later informed that only 20 days after this conversation, the close bodyguard of Comrade Sufi, the squad commander from Pervari, surrendered to the Turkish security forces. He had informed the security forces of many secretive details, including our camp locations.

We were told about this leak of information very late. The information obtained from the bodyguard was the reason why Turkish security forces were carrying out a land operation in that area in January. I was confused, because the security forces that I knew carried out operations only twice a year at most—once in the fall just after the leaves fell and in the spring just before the trees sprouted new growth.

Considering all of those problems, I decided it was in our best interest to leave our winter camp. It was a troublesome time for us. How could we safely relocate to another region, without leaving footprints on the snow? Anyway, we left the bunker and I asked everyone to take off their shoes leaving only their socks on. There was a stream 200 meters from our bunker. Stepping on rocks, we walked toward the stream without stepping on the snow or the mud. Since we were not wearing shoes, we did not leave any traces of our passing on the rocks. When



we reached the stream, we put our shoes on again and continued our walk in the water. It was icy cold, so it was easier said than done!

We did not get frostbite, because it would occur only if we had walked in snow first. If we entered the water after a long walk on snow, or if we stepped on snow after a long walk in water, then we would get frostbite. Also, not all types of snow would cause frostbite. There was a light, tiny snow that was as shiny as crystal, which would usually fall near the end of February and the beginning of March. This was the most dangerous type of snow for us. It would quickly burn the feet of guerillas, when there had been only a slight contact with water. The snow that fell during the months of December and January would not easily burn our feet.

We walked in the water until we came across a road with which I was familiar. At this point, I divided our group of 13 into two. I remembered from being there, in 1992 and 1993, that there was a cave under the road where we were. Not everyone knew that this cave existed. I am sure that even the security forces are still not aware of the existence of such a hideout. It was just across the Bitlis stream, close to the road. I left seven comrades inside the cave, and said to them, "I want you to hide inside here until further notice. You can do anything other than start a fire for either cooking or heating!" No one could hear them from outside but starting a fire would be very risky. The problem was not the visible smoke, since it would spread and dissipate in the cave, but actually the odor of the fire. It could be easily noticed by search dogs used by the soldiers.

I took the rest of the group with me and climbed to a higher terrain to check how the soldiers were positioned around the field. I wanted to figure out what kind of an operation it was. Was it a simple routine search or a planned operation based on intelligence? We watched them for several hours until it got dark. At the end of the day, I was a hundred percent sure that

it was not a routine military operation. The soldiers were certainly looking for something, and it was probably us. The soldiers camped in the field for approximately two days and then retreated to their headquarters.

Since the soldiers never found our bunker, we went back to it. We would focus heavily on ideological training during our winter camps. I said to my comrades, “We have to speed up the trainings, since the soldiers will probably carry out another operation to find us. We should complete everything before they arrive so that the winter camp will achieve its purpose.” Just as I had guessed, the soldiers returned to the field on February 26, 2006. I said, “We have to desert this bunker permanently. We cannot return here again, as we did before. I do not think the soldiers will stop until they find us.” Everybody agreed with me, but there was a problem. It was freezing outside. We had no problem when it came to our food supply, for we could carry the food that we stocked in the bunker, or we could use the secret food storages buried under the ground at several points out in the field. But how could we tackle the cold?

Back in the 90s I had the privilege of being introduced to some caves in the region, but I had not visited them for a long time, and I did not know if they were still a secure place to hide. On the other hand, I also did not want to share their location with these comrades, whom I had met only two or three months ago. Those caves were all perfectly hidden, and their entrances were so small that we had to crawl to get inside. However, once you entered, you would be amazed by their size. Some of them were even as large as a soccer stadium. Approximately 200 guerillas could easily stay inside these caves. Some of them had rooms carved out of the rock. I guess those caves had been used by people as homes in some ancient time. We also would not have to consider heat during the winter, because not only would those caves be warm during the cold season but also cool in the hot summer season. Only mid-level commanders had the

privilege to be shown these places. They were kept secret to be used only during a dire situation. If their location was made public to all the guerillas, the organization would not be able to use them again in case one of the guerillas surrendered to the security forces.

On February 26, 2006, the military carried out a land operation, even larger than the previous two. We could see hundreds of soldiers patrolling the field. Some of the comrades became angry with me, saying, “Comrade Deniz, why on earth are we not killing those soldiers while they walk right across from us like sitting ducks?” From this reaction, you could see that they were clearly inexperienced. They did not consider the possible consequences of such an abrupt attack on the soldiers. In a sense, they were right; occasionally, large groups of soldiers would travel right across us comfortably not on guard. I still do not know why those soldiers were so confident of their safety. They walked one behind the other, just like sitting ducks, without leaving any space for security. Just three of us could easily have killed them all with Kalashnikovs. However, it would be dangerous for us later, because there were hundreds of other soldiers in the field, and eventually they would kill us in the end.

If they had noticed us, the soldiers would lay siege to the area and destroy us with cobra attack helicopters, heavy rocket bombardments, and LAW flamethrowers. They would not even try to capture us alive. In the end, even if we had killed 50 soldiers, all 13 of us would be dead as well. Since the guerilla forces of Sirvan were composed of relative newbies, they were inexperienced on these issues. No matter how far they pushed me to begin a mission to kill those sitting ducks, I rejected their offer. “You will take revenge for the hardships, cold, and pain to which you are exposed when you have more opportunity to disguise yourself and burst out of the trees—when you have the upper hand in the battle! But not now... You must learn to be patient!”

## MERETO MASSACRE

The last operation went on for nearly a week. If I remember correctly, it was in the month of March when we abandoned our underground bunker permanently. We received news that Apo had been poisoned in prison. Once my comrades heard this, they boiled with vengeance. Some of them said, "How can the government kill our leader in a time of peace and negotiation?" I was not able to share their feelings for vengeance any longer. They were pushing me to organize a mission against the Turkish soldiers in retaliation. On March 4th, as soon as the security forces withdrew from the region, we returned to our bunker but not to stay. It had been 15 days since we had last taken a shower. Everyone showered, packed their stuff, and we left the bunker on March 6th.

The first thing I did when we left was hand over our heavy radio to the region commander, since we had to walk on foot from one region to another until the end of fall. It weighed nearly ten kilograms, and we only used it to listen to instructions that were delivered by headquarters management, while we camped for the winter. The communication time was pre-determined: every day from 11:00 to 11:30 a.m.

Since I was scheduled to pass into the state of Amed in the spring of 2007, I decided to teach the guerilla force of Sirvan about the details of the area. Around that time, we heard from the radio news that security forces had killed seven guerillas and captured one in the Kulp district of Diyarbakır. A day later, headquarters sent a message, via radio, to the groups of guerillas within Turkey: "A group of comrades has been martyred in Kulp. Someone tell us which state has authority over this group!" Kulp is a region located in a buffer zone. If the news were accurate, this guerilla force could be under the authority of either the state of Amed or the State of Garzan.

No one responded to headquarters management that day, but three days later, Bahoz Erdal sent a new message over the radio. “We were able to acquire more detail regarding the incident. It occurred in the state of Garzan. In fact, one of our own people martyred those seven comrades. Afterward, he surrendered himself to the security forces!” Apparently, they consciously misled the public just to get credit for those seven deaths, but there was something still wrong. There were supposed to be nine guerillas in Garzan, not eight. Seven of them had been martyred and one of them had surrendered, so there was still one unaccounted. Where was the last one? The Garzan state commander said via radio, “We have verified that those seven comrades were from our Dorsin region. One of our comrades probably managed to run away from this massacre. However, we still do not know where he might be.”

Since the terrain was still covered in snow, none of the guerilla forces would leave their bunkers to search for Hayri, the lost comrade. We still did not know for sure if he were alive. The headquarters management in Zaho delivered another message, “None of the forces should act on their own to find Hayri. We will try to find him through our civilian comrades in the region.” The headquarters had two civilian comrades travel and search the villages around Dorsin. Hayri was found hiding in a small village. Out of curiosity, the comrades asked him, “How could one person kill seven guerillas by himself?” Hayri then told them everything:

“The code name of the person who was responsible for the massacre and who had surrendered himself to the security forces was Mereto. His real name was Galip. I was on guard the night it happened, and Mereto was going to guard after me. Because we were hiding in a three-story cave with one entrance, one person was more than enough to stand guard. The opening was located at the top of the cave. One person would guard the entrance, while the remaining guerillas rested in an area located on the second floor. We would not use the third

floor, under normal circumstances. After my guard shift was over, I woke Mereto and lay down next to the other comrades. After laying there a short time, I realized morning was approaching and knew that our comrades would awaken, make a lot of noise, and keep me from sleeping. With this in mind, I decided to go to the third floor to sleep.

I was nearly asleep when I heard gunshots. I turned the torch on but could not see anything. Mereto had gone around and collected the comrades' weapons while they slept. I was the only one who was awake during this, because I had just finished my guard duty. There was a hidden exit on the bottom floor of the cave where I was staying of which Mereto was not aware. Even before we camped for the winter, we were suspicious of Mereto, because of his strange behavior and attitude. We even thought that he might be an agent working for the enemy. Indeed, we even had a meeting to discuss whether we should arrest him or not. Nevertheless, our squad commander told us, 'The region commander isn't here, and it would be rude for us to arrest Mereto without the commander knowing. Besides that, we were already low in number. If we arrest him now, then we will need to watch him nonstop for the rest of the winter season. Let's wait for spring.' The commander had shown everyone except Mereto the hidden exit location in case he was untrustworthy and tried something. This exit was located at the end of a tunnel that was nearly 200 meters in length.

When I heard the gunshots that night, I wanted to get my weapon from the second floor before I left through the secret exit on the bottom floor. I was sure that security forces had nothing to do with the shooting, because it was the middle of night. It would be unusual for security forces to lay a siege in the middle of the night, in the winter. I went up to the second floor and noticed that all of the comrades were shot. There was blood everywhere. A comrade named Behzat, the group commander in charge of us, was lying there heavily wounded but still

able to talk. ‘Hayri, Mereto shot us all. Take all of the secret documents and radio codes that I have. Flee through the tunnel I showed you and inform our leaders that Mereto committed this heinous act.’ I said, ‘Comrade, I can carry you out. I do not think you are seriously wounded. Let’s go together.’ He replied, ‘Do not push me, Hayri. Take the documents and get out of here.’ It was then that I noticed he was covered in blood from the waist down. When I was just about to leave, Mereto started shooting down from the second floor. He probably wanted to make sure that everyone was dead. During that barrage, I was shot in the leg. I was able to reach this village with my wounded leg and was waiting for the organization to find me.”

### **AN UNCERTAIN JOURNEY**

On May 19th of 2007, I set off from the Sex Cuma district of Bitlis to the state of Amed. Once you pass through the city of Batman, there is a rest area about ten kilometers from the city of Bitlis. I was acquainted with the owner of a restaurant there, so after sunset, I sent two of my comrades there to tell him, “Send my regards to the owner. Ask him to send enough food for our group.” The comrades returned with their arms full of bags that contained kebabs and other types of food that we had not eaten in a long time. We stayed there that night and set off the next day.

I was travelling with a guerilla force from Mutki. My bodyguard and I were going to separate from them after we reached Mutki. Once in the city, I hired two local guides that were familiar with the terrain of the region and set off for Muş on May 24th, 2007. The last time I had been in that area was in 1994 and 1995, 13 years previously. I hired the two guides because I did not know what kind of precautions the security forces were taking; which roads they used, or where they were hiding. At that time, I had a long beard and shaved head, and I walked slowly

with the help of a cane. We traveled day and night walking next to the road. It was May 27th at around 6:00 p.m. when we reached a certain point. (It usually became dark around 8:00 p.m. during that season.) The ground where we were standing was covered in footprints of soldiers. From the looks of them, the footprints were new, probably only a day old.

I told the guides, “Look, we are going in the direction where the security forces went before us. Those footprints are new.” After I said that, I began to smell the odor of smoke which made me even more nervous. I asked the guides if shepherds stayed in the area during this season. One of the guides sniffed the air and said, “Comrade, I do not smell smoke.” I replied, “You may not, but there is a smoke odor in the air. We need to be extra careful. It’s either the peasants burning wood or the soldiers.”

When we continued on we left 15 meters between each of us as a security measure. On the way, I stopped and drank from a small pond that had formed from melting snow. While I drank, the guides continued walking. The distance increased to more than 40 meters between us. Suddenly, I noticed what looked to be three people on the side of the road. I wondered if I were imagining them, so I looked more closely and carefully again. I was right. Not only were there three people there, but they had weapons in their hands and were targeting our guides. I immediately began firing on them, and they returned fire in my direction. It seemed we were stuck in the middle of an ambush and had not been aware of it.

We later learned that the ambush was carried out by Turkish soldiers and the rangers of the Has village of Muş. We started retreating. The soldiers probably thought I was an old guerilla because of my long beard and cane. I also was not as fast as the other comrades. At some point, I had to stop and rest for a second, and I thought I had lost the soldiers. The two guides were looking toward us at a distance of about 50 meters. One of them suddenly shouted,



“Lay down immediately!” When I stopped to rest, I had laid my back on the ground. When I raised my head to look back, I saw a soldier targeting us with an LAV brand flamethrower. I did not even have time to fire at him with my weapon. Luckily, the soldier could not hit us because our guides began to shoot at him. My bodyguard and I stood up and again began running.

We ran for half an hour until we reached a valley. The terrain was open, without a single tree or rock behind which to hide. It was clear that we could not flee the soldiers by running, so I decided to stop the guides and the guard, and said, “Our only chance of survival is to run toward the soldiers. One way or another, we have to pass into the wooded area behind them. We can conceal ourselves there. If we do not do that, we will all die here!”

My plan ended up working. We ran into the woods and waited, completely still, until it got dark. It was pitch black at around 8:30 p.m. On one side of us, there were soldiers still searching. On the other, there was a military battalion post. Additionally, a military aircraft was dispatching even more soldiers into the field for the search operation. We were stuck. We could not wait where we were any longer, so we began walking again not knowing where we were headed. We walked until sunrise. We had probably avoided the soldiers, but we were also exhausted, and I said to my comrades, “We are all tired, so we should find a safe place and rest for now. Once we figure out where we are, we will continue traveling in the afternoon.”

It was around five in the morning. I checked the terrain, and saw a field with long grasses in it, but the grass was very thin. The security forces would easily detect that someone had hidden in the grasses if we slept there. So, I told my comrades to sleep on the side of the field. At around 10:00 a.m. I woke up to the sound of shouting. There was a village 200 meters from where we were resting. Someone from the village was shouting, but we could not understand him because he was speaking in Arabic. We could not figure out if the villager had

seen us and was telling the peasants something about us. It was in our best interest to wait until there was movement toward us from the village. We waited, hiding inside the tall, thin grass until sunset. We would not have been so badly frightened if we had known whether or not we were to die soon. The uncertainty was more stressful. We waited for hours without knowing what was going on around us.

We set off again when it got dark. We were still walking without knowing where we were going. We began following a path in the woods. There were so many trees that it was very hard to walk without hitting them in the darkness. I turned to my comrades and said, "Let's rest here for the night. We will check our surroundings and continue traveling when the sun rises." Everyone agreed with me. We thought we could have a good rest where we were, without being noticed. We had been walking for the last four days and our feet were in extreme pain because we had not had time to wash our socks. We all took off our socks and washed our feet and the socks with soap and water. Everyone slept well that night. Around one in the afternoon, we heard gunshots that sounded like a Kalashnikov-brand weapon. The noise came from nearby, but we could not see anything because of the thick woods. Again, we stayed where we were and waited for the sun to set. Near midnight we set off again.

### **ESTABLISHING PEACE WITH THE VILLAGE PROTECTION GUARDS**

There was a military post called Üçevler in a district of the city of Muş. We passed near it and reached the guerilla forces of Mus where the Garzan state guerilla commander was waiting. He was still discouraged because of the incident in that cave in Dorsin and asked me, "Comrade Deniz, would not it be better if you stayed here in Garzan?" I replied, "Comrade, you are correct, but I have been assigned to work in Amed. I have to go there as soon as possible." I

stayed there for a few more days and while I was there, I received a message from central headquarters that Commander Bahoz Erdal wanted to talk to me. I figured out that the state commander and guerilla forces of Garzan had spoken with Bahoz Erdal to convince me to stay in their region. I could easily reject the offer from the state commander, but it was much more difficult for me to convince the ground guerillas, who were aware of this weakness of mine and thus knew that I would not ignore their offer. So, I accepted and stayed in Garzan, even though I wanted to be in Amed.

Although I agreed to stay, there was still a problem. The administrative level of Garzan had no open positions. How could I be assigned a position when there was no place for me to be? When they said they would relocate someone else to open a space for me, I said to them, “Assign me under one of those comrades as a consultant. I will do whatever the organization asks me to do, but do not relocate anyone because of me!” They rejected my offer and a comrade named Azad was dismissed from his duty, so that I could be assigned to his position. Azad was highly disappointed because of this. The fighting season of spring had just begun and nothing serious had happened yet. There was nothing on his record indicating he should be dismissed. As soon as I heard what happened, I spoke with Azad. He was from the city of Van in Turkey. I said, “Comrade, my authority is yours. We will act as co-leaders if necessary. You keep the money and codes, because we will govern this region together.” When commanders handed their positions over to their successors, they would give all their money, codes, and secret documents regarding the organization. I did not take any of them, because that would have demoralized Azad even more.

In fact, if I had no choice but to stay somewhere in the state of Garzan, Bitlis was the most appropriate place for me, since I had been there on duty in the past. I knew next to nothing

about Muş. When I informed Garzan state management about this, they told me to wait for a while, because they were going to task me with a different type of guerilla work. Before too much time had passed, I was notified that I would be in charge of handling the organization's relations with the rangers in Mus. There were too many villages registered in the village protection system in Mus. I was charged with opening intimate dialogue with the rangers to convince them to stop attacking the guerilla forces in the region. The organization was willing to accept any terms offered by the rangers for peace to be established. Our orders stated that we were not to attack them even if they refused to quit the village protection system. But those terms only held as long as they did not fight against us or help the Turkish security forces fight against us. The state commander of Garzan said to me, "Deniz, your task of convincing the rangers to accept our peace terms is even more important for us than ten successful guerilla missions that you might achieve in the region."

The bilateral relations of the organization with the rangers were getting better each year throughout the Turkish territories. The organization had not carried out any armed missions against the rangers since 1996, unless, of course, we were provoked. After the year 2000, the organization was in a very close relationship with many of the ranger villages in Turkey. We would meet regularly with these rangers and perform lots of give and take. We had gotten so close to each other that some ranger villages were even willing to quit the village protection system and hand their guns back over to the Turkish state. The organization asked them to continue what they had been doing. We would speak to them and say, "Do not quit the village protection system. If you do, you cannot graze your animals on the summer ranges or, easily travel in the region. You will have to leave and immigrate to the big cities. For now, you are at

least being paid on a regular basis and you have no restrictions on using the summer ranges. You will lose all of those privileges if you quit.”

Each year, from the beginning of spring until the end of fall, the Turkish Gendarme forces, or rural police, would apply a grazing ban in eastern Anatolia. This ban would especially hit the regions of Şırnak, Bingöl, Erzurum, and Garzan. The ban prevented Kurdish farmers from letting their animals graze in the pastures. Of course, the villages that were registered in the protection system were exempt from this restriction. The ranger villages would freely graze their animals on those pastures, while their fellow Kurds would be banned because they were unwilling to cooperate with the state against the organization.

Since I was now going to work in Mus, the senior commanders and I had to plan administrative changes in order to more effectively control the area. The first thing we did was to divide the Garzan province into two parts, east and west, as far as administrative control was concerned. I was assigned as commander of the east. According to this new planning, Muş, Kulp, Sason, Batman, and Mutki were assigned under the control of the commander of the west. Tatvan, Bitlis city center, and Siirt were to be under my control in the east. This was the area with which I was tasked to establish better relations with the rangers. There were too many villages registered in the village protection system in the east. The interior parts of Muş, Kulp, Sason, and some districts of Kozluk were all ranger villagers.

I officially started my duty as commander of the east on June 1st, 2007. I still did not know which tribes in the region were part of the ranger system, nor which tribes did not side with either us or the state. One day, I saw my comrade, Azad, using binoculars to look out at the plains. I asked him what he was doing. He answered, “Comrade Deniz, there are some nomads on the plains, and I think they are the same nomads we have spoken with before. They are one

of the friendly groups.” “Okay then,” I replied, “Why are you waiting? Send a couple of comrades there to welcome those friends! In the meantime, you can give me a small tour of the field!”

We were chatting at our campground around 9:30 p.m. when we heard gunshots from the area where the nomads were settling. I immediately climbed up to a high spot, so I could listen to the radio channels used by the soldiers. I heard the ranger nomads talking to the soldiers. Azad had been mistaken. Those nomads were not friendly to the organization. From listening to their conversations over the radio, I learned what had happened down there. One of our squad commanders and two other guerillas had visited the nomads’ tent to greet them, as we had asked them to do. Initially, they had not noticed these nomads were not patriots. While they were all drinking tea, other nomads surrounded the tent. Their plan had been to catch our comrades alive and deliver them to the soldiers. However, one of our comrades had pulled the primer on a hand grenade and threw it at the rangers coming towards him. He and one of the rangers had died in the explosion, while the other two comrades had been captured alive.

As soon as the rangers finished talking with the soldiers, I contacted them from another radio channel. “Set our comrades free! Do not deliver them to the security forces! I promise we will not come down to take revenge for our fallen comrade if you let those two comrades go!” The chief ranger began to swear at me over the radio. Thirty minutes had not even passed when the security forces came by, in panzers, to get the comrades.

I conducted a detailed search on this tribe after this incident. They were of the Badikan tribe from the Kulp district of Diyarbakır. A few weeks after the incident, I contacted that chief ranger again. His name was Abdülhamit. I asked him, “Abdülhamit, why did you commit such a dishonorable act?” He replied, “Your men came down here to kill me!” I said, “Comrade, are

you out of your mind? Would a person who wanted to kill you sit and drink tea in the tent with you?” The Kurds have a tradition that when an enemy comes and sits in your home, you cannot do anything to him, even though he or she is your enemy. I told him again, “You could even say to our comrades, ‘Look, we are enemies, but you are in my home now and you are my guest. Have a cup of tea and then get out of here.’ Do not you Kurds have this tradition, too, Abdülhamit?”

There were around 60 tents on the plains. After this incident, the Turkish security forces regularly patrolled the nomads, with those large panzers, since they knew that sooner or later we would seek revenge for what the rangers had done. I said on the radio to Abdülhamit, “Thirteen tanks could not discourage us against revenge, let alone those three panzers! In fact, we can kill you right in front of your house, in the city when you return at the end of the summer. Neither the soldiers nor the police can protect you from us! If you have any brains, you would come and apologize to us.”

Despite all of these warnings, Abdülhamit not only continued to reject us but continued to swear at me on the radio. On top of that, he was patrolling the area to find and kill us with his ranger team. I could take it no more. This man needed to be punished. I notified organization management about the issue. According to organizational policy, it was forbidden to carry out a mission against the rangers, but this was an exceptional situation. The organization gave us permission to kill three people, one of which was Abdülhamit. “Comrades, you can kill Abdülhamit, his brother, and his cousin. But do not harm anyone else in the tribe.”

As soon as we received approval from the organization, our comrades planted mines at four different locations on the road that the rangers used daily. I was strict in my warning to the region commander. I said, “Be careful not to kill anyone else. The organization has allowed us

to kill three specific people. We would be in trouble if we, even accidentally, kill the other rangers.”

Because I was the commander of the whole eastern front in Garzan, I had to regularly visit the three regions under my control—Dorsin, Sason, and Mutki—to supervise their activities. In June 2008, I visited the guerilla force located in Dorsin for this reason. The commander of the Dorsin region said to me, “Comrade Deniz, we have successfully carried out a mission in the city of Mus.” They planted mines on the railway and detonated them while a train was passing by. I asked whether it was a passenger train or a freight train. “It was a freight train with no civilians inside. There were only some guards on it,” he said. Their goal was to cause financial damage by destroying the goods that were loaded on the freight cars. I said, “Comrade, why did you carry out such a mission? Was it really necessary? Besides, why did not you inform me about your plan before carrying it out?” He was disheartened when I criticized him. I returned to Muş after a couple day stay in Dorsin.

As I mentioned earlier, the guerrilla force in Mus planted mines at four different points on the same road. I was critical of their actions and said, “Why are you wasting so many mines to kill just three rangers?” One of them replied, “Comrade, we thought that if we missed them on our first attempt, we would definitely kill them on the second or next attempts. That’s why we planted so many mines on the same road.” They had gathered a lot of information about this ranger: the color and brand of his car, what days and times he would leave the summer range, and what time he would return.

Before we actually carried out our mission, the rangers contacted me. They wanted to meet and talk to us about what had happened. I notified headquarters about their request. Once they heard the request, headquarters ordered me to talk to them before killing the three.



Over the radio, I said to the rangers, “Tell your chief that he should meet us on Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. in the foothills of the mountains across from your summer range.” Interestingly, it was not the chief ranger that had come to the meeting place but a woman and a different man. This woman was a Kurd living in Germany. I do not remember exactly, but she was either the aunt or sister of the chief ranger. The rangers had used this woman to contact headquarters through our political extensions in Europe. Before meeting with us, she explained the situation to our political outlet in Germany and apologized on behalf of her brother. Hearing her words made me realize that Abdülhamit was aware we were going to take revenge on him and that was why he had used his relative to apologize to us.

This woman introduced herself to us first and then asked us to forgive Abdülhamit’s past mistake. I told her how the incident occurred, “One of our comrades had gone to welcome them and they killed him. On top of that, they delivered two others to security forces, even though I had cautioned them not to do so. What would you do if you were in my shoes?” She did not expect such a harsh question from me. After staying silent for a moment, she said, “I would probably kill them, too. But please do not retaliate. Forgive them for this.” I replied to her plea, “Honestly, it is not in my hands to forgive them. I will ask headquarters. Also, I must inform you that Abdülhamit and all the other rangers will have to abandon the plains, even if we agree to forgive them. The problem is not just with us but also with the local Kurds. Your relatives are inflicting cruelty on the villagers by abusing the power that arises from the village protection system. They do not let the Kurds that are not in the system graze their animals on those summer ranges. Also, they confiscated the lands of those same Kurds. Therefore, as a precondition of our peace agreement, your relatives will leave the plains and hand those lands back over to their legitimate owners, until I hear from the organization.”

After our conversation, I had to cancel the mission we had already planned. It would be extremely dishonest to carry out an assassination attempt while negotiating with the enemy. I gave orders to my comrades, “You can leave the mines wherever you planted them, but take all the igniters out of them now. We might need to use them again if we cannot reach an agreement with the rangers.” They did exactly as I asked them.

Later, however, one of the mines accidentally exploded. It rains a lot on the plains of Mus, even during the summer season. In a stroke of bad luck, lightning hit the mine during a bout of heavy rainfall. There was a very loud explosion. When the rangers realized their road to the summer range was planted with mines, they immediately notified the soldiers.

We were using binoculars, from quite a distance, to follow what was going on down on the plains. Two squads of soldiers came from the Üçevler military post. The soldiers used mine detectors and found the remaining three mines.

The rangers became nervous when they found that the road was full of mines. I contacted the chief ranger via radio to explain why the mines were there. Even before I finished my explanation, he began swearing at me. I said, “Look, your manner of speech is unseemly. You are an old man and the chief of the rangers. You should know how to speak to a person properly. If we had really wanted to, we could have already killed you, even without the mines. How many times have you driven on that road during the last two months? Did we ever blow any of those mines?”

Living in fear for one’s life is not an easy thing. We guerillas were used to it, but not Abdülhamit, which is why he was so frightened when he found out about the mines. He replied to me helplessly, “What do you guys want from me? Just tell me and I will accept all your terms

without negotiation!” I said, “Turn off your radio for now, the security forces may be listening to our conversation. I will contact you later.”

Two days after this conversation, the same two women and man that we had met before, came to our campground. I explained to them why the road was planted with mines. “Look, I am going to be honest with you. If you had not come and spoken with us, we were going to kill Abdülhamit and two other men. When you visited us for forgiveness, we delayed our mission. Not a single one of those mines had an igniter on it. We deactivated them, since we were going through the process of negotiation with you, but lightning struck one, and it went off. It was an unfortunate incident that was outside of our control! Now, go and tell Abdülhamit that we will kill him and two others if he ignores our previously stated terms.” The woman said, “Okay, all of your terms will be fulfilled without negotiation. I am the one who is in charge of this issue from now on. If a problem emerges, you must contact me first!”

Of course, in the meantime, I visited other rangers in the region and signed peace agreements with most of them. Toward the end of 2008, there were no rangers left to fight the organization. The official records still had them registered as part of the village protection system, yet the agreement meant they would not carry out missions against us any longer. They all accepted the terms set by the organization and declared their loyalty to us.

The main reason the organization chose me to broker for peace, was because I was the most familiar with the people of that region. I was never alone when I met the rangers at these meetings. The organization had a strict rule stating that at least three guerillas must be present to represent the organization. I was able to convince the rangers by telling them, “Brothers! We have been fighting each other for many years now, and yet none of us has had a conclusive

victory. In fact, both sides have had heavy losses during those battles. It is now time to forgive each other's past mistakes.”

Before meeting with the chief of a ranger village, we would do detailed research on the families that lived in that specific village. We would find out whether the families living there had been exposed to an injustice through us, whether someone had been recklessly killed by us, or whether any civilians in that village had been exposed to cruelty by the organization in the past. Only after that would we meet with the villagers and apologize to them for the mistakes we had made, and would explicitly ask for their forgiveness.

Many of the ranger villagers responded to our call for peace. Our reasonable approach had worked. I told those villagers, “We are not asking you to lay down your weapons or quit the village protection system. We understand that you had to register with the system to earn your keep, or you'd have to relocate to the big cities on the west end of Turkey. Instead, you chose to stay in the region and be rangers. Again, we are not blaming you for this. You can continue being a ranger as long as you do not carry out missions against the organization, or mistreat the local Kurds, who are not registered in the ranger system. Keep your weapons and continue to get a monthly salary from the Turks, but do not lead military operations by fighting on the front lines. Use your ranger title just to earn your keep! Additionally, if you can, inform us beforehand about military operations, so that we may prepare ourselves.”

As I mentioned before, there were two groups of people that posed a major threat to us. First, there were the organization members who deserted us and aligned themselves with the Turkish soldiers. Second, were the Kurdish peasants who registered in the village protection system. Both of those groups were closely familiar with our fighting strategy. For example, in the winter of 2003 to 2004, the Turkish security forces were able to kill 13 of our comrades, with

the help of PKK members who had deserted. That was a tragedy for us. Without the help and guidance of those traitors, the Turks would not have been able to hand us such a huge defeat, though our comrades were able to wound a Turkish squadron commander in that clash. One of those traitors had carried that squadron commander on his back away from where the battle was taking place. You can find more details if you search the archives of the security forces.

On the other hand, there were some special combat groups within the rangers. For example, if there were 80 to 90 rangers in a village, 20 of them would be assigned to that special group. The soldiers would give highly advanced weapons to that group. The Turks would task this special team to patrol in the mountainous areas and dry gulch to search for us. Indeed, many of our comrades lost their lives during those ambushes. I would tell the peasants, “You will not take part in any of these special combat groups anymore. You can stay in the village protection system, but you will not have these special groups!” During one of those meetings, one of the rangers stood up and said, “How we are going to explain this to the soldiers? They will think that we are helping the organization, as soon as they hear that we have stopped using those special groups!” I replied, “Go and talk to the commanders of the soldiers. Tell them that your families are being targeted because of the special combat groups. Tell them that you can continue to work as normal village protection guards, but you cannot take part in those special teams!”

These special combat teams were posing not only a threat to us but also to the local public, since they were given extreme authority within the Turkish state. They sometimes carried out raids on non-ranger households, and would torture the inhabitants, blaming them for supplying the guerillas with provisions. They acted like the police or soldiers, even though they were not given such authority. They would detain whomever they wanted and then beat the tar

out of them. I specifically cautioned the rangers not to carry out those kinds of malpractices anymore.

My other request for the rangers was for them to supply us with the ammunition they received from the Turkish state at no cost. The soldiers distributed ammunition and weapons to the rangers on a regular basis in return for their service to the state, but the ammo and weapons were under the strict control of the soldiers. For example, let's say that a village was given 100 cartridge clips full of bullets, 40 hand grenades, and ten LAW flamethrowers. The villagers were required to tell the soldiers where, how, and why they used the ammo in those weapons. The villagers were also required to hand back their used cartridges to the soldiers. I told the villagers some things they could do if the soldiers asked for used cartridges, saying, "You will go up to a distant field, from your village, and use only a couple of cartridges, as if you were in a real battle, or were victims of an ambush. But really, you will be giving us a portion of your ammunition and weapons and then return back to your village. You will then contact the soldiers and inform them that you had been abruptly attacked by a large guerilla group and that you were able to resist us for some time but had to flee without being able to collect the used cartridges." This was just one tactic I shared with them, explaining that, by this method, each village protection guard would be able to supply us with 100 cartridges each month. The chief rangers did not object to our request. After all, they would be able to resupply their own ammo needs, through the soldiers, at no cost.

And, finally, I asked the rangers to supply our provision needs, whenever necessary. I told them, "We will occasionally send you a list of provisions we need. You share our needs with each other, so that one place will provide us with sugar, another with flour, and another with oil." When we were supplied by the normal Kurdish peasants, we would pay them fairly. We

were not going to pay anything to the rangers for supplying us, since they already had a good salary that was paid by the state.

Almost all of the villages were registered in the village protection system, but the ones located in Sason, Muş, Kulp, and Mutki had accepted our terms of peace. We could not get along with the ones who refused, no matter how hard we tried. For example, the rangers in Mutki were not Kurds but Arabs. I did not know Arabic, and even the comrades who did speak Arabic could not communicate with them, because of the difference in dialects. Beyond the lack of communication, there was also another Arab village in the region that rejected our peace terms, saying that the organization had not helped them in the past, during a time when they had rioted against the state.

## CHAPTER 19

### RECRUITING NEW GUERILLAS

When I was assigned to work in the Garzan province, I was also tasked with recruiting new guerillas from the city centers there. I did this while simultaneously handling the peace negotiations with the rangers. I had to establish recruitment committees in all the cities under my jurisdiction, within Kurdistan. We needed active intermediaries, who would guide the younger generation of Kurds when they wanted to join the organization. These committee members would visit coffee shops, shopping centers, mosques, and even the schools in Turkey to come across the willing Kurdish youth and then would direct them to our camps in Iraq and Syria. For this job, I sought help from the civilian organization members of the self-defense units who were already covertly organized within the cities.

I travelled to Bitlis to establish the committees. I do not recall the exact date, but on the day I arrived in downtown Bitlis, the nephew of Ali Babacan, who was the Economy Minister back then, had been killed in a guerilla mission carried out against the Gülyazı Military Post. I gave some advice to the guerilla forces before I left Bitlis. “If you want to carry out successful missions, do not waste your time seeking opportunities in the countryside. Instead, plan your missions in downtown Bitlis. The security forces are already searching for you in the countryside. All of their plans and operations are directed at ending you outside of the city. You cannot be successful there. Sneak into downtown and hit them at their heart, where they feel they are most secure.”

There was only one way to achieve this goal. Small guerilla teams had to sneak into the downtown area by carefully passing the military posts located at the perimeters of the city. Security measures used in the cities were much weaker than the ones used in the countryside.



The soldiers were ten times more careful and prepared against a potential attack in the countryside than the police officers in the cities were. The soldiers would guard a military post with at least four or five guards. The police officers were often negligent, and we had witnessed this fact on many reconnaissance missions. The police officers were extremely inattentive and like sitting ducks for us. We knew what kind of vehicles they were using, where they hung out in their spare time, where they shopped, and at what time they started and ended their work at the police station.

I think the main reason for their negligence originated from their exaggerated trust in the presence of military posts around the perimeter of the city. The police officers probably thought that a guerilla mission would most likely be carried out against a military post, so they never considered themselves a target of the organization. They were clearly mistaken. It was for this reason that I told the Bitlis guerilla forces to sneak into Bitlis and carry out simultaneous missions at several police stations. They even blew a police panzer sky high on Sirvan-Siirt state road, after I left Bitlis. The security forces lost seven police officers during that mission.

The roads in the region were all paved and sealed, and no longer earthen roads, as they had been in the old days. This made planting mines on those roads and highways a more difficult job, but it was not impossible. There were two basic methods for planting a mine, under a paved road. First, with the help of a drill, we would cut a large circle on the road. Then we would pry up that circle-shaped piece out of the road, using a lever. Once that piece was extracted, we would dig to a depth of approximately one meter. Then, we would carefully place the mine and igniter into the hole. The mine had an antenna with a strong signal connected to it. Finally, we would fill the hole with the dirt we'd taken out and place the circle-shaped piece back into place. Once completed, all we had to do was find a secure place to wait for a vehicle,

belonging to the security forces to pass. This method was very hard to achieve and highly time consuming. It took at least three days to cut the circle out of the road. Then, [we had a second method] we could dig a tunnel from the side of the road to the middle of the road, usually around two meters long. A squad of guerillas would open this tunnel in just a single night of work. In rare instances, as when the soil under the paved road was rocky, it would take three to four days. In those situations, we would hide the entrance of the tunnel with bushes during the day and continue to work after the sun went down.

The guerilla group in Bitlis carried out their mission using this second method. They began waiting 20 meters from the road, after they planted the mine in the center using their tunnel. They used a cable to activate the bomb instead of an antenna. On one side of the cable an igniter was connected to the mine, and on the other side there was a 12-volt battery. Our comrades sat on the side, waiting, with the battery. They buried the cable a bit underground, so no one would notice it, because earlier, while they waited for a panzer to pass by, a young shepherd girl noticed the cable, and pulled it up as she followed where it led, and saw our comrades when she reached the end. To their surprise, she was a patriotic Kurd, and said, “Comrades, you haven’t hidden the cable well enough. I can hide it for you. if you’d like.”

Our comrades accepted her offer. Fifteen minutes later, a panzer passed by, and they were able to destroy it by activating the mine. We even heard later that the shepherd girl had been taken into interrogation, by the security forces. They asked her, “You have been strolling around here. Have you seen anyone?”

The soldiers still thought the peasants would inform the security forces as soon as they saw us, but, once again, they were highly mistaken. While those greedy Turkish politicians were occupied with their comfort in Ankara and wasting our time with the so-called peace process, we

had already won the loyalty of the rangers and the Kurdish peasants within the region. The Kurdish public began directly helping the organization, with no fear of retaliation from the security forces. They would even go out of their way bury that cable in order to protect our comrades.

### **HAKKI GABAR**

In August, 2007, a new state commander, named Hakki Gabar, was assigned to Garzan in Nurettin Sofi's stead. I had written and sent an official complaint report regarding Hakkı to headquarters concerning a deadly mistake he had committed in the past. Now, here he was assigned to be my superior. Such bad luck! There was a secret path used by the guerillas for years when they traveled from the south to the north. The security forces discovered it, and Hakkı's guerilla group was using the path, when they were raided by Turkish soldiers using howitzers. Under normal conditions, a commander would have to notify headquarters when encountering a situation such as this, because the groups traveling behind do not yet know about the danger. Hakkı and his group did not inform headquarters, even though they were attacked by the Turkish soldiers while traveling on that path. The guerilla group traveling behind them, (a group that had set out for our region) used the same path since they had not been warned the path was discovered by the soldiers. Eleven guerillas from that group were martyred—for nothing—on the exact same spot where Hakki's group had been attacked.

Initially, I did not know that Hakki's group had also been attacked. I learned all the facts while Hakkı's group was resting in our campground in Mus. I immediately went to Hakkı and asked him why he had not notified headquarters that the path had been discovered by the enemy. Even though Hakkı's own guerillas were telling me that they had been exposed to fire from

panzers and howitzers, Hakkı was telling me that he was not aware of the existence of such an attack. How could that be? It was a total dilemma.

In the meantime, headquarters leadership was communicating with the states over the radio to figure out how the tragic incident had occurred. The state commanders of Haftanin, Botan, and Garzan were all discussing, between themselves, about when the path was discovered by the security forces. I walked in on the conversation and announced that Hakki Gabar was the only person responsible for those 11 losses, and then I told them the whole story. After my report, Hakkı was put under investigation and began to view me as an enemy.

As luck would have it, this man I complained about years ago was now my superior. As soon as Hakki was appointed to Garzan, he visited my jurisdiction on the eastern front. He criticized me over absurd things. “How can you continue to be comfortable when one of your comrades died and the other two were captured alive and delivered to security forces by the rangers? Why have you been waiting for so long to get vengeance?” I responded, “We will take our revenge if necessary! However, the organization gave me an order on this matter. We cannot just randomly fire and kill all of those rangers as we would have in the old days, Hakki! The organization tasked us to kill specific people, and we will kill them when the time comes!” Hakki did not have a ready reply to my answer.

As I mentioned, 11 of our comrades had been martyred by the security forces, while traveling from the south to the north. Headquarters demanded that Garzan forces must carry out a mission of revenge for our martyred comrades. Hakki was the state commander and was still staying in my field at that point. While we were deciding what kind of mission we should carry out, a comrade suggested planting mines on the intercity roads, between the city of Diyarbakır and Muş.

We planted the mines in four different spots on that road. The comrades blocked the passage of vehicles from both sides of the road around 8:30 p.m., and we did not allow any vehicle to continue their trip until 4:00 a.m. The next morning. First, we collected the keys of the cars and then searched inside each of them. Then, we checked the identification cards of the passengers and drivers to figure out whether there were any civilian security forces traveling in any of those vehicles. We expected some of the vehicle owners to notify the security forces about our road blockade, so we did not collect the cell phones. We also figured that the security forces would arrive at our mine trap location soon, since the line of vehicles extended at least a kilometer down the road. They had to be suspicious about why all those cars were stopped. Yet, they did not come. We also could not find any state-owned car (it did not need to be a security force vehicle) at our blockade that we could damage for revenge. There was clearly no gain to continue operating the blockade, so we reopened the road back to traffic and left the area.

Before we left, some comrades insisted that we at least set a car on fire to show that we had been on that road. I was highly disappointed by the suggestion of this offer. I said, “Whose car are we going to set on fire and on what grounds?” One of them gave me a stupid response. “Let’s ask them one by one and find someone who did not vote for the HDP [A Kurdish political party operating in Turkey] during the elections, then set his car on fire!” I angrily responded to him, “What?! In the end, all of these people are Kurds! What kind of suggestion was that? Everybody is free to vote for any party they want.”

It had not even been a week when the security forces found all but one of the mines buried under the road. That remaining mine is still buried under the Mus-Diyarbakir intercity road. It was quite a large mine, made from a propane gas tank and two 18-kilogram capacity oil cans filled with TNT. There was no battery attached to it, but it was still there under the road.

After our comrades planted the mine, the state highway authority of Turkey sealed it with asphalt. After that, our comrades were able to find the cable connected to the mine. They extended the cable further from the road, so they could use it in a future mine explosion mission. All they needed to do was connect a 12-volt battery to the cable. It has been almost nine years, and that mine is still there. After I surrendered myself to the security forces, I notified them about the exact location of the mine, but they did not even give a shit about it.

### **FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN**

In 2007, we were not able to carry out any missions in the Muş region. We spent most of our time preparing for winter. As I mentioned, the guerilla force in Dorsin had been completely destroyed by a traitor in the cave where they were camping. It was vital that we reestablish our presence in that area, so I dispatched some guerillas from Mus to Dorsin. Nevertheless, our reinforcement force was annihilated by the Turkish security forces, because of the negligence of Hakki Gabar.

Toward the beginning of fall, Hakki, our state commander, informed me that he had dispatched some guerillas from his field to mine by using an encrypted radio message. Until that time, I was only being accompanied by eight guerillas. The group, sent by Hakki, arrived in our region on the night of October 29th. There were seven guerillas—three women and four men.

In 2006, while I travelled from the south to the north, I had a digital camera with me the entire time. When I visited a group while on the road back to Turkey, I would have pictures taken with them, to keep as a memory of my time spent there. I had a bodyguard with me, and he carried the camera and took pictures of me with the other guerillas, as well as the beautiful views of nature. In the winter of 2006 to 2007, while staying in a camp in Bitlis, Sex Cuma, I

finally had an opportunity to see those pictures. While going through them, I found a picture with a woman in it. Something strange happened to me when I saw her. You know how people say, “Love at first sight”? After seeing that picture, I now think it is true, and she was constantly on my mind. I always wondered if I would ever see her again. I tried, several times to find out with which force she was staying, but I could never find anything. I also was not able to explicitly ask anyone about her, since I felt shy when it came to these kinds of issues and I did not want anyone to learn about this platonic love.

On October 30, 2007, I awoke and met with a group of new arrivals, and would you believe that the woman with whom I had fallen in love from a single picture, was standing there in front of me! I was ecstatic, and my whole world changed in the blink of an eye. She and two other female guerillas were going to stay with us until the end of winter. I sent the remaining men to Dorsin. As I said before, the Dorsin guerilla force had been doomed by a traitor and these four men were going to reestablish our presence there. I took the rest of the group and decided to camp in an area where the borders of Bingöl, Muş, and Solhan met. Our winter season camp was a buffer zone, and the soldiers would never carry out air or land operations within that area. Neither the Diyarbakir, Mus, Bitlis, nor Bingol security forces staked a claim in this place, so none of them would enter the area. From their perspective, it would be extra work just to carry out an operation in this area, since there was uncertainty concerning the terms of jurisdiction of authority. That place was so secure for building a winter bunker that we stayed there for the three consecutive years of 2008, 2009, and 2010, without being noticed. The only problem was that the terrain was very rocky, so we literally had to carve out the rocks in order to build it.

During the winter of 2008, our supply of provisions had been used up earlier than expected, so we were forced to leave the bunker to resupply ourselves from the hidden food storages buried underground in the region. Everything was frozen outside, and some of the comrades were constantly falling down, because of the slippery ground. While walking on the hillside, we had to be extra careful, or we could fall down over the cliff. I ordered a comrade to walk at the front of the group and make indentions in the ice, with a digger, so that we could walk easier. The boots I was wearing were good on the ice. They were an American brand I had bought while staying in Iraq and had a good grip on both ice and snow, which allowed me to walk with confidence. After a while, because of my better traction, I wound up walking 50 meters ahead of the group, checking the ground before they stepped on it. I noticed there was a cliff up ahead. I immediately turned around and said, "Stop, wherever you are now! We have to find another path!" I noticed Asmin, the woman with whom I fell in love, and another guerilla were staying just behind me, five or six meters back. From where they were standing, I sensed that they might fall down the cliff side. I started walking toward them to help them walk by, letting them hold onto me, when Asmin suddenly slid down the side. I looked over and saw that she was holding onto a bush, ten meters down, and screaming in fear. The cliff was nearly 60 meters high. If she fell, her chances of staying alive were almost impossible.

I started to climb down through the bushes to the location where she was holding on desperately. When I got to a point that was close, I reached out to pull her up back onto the hill. I could not pull her up using one hand, because she was a little overweight, and we both began rolling down together. There was a spiky tree that the Kurds called "Guni." I was able to grab onto one of these trees, as I rolled. I held Asmin with one hand and the tree with the other. I realized that it was impossible for me to save her by myself. We waited, unmoving, so as to not



lose energy until the comrades could reach us with help. I was exhausted, and my hand was bleeding from the spikes on the tree. It was also freezing cold. Luckily, the other comrades reached us and were able to pull Asmin and myself up the hill with the help of a rope.

When I climbed up, I saw that many of Asmin's fingernails were torn apart, as she had tried to hold onto something while falling. I was in a similar situation. My hands were in bad shape, because they had slid across the rocky surface. They were bleeding badly and the skin on my palm was torn apart. I did not immediately realize that I had also hurt my back. It made itself known when I tried to stand up and felt a huge pain in my lower back.

With the help of my comrades, I was able to return to our campground, and Asmin began hanging around with me after that incident. She witnessed that I had risked my own life in order to save hers. That night, with everyone present, she stated, "My life is not my own any longer. If you had not saved me, I would now be dead. Comrade Deniz! Wherever you go, I will follow as your servant from now on—because I owe my life to you."

She began feeling affection for me. We stayed in the same underground bunker throughout winter, and I was getting more nervous as time passed. Asmin and the other two women were temporarily assigned to my jurisdiction. I would have to dispatch them to their new fields of duty in April, at the latest. When I told Asmin what was going to happen in the near future, she became frustrated and said, "I am not going anywhere. I will stay wherever you are." I said, "No Asmin. You have to go or the other comrades will sense the relationship between us. It might cause us problems." She hastily responded, "Why did you risk your life for me then? You are not a regular ground guerilla, but are one of the three most authorized people in the state of Garzan. How could you risk your own life just to save an ordinary guerilla like me?"

I had to convince her to leave the region, one way or another. I would be in serious trouble if someone noticed how close we had become. (Asmin was only her nickname; her real name was Selma Doner.) I said, “Asmin, I have feelings toward you also, but it is risky for us both if you stay here with me. People might start gossiping that Comrade Deniz is keeping the woman he loves close to himself, and we could not explain that to headquarters!”

Since we had confessed our feelings to each other, I decided to tell Asmin about all my previous relationships with other women, including the ones that were slanderous. I did not want her to be confused by hearing them from other guerillas. “Asmin, I will be honest with you. I loved only one woman from 1992 to 2000. We broke up, but I still cannot forget her. Also, people said that I hung out with other women. These were all lies, but I was put under investigation for them, and there was found to be no truth to them. I am telling all of this to you, so that you do not blame me in the future if you hear about it from others. Now, if you really love me, just go wherever the organization wants you to go. Do not insist on staying close to me. Otherwise, we might both be in serious trouble!”

Finally, Asmin was convinced. She realized I was correct. Headquarters dispatched her to a field that was quite close to me, in Bitlis. Asmin and the other two women guerillas traveled to Bitlis in the middle of the April.

## **UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS**

Toward the end of my career in the organization, the Turkish security forces began using unmanned aircraft systems, called Herons. The use of this technology became so popular that it was in the news. It was often reported that the PKK was beaten down by the use of this new technology. Nevertheless, these Herons were not as troublesome to the guerillas as was reflected

in the media. Even before these high-tech reconnaissance-gathering machines began to be used by the Turkish military, we had already been provided with a brochure on how to prevent detection by them. The organizations that were fighting against Israel in Palestine sent us a brochure with information on what features the Herons had, how much area they could cover, how large their surveillance capacity was, and what precautions could be used against them.

Even though the PKK did not have any dialogue with Hamas and Hezbollah, it did have a close relationship with the Palestine National Salvation Front. This strong relationship was built years ago, in 1992, when the PKK began fighting against Israel with PNSF forces to help the assimilated and suppressed Palestinian people. In those clashes against Israeli soldiers, the organization had 17 martyred members. The fact that the Kurds sacrificed themselves for the Palestinian people during those years strengthened the relationship between the PKK and Palestine. The Palestinian organizations began to assist us on many fronts in return. I personally witnessed their help. I was even able to read three letters written to Apo by Yaser Arafat.

The head of general staff back then was Yaşar Büyükanıt. He delivered a fallacious public speech on TV, saying, “We are now able to watch the PKK camps located in Iraq and Syria 24/7 with the help of our Herons.” That was nothing but a big lie. In fact, the security forces had carried out a large land and air operation in 2008, based on the reconnaissance data collected by those unmanned aircraft. In the middle of February, thousands of soldiers were dispatched to the south in Iraq. It was partially reflected in the media, but of course it contained misleading information. In that operation, the organization inflicted a heavy blow against the Turkish military. The Turkish soldiers were probably under the illusion that they would destroy the PKK camps in the south in the middle of winter based on what the Herons had seen.

Yes, it was true that the enemy was able to watch our camp locations, but the guerillas were highly mobile. We would always relocate to another place before an operation began against us. The Turkish jets would bomb those empty camps and then misinform the public, through false news. How many times have you witnessed on the media that the PKK camps were wiped off the map? I bet it is probably been more than a hundred times. I do not understand how the public buys those lies. If that news were true, would there even be a single PKK member alive today? No!

In the operation that was carried out in 2008, the organization had also been warned about the Turks' arrival. The invasion of Iraq by the Americans changed the rules of the game for the Turks. The Iraq of today is not the same as Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Today, if the Turks want to carry out a military operation within Iraq, they must go through three steps. First, they have to get permission from the United States. Then, they must get permission from the Iraqi Central Government, which is controlled by the Iranians. Finally, the Kurdistan regional government in the north of Iraq has to be notified. Now, do you think an operation, which is supposed to be carried out secretly can stay secret while the Turks obtain permission from these three authorities? Worse than that, one of the authorities from whom you needed to get approval, was your enemy, the Iranian-backed Shia government in Iraq. In fact, when the organization was forewarned about the Turkish security forces' mission in Iraq, we were also leaked information that Barzani was going to support the Turks during the operation. The organization put leverage on Barzani to withdraw his military support from the Turks, and Barzani did not dare join the operation.

Turkish fighter jets had crashed the empty campgrounds with their million-dollar bombs, as our comrades had been forewarned. But the Turkish army air corps had landed into an area

circled by guerillas. Many of those soldiers lost their lives there. I do not know how it was reflected on the public records, but in that operation that took place in February of 2008, at least 120 Turkish soldiers lost their lives.

I was staying in Mus while this operation was being carried out. I had learned instantly what happened, by listening to our comrades' radio talks via those big radios. From Metina to Zagros, we had lost only 20 comrades in the air strikes, and that was only because of a mistake by a battalion commander. A group of guerillas had been mistakenly dispatched right into the field, where Turkish air corps had already landed, and they were all killed by the soldiers. There was a famous saying, within the organization regarding that 2008 operation: "There were two losers in 2008; the one was the head of Turkish General Staff, and the other was Mazlum Bardakçı, the battalion commander." And, if I am not mistaken, Mazlum Bardakçı was martyred in 2012 in Amanoses.

In the end, that operation, which was carried out based on some reconnaissance data collected through Herons, ended with a large crash and burn for the Turks. In fact, the Turkish military would not dare to enter into Iraq for a long time after that defeat.

In the north, there were also many Herons flying above the countryside, where we guerillas usually stayed, and often flew very high. Nevertheless, we were able to hear their presence. In the brochure that was delivered by the Palestinians, there was a note saying that Herons would not take images if they flew very high, which was true. If a Heron were flying high from the ground, then we could freely continue to carry out our activities. However, if it were flying with a low altitude, then we had to be extra careful. Otherwise, these unmanned aircraft systems could send our pictures and location coordinates directly to the nearest security forces. Additionally, if a Heron detected something on the ground, it would fly back and forth

over that place a couple times, at which point we would have to remain completely still. It mattered not whether it was night or day. If there were movement, the Heron could easily detect us. But if we remained still, on the ground—whether in mountainous areas or on a wide open plain—the Herons were not able to detect us.

Also, we would be careful about setting a fire for heating or cooking if the weather were rainy. I do not know how, but the Herons were able to easily detect the heat relatively during rainy weather. Other than that, during the day times when the sky was clear, they could easily detect vivid colors, including green, blue, and red. The Herons had amazing capabilities in the most challenging conditions. Occasionally, we would set a fire during the evenings in order to sit around and socialize with each other. Some nights, though, we would hear the noise of Herons flying above us, and we would quickly kill the fire—first with spreading dirt on it and then water, trapping the heat under the dirt, since some of the Herons were heat-sensitive. Since these aircrafts began to be used by the Turkish security forces, we guerillas began to be more sensitive on the issues, which clearly improved the situational awareness of the Turkish security forces, even without stepping into the field to reconnaissance. We quickly adapted to the hardships posed by the Herons. For example, as soon as we started a fire in the wood burning stove during the winter camps, a couple of comrades would go outside the bunker and check to see whether there was any light leakage. If there were such a situation, our comrades would properly close those exposed areas with dirt and earth.

Headquarters also had taken some precautions against the risk of being detected by Herons. For example, after some information exchange with the Palestinians, the seniors instructed the guerilla forces, fighting in the north, to build half-open camouflage spots to certain locations in the shape of a coffer. While we guerillas were resting somewhere, we would hide in

these coffers, our rucksacks, explosive materials, and kitchen tools that we carried along with us. Then, one of the comrades would cover the open side of the coffer with his tent. After hiding the items, the Herons were not able to detect us, even if they flew over us all day as long as we remained still. But these unmanned aircraft systems seriously limited our freedom of mobility. However, we were still able to travel from one place to another as long as we abided by the precautions.

The Palestine National Salvation Front was very experienced on how to get these unmanned aircraft systems out of the way, since they were exposed to them for a longer period of time by the Israeli security forces. They had developed valuable tactics and combined them into a brochure. That brochure had really helped us to get over our novitiate period with almost no loss.

Besides Herons, the Turkish security forces used another type of unmanned aircraft system, which was small, and it could be launched quickly by projecting it through the air. The soldiers would use them to increase their situational awareness when they were out on the field. They were American made, if I remember correctly. The smaller ones would not pose a huge threat to us guerillas, since we were able to shoot them down, when they often flew at a low altitude

One of the areas in which the organization was most successful was the importance given to continuing education among the guerillas. Whichever tactic or technology the security forces adopted, we immediately got trained in that direction. We would exchange ideas with the other groups around the world and then develop our own counter tactics. At least 70 percent of the activities of the organization depended on trainings in various areas. The remaining 30 percent consisted of all other works. That is why I still do not understand why there was always such

fallacious propaganda after each air attack carried out in Iraq, stating that, “The PKK was doomed, their camp grounds were completely destroyed, and no one was left alive.” If there were even a small amount of truth in those news, the organization would have been destroyed at least 20 times by now!

### **DENIGRATION OF THE KURDS**

The training activities had always been crucial for the organization; especially the training of the ranked guerillas. In each guerilla camp, there was at least one ranked guerilla-training academy. I would argue that the trainings given in those camps were not even given at the universities in Turkey. In those camps, each guerilla would undergo a systematic and professional training. The basic philosophy of the organization was to raise awareness among the guerillas, because you can talk, discuss, and debate about anything with an informed person. On the other hand, even talking, let alone discussing, is difficult with an uninformed person. You cannot make them change their ideas, because of the deeply rooted prejudices. That is why 70 percent of the all activities of the organization are composed of trainings. We were trained in almost everything. Beginning with 2005, the organization even began to give trainings on quantum physics.

Newbies, who successfully completed the ideological trainings, would then be trained on guerilla-war tactics. The ideological trainings might become boring for some; however, the guerilla training was not like that. In fact, some trainings had to be taken maybe five times by each guerilla, but no one was offended by those repetitions, because every one of us was aware that it was for our best interest to advance ourselves on guerilla tactics. Indeed, some comrades among us were highly insensitive to the ideological trainings. Even though they were physically



in the classroom, their minds would be at somewhere. Nevertheless, during the war-tactic classes, the guerillas began to act like different people, participating in discussions and asking multiple questions.

These trainings would change the way in which those guerillas saw the world and world incidents. The guerillas no longer went at one another, tooth and nail, for petty situations after completing those trainings. We witnessed this change, especially on the subject of religion. Since the organization was not against any religious view, it would not view any one religion above another. In other words, they would not say anything like “Qur’an is good, Torah and Bible are bad.” It gave complete freedom on searching, choosing, and living a religion of your choice. Additionally, it would not let any members of a specific religion tyrannize guerillas with different religious beliefs. The organization was open to every religion, but it was not an atheist organization, as it was continuously reflected in the Turkish press. We had comrades who are atheists, Marxists, Christians, and Muslims among us. For the most part, we respected each other’s religious beliefs. You could worship whatever you wanted, as long as you respected your comrades’ beliefs.

This was one of the basic reasons why so many civilian Kurds were eagerly joining the organization. The PKK provided great freedoms to the people, especially the women. Kurds in the east of Turkey were now free to believe whatever they wanted—and free to marry whomever they wished. Apo had a good comment that he used during the trainings: “A person can take the national test for a university enrollment after going through primary, secondary, and high schools. If he gets high scores on the test, he will have many opportunities in front of him, such as studying to be a doctor or an engineer. He can choose any of them and then professionalize in that field. Let society be free to choose whatever they wish, as long as they do not interfere with

others' rights. There is to be no making everyone believe in the same God or same religion. Let them use their free will.” The appeal of the PKK on Kurdish people originated from those basic rights granted to them.

If we were in fact an absolute atheist or Marxist organization—and forced people to be either atheist or Marxist as it has been depicted in the media—would those thousands of Kurds have continued to join us with their heart and soul? I personally visited several Kurdish villages many times, and I organized meetings with thousands of Kurdish peasants. In those villages, we would often gather in mosques. If we imposed people to be atheist, would they let us carry out our meetings in the mosques?

I even have a funny story about one of these mosque visits. In 1993, we had a meeting with the peasants in a village of Siirt, Kurtalan. After the evening prayer, before the community left, I went up to the stage. During the speech, we hung the flag of the PKK inside the mosque. The Turkish soldiers came to the village while I was still speaking to villagers. There were shelters in each village in which to hide that were arranged beforehand in case security forces raided the villages. We immediately hid in a shelter, but because of the hurry, we had forgotten the PKK flag inside the mosque.

The soldiers, of course, noticed that all the men peasants were leaving the mosque. The ranked Turkish commander was smart and had checked his watch and figured that the praying time was already over. He entered the mosque to check, and as he was thinking about what all those villagers were doing there, he asked the imam, “Where are your comrades, dear Imam?” The imam had replied, “Comrades? There is no one here, but those who came for the evening prayers.” The commander replied, smiling, “Tell them not to leave their flag behind while

fleeing next time, okay?” Then, the soldiers left the village, and we guerillas continued our recruitment meeting.

The PKK is an organization which respects the people and their ideas. The executives of the organization gave great importance to the guerillas’ attitudes and behavior. Some basic principles were taught and practiced by everyone. For example, it would not matter whether it was your inferior or superior—no one would sit with legs crossed in front of others. When we were talking with people in the community, we kneeled. If you paid specific attention to the images of our seniors on the media, you would notice this. Cemil Bayık, Duran Kalkan, and Murat Karayılan participated in several press statements or interviews. You never saw those seniors of the organization sitting cross-legged in front of a journalist. Villagers respected and embraced this demeanor of the guerilla. Also, if we guerillas were staying near to their village, the peasants felt comfortable and secure, knowing that we would protect their families against a possible atrocity from the soldiers.

The biggest share in the growth of participation to the PKK, and its acceptance by the Kurdish civilians, arose from our demeanor. When the PKK was not present, there was the KDP, which was founded in Iraq between the years 1946 and 1947. Their influence now is somewhere close to the bottom, and the Kurds do not accept their authority. Many constituents of the KDP simply support it in order to receive a favor, such as a position, in return. Similarly, look at the other Kurdish organizations operating in Iraq, such as the YNG, which had also lost its authority and influence on the Kurds of Middle East. None of the Kurdish organizations, which were active during 1950s and 1960s before the PKK was established are still active. Why? Because these so-called Kurdish parties deceived the Kurds to get their votes, but they did

not serve their interests. They did not strive to win the hearts and minds of the Kurdish peasants! What helped us to reach our popularity was simply our way of treating the people.

We could not explain this to the Turkish community in the western parts of the country, because we could not make our voices heard by them in a positive light. Through slanders and false information, we were not given the opportunity to let the Turks know why we were fighting, instead of living a comfortable life, having families, and raising children. A simple example: As you know, the HDP is a political party operating under the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Its goal is to reach the Turks in other parts of the country and inform them about the injustices to which the Kurds have been exposed since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. During the last three days, there have been at least ten attacks by the civilian Turks, against HDP buildings in the western cities. Shooting, breaking glass in the office buildings, plundering, and beatings; everything you can imagine! Why is this still occurring? Simply because many political parties in Turkey win the support of these constituency on this fascist polarization among the Kurds and the Turks. A permanent solution to this deep-rooted problem, would not serve their agenda.

The basic factor in the continuance and growth of this problem is that Turks are still unaware of the goals and the *raison d'être* of this Kurdish organization, which has by now been fighting against them for more than 30 years. They have always denied our presence, never accepted the fact that Kurds have also lived in these territories for centuries, and disseminated sheer calumnies that “PKK is not an organization representing the rights of Kurds but is composed of Armenians and Christians with a plot of foreign powers to destroy the unity of the Turkish Republic!” If they really wanted to end this problem, they would “know their enemy” first. If one takes a closer look into the history of the PKK, you will easily see that many of our

founders were Turks, not Kurds. Apo, our president; his assistant Kemal Pir; Hakkı Kara; an important figure within the organization, were all Turks. Duran Kalkan, from Adana, Osmaniye, from where well-known Turkish nationalist and politician, Devlet Bahçeli, is also a Turk. There are many other senior comrades, who also have Turkish origins but now serve the PKK. Therefore, you cannot call the PKK a Kurdish movement. There are as many Turks in the organization, as there are the Kurds. Nevertheless, we were unable to explain this situation to the Turks living in the western parts of Turkey, because of the prejudice planted by the Turkish officials. Instead of trying to set the seal on this problem, the Turkish government has been creating polarization between the two public entities for years by using the propaganda that the PKK was composed of manslayers: Armenians, Jews, and even atheists, besides Kurds. In the near past, around 2012, did not Erdoğan say, “The PKK is composed of a bunch of Zoroaster”? Because of such long established and media backed prejudices, the organization had been unable to express its grievances to the civilian Turks. Besides, everyone should be counted as a human being, regardless of his or her race or religious beliefs.

In today’s Turkey, almost everyone views the PKK as a plot against Turkey. Almost any government in Turkey has yet to take a concrete step towards peace and stability. Politicians, prime ministers, presidents or bureaucrats—all liars! They would occasionally indicate in the media that they strove to end the problem peacefully, but those public statements were nothing but attempts to save the day for their own greedy goals. These dishonest politicians ignored their fallen soldiers, as well as our guerillas, for the sake of their own benefits, because a soldier might be nothing but the son of a poor Anatolian parent. Did not, in fact, one of the Turkish ministers say in a public statement, “Who cares if a few soldiers died in our fight against PKK?”

Shortly after the 2001 economic crash in Turkey, many foreign agents contacted the organization, stating, “Do not let this opportunity pass by you! Now is the right time to separate from Turkey and declare your independence!” Those agents, in fact, had also reached out to the ground guerillas. Affected by those agents’ support, many guerillas were insisting to deal a deathblow to the Turks in 2001. Back then, the senior commanders at headquarters settled the ground guerillas’ discussions by telling them, “This is a plot imposed upon us by some foreign powers, for their own benefits. We should never, ever achieve our goals in a dastardly way!”

During that economic crisis, Iran and Syria put a great pressure on the organization. They were so-called allies of Turkey at the same time. Nevertheless, if one ever has the opportunity to check the archives of the organization or speak to another senior from the organization, they would easily see how many times the state of Iran reached out to organization headquarters in order to convince them to “move in for the kill” while Turkey was experiencing turmoil due to that same economic crash. The organization rejected all of those encouragements and offers of help, even though we had the power to achieve just that. In fact, in 2012, the organization played a small-scale “rehearsal” as the AKP had increased its push on the guerillas. Every single day for a month, there was news coming from eastern Anatolia of martyred Turkish soldiers. Apo ceased the guerillas desire for revenge by sending an order from prison. Even the Kurdish public was armed at that time. If Apo had not interfered, a civil war would definitely have broken out in Turkey.

However, the organization never considered starting a civil war within Turkey by letting the Kurdish civilians fight against the Turkish civilians. Nevertheless, when the organization figured out that the Turkish government was not fulfilling the conditions of the peace negotiations, it gave a warning message to the government in 2011-2012. “You Turks will either

fulfill your obligations or we will respond to your negligence, not only with guerilla missions but also with a civilian Kurdish revolt!” They had many losses in the borderline, especially in the towns of Hakkari and Şırnak. It was a huge blow on the Turks. Almost 80 percent of Beytüşşebap were registered in the village protection system. Despite that, the security forces even lost control of the town there. They were so desperate that they could not even relocate to a safer place but hid in their military post. The security forces completely lost control in the countryside and mountainous areas of the city of Hakkari. We had literally established our liberated zones within Turkey.

There occurred three so-called “peace agreements” between Turkey and the PKK. In each agreement, we were promised that the Turks were going to address our grievances arising from basic democratic rights. Nevertheless, nothing was changed or was fulfilled. The guerillas, more specifically the mid-level guerillas, stomped with rage at these deceptions. Our trust of the Turkish government almost ran out.

For example, the government deliberately undermined the peace process of 1993. The Turks even annihilated all pro-peace Turkish people with unaccounted murders. Initially, a journalist who had close information about the cause of PKK, Uğur Mumcu, was assassinated by an explosion. Then President Turgut Özal, a high ranked General in Turkish Gendarmerie, Eşref Bitlis, a regional commander in the Turkish military, Bahtiyar Aydın, and so many other pro peace military officials and politicians, were annihilated, one by one.

The exact same thing happened during the peace process of 1996-1997. The deceased Prime Minister Erbakan had desired to solve this problem. And some generals in the army were also supporting him. However, a post-modern coup occurred in Turkey and Erbakan with all of his friend, were eliminated from the politics.

When the peace negotiations begun in 2013, the AKP also wanted to settle the Kurdish problem around the table. However, they were not sincere about the establishment of peace, even though they had come to power with a unified government. Those politicians at the AKP always had a second agenda, which they hid from us. In that period, even top Turkish generals, Yaşar Büyükanıt and İlker Başbuğ, supported the peace process. They both declared to the media that the Kurdish problem would not be fixed by solely relying on military power. İlker Başbuğ even declared that the politicians had some vital responsibilities to fulfill, which were even more important than the military operations. I do still not know who the mentorship of the AKP politicians and Erdogan was, but the AKP was definitely not sincere with establishing the order, stabilizing the country, and winning the hearts and minds of Kurds in the east. Despite the fact that it was literally the only political power with such control on the government and bureaucracy, they always had something else in their mind.

### **MEETING WITH AN OLD ENEMY**

Until the end of 2008, I stayed in the eastern fronts of the state of Garzan, Dorşin, Sason, and Muş. I did not have the opportunity to visit the fronts in the west due to my workload. In the winter of 2008-2009, I heard that headquarters had assigned two women comrades to my field. I learned that Asmin asked headquarters to be assigned to my duty field in the east. Of course, I got very angry with her when she arrived at our campground, because there had already been some complaints filed by the guerillas concerning a possible relationship between Asmin and myself during the winter of 2007-2008. Because of the existence of such complaints, it was completely wrong for Asmin to make a request to be assigned to my field and for the regional commander to have approved such a request.



I did not want another investigation of me because of this. Therefore, I immediately communicated with the state commander via radio, saying, “Comrade, you more or less know the relationship between Asmin and me. We had complaints about it by some of our comrades and now, despite that, you assigned her to my field! What was your purpose?” He replied, “Deniz, I meant no offense! Asmin asked, and pretty much insisted on it, so I assigned her to your field!” I asked, “Have you notified headquarters of the women guerillas, before assigning Asmin close to me?” “Yes, I did,” he said. “Okay, then, if you are all aware and okay with this, then I should not be bothered about it!” I replied.

That same winter, my superior, the field commander, sent some news, stating, “I will be staying in your region this winter, Deniz. Arrange a place for me. He was then in Erzurum, and was to visit all the regions in Garzan, one by one. Later, he again contacted me via the radio and asked where I was staying. I told him that I was going to stay in Muş that winter. He said, “Comrade Deniz, I do not want to stay in Mus. Ask your guerilla force to arrange a place for me in Dorsin.” “Heval, where I am staying is much safer, compared to the campground in Dorsin. If the security forces hear that you are staying in Dorşin, you do not have a chance of escaping alive,” I told him.

He still insisted, so I arranged a place for him in Dorsin, and he spent that winter there. At the beginning of spring, before the snow even began to melt, he contacted me via radio on the 6th day of April. “Deniz, come to the camp where I am staying in Dorşin. I need to talk to you as soon as possible!” he said. The area, in which I was staying, was still covered with snow of two meters’ height. In that field in Mus, the guerillas would leave their winter bunkers, either at the end of April, or in the middle of May. Nevertheless, I left the bunker and headed to Dorşin,

because of the field commander's insistence. I did not know that the head of Sason force had also been called to Dorsin.

For a week, the field commander held separate meetings with the forces of Dorşin, Sason and Muş. In one of those meetings, the relationship between Asmin and me came up. The field commander asked me, "Deniz, what is this all about? The comrades have been criticizing you, and, if I am not mistaken, this relationship between you and Asmin became the agenda last year, too." I said, "It is true comrade! It did become the topic of discussion last year, also. Despite that, the state commander assigned her to my field! If you already knew the existence of such a relationship, why did you assign her to me?" I asked.

"So, you do not deny it? There is indeed something between the two of you!" "Why should I deny it? I have feelings for her. If you asked me if my feelings toward her were affecting the quality of the work, I am doing, I would adamantly say no, they do not," I replied. "Okay, we will close this issue here. I will explain to my superiors, so that no one will ever talk about it anymore," he said.

That discussion occurred on April 19, of 2009. I remember the date quite well, because it had coincided with the date of the first KCK operations [Operations carried out by Turkish police against the political wing of the PKK] against the organization, which truly shocked us. The local elections had recently been held, and the BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) had achieved a great success and was able to win the majority of votes in more than 79 districts in Eastern Anatolia. We even knew that the seniors of the organization were regularly meeting with the Turkish government to negotiate the terms of peace. Despite these ongoing meetings, we could not attach any meaning to the KCK operations. A weird situation had developed. The Turkish government was meeting with the seniors of the guerilla force of the organization, but

the Turkish security forces were carrying out operations against the political wing of the organization in order to incarcerate them. On the one hand, we were being told to lay down our arms and weapons and discuss the terms of peace around a table through politics. On the other hand, the state arrested the professional politicians.

In 2009, after that meeting, the field commander (Hakkı) told me that I was to travel with him to the town of Siirt. We left Dorşin on the 13th of May. We had five other guerillas from the Sason guerilla force with us. We had two possible routes to use when travelling to Siirt—either through Mutki-Bitlis, or through Sason-Kozluk.

Since everywhere was covered in snow, the Sason-Kozluk path would be too risky to use. Comrades could become frostbitten. The Mutki-Bitlis path was also risky, because it passed through the plains. I informed the field commander, Hakkı, about both of these risks waiting in front of us. “Comrade Hakkı, we have two options. One is a mountainous road, but covered with snow; the other one is an open field, but has security risks. You make the choice, since I do not want top responsibility in case something happens,” I said. He told me, “We will travel through the plains, in Sason!”

When we reached Sason, it was almost spring. The trees were coming into leaf, the snow had melted, and the weather was very nice. We rested in Sason for two days, with 11 people in total. Around evening, I climbed up to a high hill and reconnoitered the area before setting off again. I noticed that many of the passages were held by the security forces. As spring arrived, the security forces had positioned themselves in the field. I told Hakkı, “Comrade, all the passages are held by the soldiers! We cannot make it through that way.” He asked me what other options we had. I replied, “Those soldiers are positioned there during the daytime. I think they only lay an ambush during the evenings. That leaves us only one option. We will pass

through there during the daytime before sunset. The area is already wooded and we can travel, carefully hiding behind the trees.” He accepted my plan.

The next day around 6:00 a.m., we set off as planned. I was correct. The soldiers were laying ambush only at night, not in the daytime. The terrain was empty. I suppose the security forces were thinking that no one would be brave enough to pass that area during daylight.

When we reached Kozluk, we stepped onto a flat plain. There was neither a wooded area, nor a hill behind which we could hide. We were walking in wheat fields, but around 1:00 a.m. in the afternoon, when the sun was shining directly above us, we started to walk the perimeter of the field, since the wheat was absorbing all the sun’s heat and making it difficult for us to walk in the middle. We had a large obstacle waiting before us; the Kozluk Stream. None of us had ever passed over this stream before. We did not know at which point it was shallow or deep. At sunset, we tried to pass over it, four or five times, from several different spots. Nevertheless, we were not able to cross. Not only was it very deep, but also the current was very strong. We could not move into the water for even ten meters. We had to find an alternate way.

I said, “Comrade Hakkı, we now have two options in front of us. We can either reach the Silk Road and board one of the international transportation trucks going to, or passing by Bitlis.” The trucks were important for the organization, because cars, minibuses and cabs would be stopped at security checkpoints, in various cities. However, the international trucks were exempt from this stop and search procedure. Someone must make a specific complaint for a truck to be stopped by the security forces. Hakkı did not accept my first offer. “Then, there is one option left, comrade,” I said. We will go into one of the villages, find us a vehicle, and pass over the stream, under the guise of passengers.”

In line with my second plan, we arrived at a village in the middle of the night. Since it was late, the lights were off in almost every single house. The peasants were probably already sleeping. Nevertheless, we noticed a torch light close by. Two peasants were talking and, at the same time, working on something. We headed towards the light and noticed that one of the peasants was digging a hole, while the other one was holding the torch. He had dug almost one-and-a-half meters deep. After our greeting with them, I asked why they were digging that hole in the middle of the night. One of them said, "Comrade, we are looking for a treasure." I again asked, "Why are you searching for it at this time of the night? Besides, who told you that there was a treasure buried here?" He replied, "It is taken for granted that there is a large amount of treasure here, comrade." I felt sorry for them. They were probably wasting their time, and responded, "We have something we need to do. We have to cross the Kozluk Stream. We've already tried, but were not able to manage to do it."

"Could you please find a vehicle in the village and drive us to the other side of the stream!" He replied, "Comrade, why do you want to use the bridge? If we use the bridge, you will have to pass through the downtown. It is very risky. You will be easily noticed, if we are stopped by security officials, patrolling at night. Let me show you where to cross the river." "Are you sure you can cross the stream? We already tried it, and not only is the water deep but the current is also too strong," I said. They then left their treasure hunt behind and took us to a point along the stream. Unbelievable! The place where they brought us was only ten meters down from the spot that we had tried all night to cross. This peasant got into the water and walked to other side of the stream in five minutes. We were all shocked, and, one by one, we crossed the stream.

It was 2:00 a.m., and we were not only soaked but also exhausted. We were all dying for a sleep; nevertheless, we were then very close to the town of Kozluk. A slightest image of us that might be captured by soldiers would cost us our lives. Since Kozluk was a flat plain, without a single wooded area, it would be enough for the soldiers to attack us with a single panzer. We were an open and easy target.

Leaving 15 meter intervals between each of us, we laid down in a lentil field to rest. The next day, we had to continue to hide in the field, until the sun set, so as not to be recognized by the peasants. This was easier said than done. Can you imagine what it actually means to lay still, without moving, from 2:00 a.m. in the morning, until sunset, approximately 20 hours? Try to lay down in your living room, without moving for a couple hours! You will understand what I mean.

When the sun finally set, we first headed to Siirt-Baykan and then to the city of Bitlis. Three days after we reached Bitlis, the state management gathered for another meeting. I threw heavy criticism toward the superiors regarding the martyrdom of the comrade who was taken from his position, so that I could be appointed as a commander to Garzan state. The state commander assumed the full responsibility for that incident and apologized to everyone. “We made a serious mistake. As soon as we dismissed that comrade, we should have sent him to another region—probably to the south,” he said.

Before the meeting ended, Hakkı offered something weird. “I am alone when fulfilling my responsibilities. As you all know, I am in charge of three states. Because of my workload, I am occasionally unable to travel to each state and to each region within them. When I last visited the state of Garzan, I could only visit two regions to check on how the guerillas were doing. I need an assistant, at the level of a senior commander, so that I can properly carry out

my supervisory responsibilities. This person could visit the places that I cannot,” he said. Our state commander replied to Hakkı, “That is understandable. With whom do you want to work? Give me a name!” Hakkı gave my name.

I was so surprised. Hakkı and I never got along well. I had filed official complaints about Hakkı, not just one time but several times. I had even criticized him in the meeting when Hakkı was forcing us to carry out a mission against the rangers, without letting the organization first know about it. He was assuming full responsibility of potential losses that might result from that mission. Despite all my complaints about him, he was asking the state management to assign me as his assistant. He definitely had something else on his mind.

I rejected his offer. “There are other comrades in the field, especially in the state of Amed, and they are more experienced and capable than I. Take one of them as an assistant.” He continued to insist on me. “I want Deniz as my assistant!” The state commander said, “Hakkı, this is not something I can decide by myself. Let me discuss this issue with the other states...”

Those kinds of appointments would be done through a consensus. No ranked guerilla could be appointed to a position with the request of a state or field commander. Our field commander informed the state commanders of Erzurum and Amed about this request. They both rejected it. Amed province commander even said, “This does not make any sense to me. Deniz was supposed to be here, in my state. You stole him from me, saying that you really needed him. Why are you now planning to assign him under the field commander as an assistant? If you do not need him in your state, simply send him to Amed, as soon as possible!”

In the meantime, I figured out that Hakkı’s real purpose was to keep me under his close control. If I were away from him, I could easily talk and criticize him. But, if I worked under his control, as an assistant, he was thinking that he could control my behavior. When he

continued to assist, I said, “You know what? It is indeed okay for me to work as his assistant. Let’s do not waste each other’s time any more. I am willing to work as assistant to field commander Hakkı.”

Hakkı was extremely intelligent but also a double dealer. If I had not accepted his offer, he would probably have gotten in touch with headquarters management and filed a complaint about me, saying that I was dodging my duty. He knew that I had rejected two assignments in my past. Headquarters might think that blowing off a position was getting to be a habit in my character. Therefore, after second thought, I offered myself to work under him.

This time, Hakkı could not make sense of seeing me suddenly accepting his offer, since I had initially harshly rejected his offer. He probably thought that I might do something to him, while working under him. Towards the end of the meeting, he hemmed and hawed around, and then said, “Deniz, I think it is good for the organization, if you continue to carry out your activities in Garzan.”

Right then, I began to drive him further into the corner, as I saw him step back. “Comrades! Hakkı, the field commander, has been constantly pushing us to carry out even more missions against the security forces. He compares Garzan with the state of Amed, in terms of the number of missions carried out against the security forces. This comparison is misleading. Our state is relatively new, compared to other states in the region. We have not even transferred enough guerillas from the south to fill the duty positions in our state. How can we carry out missions against the security forces when we do not fully control the areas in which we stay? Most of the guerillas assigned here are not even familiar with the terrain. Give us some time before calling us to account. Stop pressuring us to carry out large missions, as the other states do. We are not able to achieve this due to the circumstances I have just outlined. I will continue



to lead the eastern fronts in Garzan only if Hakki stops blaming me for not being successful. However, if you continue to complain about my performance, discharge me now!” All but Hakki agreed with my words.

After my harsh critique of Hakki, he began to give me a hard time, “Deniz, you have always ignored the authority of headquarters and have not paid attention to the rules!” He began to talk about an incident of mine, which occurred in the past; in 2007. The supreme guerilla force commandment had gathered for a conference. This conference would periodically gather about every two years in order to discuss the issues related to the guerillas. That year, some decisions were made, regarding the internal workings of the guerillas in each state. I had strongly objected to two of the decisions that were discussed in that meeting. I had not gossiped about them, as many others had done. I barged into the conversation, in front of everyone, and then explained my concerns about those two decisions. I said, “You are disregarding the special circumstances of the states within Turkey when considering those changes and you are making a big mistake.”

One of the decisions supported by the majority of the conference participants, was that each state was going to recruit its own guerillas from then on. The second decision concerned my opinion that each state should be responsible to self-supply itself financially from then on. I had mentioned the tragic incident, which occurred in 2006-2007 winter camp in Dorsin. One of our comrades had killed seven others, while they were on sleep and had then fled. This tragedy had, unavoidably, created an atmosphere of nervousness and distrust among the guerillas. Everybody knew that it could be a fatal decision to immediately accept a new guerilla among us. We would not know the newbie very well, and we would not even know if he or she had any connections to the security forces. Therefore, we would not be able to know how honest they

were or what might be in their past, yet we were expected to accept them immediately. How could we know that this newbie would not do any harm to his or her comrades in the winter camp when they spent the winter in the bunker? That is why I raised my objection and suggested to them that guerillas who would fight in the north should be selected only from the experienced ones in the south (Syria and Iraq) with whom the organization had formed a trusting relationship. I suggested. “We can recruit newbies from our regions, but they should be first sent to the south to be trained and to figure out their real intentions for joining us. One’s real personality and character is only understood after a couple years living among us. After this period, we should let only the most trusted of them be assigned to north,” I said.

It was also a faulty approach to hold each state responsible of supplying itself financially, because our state (Garzan) did not have the same opportunities that Amed or other states had at that time. For example, the state of Amed covers a very large area and almost all of Kurdistan’s big cities fall within its borders. The guerilla management of Amed state was in a close relationship with the industrial establishments and rich merchants. They were able to collect large sums of money monthly. Now, Garzan has not a single economically wealthy city within its borders. There was neither an industrial establishment, nor rich merchants who could support us financially. The Kurdish public, living in our cities, was also poor. They were not able to support their families, let alone help us financially.

If this decision had taken place in the old times, it would not be a problem for us guerillas, because, as a member of a guerilla force, we were given the right of collecting taxes from the factories and large construction companies, building roads, dams, and other facilities within our regions. However, all this had changed in 2003. The authority to collect taxes from those facilities had been taken from the guerilla forces and given to the KCK. Therefore, the

taxes were then being collected by our civilian comrades, carrying out activities within the cities. The guerilla force was banned from collecting taxes anymore. All these taxes were to be spent by the self-defense units organized within the Kurdish cities. With those authority changes, the guerilla force had begun to experience financial difficulties, meaning we began to be unable to self-finance ourselves. It became so bad that we were sometimes unable to find money to buy ammunition and, therefore, unable to engage in reconnaissance activities within city centers before carrying out missions.

Headquarters had also stopped sending money to us. Now, when we were in trouble, we asked for help from the state of Amed. That was why I had objected to that issue when discussed at the meeting. I had told them that the financial opportunities were not equally distributed across each state, and only a few states were able to self-finance their activities. I had told them that the state of Garzan would not be able to fundraise money from the cities under its authority, due to their income circumstances. It was similar for Amanoses. What could the guerillas in Amanoses do to earn money? Were they supposed to collect money from the tourists? What would the guerillas in Garzan do? The people living there were already poor. Were we supposed to establish a mint and print our own bank notes?

Fortunately, it was not only I who opposed those decisions. In fact, the field commander of Dersim supported me by saying, “The Dersim Field is still borrowing money from the state of Amed, plus Amed is also sending uniforms to our guerillas, since we do not have money to buy fabrics. Under those circumstances, how could you expect us to fund ourselves?”

In May 2009, Hakkı again tried to defame me by using those objections I had raised in 2007. He said to me, “You always object the decisions of the organization! You are a rebel.” He even went further and began to insult me by saying, “There were 300 other high ranked

commanders in that conference. Were they not as intelligent or capable as you were? Could they not consider those caveats? Why were you the only one objecting to those decisions? What was your real purpose? Are you against the policies of the organization?" Despite his accusations, the fact remained that there was nothing to show me as rebelling against the long-established rules and regulations of the party.

## CHAPTER 20

### DECISION TO KEEP MY HANDS OFF

During the winter of 2008-2009, the Turkish security forces carried out several land operations on our field at the triangle cities of Muş, Bingöl, and Kulp. This field was previously convicted of a well-known incident, perpetrated by some dark forces within the PKK. Additionally, many of the guerilla missions, which were carried out, without the prior knowledge of headquarters, in 1992 and 1993, had also occurred in this same field. I mentioned before about the malicious boarding of unarmed Turkish soldiers into a civilian bus and sending them off without protection or escorts. They became sitting ducks to Şemdin Sakık, and all those soldiers were killed by him in 1993 in this same field.

There was really something going on in this region, but neither the guerillas nor the seniors at headquarters were aware of what was happening. The incidents taking place were out of our control. For example, we were carrying out a simple mission against the security forces, simply to intimidate them—and we knew that it would not throw a deathblow to them. However, we would sometimes witness that the mission was more successful than what we had originally thought would happen. This only occurred in that field and never in the others. It was as if some unseen forces were opening up space for us, so that we could establish our PKK authority there. We could not figure out whether there was a trap behind this freedom, but we were freely moving and carrying out our activities there. Neither the security forces nor the rangers were interfering with us.

It was extremely unusual that the soldiers were carrying out operations in the Bingöl, Solhan, and Kulp triangle in the middle of winter under the snow cover. Even Apo was highly disturbed by those operations occurring in that area. I remember it very well. He had sent a note

to us from prison via his lawyers. It said, “What is going on in that triangle again? Who is the guerilla commander there? How could the soldiers carry out a land sweep during this winter season?” I felt nervous when I read that note, since I had the sole responsibility if something bad would happen. As you know, Şemdin Sakık was one of the previous guerilla commanders of this region, and I could experience what he experienced.

Apo had used the words, “What is going on in that triangle again?” for a reason. They were carefully structured words. It was not an ordinary sentence trying to understand what was going on there. Rather, Apo was implying something dangerous, which caused my nervousness. I had no connection with the Turkish security forces or the intelligence services and could not figure out why Apo implied that in his note. It was an area which was under the control of the Turkish national police and their intelligence units rather than the security forces, and their own intelligence. I was stuck with a difficult situation. Almost all the traitors within the PKK, who secretly worked for the Turkish intelligence units, had also worked in this field. For instance, we all knew that Mahmut Yildirim (Yesil) [A Kurdish contract killer who worked for the Turkish National Intelligence Organization] was meeting with Şemdin Sakık in this area.

For days, reading that note several times, I thought carefully and finally came to the conclusion that Apo was trying to warn headquarters about the existence of a potential agent/traitor working for the Turks. He was warning them to be extra-careful about the guerilla commander of this triangle. Then, headquarters would focus on all the activities and guerilla missions going on in this region in order to discover the traitor. I could easily face a traitor charge with a single mistake. Due to this risk, I asked my superior, the state commander of Garzan, to assign me to a different position, during the meeting we held in May 2009.

The state commander asked why I was insisting on such a change now. I said, "I have been here for a few years and want to be assigned to a western front. The comrade who has been in charge there could now take my position." Unfortunately, I was not as familiar with the terrain of the western front, but, the state commander rejected my proposal. He said, "Comrade Deniz, you have established such close relations with the rangers in the eastern front and you are acquainted with the Kurdish peasants living there. If you leave now, we will lose all our contacts and friends there. I cannot take such a huge risk!"

"Comrade! I understand your concerns. However, I will now ask you a question and you will be honest with me. After the arrival of that note from Apo, has any one from the PKK administration asked you any question regarding me?" "Yes, they did. They asked me to provide the name of the person who was staying in that region. In fact, I asked them then if I could reassign you to another field if they had concerns about you, but, they did not answer me back," he replied. Headquarters and the defense committee would know which commander was assigned to which field. Nevertheless, the PKK administration could not know that, since they had no direct connection the headquarters of the guerrilla force.

I knew for sure then that someone was testing me and looking for a possible mistake that I might have committed in the past. The words used by Apo had left question marks in the minds of many guerillas. Apo had not uttered those words for no reason. Someone had probably warned him beforehand. Those dark forces operating within the Turkish security forces or the organization were planning to carry out a mission, similar to the killing of 33 Turkish soldiers.

Considering all those risks, I again said to my state commander that I could not work in that region any longer. The organization had also forced the Turks to agree to the establishment of the "Parliamentary Commission Investigating Truths," in Oslo, as a pre-condition of the

peace talks. This was supposed to be a double-headed commission, with both the Turks and the organization needing to explain, and give account, to the civilian Turks and Kurds, of all dark incidents which occurred throughout this war. As the Turkish security forces did, we, as an organization had also committed some atrocities that we had to face. Several Kurdish rangers were killed, unarmed civilian villagers were inflicted pain, and some of them were killed, simply because they were siding with the Turks. The organization was trying to wash its hands of those atrocities, as individual guerilla missions rather than the policy of headquarters. We were going to pay the price for all the atrocities we had committed up until that time by holding specific individuals responsible for them. For that job, the organization needed names.

In the past, we had carried out horrific atrocities against some villages. In those missions, children, women, and older people were all killed, along with the rangers, but, by 2009, most of the guerillas who had participated to those missions had already lost their lives during clashes with the security forces. There was only myself and a few other comrades left alive. So, who would be the best candidate to assume the responsibilities for all those missions carried out against the Kurdish villagers in the 1990s? It was going to be either I or one of the other two. Right then, I figured that I could be held responsible for everything, since I was assigned to this critical post—the triangle of Bitlis, Solhan, and Kulp.

As a matter of fact, I decided not to carry out any missions and did not participate in a single one during the next three years. If I had made a mission and even achieved great results, I would be put under investigation for any small error. For example, in 2008, I sent one of our comrades to the downtown area of Muş to collect intelligence about critical infrastructure that we might attack. He had carried out an awesome reconnaissance. We bought a car for four thousand dollars and loaded it with explosive materials. There was a bus, which would be



transporting 40 mid-to high-ranking soldiers every morning from the downtown of Mus to their duty posts at the airport. This bus would also bring them back to downtown at the end of the day. We were going to park our explosive-loaded vehicle on the bus route and detonate it when as bus drove by.

All those high-ranking soldiers were traveling within an unprotected bus. There was neither a panzer nor a security vehicle escorting them during their travel. Even if there were an armored panzer escorting them, we could still have blown it up, but there was the example of 33 soldiers, killed by Şemdin, facing us as a caution. We had to consider whether those soldiers were given purposefully to us as a prey to serve some other force's larger objectives and goals. If so, we could find ourselves where Şemdin was after killing those 33 unarmed soldiers.

It could have been a blockbuster mission if we killed those 40 soldiers. Everything was planned and we could get them, without harming a single civilian. However, I did not allow my forces to carry out that mission. As I said, the organization would probably congratulate and reward us initially. Nevertheless, one week later, we could be put under investigation because of a small detail we had missed. You could be detained by a question like, "Why did you park the explosive-loaded vehicle here but not there?"

There were many other examples of these kinds of investigations. In 2009, an armored vehicle was blown up by guerilla forces, either in the town of Lice or in Genc. I do not remember exactly. That explosion hit all news channels and attracted the attention of the public. The head of the Turkish General Staff even delivered a public speech saying, "We still do not know how this explosion was carried out or what kind of explosive was used; whether a missile, propane tank filled with explosives, or land mine." The comrade who planned and carried out this mission was initially thanked by headquarters for his success. I remember it very well.

Everyone was talking about how successful he was. He had suddenly become a hero. But not a month passed and the same comrade was put under investigation because of the incident and was discharged from his position.

In fact, an order had arrived from headquarters to carry out a retaliatory mission against the security forces. That is why that comrade destroyed the armored vehicle. However, he was discharged from his position and told, “Why did you carry out such a big mission when we are negotiating the terms of peace with the Turks? Are you a traitor? Do you work for the Turkish security forces?”

Indeed, carrying out even a simple mission, had become too risky for us guerillas after 2004 compared to earlier years. It was not because the security forces were better than we, or that they had more advanced war technology. The PKK had more than a thousand already planned missions in its pocket to carry out in Turkey when the time came. For all those future missions, the reconnaissance would be completed, and the explosives, mines and the weapons would already be arranged. The only drawback was to consider every possible aspect of any liability.

After 2004, as a commander, we were required to take into account all possible military and political consequences of a single guerilla mission before carrying it out. It had not been that way during 1990s. Back then, the more Turkish security forces you killed, the more successful you would be considered by the organization. However, this was no longer the case. We were in close contact with the European Union, the United States, and many countries in the Middle East. In short, we were then connected to world politics. No matter whatever they said in the media, most of those powers had already accepted that the PKK was an organization defending the basic rights of the Kurds against the oppressive Turks, and we did not want to spoil our

relations with these powers by carrying out attacks against the security forces with tragic consequences. Therefore, the guerillas were then required to limit their attacks to retaliatory purposes. We would engage in clashes as long as we could legitimize their consequences to the other world powers. Otherwise, we could run the risk of losing our legitimacy of defending Kurdish rights. Other than those concerns, as an organization, we had sat with the Turks at the negotiation table where we had to be extra careful. The Turks had strong tools in their hands in order to legitimize their military operations, including diplomats stationed around the world, legitimate information outlets, and media resources. They could use those resources to fabricate a story and make the world believe it, as the Americans had in the Iraqi war. We did not have many of those same resources. Therefore, even the smallest mistake we might make could change the point of view of those with whom the organization was in a close relationship. We did not now have a free hand, as we had in the old days.

I decided to keep myself free from any kind of guerilla missions between 2006 and 2009. However, it was not because of running the risk of spoiling the organization's bilateral relations with world powers. Rather, it was mainly because of the concerns I had had. My remaining passive for three years had arisen the attention of some of my ranked comrades. They began to ask me questions, such as, "Deniz, you have planned and carried out many successful guerilla missions in the past. Why this change now? You have not carried out any missions for three years. This could be a problem for your future career!" I would keep them at bay by replying, "Comrades, I decided not to kill as many people as I had in the old days. I will now only kill the enemy forces when it is necessary!" Of course, they were not satisfied with my answers.

## **BEING TESTED FOR LOYALTY**

The organization was probably suspicious of me, since I was not carrying out any kind of missions against the security forces. In September, 2009, I was sent to a mission planned by the region management. They were probably trying to test my loyalty to the party. There was a military control post right at the entrance of the town of Kulp, though it was not a military infrastructure. The security forces had placed a container at the entrance to the city and were randomly stopping and searching cars, driving through the city. I was asked to destroy this post, along with the soldiers (maybe it had been police officers). It was an easy job for me.

I was escorted by two local guides as I headed towards the Kulp to reconnoiter. I told the region management, "I do not need those guides. I'm familiar with the area," but they insisted on me traveling with them. When we reached a point close to the town of Kulp, I noticed, via the radio, that the soldiers were in frequent communication with one another. I was sure that they were up to something. Most probably, they were sending squads to the field for an ambush, so we began to travel a different route. We were all able to reach our target without being ambushed.

Since I had safely reached my destination, the guides were to return to their homes. Before they left, I warned them, perhaps three times, not to use the path about which I was suspicious. There was another path, much longer but much safer. I described to both of them this second route back to Sason. Unfortunately, they ignored my warnings and used the other path, probably because it was much shorter compared to one I had described. I still do not know whether the Kurdish villagers or a traitor among us informed the security forces, but the soldiers had advance knowledge of an executive, from the Garzan state, passing through their region. That is why they had set ambushes everywhere. One of those two guides was martyred in that

ambush on their way back home. He was the son of a well-known person in that region. If I am not mistaken, his name was Berxwedan. That comrade was carrying a camera and a couple memory cards with him. Unfortunately, all those things were captured by the soldiers. That military operation lasted a few days. The soldiers thought that I was still in that region, but I had already reached to town of Kulp.

When I arrived there, I asked three civilian comrades to go downtown and take pictures of everything. I then created a map, using those pictures, highlighting all police stations, the central police command, military posts, district Governorship Building, and everything else that might possibly retaliate against me after carrying out my mission on that control post at the exit of town. Some of the military posts and police stations were very close to my target. I might be caught, so I had to be extra careful. After the reconnaissance, I decided that I needed at least four others to carry out this mission.

A vehicle full of explosives was going to drive close to the search and control area, and the driver was going to blow up the vehicle when the soldiers were close to him. Of course, I needed a volunteer to carry out this first part of the plan, because it was a self-sacrificing mission. After the explosion, the guerillas, driving in another vehicle, were going to kill all the remaining soldiers with hackbut fires. No one was going to be left alive. After the reconnaissance and planning, I returned to Sason. I told the regional management that everything was planned, but I had delayed the mission to find a suitable guerilla for the self-sacrificing mission. In fact, my goal was to delay the mission as much as possible for the reasons I outlined before.

Around that time, my superior, the Garzan State guerilla commander, was assigned to another post in the south. I was very well acquainted with the new person replacing him. The

old state commander was very talented. However, similar to me, he was not getting along well with his superior, Hakki, the region commander. He objected to all of Hakki's nonsense orders. Hakki did not want him under his command, so he had asked headquarters to relocate him to another position.

Since I was able to postpone the mission at Kulp, by the excuse of finding a voluntary self-sacrificing guerilla, Hakki assigned me to another mission. A thermal power plant was being built somewhere close to the town of Kulp. He asked me to go there and collect the building taxes. Normally, the Kurdish self-defense teams, our civilian comrades, were supposed to collect that tax. However, the owner of the company that is to build the plant had refused to pay them. In such situations, we armed guerillas would pay a visit them and collect the taxes.

The amount of tax was calculated according to the scale of the job done by the company. In most of the situations, it would be 10 percent of the amount and the contractor was paid by the state. According to the research made by our self-defense teams, this contractor was paid \$145,000,000 to build that plant. After our visit, he agreed to pay the tax. Nevertheless, this man had many friends who were able to negotiate the tax amount with us. By contacting some important names from the organization's European representatives, seniors from the Kandil, and even some Kurdish politicians from Turkey, he was able to reduce the tax amount to \$5,000,000. He informed us that, "I'm not able to drive to Kulp to give you the money, so let's decide on a meeting point, somewhere in Amed. It can be Hazro, Lice, Genc, or any other town of your choice. If you cannot meet me there, connect me with someone from those places, so that I can pay my taxes." There was no problem left to solve. He was willing to pay it. I communicated with the state guerilla commander of Amed to have him collect the taxes. I later confirmed that the owner had paid all \$5,000,000 in three monthly installments.

Despite this, the field commander, Hakki, had ordered a squad from the Dorsin guerilla force to burn all the construction vehicles belonging to this company. While I was planning activities to be carried out in my new post in Mus, the Amed guerilla commander contacted me via radio. He asked me, in an angry tone, “Comrade Deniz, why did you set this man’s vehicles on fire? He had paid all his taxes.” I replied, “Comrade, I did not know that the company vehicles had been burned. I am in Muş now. I do not even work there anymore.”

This was very strange, because I was supposed to be informed before this mission was carried out since I was the contact person between the owner and the organization. Now, I could be held responsible for whatever happened there. Headquarters would contact me and ask, “What was your purpose? Are you trying to spoil our relations with the Kurdish businessmen? Do you work for the government?” It was just a matter of time that I might be put under investigation because of it.

Toward the end of 2009, before headquarters heard about this incident, I reached out to them to let them know the truth. Hakkı was always doing something destructive behind my back. I contacted headquarters and told them that the unjust mission had been carried out by Dorsin guerilla forces, with the order of field commander Hakkı. In this way, I was able to save myself from the trap planned by Hakki.

### **WINTER, FALLEN COMRADES, AND TRAITORS**

I spent the winter of 2009 to 2010 in a camp near the city of Muş. That winter season, I had decided to gather all female guerillas and have them stay in a single underground bunker, instead of scattering them in different locations. All the women guerillas in my region, nine in

total, and seven men guerillas were arranged to stay there. I stayed in another bunker with 13 other guerillas.

The remaining nine guerillas in our region stayed in another camp near to the town of Sason. Before it started to snow, I checked all the underground bunkers to make sure they were safe enough. During these visits, I was also sharing the encrypted communication codes with the commander of each of the bunkers. I told them, “Keep those codes to yourself and let me know immediately if something happens!”

It was January 22, 2010. I received a radio communication from the Dorsin guerilla commander. He informed that one of the women guerillas had fled the camp and surrendered to the Turkish security forces. Normally, in the case of a deserting guerilla, the winter underground bunker had to be evacuated, since that traitor would possibly inform the security forces about its location. After long discussion in our bunker in Mus, we decided, as a group, to travel to Dorşin and bring all those comrades back to our bunker.

According to the plan, four of our comrades and the Mus region commander would set off for Dorsin to bring those comrades back our area. In the meantime, we were to stay in the camp and prepare sleeping quarters for the newcomers. It was morning, and the comrades were just about to set out, when the Mus region commander came up to me and said, “Comrade Deniz, I cannot bear this cold weather and snow. I do not think I will be able to travel such a distance in these conditions.” There was another region commander staying with us, who could potentially lead the other four comrades. However, he was our guest and not a member of our team. He was to go to Dersim Field in the spring 2010. It would be rude to assign a guest with a duty related to our field.



That left only one option. I was to lead the four guerillas to Dorsin. We set off on January 23 at 8:00 a.m. It was so snowy outside, and, at some areas, the snow had piled up for more than two meters. It was freezing cold and also snowing non-stop. Normally, it would take only three hours of walking, between our camp in Muş and Dorşin camp, but, that day, we walked from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and could still see our camp field in Mus. In eight hours, we had only been able to cover a distance of less than two kilometers.

Around 5:00 p.m., we stopped and started a fire, since we were all exhausted. We sat around the fire to warm our bodies. While sitting, one of the comrades began to talk weirdly. He was speaking out nonsensical words. His name was Xelil, and he was originally a Syrian Kurd. Then, he also began to act strangely. Not only his speaking, but also his gestures had changed, as if he were a drunken person. Poor comrade, he had lost one of his shoes, while walking in snow and had not stopped us to go back and find it, because it would delay our trip. As soon as I noticed his situation, I told the other comrades that he would no doubt soon die, so that they would not be too shocked. The heat of a fire could kill a person, who had been subjected to severe cold for a long time, and I told them to move him away from fire. I had had a lot of experience about those situations. If any of your body parts are subjected to direct contact with the snow, you should never get close to a fire's heat, because you could lose your life!

Three meters away from the fire, we laid down two sleeping bags and put Xelil on them. He was now unconscious. Four of us began to rub his hands and feet to increase the blood circulation in his body, but then his speech became completely unrecognizable. He was like a toddler who was just learning to talk. He passed away before 7:00 p.m.

We were all demoralized, and I told the remaining three comrades, "We will stay awake, close to each other, around this fire. It is too risky to travel at night in this cold. We will keep

the fire alive; however, nobody is going to sleep!” Because we were sitting on the snowy ground and the temperatures were so extremely cold, we would not make it to the morning if we fell asleep next to that fire.

It was -22 Fahrenheit, and we had to regularly move our bodies, even though they were warmed up from the heat of the fire. Otherwise, the bloodstream in your body would stop flowing. In order to stay awake, we chatted with each other until sunrise. I was hitting my comrades' heads with my cane when they closed their eyes.

As soon as the sun rose, we placed Xelil's corpse into a sleeping bag and then buried him under the snow. Nothing would happen to the corpse at that time of year. It would not decompose until spring. On the other hand, there were also no wild beasts living in that region. We could return to this place, just before the spring, and then bury him.

After we buried Xelil's body in the snow, we had not even walked 15 meters away when a comrade shouted at me, “Comrade Deniz, I am exhausted and I cannot even move my legs. You go on. I will stay here.” His name was Hebung. The three of us spent quite a bit of time convincing him to continue with us. We rubbed his hands and feet but nothing worked. He insisted on staying there. Since we were all waiting in the snow, the other two comrades told me, “Comrade Deniz, if we keep waiting here, we will all die. We should continue on, whether Hebung comes with us or not.”

I had to make a choice. We were either going to leave Hebung there alone and continue on our journey, or we all were going to stay there with him and die. It would have been unjust of me if I let the others die because of one comrade. Therefore, I decided to leave Hebung to save the lives of others. We set up a tent and left a lot of firewood in front of it. We started a fire and left his share of food in the tent and then set off. Hebung had to survive for at least two days, until

we could return from the Dorşin camp. If luck were with him, we would then carry him with us on our way back to the camp field in Muş.

If it had been my decision only, I would never have left Hebun alone there. However, the other two comrades were also beginning to feel exhausted because of the cold. As I said, we were either going to all die together, or we were going to continue our trip and leave him behind. I later learned that Hebun had committed suicide in the tent. He shot himself in the head. Hebun knew that he would die if he stayed in that tent, and I also knew that. If he had forced himself to come with us, he might have been alive today. The chance of survival was very small if he remained there.

As the remaining members of our group, we continued our trip to Dorsin, under a heavy blizzard. Shortly before sunset, we started a fire and gathered around it once again to warm our bodies. We were using green wood for our fire, because it would not produce as much smoke as that from dead wood. The next morning, I experienced one of the scariest things in my life. I was not able to see! Two things might have potentially affected my eyesight: the exposure to the fire's smoke or the white colored snow that covered everything. My two comrades did not know the route to Dorsin, and, though I was not able to see anything, I was trying to describe the way to them, as well as I could.

One comrade started to cry when he saw me like that. "Comrade Deniz, if you die, then we two will die with you. We do not know the route, nor do we have any experience with these winter conditions. If you wish, I will carry you on my shoulders and you can just describe the way to Dorsin. Please, do not give up! Do not leave us alone!" The comrades began to describe to me things on the terrain, such as the trees, streams, rocks, and hills, and I gave them instructions to follow, as much as I could remember from 1990s.

I did not let them carry me on their shoulders. Instead, they held my hands and we walked together. We reached a village on the evening of the fourth day. I asked them to go to the third house, after passing over the bridge. I was acquainted with the people living there. The family was shocked to see us in that season. It was highly unusual, since all the guerillas were hiding in their bunkers. I was still unable to see. While sitting there, I heard the sound of an old woman, with whom I was familiar. I asked her if she would sit next to me. I quietly informed her about the condition of my eyes, and asked her, “Ma, I cannot see. Do you think this is something permanent? If not, what should I do to recover my eyesight?” She asked me how many days I had been suffering from this. “We haven’t slept for four days ma, and my eyes have been like this for the past two days,” “Son, do not worry, there is a remedy to fix it,” she said.

I will check on you tomorrow,” she said. Before I even asked, she told me the reason for the temporary blindness in my eyes. “Son, you probably were exposed to smoke in the snow. Your eyes are infected. These potato and onion slices will kill all the germs piled up in your eyes. Do not worry! You will be fine!” she said.

We stayed in that village until I recovered from my temporary blindness and then set off again to reach our comrades at Dorsin. When we met them, they appeared very nervous. They had left their underground bunker due to the potential risk of a military siege.

They had been in a mobile position, changing their location weekly. I found the commander of the Dorşin force and asked him to give me all the details regarding this desertion incident and was angry with what I heard. This woman had, in fact, deserted the camp on January 2nd. However, we were not informed about the incident until January 22<sup>nd</sup>—twenty days after the incident! Even though the Dorsin force did not feel the need to seek help from us, they should have informed all the bunkers immediately, because this woman, that surrendered to

the security forces, might have informed them about the locations of all bunkers in the region. I could not understand how they could act in such an irresponsible manner. They could have caused the whole region to be doomed by the security forces, because of their negligence.

The region commander of Kulp (the comrade who was responsible for the winter camp in Dorsin) and the field commander, Hakkı, were getting along pretty well. Hakkı had directly appointed this comrade as the region commander, without consulting the other seniors in the Garzan State. Despite the fact that this new region commander was an older and experienced person, it was not appropriate for Hakkı to have appointed someone on his own. Consequently, I raised my objections to this assignment, told them that this region commander should not be staying in our region for two reasons. First, Hakkı had appointed him without complying with the long established organization rules. Second, I knew this comrade from the south, and even though he was experienced and excellent in ideological trainings, he was not good at planning guerilla missions. Despite my objections, the field commander brushed off my words, saying that this new fellow was going to work as a region commander. Normally, Hakkı was required to schedule a meeting to discuss this appointment with the seniors of the state administration.

I later learned that the field commander had told the new region commander, “Deniz has a soft spot for women, and he may be in relationship with someone in Muş. Let me know if you hear anything about it!”

As I mentioned, I stayed in Kulp (Dorsin) from January 29th to March 19th in order to learn the details of the desertion incident. I noticed that, during my stay there, the region commander was giving me the cold shoulder. He looked at me with suspicious eyes. Since he was an inferior to me, in no way should he have treated me like that. Besides, he was the primary liable for all the negative things happening then. The woman deserted the camp while

under his command. My two comrades had lost their lives just because he was not able to control one woman under his authority.

With whomever I talked, at Dorsin, I was informed that the deserter was not someone who would normally desert us and surrender to Turkish security forces. Therefore, I gave this region commander a very hard time. “Why did not you pay attention to the problems of this women guerilla? She was not someone who would readily desert us, and even though she deserted, she would not surrender herself to the security forces. Her father was killed by the security forces in 1993! There is something else going on, of which we are not aware.” The homicide was recorded as an “unsolved murder,” which was very common during 1990s.

We carried out a more detailed research and found out that the deserter had not surrendered herself to the Turkish security forces. She was caught by them in the city of Batman. Later, findings indicated that, in fact, the region commander had a part in her desertion. That is why he was cold towards me. He was trying to create a different agenda to make others forget about his own mistake in the desertion incident.

In Dorşin camp, two other senior commanders were present when this incident occurred—a woman PKK headquarters committee member and a woman who was state guerilla commander of the women in Garzan. When I talked with them, I discovered that everyone was annoyed with the state guerilla commander. The guerillas were not satisfied with his style, attitude, behavior, or his approach to them. This made me angry. “If you people already knew that this person was incapable of being a leader, why did not you inform headquarters so that he could have been discharged from his duty?” The women’s state commander replied, “Comrade Deniz, we thought we could discharge him after consulting with all the seniors in the state, during the spring. We simply wanted to wait until we met with you!” I got even more furious

and turned at the headquarters committee member, replying, “It is true, that she was not authorized to discharge someone without consulting the rest of the state administration! Nevertheless, you were accorded such authority! You are a member of the headquarters executive council and could have discharged the region commander with a few words!” She said again, that she had decided to wait until I reached Dorsin. Nonsense!

### **BACK TO HOME**

We stayed in Dorsin until the snow melted, but it was still cold. We could lose other comrades if we had traveled in that weather. I had also decided that there was no need to bring the Dorsin force back to Mus, since the security forces had not carried out any operation in such a long time. It was appeared clear that the deserter had not provided them with any information regarding the camp locations. I think it was March 19th, when I out for Mus. I left behind those two comrades, who traveled with me to Dorsin, in case the Dorsin force needed extra manpower against a potential military attack.

When I reached the camp in Muş, I was told that the comrades had executed one of the guerillas among them. The region commander had decided to execute him without notifying anyone. Since they had made such a decision without first informing me, I asked the region commander to give me a written report explaining his reasoning. I said to him, “How could you decide such a decision by yourself? You could have waited for my return or reached out to the field commander, before carrying out that execution! You are, no doubt, in trouble!”

He said to me, “Comrade Deniz! It was the middle of winter, and you were not here. We were not able to use the radio to inform you, since we could have been detected by the security forces. I could not keep him in prison until the end of winter, because he would have needed

constant guarding by the comrades. He might even have harmed one of us. I could not take the risk, so I decided to execute him right away!” I asked, “Did you have any solid evidence that he was an agent working for the security forces? On what grounds did you decide to execute him?” In response, he showed me letters that the prisoner had signed. During the investigation, he had admitted everything.

Others had suspected him as an infiltrated agent from his weird behaviors. I was told that he had been engaging in activities during the evenings that could compromise the safety of the camp. For example, we never went out with a torch at night. Nevertheless, he had been going out of the bunker with a torch in his hand, despite all the warnings given by his comrades. Also, he had been staying awake nights and frequently checking the sleeping quarters, as if he were doing reconnaissance for a mission. He often had given excuses to skip the training sessions. But, when he did attend the trainings, he had been asking questions that did not fit the agenda and had put his comrades on guard. For all those reasons, the comrades had naturally been suspicious of him. So, after a short meeting, all of them decided to put him under immediate investigation. They turned on the heat until he the truth came out. He had confessed that he was an agent working for the security forces, not the military, but with the police force. He had been tasked with killing a high-ranked guerilla and capturing all the codes on him or her and then delivering them to the police.

This man was from Diyarbakır-Bağlar, and, according to his written report, the police had threatened him into doing what he had planned. He had been mixed up in illegal business; probably drug dealing or smuggling. The police had caught him and kept him in the jail for a few days until he was exhausted. Then they threatened him. “You will either help us or spend the rest of your life in prison.” He had confessed everything in his signed report: “The security



forces threatened me and my family members, because of the illegal business I carried out in the past. I had no other option but to go along with their request.”

The comrades asked him why he had specifically chosen our camp field in which to carry out his plans. They asked why he had not gone to another region, instead of ours. He replied, “I was initially staying near the state guerilla commander of Garzan, and he was seriously injured in one of the clashes with the security forces. I was then assigned to two other posts. During my assignments there, I frequently heard the name of Comrade Deniz. Therefore, I figured that he must be someone of importance in the organization. That is why I chose to kill him. If I killed such an important figure within the party, I thought I could get in good graces with the police department and could pay my debt to them, and they would probably let me alone.”

He had even planned on how to kill me. He said that he was going to be my close protection guard and then shoot me as we traveled, for a meeting, from our region to another. I still find it hard to believe. I had stayed with this man for a month. He was highly sincere and sympathetic. I never thought that he could have been an agent.

### **TOWARDS THE END**

When I was headed for Mus, on March 19, this region commander had talked on the radio to the state commander. Since I was travelling by myself, I gave all my attention to security and was not closely following the radio talks. Some comrades later informed me about this conversation. The region commander had told the state commander that I was in love with a woman, but he had different women in mind. The state commander told the region commander, “It’s impossible! As far as I know, Deniz is in love with Asmin. Besides, the woman of whom

you speak, is a very close associate of Asmin. You must be mistaken! How could Deniz fall in love with that girl when he is in love with Asmin?”

Since the state commander did not believe those accusations, the region commander directly communicated with Hakki, a close friend of his. In response, Hakki, my old enemy, ordered the state commander to put me under investigation.

I still was not aware of those developments. However, the cold attitude of the region commander was a bee in my bonnet, and I sensed that something was not normal at Dorsin. The region commander’s behavior towards me was extremely weird. He did not even answer my questions, and not only he but also the other guerillas had put up a social barrier between themselves and me. It was as if I were carrying a contagious and fatal disease. There was definitely something going on, of which I was not yet aware.

While I was still in Mus, I asked the woman at Dorsin, who the PKK headquarters member would be to come and visit me and discuss something. When she arrived, I asked her, “Comrade, I felt that something was not normal there? Do you have any advance knowledge of anything of which I am not aware?” This woman began talking and told me the entire story. The region commander had told everyone some false things, regarding me. “Comrade, there is a situation, and the field commander ordered them to put you under an investigation,” she said, shocking me. I replied, “Comrade, it is totally disgusting to suggest that I am in such a relationship! I am in love with Asmin and most everyone knows about it. If the region commander had charged me with being love with Asmin, I would accept all charges. Even though they know the truth, why are they using this other woman’s name (Silan) in this false rumor? I just do not understand this!”

In response to my question, the headquarters member said to me, “Deniz, I am not a hundred percent sure. However, my guess would be that you are the butt of something! My best advice to you is to watch extra carefully your every single movement!” I thought she was right and asked, “Comrade, whom do you think is behind all these claims?” She said, “It certainly cannot be the region commander. He has neither the power nor the courage to challenge you. You, yourself, have the authority to discharge him or even to incarcerate him, without consulting the state commander. I think that idiot is just a tool in this scheme. Nevertheless, I do not know from whom he takes his orders to treat you in such a disrespectful manner.”

I was sure, then, that Hakki was going to arrest me. However, I was confident that, in the end, they could not charge me with anything, since, in fact, I did not have any relations with Silan. So, I was feeling rather comfortable about it. Even if they might have incarcerated me for a while, they would eventually have had to drop all the charges on me, since the relationship they claimed, was not true. I was even pleased that Hakki and his puppets would have to act the guilty goat, when the truth was known to everyone.

After breakfast, on the morning of April 7, 2010, the region commander of Muş, along with Hakki’s tool in this scheme, the Dorşin region commander, came up to me. The Muş region commander was a decent person and a very committed and respectful comrade to me. I was listening to a music channel when they arrived. My close protection guard was with me. The Mus region commander asked, “Comrade Deniz, can we have a talk with you, privately?” I said “Of course,” and asked my guard to step outside the room. The sneaky Dorşin region commander did not want to talk with me. He was just waiting for the Mus region commander to speak.

“Comrade, there is an issue that we need to discuss with you, but I honestly do not know how to begin,” he said. He was clearly having a difficult time in repeating those slanders to my face. I said, “Comrade! Do not feel guilty or disrespectful towards me. I already know everything. You will probably tell me that I am having a relationship with a woman, and so you will have to incarcerate me until the investigation committee reveals the truth.” They were both shocked that I was aware of what was going on. Without hesitation, I handed over to the Mus region commander my Glock brand gun, my money, and all the documents and codes that belonged to the organization. Then, I requested permission to let me speak to the woman who was the member of PKK headquarters committee. They agreed. She arrived within two hours. I asked the region commanders to leave, so that I could speak to her privately. When they left, I asked her, “Comrade, who requested or approved this arrest warrant? You can freely speak, since I have already been informed that I will be incarcerated. Please do not hide anything from me!”

She began to tell me everything that I did not know. “The field commander, Hakkı, is behind this scheme. Honestly, I do not know what happened between you two, but he is obsessed with you. He is full of hate against you, and he openly expresses his grudge at every opportunity. In one way or another, he will defame you!” I answered, “Comrade. I want to thank you for being honest with me. I have one last request of you. As you know, Hakkı is now going to gather an investigation committee in order to seek the truth. Those two region commanders are not authorized to be part of this committee, since their ranks are lower than mine. And they cannot be appointed as the head of the committee, because the head of the committee has to be a superior of mine. That leaves only one option. Since Hakkı cannot be on

the committee, you are the only one who can possibly lead the investigation. If you are asked, please accept this duty and reveal the truths, fairly and squarely.” She accepted my request.

### **BEING INCARCERATED**

An investigation committee was established within two days. I was incarcerated on the grounds that I was having a love affair with this girl named Silan. I was put into jail on April 7, 2010, and no one visited me for the first two days. I was all alone. On the third day, the members of the investigation committee, two region commanders, and the PKK headquarters member came into my cell. They did not bring an official hearing question draft, but the headquarters member verbally asked me to write down everything I knew about the claims on myself. She asked, “Did you, in fact, have such a relationship with Silan? If yes, how long have you been together? If not, then why do you think you are being accused of it? Please thoroughly explain anything you know.” I responded that I understood and would write everything explicitly.

A few days into my incarceration, the women I loved, Asmin, gave me a visit. Under normal circumstances, guerillas were not allowed to speak to incarcerated guerillas. Normally, if someone noticed a guerilla visiting an incarcerated comrade, that person would also be jailed for some time for acting against the rules of the organization. However, the guards that were on duty that night were all my old guerilla friends, who had worked under my authority for years. The night shift guard asked me what to do about Asmin, and I told him to let her in. Asmin came inside and said, “Deniz, tell me the truth. Is there a relationship between you and Silan!” I answered, “I swear on my honor and on my life that it is all just a lie! The reason I am being incarcerated, has nothing to do with Silan. I am stuck in the middle of a bigger scheme.

Someone is trying to end my career in the organization. It is mainly because I fearlessly criticized many of the misdemeanors committed by the seniors here, and they know very well that I will file charges with headquarters against them. That is why they want to defame me, before I complain about them. You know me, Asmin! I cannot turn my back to injustices, as the other commanders do, in order to protect their positions. I have always criticized even the smallest mistake, regardless of whether it was perpetrated by my superior or inferior. I have always warned the person ahead of time, no matter who he or she was. I think that is why I am being punished now. They want to teach me a lesson by incarcerating me. Do not worry. In one way or another, the truth will be known by everyone!” Asmin left, feeling relieved, after my talk to her.

I was kept in the jail longer than I thought. It had been almost six days, and the committee was meeting regularly and asking me to talk about past incidents, which were not even related to my present incarceration. I was now in serious danger since I was being tried and accused for different occurrences—such as Deniz, who had not killed the rangers who martyred our comrades, or, Deniz did not kill the man who stole the tax revenues of the organization. The committee began to ask me questions on incidents that had occurred in the past.

The guerillas in the campground were also misinformed about me. I had been introduced to everyone as a traitor—as an agent of the government. Everyone was gossiping about me and field commander Hakkı was joining the trials, via radio, and made false statements about me, such as, “Deniz is weak in terms of guerilla fighting. He always objected to decisions made at the Supreme Guerilla Conference meetings, and he even occasionally objected to the decisions made by headquarters.” Hakkı openly accused me of being an agent in front of everyone.

## SUICIDE

It was April 13th, 2010 when I heard a gunshot while in my cell. Asmin had been furious when she heard the claims made about me. During one of the meetings, which had gathered to discuss the issues related to my trial, she had told everyone, “You should have, at least, some moral values. This commander was one of the seniors, in one of the top administrative positions of the Garzan State, until yesterday. We’ve gathered, perhaps a hundred times before to discuss the issues in our units. I do not remember anyone criticizing Comrade Deniz about the issues for which we are criticizing him now. What in the world were you thinking back then? Why did not you raise those concerns before? Now, you’ve incarcerated him claiming that he is in a love affair with Silan. Let’s assume that it is true. Why do not you try him on that accusation? Why do you bring up all those past incidents that he had never been accused of before? Be decent and try him on the charge for which you incarcerated him! If you were concerned about those past incidents, why did not anyone say something about them until now?” She had gotten right in everyone’s face, as she yelled.

After Asmin had finished, one of the women guerillas irritated her by saying, “Are you stupid, Asmin? Do not you see what he has done to you? This man has been cheating on you, with your best friend Silan! One of the comrades even saw them while they were kissing. I do not understand why you are defending him!” Just then, Silan had intervened and told Asmin that it was all nothing but lies.

Asmin had been so upset with the words she had heard, that she stood up and said, “Whatever you are saying is just a lie! The truth will be revealed eventually. I do not understand what kind of degenerates you are, and I cannot stay in the same place with you, even for one more day.” She then left the meeting hall, and as soon as she left the field, she put her

gun under her chin, and pulled the trigger. That had been the gunshot sound I heard. She died immediately.

Since I was still in my cell, I did not know what had happened. I only heard the gunshot. I immediately asked the guerilla guarding my cell, “Comrade, what happened? From where did that gunshot come?” I did not know why, but my heart had filled with horror, and I felt that something very bad had happened. The guerilla told me that he did not know what had happened, either. Then I heard lamenting and crying. Believe me, right then I felt that something had happened to Asmin, but I was helpless. In the meantime, one of the women guerillas came to my cell and began to scream at us, “It all happened because of you, Deniz!”

A chill ran down on my back, and I lost my bearings. I pleaded with the guard to let me out immediately, and, when he did, I started to shout, “What did you do to Asmin? Why did she commit suicide?” She was not someone to commit suicide easily. She had a strong character. In addition to many of her relatives, Asmin’s sister was also fighting as a guerilla in the organization. Asmin was not someone to give up on life so easily. Then, one of my older guerillas told me what had happened in that meeting. Despite the fact that I was incarcerated, guerillas from my unit would visit me daily and inform me about all that was discussed, regarding my situation.

Asmin had written a note before she committed suicide, but I was not allowed to read it. No matter how much I requested, I was not given permission to read that note. I asked to read it just once, but they would not let me. To this day, I wonder what was written in that note. It was probably something about me. Emotionally, I was devastated. In fact, if I had had a weapon in my hand, I would also have committed suicide. Life was meaningless to me right then. One of



our guards told that they had wrapped Asmin's body in a blanket and buried her in a place on the west side of the camp. It was very tough to lose someone you loved.

The state commander had contacted the comrades, via the radio, and said, "If Asmin committed suicide, then Deniz might also want to kill himself. They deeply loved each other, so be cautious." Upon this order, beginning on April 14, I was incarcerated with both hands and ankles secured during the nights and hands tied during the daytimes. Prior to that day, I was allowed to use my personal items in my cell; however, now everything was taken from my cell.

It was tough for me. After a few days, I was began being beaten regularly by some of the guerillas but not those from Garzan. I remember their faces well. Guerillas from Dersim, Cudi, and Erbil forces beat me several times in my cell, while my hands and ankles were tied. Three of my teeth were broken during those beatings. There was a guerilla, who had worked under me for a long time, by the name of Baran. One night, while I was being beaten by those bastards, he showed up in the cell and said to them, "You're not even from the Garzan State. Who the hell do you think you are, to have the right to beat him?" Baran then pulled out his gun and pointed it towards one of the guys beating me when he replied in a sarcastic manner. He then said, "I swear to God, I will kill you all if you ever come to this cell again."

On the afternoon of May 1st, I was informed that the field commander of the Amed State women's guerilla force would be the head of the investigation committee from then on in place of the PKK headquarters member. Similar to the Dorsin region commander, she was a close associate of Hakki, the field commander. She would do whatever Hakki told her to do.

Hakki had sent out a bunch of questions, drafted by him, to the investigation committee. As soon as the PKK headquarters member read the questions, she had said, "I cannot let you try Deniz on these questions. You incarcerated him, arguing that he was having an affair with Silan.

However, many of the questions in this draft have nothing to do with that. I do not think we can find justice here. I am resigning my duty in this commission.”

These two region commanders brought me the draft, prepared by Hakkı. There were 22 questions in the draft and only three of them were related to my so-called affair with Silan. The remaining questions were about me and our leader, Apo. They had gone too far. I was being accused of being disrespectful to our leader. As soon as I saw the draft, I figured out that Hakkı was not trying to discharge me from my position. It was even worse. He was trying to sentence me with capital punishment. Besides, I did not know how they convinced Silan, but she had admitted that she, in fact, had an affair with me. She was probably forced, by some means, to make that false statement.

On May 2, 2010, my trial was scheduled to begin, with the new committee head from Amed. I knew the rules of the organization very well. I would not be sentenced to death unless they could provide solid evidence that I was an agent, as they claimed. However, there was one other thing with which I needed to be extra careful. Hakkı and his supporters would try to get on my nerves, by beatings and lying, so that I would attempt to run away. They would have the right to kill me if I fled. I knew that a couple comrades had been killed in the past, using this tactic.

For example, Topal Nasır (Faruk Bozkurt) was executed in that way. He was not getting along well with Osman Öcalan. He was a decent and hardworking guerilla, similar to myself. He would explicitly criticize the mistakes made by others during the meetings and conferences. I remember him saying, “I do not have any problem with the organization. If my seniors ordered me, I would wait at the entrance of this meeting hall, like a dog, for ten years. However, I do not accept the authority of Ferhat (Osman Öcalan). I cannot be in the same place with him; even for

two days. I do not recognize him as my superior.” Because of being honest and blunt, Topal Nasir was put into a scheme, very similar to the one I was experiencing. While he was incarcerated, the guerillas were cautioned with the false information that the security forces would come and rescue him from us. He was executed in 1999 on the grounds that he was against the rules established by Apo, who would never have approved such an execution if he were not incarcerated at that time.

Similar to Topal Nasir, I would have been pushed to flee, because of the beatings, and then they would kill me while running away. No one could be held responsible for killing a deserter, especially if the deserter were a commander. Headquarters would be informed that, “Deniz was fleeing, and we killed him to prevent him from surrendering to security forces to share our top-secret information with them.” In this way, Hakki and his supporters, would evade responsibility. Because of this knowledge, I had to be extra-careful and I did not cry out, no matter what they did to me.

### **THE TRIAL**

They fiddled with my comfort a lot during my incarceration. Under normal conditions, an incarcerated or jailed commander would be treated by someone of the same level. But Hakki even sent newbie guerillas, who had joined us toward the end of 2009, to tie my hands and feet. Can you imagine how I was insulted? I had served the organization longer than the age of the guerillas who were now beating me and tying me up during nights. That was extremely pejorative for someone of my rank. Despite all these cruel attacks on me, I kept myself calm. I knew that Hakki and his supporters’ real intent was to provoke me to do something stupid, so that they could kill me before the trial.

Believe me, I would have run away from the prison, from the first day of my incarceration. However, all I wanted was to wait for the trial to start. I wanted to know everything. What was their purpose? Why were they pushing me so strongly? Who were they blaming? headquarters, Hakki, or me? I had already prepared my written report for the questions I was given before.

I was set in front of everyone at the investigation on May 2, 2010. I was to read my answers loudly and then the committee was going to decide whether I would be acquitted or found guilty. I was just about to read my defense when this new committee head stopped me and said, “Your report will not be read. There is no need for that. We all know what happened. We, the investigation committee members will inform the attendants about your case and they will then offer their thoughts, to help us reach a verdict.” Can you believe that? I was being tried and not even given the right for self-defense. I was shocked. I had never heard of something like that happening in the organization. I could not raise any objection. Therefore, I just kept quiet.

The head of the committee began to inform the attendants, using a microphone. She spoke for approximately an hour. I discovered that everything she mentioned in her speech were the slanders made by Hakki. “Why did you talk to the rangers? Why did not you kill that man? Do you want to take a revenge for Apo? Apo values women guerillas very much, but you used women for your sexual purposes. Do you work for the security forces? Why have not you carried out any missions during the past three years? Why do not you kill any police or soldiers?” I was asked to respond to these asinine questions. I could not believe what I was being told. According to their claims, I had had love affairs with seven different women guerillas.

As soon as she finished with her speech, she turned to the attendants and asked about their opinions of me. One of the comrades (and older one) stood up and said, “Comrade, you have read this and you have informed us, but let’s give him a right to defend himself before we provide you with our opinions. Let’s learn what he wants to say in response to your claims. Let us hear directly from Deniz whether those claims are true or false.” Being encouraged by this comrade, two other comrades asked for the floor, and they both said, “This trial is seriously malfunctioned. You cannot ask us to make comments before hearing how the accused would respond to your claims. What you are doing is against the rules of the organization!” Being exposed to these pressures, the investigation committee allowed me to defend myself, though against their will.

I was honest in answering all the questions and claims made against me. I said to them all, “Comrades! I was in love with only two women in this organization. One of them was Sevin and the other one was Asmin. I loved those two women, and I do not deny it. Additionally, I never hid these relations from anyone. Even commanders from PKK headquarters knew about them.” I turned and looked at the faces of the investigation committee and said to them, “My feelings towards Asmin was known, both by the field commander Hakkı, and the state commander, as well as the other region commanders. Despite this, none of you said that because we had such a relationship that we should not be assigned to work at the same field. If you were concerned about this relationship, you could easily have assigned one of us to Garzan and the other to Amed. However, you did not do that when I complained about Asmin’s assignment to my region. By the way, where did you find the names of these other five women shown on the list? I do not even know them. Either they loved me unconditionally in a platonic

way, or this is just another slander of yours! As a result, I do not accept any of the claims on your investigation files, regarding my relations with women!”

Then I began to talk about the other claims made on me. “You have just accused me of meeting with the village protection guards without the knowledge of headquarters. You cannot just make a claim and expect the people believe it. If this claim of yours is, in fact, true, show proof to everyone here. Now, tell us the exact date and hour that I met with the rangers. I swear that I will accept all the charges if you can provide the attendants with even a small bit of proof. Look! I have worked for this organization for almost 20 years. I am not stupid! I can provide you with the exact days, hours, and locations on which I met with these rangers. On top of that, I can provide you with the names, from the organization, who were with me during those visits! I never met with these rangers alone. You are also accusing me of not executing those three rangers, even though they martyred one of our comrades. This claim, with which you are charging me, does not fit the culture and ethical values of our organization. On one hand, you start a peace negotiation with the rangers, and, on the other, you will kill their leaders. In fact, I was given an order from headquarters commander not to kill Abdülhamit, the head ranger. Until today, I have never acted according to my own decisions, for works to be carried out in the name of the organization. If I had any, I never hid them from the organization.”

As I mentioned earlier, the execution decision for these three rangers was cancelled later by headquarters. Despite this, field commander Hakki had ordered his own guerilla force to kill these rangers in order to seek revenge. I had said to him, “Comrade, listen to me carefully! You are not acting professionally! What you are doing is against the policies of the organization, and you will defame all of us. We are not backstabbers! We already discussed the peace terms with them! Call your guerillas back here and stop them before carrying out this mission.”

While I was dealing with this problem back then, another shocking news had arrived to me. It was in 2009. There was a thermal power plant in our region. We visited this plant each year and collected our taxes. In 2009, I was told that someone visited this plant and collected the taxes in the name of PKK, even though he was not one of us. Because of this, field commander Hakki contacted me to arrest this man and then kill him.

I found out the name of this person and then contacted to him, using our civilian representatives working in the cities. Twice, I told this person to visit us at a location in the countryside, where we would save ourselves, if the security forces noticed our meeting. Nevertheless, this man was clever, and, in both visits, he came to the meeting point with a large group of his relatives. He never came alone, so that we could have him pay back what he had taken from us. I could not keep him and send the rest of the crowd away, because we were going to execute him if he were found guilty. Since he showed up with his relatives, we could not carry out our killing mission. During his second visit, I told him to go home and then return next week, alone! The man left and never came back. He fled when he understood that he was going to be put under investigation. The tax amount he had collected, using our names, was not very large. We, as an organization would annually collect five million dollars from this group, whereas he had collected only 120,000 Turkish Liras. Completely stupid!

Then I heard on the news that he had been incarcerated in January 2010 for being a member of KCK. Since he was arrested by the police, there was no way I could carry out my assassination mission. Now, go tell this to Hakki.

Since I did not kill the man who had collected our taxes and also not killed those three rangers who martyred one of our comrades, Hakki had been very upset with me. During the

trial, he brought up those two issues in front of everyone and said to me, “You ignore the orders of your superiors; you act like a rebel!”

Another question that I faced during the trial, was my objection to two decisions made at the Supreme Guerilla Conference. I had never worked behind the scenes as many of the seniors had. I had never provoked others against the party by meeting secretly with them. I had always openly stated my objections during the conference. In that specific case, my suggestions were denied by the majority. I had explained my concerns to them, but the majority disagreed with me. As a result, I respected their decisions.

During the trial, I turned to the guerillas who had worked with me in the past and asked them, “Comrades. Did not I tell you that, even though I disagreed, we had to act according to the decisions of the majority!” They all loudly replied that, “You are telling the truth Deniz! We all witnessed that!”

I answered all of their questions, one by one, but, they kept asking questions, looking to find something for which they could accuse me!

Finally, I was asked about something, which occurred in 2009. I think I mentioned it before. During 2009, I was carrying a digital camera. We had heard on the news that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (the current President of Turkey) was going to visit the city of Van to deliver a speech during an opening ceremony, so I gave my camera to one of the civilian PKK members and said to him, “Comrade, go to this ceremony and take as many pictures as you can. I especially want to see the people sitting in the VIP seats, so focus on that area. Take as many pictures as possible, regarding the protection detail.” I was curious to learn how the prime minister was protected.



Similar to a journalist, this militant was able to take pictures of all VIP guests from a very close distance. He took pictures of where the prime minister, ministers, governor and other people at the protocol stage sat, and how they were protected by the close protection guards. Studying these pictures, I was able to figure out how many guards were on duty, how they were positioned, the position of the civilian police officers, the locations and numbers of jammers, and all the other details regarding their security precautions. The organization has never targeted politicians or high-level bureaucrats such as governors. Nevertheless, it did not mean that the organization did not carry out any reconnaissance or intelligence activities concerning them. That kind of reconnaissance would be conducted on a regular basic and systematic manner, in case it would be necessary to carry out a mission against those two targets. However, the organization was very strict about not targeting the politicians.

I puzzled for hours over those pictures taken by my comrade, and reached a simple conclusion. If we really wanted, the prime minister and the other VIP guests could be easily killed in Turkey.

As luck would have it, those pictures I had collected as a part of reconnaissance activities had put me into serious trouble during the trial. I was asked questions like, “Why did you take so many pictures of Erdogan? Are you a fan of his? Do you work for the state? Are you an agent? Do you support the AKP? Why have you been keeping so many pictures of this man in your camera?” Those were such stupid questions!

I replied, “I carried out reconnaissance for a potential future mission that we could carry out against the elected officials. Tell me if you know for sure the AKP is going to keep its promises given at Oslo! What are we going to do if they do not? Nothing is certain, but the

unforeseen! That is why I kept those pictures—in case we needed to plan a guerilla mission in the future.” The investigation committee members were not satisfied with my answer.

That day, I successfully argued my way out of the falsehoods. Despite the fact that the committee members were prejudiced towards me, the guerilla attendants of the trial took a stand with me, and when the committee noticed that, they began to repeat the questions, which I had already answered, “Why did not you execute the person who collected taxes on behalf of the organization from the thermal plant? Who was your contact from the Turkish security forces? Were there any other people, like yourself, who infiltrated us?”

At that moment, I knew that I was not going to find justice there. Regardless of my answers, the committee had already made their decision about me. No matter how strong was my defense, they were not going to release or acquit me. In fact, let alone releasing me, they were trying to find a way to execute me by repeatedly asking those questions regarding whether I was an agent for the Turkish government.

The trial lasted for two days. The committee informed everyone that they were able to reach a verdict on the evening of May 4th. Before the decision was declared to me, I asked for the floor, in order to state my last words regarding my defense. As I said, this committee was composed of people appointed by Hakki. No one could expect them to be objective in their decision. In front of all the attendants, I said, “I do not accept the legitimacy of this investigation committee. You were all appointed by the person who hates me. Therefore, I now request for you all to retry me with a new committee, composed of unbiased members. I personally believe that the state commanders of Amed and Garzan would be ideal candidates for this job. I would like them to examine all the lies said about me, my defense proposal, and also the opinions of the attendants of this trial and then reach a verdict.”

Before I finished my words, I turned back and looked into the face of the president of the investigation committee, “I do not believe the verdict you reached is unbiased. You do not even have firsthand knowledge of all these incidents for which you tried me. When all those things happened, you were not even in Turkey. You were in the south, in Iraq. You are here simply to fulfill the wishes of Hakki!” She suddenly blushed.

As I said, I would be immediately acquitted if either Amed or Garzan state commanders would serve on this committee, because they both had the knowledge of my activities in the region including where, when, and with whom I met with those rangers. I would be exculpated. The trial attendees were in full agreement with my suggestion, and because of the pressure coming from them, the committee had to adjourn in order to discuss my request in private.

During the break, one of my older guerillas visited me and said, “Comrade Deniz, this is between you and me but be very careful now. Hakki has already sanctioned you to execution. No matter what you do or whomever serves on your trial, you will be seriously harmed. Hakki even ordered us to kill you if you attempt to flee. They will kill you even for a shadow of mistake!”

Why did this man hate me so strongly? Why did he want to annihilate me? I had filed complaints about him to headquarters, and we had been rude towards each other, but none of these incidents would necessarily require him to have a desire to kill me. He could easily assign me to a different post, away from him.

Approximately an hour later, the investigation committee gathered again and informed everyone about that I was to be retried, with a new committee, composed of new members. Apparently, they feared a potential pressure that might come from the attendees. Nevertheless, I was also informed that neither the Amed nor the Garzan state commander would be allowed to

serve on my trial committee. Instead, three guerillas from the camp in which I was incarcerated, were going to serve on the committee. Everything was to begin again, and I was to remain arrested in the meantime.

I was pissed off with their verdict, because the current committee was going to decide who should serve on the new committee. Hakki could easily assign another three of his supporters and obtain a guilty verdict. I knew for sure then that I was going to get me away from there, one way or another. Before the attendants left, I asked for a stand and said, "I have a message for you committee members. First, as long as you three will decide who shall serve on the new committee, I will be found guilty no matter what I say. So, do not bother yourself with establishing a new committee. I know you will appoint prejudiced people like yourselves! Second, I want to inform all of you that I will hurt you when the time comes!" No one was expecting me to speak like that. The committee members were all dazed. One of them even asked me if I were threatening them. I said, "Take it as you like! I said what I said."

I had always been loyal to the organization's struggle for the well-being of the Kurds. Everyone who was acquainted with me knew that very well. I looked at the faces of the people on the committee and said, "I would even have sacrificed myself for Asmin. Nevertheless, since this organization caused to her to take her own life unjustly, I can now even stand against this organization and secure revenge for her! Whether you assign your own men or unbiased guerillas to my trial committee, you will shed light on Asmin's suicide incident! Those who played a part in it will suffer the consequences! I have fought among you for almost 20 years. I have fulfilled all the duties that I was assigned. However, if necessary, I will make no bones about fighting against you all to get revenge for Asmin! You already know whom I will kill for that!" I said, as I flung all these statements right in their faces!

The head of the investigation committee got really upset with my words. She ordered her close protection guards to tie my hands and feet. Four guerillas suddenly jumped on me. They dragged me to the cell where they were keeping me as their captive.

I was so confused. I would never harm the organization for which I had worked for so many years. Besides, how could I harm the guerillas that I trained and regarded as my brothers and sons? Nevertheless, I could not help myself from thinking about how to kill Hakkı. Three creeps were behind this entire scheme. Hakkı was leading the region commander of Dorşin and the field commander of Amed, who was in charge of the women guerillas. These three had to be killed as revenge for Asmin's death. Of course, there were some other ass kissers, but they were not as important as the first three.

Even though I was released after the second trial, I would not be held in this region anymore. The organization would probably assign me to a camp located in the south—in Iraq or in Syria. In that case, I would never be able to find those three bloody-minded creeps. Besides, I already had a bad reputation, even though all those claims were nothing but lies. I was tried in front of my own soldiers and I lost face because those lies. Therefore, even though I would be assigned to the south, everyone was going to gossip about me. I had no option but to leave my beloved organization.

I had a strong character. When I said no to something, I would never do it. Similarly, when I promised to do something, I would do it even at the expense of my life. I would always stick to my guns. For the sake of the Kurds in Turkey and the Middle East, I had given my youth and sacrificed the years that I would have had the opportunity to raise a family, work in a stable job, and live in comfort. Nevertheless, I will never forget those two women, Asmin, who was pushed into suicide and Silan, who fell in disrepute because of those three evil people. As I had

fought for my people, the Kurds, for 18 years, without even blinking an eye, I would fight for the woman I loved for the rest of my life. That innocent Asmin committed suicide by shooting herself in the head only 30 meters away from me. Silan, who was placed into this scheme, was kept in her tent, with both in the hands and feet tied, even though she had nothing to do with anything! I was depressed, demoralized, and tired. I said to myself, “Fuck this shit!” Right then, I decided that I could not be part of this organization any longer, when people like Hakki were highly valued and respected. I stomped with rage.

On the evening of May 4th, only one guard was assigned to watch in front of my tent for the night shift of 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. He was one of the newbies. He asked me, “Comrade Deniz, how will this investigation end? When will they set you free so that you can be our commander again?” I looked in his eyes. He appeared to be a decent guy. I said, “You are oblivious of what is really happening here, young comrade. Nothing is really what it seems to be. In this scheme, I am just a tool to disguise the dirty businesses of some others. During this meeting, has anyone asked a question regarding the losses Hakki caused during the past year? No! Has there been any discussion about who was supposed to be held responsible for the desertion incident and the subsequent losses occurred during that winter? No! If all those losses were questioned, would not the region commander be in the prison now? Would not all the guerillas under his authority be put under investigation? Can you now see the bigger picture? Thanks to the slander about me, all these incidents were deleted from discussion.

**PART II.3 PRISON AND BEYOND**

## CHAPTER 21

### LEAVING THE PKK

It was five minutes before nine o'clock that same night. The new night shift guard was supposed to take over his duty soon. I had already made up my mind. I would not stay among these people any longer. My hands and feet were still tied. The young guard with whom I had chatted earlier in the night left the tent to wake up the next guard. In the meantime, I was pretending to be asleep. I first got rid of the ropes on my feet. However, my hands were tied extremely tight. No matter how hard I tried, I could not untie my hands. It was pitch dark. No one could see beyond the end of his nose. It was also raining heavily—a perfect opportunity for me to flee the camp area. Then, something unimaginable came right on top the rain and the pitch dark. I was familiar with the new night shift guard. He had problems with his eyes. He was having a hard time seeing objects at night. I could not arrange this scenario, even if I tried.

The guard was walking back and forth around the tent. As soon as he walked by, I put on my shoes, stood up, and then started to run away in the opposite direction from him. As I mentioned, it was pitch black. I could not see anything. Besides, it was very hard to run without falling with my hands tied. While moving away from the campground, I stumbled on a small piece of rock and fell down. The guard heard the noise and began to shout, “Who is there?” I kept my silence. He shouted again, asking who was there. I immediately sat down where I fell. I knew how the guerillas were trained on these kinds of situations. The guard was to start firing toward me, if there was no answer to his call after the third time. That was exactly what happened. He shouted for the third time and then started to rake the field with his gunfire.

Due to the noise of gunshots, everyone woke up. I was still hiding right next to the campground in the area where I had fallen down. I knew in which direction they would move to



search for me. Therefore, I hid in a place where they would never look for me. All the guerillas in the camp were out searching for me. With torches in their hands, they were looking high and low to find me. Only a couple were left in the camp to protect the stuff left behind. In the meantime, I got rid of the ropes tied on my hands. I waited still at the same spot until 12:00 a.m. While they were searching for me all over, I was so close to them that I was even able to listen to their talking.

I was soaked to the skin from the rain. The guerillas returned to the campground around 12:30 a.m. and went back to their sleeping quarters. They thought that I was already too far away. Around 1:30 a.m., I stood up and started to walk away from the campground quietly and slowly. I decided to go to Amed, Kulp.

You may wonder if I was nervous while running away. Definitely not! I had been in this organization for years. I already knew how they would search and look for me. That is why I was extremely self-confident while fleeing. In a way, I followed a negative logic. I mean I did nothing that would normally be done while searching for someone who deserted us. I kept myself away from the places they might patrol and search for me.

### **SURRENDERING MYSELF TO THE SECURITY FORCES**

I was heading towards the thermal power plant that I had mentioned earlier by following the vehicle road. It was a road full of hairpin turns. For a moment, I felt that someone was approaching towards me, from one of the hairpins. To my surprise, two guerillas had set an ambush at one of the turns in order to shoot anyone that might walk towards them. They were just leaving their positions. I was lucky. They probably wanted to be back in the camp before sunrise. I immediately threw myself to the other side of the road before they saw me. I waited

there until those two comrades passed by me and disappeared. Then, I continued on my trip, but this time even more carefully.

I knew some workers at the plant were in close relationship with the security forces. Therefore, I needed to go there to find one who could possibly connect me with a soldier. However, there was a big problem. The perimeter of the plant was being guarded by village protection guards. They would immediately notify the organization as soon as they saw me surrendering myself to the security forces. Therefore, I decided to wait far away from the plant for a vehicle to pass by. I was fortunate. Soon, I saw a truck driving towards the plant. I stopped it. The driver was shocked to see a guerilla at that time of the day. He said, "Comrade, what are you doing here?" I said, "Take me inside the plant construction site. I cannot just walk in because there are rangers around." I was finally secure. He drove me inside the site. I asked the driver if he had any contact information from the military post close to the plant. He said, "Yes, I do!" I asked him whose phone number he had. He said, "Comrade, I have the mobile phone number of the company commander!" I said, "Great, please dial the number and hand the phone over to me." I then talked directly with the Turkish company commander and said to him, "Come to this place now. It has to be only you and your superior, the squadron leader. I do not want anyone else!"

The military commander initially accepted my offer but then began to ask me questions, such as who was I, and why did I want to talk to them. I guess he thought that it was an ambush trap. He was shocked when I said to him that I was Deniz, from the Garzan State. He said, "Are you being honest with me? Can I really believe what you said?" I answered, "Well, believe me or not, it is your call! I will be at the meeting point at the scheduled time." I had described a meeting spot, which would make it clear that I could not lay an ambush in such a flat area, even I

actually wanted. Besides, one could easily see the whole area, even from a half km distance. Therefore, the military officials even had a chance to retreat if they suspected anything.

Indeed, they all came to the meeting point at the scheduled time. There were the three—the company commander, the squadron commander, and the driver. The presence of the driver was not a big deal. I just did not want any ranger, who could possibly be in connection with the organization, to be there. I surrendered myself to them right there. My career with the organization ended in that way.

I had better alternatives in front of me rather than surrendering myself. I could easily have gone to the south—to Iraq or Syria—and live there until the end of my life. I also could have gone to Europe. I had connections that could guide me until I reached Germany or France. However, I was so blinded with the desire for Asmin's revenge.

We are in 2015. It has been almost six years, and I still could not forget Asmin. I always think of her before going to sleep at night. I had thought that, if I surrendered myself to the security forces, I could be saved from obsession with Hakkı, who not only pushed Asmin to kill herself but had also blamed me for being an agent for the security force, despite my successful career in the organization.

I do not want to hold the organization responsible, as a whole, for whatever I was exposed to back then. All in my life, I have never dished on someone. If I told you that all those things occurred because of the general characteristics, culture, morals, and ethics of the organization, it would be a complete lie. It would not be right. Nevertheless, just as you have corrupt politicians in your government affairs, we also had corrupt guerillas who would do most anything for their own gain.

## **CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE SOLDIERS AND THE POLICE**

After surrendering myself to the security forces, I was transported to a gendarme military unit. Gendarme counterterrorism units from the cities of Batman, Siirt, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, and Muş soon came to see me, where I was being held. They were not allowed to talk to me as a group. Instead, the units from each of the cities visited my cell, one by one, and asked questions. In the meantime, the Turkish National Police terror teams also arrived to the gendarme post. It was very weird. The gendarme commander did not let the police officers talk with me, let alone ask questions of me. The police officers were not even allowed to listen to my conversations with the others. I told the gendarme commander, “Look, they came from Diyarbakır police department. They may have some questions, too. Give them some time so that they can talk with me, also.” The gendarme commander rejected my offer. The police officers were really offended, as they were not allowed to talk or listen.

At that moment, I realized that, similar to the structural and hierarchical problems existent among the different units within the organization, the Turkish police and the gendarme units also had similar problems between one other. These security forces were not cooperating on such a sensitive subject as fighting against their common enemy. The gendarme did not let the police ask me even a single question, while I was held in the gendarme post. Some soldiers came to talk to me when I was later held at the police department. In a similar way, the police did not let the soldiers to talk with me. Even more amazing was when I told things at gendarme post, the gendarme commanders asked me not to give that information to the police. Again, in a similar fashion, when I was interviewed at the police department, the police directors asked me not to share any of the information with the gendarme later. This was such an awkward situation for me.

Like the jealousy among the police and the gendarme, there was even a competition among the different gendarme units. The gendarme units that arrived from different cities were not allowed to listen to each other's interview sessions with me. Only the gendarme commander of Kulp and a senior commander from a Diyarbakır military unit were present in each of the sessions. Nevertheless, the counterterrorism teams from other area visited me one by one. The Muş counterterrorism unit visited me asked the questions they had for me and then left the post. After them, the Bitlis counter-terrorism unit came into the room I where was being held.

Oddly enough, neither the police officers nor the gendarme counter-terrorism teams asked me any clearly prepared question. They did not even know investigation techniques. I was shocked that people at those levels were employed in those units. They were clearly illiterate concerning the PKK. I am not even sure if they were properly trained to work at counter-terrorism units. For example, none of them asked me one question about what would the organization do in the forthcoming period? Where would we attack the next? What were our plans for the summer? Where did we acquire the weapons and ammos for the fight? How was this equipment being transported to the organization? Whom were the intermediaries providing these things? What were the possible missions to be used in the future, or, what tactics would we mostly use when carrying out those missions? None of them, even slightly, put a finger on those issues. Actually, there was a fellow from the Sason gendarme counterterrorism unit that had asked a couple of questions about our potential future missions.

All they were interested in was to learn the details about incidents that had occurred in the past. They were consumed with the past! They often asked me who had planned and carried out a specific mission in their jurisdiction of authority. I was so pissed off with their mentality. Those missions were already planned and accomplished. What benefit would it provide to find

out the persons who executed them? Move on! Focus on what could happen in the future.

Without exception, both the police officers and the gendarme units were all the same. They all thought to get into their superiors good graces by shedding light on the past missions carried out by the PKK. Interestingly, preventing missions from being carried out were not considered by them as a success. Why? Because it would not make the news. It would not publicize their success. I even thought, in my mind, that if the members of the enemy forces were so unqualified, then we as an organization were also not so successful, since we could not beat such a group of awkward people for long.

I even had a quarrel with the squadron commander of Muş's counterterrorism team. I do not remember his name, but he was someone with grey hair. He opened a file in front of me. I saw the pictures of civilian Kurdish peasants. He started to show me the pictures one by one and asked, "Has this peasant ever helped you? Is this peasant in connection with the organization?" I looked at the pictures. They were peasants, generally around the age of 70 or 80 years. Never mind helping us, they were probably unable to walk without the help of a cane. I was confused and upset. I looked at the pictures several times to make sure that I was not mistaken, but it was true. They were all very old peasants. After I was sure, I looked this squadron commander in the eye and said, "Are you kidding me? Those people could not even help themselves. How could you expect them to help the organization? Let's assume that they, in fact, helped the organization. Would you go and arrest those people at their 80s? Your stupid attitudes and behaviors push peasants into the organization. You arrested innocent peasants, most particularly the old peasants and then all their families and relatives came to us to get their revenge by killing soldiers. I am not telling you not to arrest anyone. Nevertheless, do not incarcerate a peasant simply because he or she may have helped us. If you get the intelligence that one of us is

planning a mission and is working day and night to kill security forces, or is organizing missions to be carried out in cities, then go and arrest that person. Do not arrest people just because they aid and abet to us. You anger people by your own stupid acts. You push and prod people into the organization. After each of those unjust arrests, we would have at least five new participants, who were joining us looking for revenge.”

After a small pause, I continued my speech. “Leave those innocent civilian peasants alone. Ask me questions that would directly give you answers. Take those pictures away from me. I do not want to see them anymore. Instead, ask me what kind of actions the organization plans to be carried out in Muş in the future! Ask me proper questions.” Of course, he and his assistants became angry when I spoke so bluntly. He asked, “How would you know when and how the organization would carry out its future missions?” I just laughed at him. How could a ranked person be so stupid? “I was the senior commander of Garzan State, until a couple hours ago. If you do not know, we commanders plan those missions carefully, and the ground guerillas carry them out!” Who do you think will know those missions better than I? I’m telling you again, I was in charge of three regions and a front in Garzan. Do you think there could be someone better than I who would know all the reconnaissance activities and future missions that are to be carried out in the city of Mus?” Despite all my explanations, they insisted on me answering their stupid questions regarding the peasants.

They wasted all the time allocated for them by showing me the peasant pictures in that file. The squadron commander of Kulp said to him, “Time is up! You now will leave the room, so that the next group to come in!” The squadron commander of Mus said that he had some more questions to ask. The commander from Kulp replied to him, saying, “You wasted your

time with bullshit. You should have come here better prepared, with carefully drafted questions!”

### **BEING FOOLED**

I still get angry about how I was financially ripped off when I surrendered myself to the gendarme. Before I surrendered myself, I had 3,000 Euro on me. It was my own personal money that I was going to use in case I changed my mind and decided to go either to Europe or Iraq. I initially had handed over the money to the truck driver I had stopped to take me into the thermal power plant construction site. I said to him, “Comrade, take this money and give it to my uncle. He lives at this address in the city of Batman. Tell my uncle to give it to my parents.”

I then thought of the possibility that the driver would not give the money to my uncle and just pocket the cash. Therefore, I talked to the commander of the gendarme about my concerns regarding the money I had handed to the driver. I told him, “I’ve given the driver some money, but could you please take it back from him and give it over to my parents.” The commander said, “Sure,” and took it from the driver. In the meantime, the legal “detain period” (four days) at the gendarme post had ended. They could not keep me with them any longer. I was to be sent to prison. I did not have two pennies to rub together. Therefore, I said to gendarme commander, “Could you please give me some money from the amount you took from the driver? I will need some cash to meet my needs in prison, until my parents visit me.” They gave me only 35 Turkish Liras, (less than 10 Euros) even though they had my 3000 Euros.

I trusted that the gendarme commander would, in fact, give my money to my parents. I still remember his name: Mustafa Yaşar Yıldırım. I remember everything he said that day. “Are



you out of mind? Why did you give the money to a peasant truck driver? You should have given it to us. Do not worry, we will take it back from him and deliver it to your parents.”

My parents were notified about my surrender. My father, mother, and uncle showed up at the gendarme post on the second day of my detainment. After so many years of separation, I had a chance to talk to them, face to face, for a couple of hours. My mother began to cry as soon as she saw me. She could not say a single word, but cried for half an hour. Before she was asked to leave the post, she said to me, “Deniz, I am happy that I could see you alive one more time, before they kill you. That means everything in this life for me!” My father was the same. Poor man! He also cried a lot. Apparently, they had missed very much, even though they had other children. I was so angry with the security forces present there. They had given my parents high hopes when the gendarme commander told my father, “Do not worry at all! Deniz will not even be incarcerated, because he is helping us. He might be held in prison, at most, for two months. After that, he will be free!”

I did not ask my parents whether they had received my money from the gendarme commander, because the gendarme officials were present throughout my whole visit with them. It would have been rude to ask whether the commander had given it to them, in front of his own soldiers. I honestly thought that such a senior ranked person would be honest with me! My father had even asked me if I needed money. My parents were already poor. How could I accept money from them? Therefore, I told him that I did not need anything.

Unfortunately, not even a penny of those 3,000 Euros was handed over to my parents. I was very disappointed when I learned about it. A friend called Atilla (I do not know whether it was his nickname or real name) from the Diyarbakir Police Department counterterrorism unit, with the help of the public prosecutor handling my files, wrote a petition to the court on my

behalf. We filed it, but the court decided that the money belonged to the organization, so it was to be confiscated and then delivered to the state treasury. I got even angrier with the squadron commander when I read the court's decision. He had misused my trust. I wished I had not talked to the security forces to whom I gave the money. The peasant truck driver would have probably delivered it to my parents.

A relative of mine, along with my parents, visited me on the night of the third day. He was a well-known village protection guard. He was the commander of the special ranger forces of the Kulp district of Diyarbakir. He was one of those who had left the organization and begun to work for the state security forces. I did not know that he was a relative of mine until I saw him with to my parents. When I was still in the organization, I was getting many complaints about him, from the peasants, who were telling us that he was even more dangerous than the security forces, and that he often oppressed them. This man was leading the state security forces in carrying out ambushes and other missions against the guerillas. His name was Talat Eryilmaz, and he still visits me in prison, from time to time.

I had mentioned before that one of our comrades was killed in an ambush, while travelling from Kulp to Sason, in 2009. This ranger was the very same one who had laid that ambush. Because of that, we had planned a mission to kill him for revenge. Our bomb units had prepared a timed explosive that would be attached to his vehicle. We had instructed one of our civilian employees, "Attach this explosive under the car of that ranger and then activate the timer, using the remote controller. Be careful! You need to carry out a perfect reconnaissance before activating it. Find out when this crook leaves home and on which day he uses his car. Do not waste our explosive!" I had surrendered myself to the security forces only five months after

we had instructed this civilian organization member to carry out the mission. I thought he was already dead. Therefore, I was surprised when I saw that ranger sitting next to my parents.

Since he was still alive, the militant we had sent was clearly not successful with carrying out the mission. Still, no one knows what actually happened to that militant and the explosive. During our visit, I told Talat, “Comrade, we guerillas were going to annihilate you with a bomb attached to your car. Check your car carefully. Since you are still alive, either the explosive did not activate, or the militant we sent to kill you made a mistake!” You should have seen his face! He was so panicked and immediately asked me, “What bomb? Who is going to kill me? What the hell are you talking about?” I intentionally made him more nervous by saying, “The bomb must have been placed on your car, but, why are you still here? I wonder what could have happened to it?” He asked me how we knew which car he drove. I said, “Do not be dumb. You know very well that we guerillas always reconnoiter in the cities in order to prepare plans for our future attacks!” I heard that Talat sold his car soon after this talk.

I had only one request from the security forces, and said to them, “If you put me in jail, I will not be any good to you. You may perhaps visit me occasionally and ask questions, but I do not know if I will be willing to talk with you then. If you want to get the maximum benefit from me, let me work with you. Give me two squads, one composed of Kurdish rangers and the other one with soldiers. You can even give me the special ranger squad that is led by my relative, Talat. You all trust Talat. He has worked with you for years! Kill me, if I cannot annihilate the Garzan state in six months! I promise I will end the dominance of the organization in Garzan!” Again, all I wanted was to catch and kill those three bastards: Hakki, the Kulp region commander, and the woman field guerilla commander of Amed.

Talat was present as I was talked to the gendarme commander. He even supported me by saying, “You trust me deeply, and you are well aware that I have been fighting against the guerillas in places that you could not even walk. Look, I am literally nothing when compared to the experiences and knowledge that Deniz possesses! Assign a ranger team to him. Deniz and I will doom the guerilla presence there in that area!” The gendarme officials initially welcomed our offer. The commander even said, “Of course. That is what we have been considering.” Nevertheless, nothing happened.

During my detainment at the gendarme post, I gave a lot of advice to the soldiers. “Your fight strategy against the organization is seriously flawed. As in the old days, it is almost impossible to get into a close contact with the guerillas in the countryside. There are now only 15 guerillas, where there used to be 300. You have zero chance to encounter these 15 guerillas. On the other hand, if you continue to dispatch hundreds of soldiers into the open fields for operations, you will lose a many of them. We do not need to carry out missions against you anymore by laying siege to the military posts or infiltrating the cities, because you come to us with hundreds of sitting ducks. If you want to gain control in the countryside again, you have to form small fighting squads. For example, if your squads are now composed of 18 soldiers, divide that into three equal, separate units; six, six, and six. The members of those teams must have strong self-control. They must be dispatched to the field and wait in an ambush position, for days, to get in close contact with the guerilla teams. You can only establish dominance in the countryside by this way. Those large participant land operations have literally no effect on us. You have to fight in smaller units to disguise yourself.”

In return, the gendarme commander said to me, “Deniz, we do not have such qualified soldiers among us.” I responded with, “That’s fine. If you do not have such fighters, leave it to

me!” I was very open with him, and said, “Look, you do no harm to us with only those two spring and fall land operations, but you deceive the Turkish public with exaggerated news. I have been fighting in your jurisdiction of authority since 2006. Haven’t you carried out land operations both in the fall and in spring throughout those four years? You have! Have you ever had close contact with guerilla units during those operations? No! Never! Have you ever been able to capture images of guerillas traveling in the mountainous areas with your expensive unmanned flying vehicles? No! Do not you see that you did nothing but waste your resources! I can tell you about a single spot where you can direct your forces. Dispatch only one small unit there. Tell them to remain there quietly for a couple of days. I swear to you that they will get into a hot encounter with guerilla units, in no longer than three days. How do the guerilla units travel from Botan Field to Amed State? Dersim, Erzurum, Bingöl, Bitlis; all these groups reach their final destinations using that spot that passes inside the territories of Garzan. If your soldiers can hold that passage spot, and if the states within Turkey are not supplied with new guerillas for a year, then none of those guerilla forces who are already positioned within Turkey, would dare to carry out missions against the security forces.”

Again, my suggestions were initially welcomed with excitement. The soldiers even verbally supported and encouraged me. Later, I figured out that they were reluctant to do what I suggested. I do not know if the commanders did not trust me or they did not have the guts to do what I told them. Nevertheless, if they had held that passage, they would have had worry-free years ahead of them. I would then, in return, ask them to let me go and kill Hakki and his team.

## SENTENCING

I was taken to the courthouse on Saturday, May 8th, in the city of Diyarbakir. As it was the weekend, the courthouse was extremely quiet. Even the prosecutor and the judge, who were supposed to handle the incidents of that weekend, were not there. After a phone talk with the prosecutor, the soldiers took me to the prosecutor's house. He had read all the files that required his signatures. After that, I was transported to the prison.

I was handed over to the prison administrators at 12.30 p.m. By this time, I had been in this prison for six years, three hours and 30 minutes [It was May 8, 2015, 4:00 p.m.] I still remember which guards and prison directors were on duty that day. As soon as I stepped into the facility, I was taken in front of the second director, Tahsin Muş. He talked to me for almost two hours and asked me whether I wanted to stay alone for a couple days or assigned to a repentant cell immediately. I preferred staying alone, until I got over the shock I was experiencing. Additionally, I did not know who was staying in which cell.

On Monday morning, the head guardian called me into his room and showed me pictures from two separate files. They were the photos of the comrades staying in the repentant cells; one file for each cell. The head guardian said, "Look at the pictures and decide in which cell you want to stay." I picked one of them and was taken directly there. Two comrades with whom I had been acquainted previously welcomed me as soon as I arrived. I knew both of them very well. I then greeted the rest of the comrades, one by one. Everyone was waiting to hear my story and my reason for quitting the organization. I told them everything that I had suffered. One of them said, "Comrade, I wish you had not surrendered yourself. It would have been better if you had traveled to Europe. You will probably be given a life sentence." Hearing that was

demoralizing and I asked, “How can someone who surrendered himself be sentenced to life?” Time showed that I had been seriously mistaken.

My first hearing soon took place. I told the judge everything. A ranked soldier from the military accompanied me during all my trials. At the end of that first appearance in front of the judge, the soldier told me, “Do not worry Deniz! You will be free soon.” Naturally, I was happy to hear that. My second trial was scheduled for December 30, 2010. I remember the date very well, because the former President of Turkey, Abdullah Gül, had visited Diyarbakır on the same day, which turned out to be one of the worst days of my life. I thought the judge would recall me for more trials, but, interestingly, he sentenced me to 51 years on that day. It should not be determined so quickly!

I looked at the judge and said, “I should not be given such a long sentence. You did not catch me, nor did you capture me wounded from a clash. I surrendered myself with my own free will. I do not understand how you can sentence me to 51 years, even though I had put my application in to benefit from the repentance law.”

The ranked soldier accompanying me was also shocked. He even told the judge that there might have been a mistake and so checked everything again. The judge responded that there was no mistake on this sentencing decision. Then the soldier looked at me and asked, “Deniz, have not you applied for the repentance law?” I answered, “Of course, I did. Why would I be put in repentant cell if I had not applied for it?” It never rains, but pours. Back then, I had no money with which to hire a lawyer, who would thoroughly go over my files, so the police department arranged someone for me. His name was Mervan. I guess. He was one of the legal aid lawyers. He said that he objected to the decision of the lower court, but had not heard anything from the higher court. I was not even called to a hearing, so, I guess he had lied to me.

I could not believe anything that was happening at that time. Why had my trial been concluded in such a swift manner? I thought I would stay, at most, 10 years and then be released.

There was a comrade in my cell, who is still with us. His trial lasted for more than four years. I was brought to the prison on May 8th and the court sentenced me on December 30th. Deniz Koçer, here you are, sentenced to three consecutive life sentences plus 15 years. It was a total of 51 years of incarceration. I was deeply depressed when I heard of that.

Two months later, officers from the Diyarbakır Police Department wanted to visit me in prison in order to get some information regarding the organization. I rejected this interview request. "I helped you a great deal, and what did you do for me in return? You let the judges' decision pass unchallenged!" They were all friendly and extremely nice when trying to get information from me. Nevertheless, I was left on my own on the date of the trial. There was no one there to raise objections to the judge or at least give solace to me.

I was housed at the Diyarbakır Police Department for a whole week before the judge gave his final sentencing decision. The prosecutor, who prepared my files for the court, was also present during those seven days. He interviewed me every day. He told me that I should not be worried, since he was going to help me to get a reduced sentence. The prosecutor, the head of counterterrorism unit, and I, were all sitting together, chatting for hours. We became like friends. The prosecutor asked me to explain the hierarchical command order within the organization. I drew it out for him in 15 minutes. They were all amazed with the extent of my knowledge, regarding the organization. The prosecutor even said to me, "Deniz, God has sent such a talented person to us!" I swear, he used exactly these words. So, what happened next? Only a couple days after I was praised with such words, I was sentenced to 51 years. This is the judge's decision. The normal release date: 2061. The conditional release date: 2044. This is



what I still do not understand. I was sitting with the prosecutor and the head of the counterterrorism unit on December 23rd. They promised me many things. Nevertheless, the same prosecutor clearly had asked the judge to try me with three consecutive life sentences, plus fifteen years. Can you see the confusion? It was also weird that, despite the fact that this prosecutor had prepared my files and charges, from the very beginning, he did not show up at the court on December 30th. Instead, there was another prosecutor in the court on that day. He probably could not look at me after all those promises.

I could understand if I had not provided them with any information, but I told them everything, regarding Hakki and me. They could have said, “That man is a double crosser. Let him rot in the prison,” if I had not told them anything, or if I had misinformed them. But I had helped them in many aspects, even preventing a couple missions that were to be carried out. Of course, I do not know if they would have recognized my part in preventing those missions, but many lives were saved, after they took precautions, thanks to the intelligence I provided. For example, the police officers showed me a picture, and I told them, “This man is very dangerous. He has been preparing to carry out a mission in downtown Bingöl or Bitlis. Arrest him as soon as you see him.”

The man was caught one week after my statement. He was driving a car that had a trunk loaded with explosive materials. As soon as he was caught, I was invited to the police department. I told the officers at the counter terrorism unit that, “Do not waste your time. He will never tell you anything. He will never speak, even if you beat him or let him starve.” As I said, he did not utter a single word.

I even informed the police officers about a large explosive mission which was to be carried out by the organization in the future in Istanbul. A guerilla was sent by the organization

to Istanbul in 2006. He was an expert in preparing explosives and was given a large amount of money to start a business there. The organization said to him, "Settle into Istanbul and start a business. Live a normal life. Get married, have kids, visit the mosque. When the time comes, we will let you know, and you will carry out the mission." He was one of our sleeper cells in the city of Istanbul. After I surrendered myself, I notified the police and the gendarme units about him.

I did not personally know this person, even if shown a couple of pictures. However, I knew his parents very well. I told the officers, "He's the son of that family and is now in Istanbul. He was sent there from Iraq, in 2006. He must own a shop there by now." I knew him very well, because he contacted me in 2007 and said, "Comrade Deniz, I settled and started my business. Send me the explosive materials, as soon as possible. I am ready to carry out the mission." I did not allow this delivery to occur at that time, because it was still too early. He was new in his neighborhood. He had to stay there at least for three or more years to be acquainted with the people and to gain their trust. If he had performed his mission only after one year, he would easily be on the list of potential suspects. Otherwise, if he stayed there for a couple years, got acquainted with his neighbors, and visited the mosque regularly, no one would suspect him. I gave all this information to the security forces, but he has not yet been arrested. I guess they will arrest him after the bomb goes off.

## **BIG MISTAKE**

I think now that the idea of surrendering myself to the security forces was a huge and irreparable mistake, because nothing had worked out as I planned. I remained in the investigation for four to five days and then was directly sent to prison. Yet I had planned to kill Hakki for revenge of Asmin's death. That had been the sole purpose for my surrender to the military.

If I had my choice, I would never stay even one day in prison. If I had not told them about the missions I carried out, or crimes I committed, the security forces could never have found out about them. I was just trying to be honest. I even gave them the exact date and time of the missions. The security forces had initially not believed me. They thought I was taking a wild guess. Nevertheless, they were all amazed when they checked the accuracy of my statements from the incidents archived by the counterterrorism department. They also checked the statements of the guerillas who had surrendered themselves between years 1994-1995. They saw that all the dates I had given them matched not only the archived information but also with the statements provided by the repentor former guerillas.

When I surrendered myself, I warned the commanders, "Do not ever inform the media and the press about my surrendering." I had experience in legal issues. The judiciary authorities would learn about my arrest, as soon as the information was given to the press. In that case, the security forces could keep me for only four days; the legal duration given to security forces by the law. I then had to be delivered to the prison. Therefore, as soon as I surrendered, I told the commanders, "Do not inform anyone about my surrender. I will give you some sensitive information and, in return, you will let me kill Hakki. So, we will both win in the end."

## CHAPTER 22

### THE PRISON AND THE GENERAL

Neither the police nor the gendarme visited me for a long time. How could they? They had promised me that I would soon be released. They were going to visit me after a couple of months, but I rejected their request to see me. I told the prison guards that I had no desire to sit and talk with deceivers!

As I said, the only reason for my surrender was to get my revenge on Hakkı, but after the incarceration, all my hopes disappeared. I told myself several times, “Deniz, you put yourself into this hot water and you will bear the losses.

Almost two months after my surrender, Silan, the woman who was accused of having an affair with me, also fled the organization. I had already informed the police officers during my first questioning at the police department, “The woman, Silan, will definitely also surrender herself, and as I prophesied, Silan had, in fact, deserted the organization towards the end of May.

I was invited to the courthouse when she surrendered herself. The prosecutor asked me if I knew her. I replied, “Yes, I do. I know her very well.” He asked me whether Silan had carried out any mission. I said, “No, she has never participated in an action.” Silan was set free after the investigation period.

Later, a general who was on duty in the Eastern Anatolia region, asked a couple of times to see me in person. Each time, we met outside the prison environment. I was hosted at the military guesthouse, when I was not in prison. We would talk together for hours. After each of these talks, the general said, “Deniz, I wish we’d had the chance to meet before! I wish I’d met you before the judge sentenced you to such a long term!” He appeared to be furious with the length of my sentence. I told him everything about the trial process. “The security forces neither

paid attention to the information I provided them nor did they help me at the court. Besides that, they also depicted my surrender in a misleading manner. The media was informed that I had been captured by the diligent works of the security forces. Liars!”

I believe no one wanted to take the risk, since I surrendered myself close to the date of Supreme Military Council meeting. As I mentioned before, the time before those meetings were great relaxation periods for the guerillas. None of the military commanders would easily carry out an operation against the guerillas during those times. They simply did not want to be the topic of the agenda. On the other hand, the military commanders were already viewing my surrender as a great success for themselves. They did not consider it necessary to carry out operations in the places I had told them.

This general, whom I had recently met, did not understand why I was sentenced to such a long-term, despite all my helpful information. I was even later offered a way out of prison, but did not like it. I was told, “We can get you out of here in one of the two ways; either as an escape or by death.” I replied, “I cannot accept such an offer, because I have no legal assurance in either situation. It was true that I would be free, but I would not have any life security. If someone got angry with me one day and shot me in the head, nothing would happen, because I would already be a person shown as dead, in the records.”

They could, in fact, have easily closed my investigation file, if they had really wanted to set me free. I had trusted those officers and told them everything about myself. How could they know which missions I had carried out or planned, if I had not told them? They should have set me free, for the sake of the intelligence I provided them about Hakki. Same for the prosecutor. He was not with me while I was carrying out those missions. The police could tell him that I joined the organization in 2009 and deserted it in 2010. Again, the only mistake I made was to

be honest and overconfident with the police and the gendarme. There was no arrest or search warrant out for me until I surrendered myself. I had a clean record. That was why it would have been an easy job for the security forces. They could have said to the prosecutor, “Deniz joined the organization in 2009 and surrendered himself in 2010. He is applying for repentance law and should be set free, since he has no records.”

This general that I mentioned earlier was much affected by the things I told him. Therefore, he asked to read the statement that I gave, soon after my surrender, to figure out what could have gone wrong during the trial process. He could not find a single statement, regarding me, from the gendarme. Right then, I figured out that the information I had provided had not been archived or had been intentionally deleted by someone to free themselves from a potential future responsibility.

The general was persistent and kept hard on the heels of those responsible. Every single archive that was held by the gendarme was searched, with no results. Nothing was left behind. Can you imagine? All that strategic information had not even been stored at the military archives. Even a person with the rank of general could not find out a single thing about my initial statements. Again, most probably, the gendarme commander had destroyed all that information in order to protect himself from a future investigation.

I even remembered the name of the person who was taking notes on a computer when I was giving my statement. The general spoke to him in my presence and asked where those statements were archived. He said, “General, those notes were all discarded, because the gendarme units were not ready to carry out a mission against the targets.” The general went crazy as soon when he heard the explanation. “I need to see those files! Where did you archive them?” He could not give an answer. The general shouted again, “Where are the damn files?”

The record keeper was frightened, and said, “General, the files might be stored at the headquarters of the intelligence gathering unit of the gendarme.” All to no end! He could find nothing in Ankara, either.

### **THE REACH OF THE ORGANIZATION IN THE PRISON**

The organization has wide control within the prisons and has too many civilian supporters working as guards in the prison. We repentants are sometimes amazed at how on earth the authorities allow so many people from the organization to work there. Once, the soldiers took me out of the prison at 8:00 a.m. without even the guards being informed in order to take me to the office of this general I mentioned. The general and I boarded a helicopter and flew to Mus region. It was a secret meeting, and we thought no one knew about it. The next day, we heard on the radio that a repentant convict from Diyarbakir E Type Prison Facility had been taken outside the prison to join a reconnaissance activity with the soldiers. By this, you see just how strong a control they have in the prisons.

Using its supporters, the organization even reached out to me, while I was incarcerated. I was told, “Ask for a transfer to a political convicts’ cell from the repentant convicts’ cell. If you do so, we will do anything you wish for you and your parents.”

Of course, I disregarded their offer. The organization was well aware of the danger waiting before them. They thought I would share their sensitive information with the security forces, such as the secret locations of ammunitions, the coded words we used for communication, the coordinates of the guerilla campgrounds, and our secret hideouts. I had surrendered myself on May 5, 2010. Look at the security forces’ archives! The Garzan province could not carry out any missions during the year I surrendered myself. They thought I would

talk to the security forces about all the plans we had made during the winter camp to be carried out in the spring of 2010. Therefore, they were occupied with defense preparations rather than carrying out those plans. Believe me, they were nervous about whether I had compromised those details of the Garzan state. It was simply because I knew the whole state intimately. I even knew where underground bunkers would be dug for the 2011 winter.

I was later informed by some guards in the prison that the organization had accepted that I had been right on many of the issues discussed during my trial at Garzan state. For example, the headquarters commander had said, “Deniz met with those rangers upon our instructions and orders. He never did anything without first confirming with us.” One of the comrades even brought me the transcripts of the radio talks that were broadcast after my desertion. The state commander of Garzan had said, “How could something like that happen? Deniz would never desert us just because he had a relationship with a woman. There must definitely be something else.” He was an old friend of mine. We had known each other for almost 15 years. He had asked the others, “What did you ask Deniz during the investigation? With what did you threaten him, so that he deserted us?” If Hakki and his men had told the truth, everyone would have figured out the plot played against me. Therefore, no one could give a proper answer to the state commander’s questions.

Nevertheless, Hakki had continued telling lies about me on many issues. He had burst with anger, because I was able to escape before he killed me. Therefore, he had cast aspersions on me at every opportunity. I heard that he had told the Kurdish villagers, “Deniz gave to the security forces, the names of at least 60-70 patriot villagers who have been helping the organization. That bastard would have even give his father’s name for his own benefit.” In fact, many civilian villagers had panicked over whether their names had really been leaked to the



security forces. Hundreds of them then decided to desert their homes, due to the risk of being arrested. They all returned only after a few months passed and realized that they were not being searched for by the police or gendarme. Hakkı had also told headquarters that I was working as an informant for the security forces during my time in the organization. Some of my close comrades had even started to believe Hakkı, since I had stayed in Garzan for three years and had not carried out a single mission against the police or the military.

All this information was delivered to me while I was incarcerated. Headquarters asked me to give them a written response for all the claims of which I had been accused. However, I did not bother myself with that. I even told my parents not to be in touch with anyone coming from the organization, but they did not give up pressuring me. They goaded my parents in order to get to me. The civilian members of the organization even put leverage on my parents to try and convince me to leave the repentant convicts' cell. My elder brother once visited me in prison. Each convict is given 45 minutes to talk to his family member during the visit, but he did not even talk to me for one minute. He was very angry with me, since I was staying at the repentance convicts' cell, and told me, "What the hell are you doing with the repentant convicts? We can't take the pressure coming from the organization anymore. Should we move to Istanbul again, just because you are won't changing your mind?" I replied, "Brother, I surrendered myself, and I will continue to stay in the cell I am staying in now! I will never be a part of them again, even though they threaten to kill me!"

Believe me, I would be in a much better shape now if I had accepted the offer proposed by the organization and transferred to the cell of the comrades captured by the security forces. The organization would have taken very good care of my parents, if I had done that. Nevertheless, I did not change my mind. I always thought that the Turkish state would look after

my parents and me. However, I was mistaken about that. They did not help me, and they did not even give a shit about the threats of the organization on my parents.

I sent several petitions to the Ministry of Justice. I sent petitions to various other institutions within Turkey. Nevertheless, not even one of them condescended to write me a response. Actually, the Ministry of Justice sent me one paragraph note saying, “We are working on the issues you have outlined. We will let you know about the results in the future.” It has been almost five years, and no one has responded to me yet, regarding my petition. Actually, none of my petitions involved personal requests. They were for the good of all the convicts.

### **MY TESTIMONIES**

You would never believe what ridiculous things I had been through after I surrendering myself to the security forces. After hearing what I had say, you would definitely think the Turkish security forces had rocks in their heads. When I first surrendered to the gendarme units, I provided them with a name from the organization of one who used to torture the local Kurdish peasants. He was also incarcerated in the same prison, and I really wanted him to pay the price for what he had done in the past, to innocent people. I told them that I would be happy to be a witness against him at the court. For that purpose, I was transported to the courthouse in Diyarbakir, to give my testimony. Do you know that the person against whom I was to give my testimony was put in the same vehicle as me on our way to the court? Even worse, my right hand and his left hand were handcuffed to each other with a single handcuff. Can you imagine that situation? I have never seen such gross stupidity in my life.

Naturally, this man threatened me all the way to the prosecutor’s office. He asked me, “Why did you give my name to the gendarme? Why did you snitch on me? I will kill you at the

very first opportunity I have. I will even contact the organization to kill your parents.” I was really stressed, as I was supposed to have served as an anonymous witness. This was the first stupid act I encountered.

Now, the second one. Earlier, in one of the KCK trials, I was forcefully taken out of prison to give my testimony against one of the arrested suspects. There were more than ten suspects in that trial. The courtroom was jam packed with relatives of the suspects. There were close to 200 people. You know how I was asked to give my testimony about that suspect? I was put on the stand in front of those ten suspects and that large crowd, and then asked to start giving my testimony. This stupid incident took place in Diyarbakir 6th High Felony Court. Before I was put in front of that crowd, I had a chance to talk with the judge in his chambers, and he told me then that I had to give my testimony in front of everyone. I began to tell him off, “What kind of judge are you? How could you earn your law degree? Shame on you! You want me to help you by revealing my identity in front of everyone! Look! I do not care about my own life. I am willing to take the risk. I am not afraid of death! However, I have parents and they are out there, unprotected. You want to make them a target? Are you trying to kill them?” I was so furious.

When I was put on the stand, the court bailiff began to read aloud the note he was holding. “Deniz Koçer. His mother’s name is blah, blah. His father’s name is blah, blah. He is from the city of Batman. He used to reside at this address.” He read everything aloud, in front of everyone. After that, he looked at me and asked me to verify the accuracy of all the information he had read. Did he really need to read all that private information, regarding me, in front of that large crowd? No! He had my ID card in his hand. He could have checked everything by looking at the card. Alternatively, he could have come close to me and verified everything quietly. The court bailiff did that on purpose! I was forced to keep my silence. The

court secretary, the judge, and the attorney had all given me a message. Look, we made your information public. If you say something about the suspects, you and your family will be targeted by the organization.

When the judge asked me to start my testimony on the suspect, I said, “Your Honor, I do not even know this man! How could I give a testimony about him?” The chief of the court angrily asked, “How come you do not know him? You have a statement about him with your signature!” he replied. I was acting sarcastically because of the situation I was put in and replied, “Your honor, I do not remember giving such a statement. Call the officer who wrote it down and ask him to be your witness.”

The officials in the Turkish justice system are such idiots. Even though I was closely acquainted with this man, I had told the judge that I did not know him. “Your honor, I have never seen this man before, I am not acquainted with him, and I do not know him.” This man had, in fact, killed dozens of innocent villagers, bullied, and racketeered them. Can you see the irony? The security officers had revealed my real identity in front of such a man and his relatives, disclosed the address where my parents were staying, and then asked me to give a testimony about him! What stupidity!

The officials seriously risked the life of my parents and me, when they were, in fact, supposed to repay me for my willingness to provide testimony. That was a real life threat. If I had presented my testimony in the court, a relative of one of those suspects would not have hesitated to go and kill one of my parents as a warning. The justice system had, officially, forced me to get even in one of their own matters. I was given the message that not only I but also my parents would be a target if I helped the security forces. Such incidents took place many times

during 2010 and 2011. Sometimes I do seriously wonder whether there is even a single smart person working for the Turkish state.

After my appearance in the court that day, the brother of the prisoner had called my parents' house and threatened openly them. Moreover, he sent a letter containing insults and threats to their house. The letter said, "Either you keep your son quiet or we will kill you all!" My parents still have a copy of that letter. The original is being kept by Batman Police Department, counterterrorism unit.

After those ridiculous incidents to which I was subjected, those cheeky officials continued to call me to the courthouse to give testimony against the people whom I mentioned in my initial statements with the gendarme and the police. I rejected all of them. I even denied the information that I had provided in all my previous statements. I openly said to the security officers, "You are traitors. I sincerely trusted you. Nevertheless, you wasted my trust. Since you have been acting treacherously, I will do the very same from now on!"

In my first statement, stored at Diyarbakır Police Department, my first sentence read, "I will do whatever you want, but I have one condition. You will help me get my revenge on Hakkı, and you will also fulfill the rules of secrecy and witness protection"—and the police officers told me that they surely would. They even told me that it was an insult to them that I was warning them about the rules of witness protection. Nevertheless, I was subjected to those incidents I just mentioned. It not only happened once, it happened maybe on three different occasions. Right then, I figured out that they were selfish and only concerned about their own successes, at the expense of another person or his parents' lives and that's why I began to reject all my initial statements, given at the police and gendarme departments. I said, "You can even

go and sue me for giving you misleading information. I do not care! I will never ever provide a testimony for you again. Do not ever knock my door again!”

Put yourself into my shoes! Would you continue to help the security officials after all that insulting treatment? That KCK trial was the last straw for me. I called the police officers from Diyarbakir PD and said to them, “I provided you with all that information under one condition! I told you that I would provide testimony against some people in my statements, as long as you do not expose me to them. You accepted all my conditions. Why did you break your promise?” I received the same old lies. “It was a mistake, Deniz. We do not even know how the judge made such a huge mistake.” I was so disgusted with all of them. After that court appearance, the security officials attempted to visit me several times to apologize, but I rejected them at each visit.

### **THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT**

Initially, I struggled a great deal to get used to prison conditions. I encountered an atmosphere worse than I could have imagined. For instance, the physical conditions of the ward. It was a two-story cell. The bedroom was located at upstairs. The kitchen and the living room were downstairs. There was only one heater in this two-story cell. The windows were from the 1970s, and the cold weather came directly into our cell during the cold days. It was usually 17 degrees (-8 Celsius) in the winter. It got so cold that we are usually not able to leave our beds. It was just the opposite in the summer. It started getting hot in June, and we experienced exhaustion from the heat, until the end of September. There was only one ceiling fan and it was downstairs, not at upstairs where we slept. It became impossible to sleep at nights in the summer

season. We all spent night awake, tossing and turning in our beds. We usually fell asleep, from exhaustion, just before the sunrise.

We had a television, a kitchen, and a dinner table near the front floor. There was also a small area, surrounded by high walls, right by the shower area on this floor. It was a place where we had fresh air daily. We had access to this place from the morning until 6:30 p.m. We are not allowed to use it during the night. Therefore, our life was basically confined to this two-story cell and its small fresh air area.

We had bunk beds in the upstairs. In some cells, these bunks had three beds, since there were so many people incarcerated. We heard that some cells were so crowded that some people were even sleeping on the floors. In our cell, no one used a mattress, except for two. It was because of the life style to which we had become accustomed in the mountains. It has been almost six years, and I still cannot sleep on a mattress. We all slept on a solid wood platform. We might, at times, place a thin blanket on the wood, when it is very cold outside.

There was a shower and a restroom on the first floor of the cell. We were fortunate that there are only seven people living in our cell. However, this number ranged from 25 to 30 in other cells in prison. We were provided with hot water twice a day, for 15 minutes, at 2:00 p.m. and 6 :00 p.m. Therefore, we all had to take shower within those 15 minutes, meaning, we had approximately two minutes each.

Since two minutes was really too short of a time, we created a routine among ourselves. Three of us used the allocated hot water time at noon, and the remaining four showered at 6:00 p.m. That way, each of us had more time to wash. These fifteen minutes was same for all the cells, regardless of their size. As I said, there were cells in this prison with over 30 convicts. I cannot even imagine how they handled the shower time.

Within our cell, we had a weekly schedule for cleaning. We washed the floors, both upstairs and downstairs, with soap and water every Saturday. Apart from that, every day, we had one person responsible for the kitchen works and dishwashing. We prisoners paid out of our own pockets for the cleaning materials—detergent, soap, bleach and other things. The prison administration did not have a budget for that.

We even paid for the electricity and water we used within the cells. Each cell had its own electric and water meter box. We paid approximately 20-25 TL during the winters, and 50-60 TL during the summers. We had to pay these bills as a cell unit, and it was very serious. If we did not pay it on time, our water and electricity would be shut off immediately and we would literally then be in the dark. Once Şemdin Sakık did not pay his bill, saying that he did not have the money for it and was left in the dark for days. Do you see how the Turkish state protected the repenters? In fact, the state security forces were able to deal their biggest blow to the organization with the help of Şemdin. He provided the state with such sensitive information about our structure that the organization did not recover from the damages he caused, for approximately three years. What did Şemdin get in return for his help? He also received a life sentence. He is going to die in this prison. He was thrown away like a piece of clothing, after being used by the security forces.

There were two “counting sessions” carried out every day by the prison guards; one at 7:00 a.m., and the other one at 8:00 p.m. The guards also would occasionally search our personal items. Our cell did not have anyone who would be considered a troublemaker, and none of us were on drugs or marijuana.

I generally woke up at 7.30 a.m. We had our breakfast around 8.30 a.m. There was a handcraft workshop that opened at 9 a.m., and I usually went there every day to build model



ships for sale. We are allowed to work there until 11:00 a.m., but we had to be back in our cells between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. I would go back to my cell and have lunch with my comrades during that time. After lunch, we make tea and watch the news on the TV. At 1:00 p.m., I went back to the handcraft workshop and continue to work on the model I was building until 4:00 p.m. We had to return to our cells around 4:15 PM. I usually hung out in the small fresh air area until dinner.

I took a shower before eating dinner. Then, I either read the newspaper or watched TV. We also needed to pay for the newspapers. It was good that we are allowed to read any newspaper we wanted. As a group, we generally bought Milliyet or Hürriyet. We also enjoyed watching political talk shows during the evenings. Unfortunately, those shows were only available on certain nights. The prisoners were allowed to watch the following thirteen channels; ATV, Kanal D, Star TV, Show, CNN Türk, NTV, Kanal 7, IMC, TRT 1, TRT Kürdi, TRT Spor, Meclis TV and Kral TV. However, we often only watched two channels: NTV and CNN Türk.

We had three meals a day. For that, each convict had to pay a monthly fee of 150 Turkish Liras. Meals were generally pretty standard. For breakfast, we were given a small chocolate spread, honey, eggs, and sometimes milk or a piece of cake, but not all together in one meal. One day, we got the chocolate spread and the egg. Another day, it would be honey and a piece of cake. We had our own tea to fix. In addition to that, sometimes milk was served with the breakfast. Each person was given two breads each day. For dinner, we would mostly have either pasta or brown beans. No one ate the dinner in our cell. However, lunch was always good. On Tuesdays and Fridays, we had chicken or boiled beef. On Thursdays, each of us was given four pieces of burgers.

The worse thing about being in the prison was that we prisoners did not have a social activity in which we could actively participate. We spent most of our time in the cells. There were neither educational or social activities in which we could engage. When I was first incarcerated, the prison administration offered some courses and trainings on computer use, football, volleyball, and handball. Participating in those trainings, time passed very quickly. Leaving our cell to engage in those activities provided a great deal of relief for us. There was not a single course or training being offered now. The new director of the prison cancelled out all the previously provided trainings. We were stuck in this cell 24/7. This was not something that would last for a day, for a month, or for a year. We will be here until we die...

We questioned the prosecutor about this, when he visited our cell during one of those routine controls. I told him that, since we were repentant, at least one privilege should be given to the convicts staying in our cell. "We left the organization and surrendered ourselves to the state security forces. To some extent, we helped those officials in their fight against the organization, so our sentences should not be the same the other prisoners that are held here," I said. He replied to me with the classic response, which they used all the time. "There are only seven of you in your cell and you know the rules. We, as the prison administration, need at least ten signatures to start a social activity. Additionally, it is not possible to mingle you with the others, because you are repentants! Your lives would be under a serious threat, if we joined you with them." Each time we asked for something, we are given that same response, so we remain deprived of everything. It was true that the rule stated there must be at least ten signatures for a course, training, or a social activity to be opened. However, there are only seven people in this goddamn cell, and so we are stuck here. One might argue that we at least have the opportunity to join the model shipbuilding in the handcrafts workroom, but that is not actually a social activity

for us. It is the only way we can earn some money while we are incarcerated. It is true that we are stepping outside the cell to go there, but it is not really a social activity. Several times, I talked to the prosecutors and prison administrators to give us freedom from this strict rule, but each time they ignored my requests.

The prison director even considered the repentant convicts' situation equal to the people who were convicted for petty things, such as theft. He told us, "The other prisoners are in a similar situation. They also are not able to participate in social activities, since they do not have enough signatures." In response, I said, "The convicts that you say are here for only a month or two are then freed. They are not as deeply affected, as we repentants, for not being able to join social activities. However, we will be incarcerated here forever." The director was very stubborn. No matter what I asked him, he told me that he could not make an exception due to the military type structure of the prison. I had been here for almost six years. During this period, I witnessed a petty criminal being arrested and then set free four times! Each time, he had been released, with parole, committed another petty crime, and then incarcerated again. It was not ethical to compare those people with us. The prison administrators should have made a concession for us, so that we could benefit from some social activities.

We were allowed to do sports once a week, for 30-45 minutes. There were two sports fields. One was an outdoor field, and the other was indoors. Each week, we were allowed to use only one of those fields. Again, since we were less in numbers, we were unable to play any games. What could seven people do on a soccer field? During the administration of the former director, we were allowed to play soccer with the other prisoners, but, as I said, the new director was strictly against that. He always said that it was dangerous to mix different types of convicts, though there had not been a single incident so far.

Another strange thing here was that we were not allowed to see the doctors whenever we needed them. Each cell had a specific day in which to visit the doctor's office. For instance, our cell was allowed to visit the infirmary on Wednesdays only. Let's say one of us got sick on Thursday. If it were not a life threatening issue, that person literally had to wait until the following Wednesday to see the doctor and get medications. In such cases, somebody from the infirmary visited the cell and checked the sick person from behind the bars. He did not even touch your body, but figured out your condition by simply looking at you. If he decided that there was no urgency, then you had to wait until next week and no one could change that decision. You can see the bullshit going on here.

Moreover, even though you visited the doctor on the day you were allowed, you did not expect to get a proper diagnosis and treatment. The doctor just talked with you and then prescribed you a bunch of medicines. All diagnoses were based on your talk with the doctor. He did not even bother himself with the basics, such as checking heartbeats and pulse.

I have a serious problem with both of my knees. I was taken to a university hospital at least four times because of that problem. The doctors at the hospital examined my MR and X-ray pictures and then informed me that I needed to have surgery as soon as possible. You know what the doctor at the prison told me? He said to me that there was no need for surgery, as long as I did not play soccer, run, or even walk. He told me that I would be fine, if I no longer did any of those things, including the walking. I still do not know if he was making fun of me, or he was, in fact, serious, but, I was not yet allowed to have that surgery.

The problem with my knees progressed so badly, that one of my legs had to be put into a cast, and it remained in that cast for ten days. I removed it myself, when I could no longer

endure lying still in the bed. I knew there would be calcification in my knees without some mobility.

Honestly, I did not even feel like visiting the infirmary when I really needed it. There used to be only a male staff working at the infirmary. Later, there were three female doctors and a nurse. These women were very well-behaved and decent. Over time, the male doctors became very lax in their conversations. I was amazed at how freely and easily they spoke about immoral things, even when patients were present in the infirmary. One day, I could not take it anymore, and I yelled at the male doctors, “You cannot speak like that when there are women around. You must pay attention to the tone of your conversation!” They all resented my words, but I did not care.

You know, I think the public is morally corrupted. It was not like that when I left my parents years ago. People would care about their language. I sometimes asked myself why I wasted those best years of my life for those morally corrupt people!

### **POLITICAL GUERILLA PRISONERS VERSUS REPENTERS**

There were two different types of cells in the prisons where the incarcerated guerillas were kept. Within the first type, the prison administration kept the PKK members, who were caught by the Turkish security forces. This type of cell was called political prisoners cell. The guerillas who surrendered themselves to the security forces were kept in the second type, which was known as the repenters captives’ cell. And since I had voluntarily surrendered myself, this is where I stayed.

The numbers of repenters staying in the prisons were decreasing as the days passed. As people witnessed the intolerance of the state towards them, they decided to side with the

organization again by requesting their transfer to the political prisoners' cell. When I was first brought in, there were two women repenter guerilla cells in the prison. Unbelievable, but the political guerilla prisoners rioted against the administration to have those two repenter cells closed down and they were successful. The administration closed those two cells and transferred the women repenter guerillas to other prisons in Turkey. The Turkish politicians always said that they had established their full authority over all of Turkey and even in some regions of the Middle East, but that was not accurate. It was actually funny that they claimed such a control when they were not even able to establish their authority in their own prisons.

The Ministry of Justice operated those prisons on a simple rule: to fulfill all the demands of the political guerilla prisoner, even at the expense of the repenters so that there would be no trouble. The Turkish officials were even willing to sacrifice the repenter, who sided with them, just to prevent potential chaos in the prisons. Would not you call that full dominance and authority?

When those two women's repenter cells were closed down, I asked the guards to let me talk to the director of the prison. There were even two police officers accompanying me, when I visited the director. I said to him, "Look! Your solution of pleasing the political guerilla prisoners is seriously mistaken. You are losing the hearts of those repentant people, just to make the political ones happy. By closing down those two cells, you were officially serving the goals of the organization, which encourages its political prisoners to riot in the prisons, simply to force the repenters to change their minds, and turn back to the organization. You should leave at least one of those women repenter cells open, so that those women guerillas would not return their loyalty to the organization, just to be able to stay in this prison."

As a result, even though those repent women did not really want it, many of them asked for their transfer to the political prisoners' cells, just to be able to stay close to their families that live in the surrounding cities. They had no other feasible options. If they resisted moving to a political prisoners' cell, they would take the risk of being transferred to other prisons that were located in the western parts of Turkey, when almost all of those prisoners' parents and families live in this region, and if they were sent to west, they would have no one visiting them, including their own parents. You do not understand the reality that those people are coming from mostly poor parents, and those Kurdish parents are not even able to earn enough money to supply their basic needs. Because of this, those prisoners simply submit their request to be transferred to a political prisoners' cell. Do you see the irony here? Your own state pushes those repenters back into the arms of the organization.

The male political prisoners and some of the prison staff attempted to put similar pressure on the repent men's cell, also. They threatened the prison administration to be either sent to their side, or sent to prisons in the western parts of Turkey. There was even a head guardian working in that prison and he tried everything possible to close our cells. He was a pure organization member and did not hide it, even from the prison administration. Many times, he visited our cells and openly threatened us to return to the organization's side. We officially complained about him to the administration, but each time we went away empty handed. At some point, I could not take those pressures anymore, so I visited the prison prosecutor and the director and said them, "Look, your own staff member is forcing us to return to the organization, and regularly threatening us. I do not understand how can you allow such a follower the organization to work as the head guardian in this prison. I am telling you! He works for the organization. Do not you see what is happening here? We were 19 people just a year ago and

are now only seven. Why do you think those people left us? They got sick of hearing threats. They got sick of your negligence towards them and they got sick of being treated in such a derogatory manner in a Turkish prison, which is apparently controlled by the organization. I am warning you. You are helping the organization by allowing those people to put pressure on us.” Thank God, I had those two police officers accompany me during that visit, because the director had already made his mind that he was going to close down our cells.

Other than those unacceptable treatments, the prison administration also had once worked on a very stupid idea concerning the repenters. They decided to gather all repenter guerilla prisoners in a single prison located in the western part of Turkey, in order to get rid of the pressures applied by the political guerilla prisoners. Something like that would be a disaster for all the repenters, as I had already mentioned. We were all Kurds. Our parents, families and relatives all lived in this area. Here in this prison, my parents were at least able to visit and see me once every three weeks. If I were transferred to a prison in the west, they would hardly be able to visit me once every six months due to the financial concerns. Challenging it, we repenters were able to temporarily suspend that project, and I hoped the administrators would not think about carrying out such a plan in the future.

Because of such uncertainties, we had at least one comrade leaving us each year. It was sad to see that people were giving up. They would pack up their stuff, say goodbye to each of us, and then leave. They just did not want to tolerate such injustices any longer. They had too many things to think about. Their parents and families were living in desperate conditions outside. They were subject to continuous pressure inside the prison. On top of that, the Turkish state was ignorant of all of those things, and so, finally, they just give up. They did not want the load of so many problems. Therefore, they just transferred to the political guerilla prisoners’



cell. They even went to that cell knowing that they would be left alone for at least six months or more. The problems did not end because you joined them. The political prisoners punished them by not talking to them for almost a year. Only after that time were you allowed to make friends. You were allowed to chat with them and to sit and eat with them. Our repenters comrades went there, even though they knew those problems. They did that just because they cared about their parents, families and loved ones. They would say, "I'm willing to suffer the consequences as long as the organization leaves my family alone!"

The repenters friends, who left us were actually right. They made the right choice. We do not even know how the Turkish state will treat us in the future. Everything is uncertain, including the state. We were being treated differently from one director to another. There simply was no standard. By changing your support to the organization, people at least had a stability to their life in prison. They knew what they would encounter and did not expect too many surprises. I do not think there is another country in the world as undisciplined, disorganized, and without standard rules and politics as Turkey.

It was extremely stressful environment there, and so complex that sometimes we repenters were not getting along with each other due to circumstances out of our control. In the prison's view, we were all the same; nevertheless, it was not actually like that. For instance, many of the siblings of the repenters were also incarcerated but among the political guerilla convicts. One sibling was in the cell for repenters, and the other one was in the cell of political convicts. Worse than that, another sibling might still have not been caught or killed by the security forces, and he or she was fighting in the countryside, while a sibling was locked up in the repenters convicts' cell. We were in such a confusing and frustrating situation.

That problem, in fact, posed a life-threatening situation for us. The Ministry of Justice officials were largely negligent regarding which convict would stay in which cell. For example, I gave a testimony to the security forces about the sibling of one of the repenting comrades, who used to stay in our cell. Think what would happen if that repenting comrade heard about it? Would not he try to kill me? Would I be safe? Such a big risk! However, no one cared about it.

The brother, sister, or a relative of those who deserted the organization might still be fighting for them. In other words, one might have deserted the organization, but his or her loved ones could still be part of it, and this was actually very common. So, due to my testimony, I asked the prison administration to transfer the comrade staying in my cell to another prison, explaining to them my concerns for safety. “Look, I gave a testimony about the brother of this repentant comrade. If he hears about it, I could be in a serious trouble.” You know what happened? The prison administration decided to transfer me, not him, to another prison! They were going to send me away, instead of him. Thank God, a gendarme commander intervened and canceled that bullshit. That repenting comrade was transferred to Mardin/Midyat Prison Facility.

The Ministry of Justice generally fouled up on these transfer issues. They needed to be in close contact with the police and the gendarme forces when they made decisions on those issues. Those two security agencies should direct the Ministry of Justice, according to the information provided by the repenters, and should inform the Ministry of Justice about the information and testimonies given by the repenters—and then require the prison administrators to assign convicts into cells, considering that information. As those security agencies did not direct the Ministry of Justice, the officials who worked at the prisons had their freedom, in regards to cell arrangements. We knew of many convicts who lost their lives, because of such negligence.

## **PRISON STAFF AND CORRUPTION**

I do not think that the prison administrators or the guards were properly trained on correctional issues. They all worked on one principle: punishment. They did not view us as human beings who need treatment. Rather, in their eyes, we were guilty animals who needed nothing but the severest punishment. There was no program or policy, such as listening to the problems of the convicts and treating or educating them.

For instance, we convicts were only able see the prison administrators in two situations. On the day of your trial, they came to your cell and took you to the court. That was, literally, the only time one could see the directors of the prison. Second, on very rare occasions, they visited your cell if a fight had occurred between the convicts. In that situation, the directors visited your cell not to talk to you but to threaten you. Would not it have been good if the prosecutor, the director, or even a regular guard came to visit us in our cell, and then chatted with us on general topics? We really needed them to spend some time with us. We were bored there and were all about to burnout.

I can understand that how they treated us was because of the prejudices drilled into their brains. But what about the general prisoners, who had had nothing to do with terrorism. The administrators, at least, should have tried to help these petty criminals get out of their cycle of crime. You were doing no constructive good to them by simply putting them into a locked cell. They should have tried to understand why those people committed those crimes. Everyone there needed treatment. For example, there were many people incarcerated because of theft. I do not think the prison administrators talked to them in order to try and figure out why those people fell into a life of crime. Not all prisoners were the same. There may have been some among them who committed theft, because he or she had no other option. There were many there who

committed a homicide, and I wondered if some of them had gotten proper treatment, they might have had their lives changed for the better. Locking them up and leaving them alone was not the solution. I can tell you, that we were desperately in the need of psychological support. We felt as if we needed someone to come and talk to us. However, that prison administration thought that we had to be left alone.

This prison mentality in Turkey needs an urgent revision. Prisons should be viewed as rehabilitation or educational centers, who work with incarcerated people to help them successfully reenter society.

Look at the room in which you are interviewing me now, Murat. There are 30 computers donated by the European Union to be used for the social activities of the convicts. Why were they given? Why did the European Union pay so much money and buy those computers? They donated them for the incarcerated people's educational activities. In ten more days, I will have lived in this prison for six years, and I was allowed to use those computers only once throughout those six years. All those computers will be left to fall apart. [In fact, all of them were covered with a thick layer of dust. It was clear that they had not been used for a long time.]

If they had trained us with various courses, the prison facility could have also made money out of it. There used to be a textile, a football, and a volleyball court here when I first arrived. They are all closed down now. There was even a carpenter workshop, but the prison administrators closed it down. Why? Because many administrators were engaged in fraud and corruption. For example, the official who was the director of that carpenter workshop bought the wood for 100 TL from the store and then sold it to us for 200 TL. He and a couple other administrators shared the profit among themselves. In the end, all the courses were closed down because of that.

In fact, the same thing continues now. As I mentioned, we were allowed to work at the handcrafts workshop every day. The convicts are allowed to draw pictures, build ships, or make sculptures of various things to be sold outside the prison facility. The administrators increased the price of materials each month. For example, let's say I bought a bundle of rope for 100 TL one month. There is no way I can buy the same thing for the same price when I need it again. I paid 150 TL for the same bundle of rope in the following month. I was told that the prices changed due to inflation. How could a material's price increase by 50 percent in a month?

I once informed the prison prosecutor about this fraud. However, the director of the prison was getting his share from this corrupt business, too. He sabotaged my talk with the prosecutor with answers that made no sense. The prosecutor could not even understand what was going on, because of the director's interference with conversation. I could not inform the official authorities, since we were sold those materials without receipts. So, we cannot even prove this injustice. The prison administrators would say that we were lying. We were already known as terrorists by many of them. So, whom do you think the officials in Ankara would believe?

Never mind all those corrupt businesses. The cell, in which we have been staying, has not been given any maintenance for the past six years. They should at least have painted the walls. They are filthy and it bothers us. We convicts know that the Ministry of Justice allocates an annual budget for keeping up the maintenance in the prison. They buy a few cans of paint and then paint the areas seen by everyone, and that's it. Where does the rest of the money go? No one knows. The walls are like rubbish. Even an animal would not want to stay in those cells.

They say that a controller from Ankara visits the prison to make sure that everything is on the right track. Trust me, I have never seen anyone checking our cell during the last six years.

No one cares what those prisoners are doing—how they are treated, how are their life standards, what are the physical conditions of their cells? No one gives a shit about any of those things.

We heard from the guards that the controller tours around the facility has a lunch or dinner at an expensive restaurant in the city of Diyarbakir and then returns to Ankara. They just aren't doing what they are supposed to do and not doing their jobs well. Those controllers should check on where the annual budget money, provided by the Ministry of Justice, has been spent. They should check on whether the money has been used for its intended purpose. Everyone, from the prisoners, to the officer working here, knows that the budget allocated for those types of repairs was shared between the director and his assistant.

For example, the prison administration had a greenhouse facility built in the backyard of the prison area. Rumors spread that the cost of construction was billed for four times more than what it actually cost. As you can guess, the money was shared among our corrupt administrators. Worse than that, the administration has not yet allowed anyone to raise vegetables in that greenhouse. It just sits there. Forgetting about all the corruption, they should at least let us use that field to plant vegetables.

You know, if those guys found out that I had complained about their corrupt businesses, they would not hesitate to give me a really hard time. They would even try to transfer me to another prison. Most of the convicts are aware of this corruption in the prison. However, no one wants to fight against it in fear of being transferred to another facility. The parents of most of the prisoners incarcerated here live in the city of Diyarbakır, so, in order to stay close to their parents, all those convicts endure the pressure and maltreatment.

The corruption pretty much started after the new director was appointed. No one dared to confront him, because he has close political connections. I had wanted to report these

happenings by writing petitions to the Ministry of Justice. Unfortunately, we would not have been able to follow the movement of where the petition went. The guards might read it and tear it up. As I mentioned before, I am personally not afraid of anything. The worst they could do to me would be to transfer me to another facility, and I could accept that. But, shame on the Ministry of Justice officials and the prison prosecutor if they would allow my transfer simply because I told the truth.

### **THE DUPED REPENTERS**

I am not sure whether the petitions I sent to the Ministry of Interior, Besir Atalay, regarding the situation of the repenters in the prison, reached him, but I also sent the same messages to the Ministry of Justice. I wrote to both of them: “We repenters voluntarily surrendered to the government. We were not arrested in a clash or operation. We personally gave ourselves to you. Now, look at us! Without exception, we have all been sentenced to life!”

You talked about a repentance law from the government, but you have sentenced those who surrendered themselves, to 50 years in prison! As I mentioned, I am staying in the repenter convicts cell, and all of us were sentenced to life, even though we had expected to benefit from the repentance law. We will all die here in this prison. What I do not understand is whether that repentance law has actually ever been applied to any convict.

For example, there were two comrades here, who used to be active within the organization, years ago and left to live in major Iraqi cities. They were both married and had children. The Turkish security forces, and the MIT (Turkish National Intelligence Agency) had contacted them in order to persuade them to return to Turkey. They had both been told, “Return to Turkey, and after a short trial period, we will set both of you free with the repentance law.

The MIT managed to convince them to return to Turkey, and then both of them were sentenced to a life sentence.

An intelligence officer, from the gendarmerie, had promised them this freedom. As I said, both of those comrades were living comfortably as regular Iraqi citizens. They accepted this offer because they both wanted to be able to visit their parents who lived within the borders of Turkey. The gendarmerie intelligence officer had told them, "Return, let your trial begin, and I promise that you will not be punished. If you accept my offer, you will have no problem going back and forth between Turkey and Iraq." Both of the comrades had come here in order to take advantage of that offer. But, to their surprise, when they surrendered themselves to the security officers, they were unable to see the intelligence officer who had promised to help them. They asked where they could find him, but the other officials told them, "You cannot see him again. He was assigned to another post in Ankara." No one had cared about the promises, since the man who had promised all those things, was no longer there. In short, they were both duped into returning. They both were sentenced to life.

One of these comrades was able to bring his wife and child to the city of Uşak. The woman and the child now live there all alone. Was this justice? Do you security officers call this a successful career? That comrade, who was able to bring his family to Turkey, was fortunate. The other comrade's wife is still in Iraq, living alone with a two-year-old baby. Can you imagine what kind of psychological stress that comrade is under? He's not able to see his child, and does not even now know if they are getting along. I, and the others, at least have our parents visiting, and letting us know how everyone is doing, but this poor comrade has no way of doing that. I get very angry about these stupid schemes, whenever I talk about them. The



security officers ruined the unity of two families, just to show themselves successful in the media. Of course, there may have been others who were affected in this way

That particular intelligence officer had actually contacted 15 former guerilla comrades in Iraq. The remaining 13 had been astute enough to not accept the offer. They had said to the two comrades, who were willing to surrender themselves, “Comrades, we will not accept this offer. If you are so willing to do that, you go and see what will happen. If they really keep their promises, then we will also travel to Turkey and surrender ourselves.” When the ones who had remained in Iraq heard that those two had not only been arrested but also been sentenced to life, they all immediately gave up the idea of returning to Turkey

I told my concerns about those policies to the security forces many times. “You are using a strategy that will do serious harm your cause in the long run! By incarcerating those who voluntarily surrendered themselves and giving them a life sentence, you close the doors for the ones, within the organization, who want to desert it. If those who voluntarily surrendered were set free, after a few years of incarceration, believe me many others would follow them. If this former guerilla was released back into society, he would be seen by his neighbors, relatives, or someone from the neighborhood. I told you, every single family has a member fighting for the organization. Those mothers and fathers would say, ‘Hey, that family’s son has returned and he was not punished so severely, so why should our son continue to fight in the mountains? He should return to us, too.’ Believe me, those mothers who see other mothers rejoined with their sons and daughters, will try to encourage their sons and daughters to come back to them. Life out there is not easy, and any mother in the world, including Kurdish mothers, would not want their child to live such a life. However, when these mothers see that the Turkish state sentences the guerillas who surrendered themselves, to a life sentence, they would warn their sons not to

return to Turkey. They will say, ‘Oh my son, please stay where you are, and do not ever come back here. It is better to live in mountains than to be locked up for the rest of your life!’”

The Turkish governments have been unsuccessful in terms of benefitting from the repenters. You do not have to look too far to see what Barzani had been doing. He had a special force, other than his Peshmerga soldiers, which consisted of approximately 1,500 guerillas, who used to fight for the PKK. The chief commander of this force was a person named Aziz Veysi, a former PKK guerilla commander. Although Barzani was not experienced in politics, he was very good at taking advantage of every opportunity. Such a professional group of fighters was not easy to obtain. Many governments spend a lot of money to train their soldiers to be professional.

Barzani was clever, because he knew how to recruit those former PKK guerillas. During the Iraqi war, when the United States invaded Iraq, the most effective force fighting in the coalition forces was Barzani’s special forces, which consisted of former PKK members. This situation was even reflected in the media., when the Turkish press informed the public that, “A former ranked PKK commander was assigned to the head of general staff position in the territory controlled by Barzani within Iraq.” If the guerillas in the countryside had doubts, and were sick of fighting for years, would they surrender themselves to Turkish security forces and receive a life sentence, or would they go and enroll in this special forces, get a monthly salary, and live a regular life? Which one would you do?

Have you ever thought why those repentant former guerillas asked for their transfer to a D-type prison facility (the facility in which only political guerillas were incarcerated) when they saw that the Turkish government did not protect them? Believe it or not, many of the local institutions, municipalities, health and even education departments are under the direct control of

the organization in this region. This included the prison guards who worked at the prisons in that area. The officers in the prison were included in this. The Turkish government can either take it or leave it. This was the reality and everyone here knew it. When a guerilla deserts the organization and prefers to stay in the repenter convicts' cell, the organization asked the local agencies (municipalities and other places under its control) to fire their parents, family members, relatives, and even their friends. I mean they pushed you into the corner by pressuring the individuals that you love. The repenter here were in such a difficult situation. You had no idea what the hell we repenter went through. Their loved ones were all fired from their jobs, just because they preferred to stay in the repenter convicts' cell. Who would take care of their parents? Who would give them jobs? That is why many of our repenter comrades asked for a transfer to the political guerilla prisoners' cell.

If you stayed among the political prisoners, the organization met all your needs in the prison. You received a monthly salary from the organization, in a Turkish state controlled prison! Moreover, since you were now a hero, one of your parents or family members was immediately given a good paying job in one of the institutions in the region, and you decided who would get that job! Can you see the irony here? The organization was, in fact, doing what the Turkish state should have been doing for the repenter guerillas. The organization looked after the repenter guerilla convicts and convinced them to move into D-Type Facilities with those great incentives, whereas, the Turkish state should actually have been doing the same thing for the political guerilla prisoners.

A comrade, who had been incarcerated in a repenter convicts' cell for almost 15 years when I was first brought here, left us five days ago, and joined the ones at the D-Type. He said that he could not take it anymore. He had joined the military operations, helped the security

forces in the field, but in return, was not rewarded with any kind of reduction in his life sentence. Even worse, his family had been subjected to community pressure, since their son was viewed as a traitor by many Kurds. The prison guards would sometimes visit our cells in the middle of the night and swear us. They blamed us for being traitors to the Kurdish cause in their government's prison, because we deserted the organization, took sides with the state, and chose to stay in the repenters' cell. In their eyes, we were nothing but servants of the enemy!

I do not think the person who sits at the top of the Ministry of Justice is aware of this situation. My family lived in the city of Batman. They had to leave it temporarily and move to Istanbul when I joined the organization. However, they returned to Batman after I surrendered myself just to be able to be close to me. Since I am staying at the repenters' cell, no one from my family or from my relatives are allowed to have a job at the municipalities or other local institutions. I have six siblings. They all work in daily, temporary jobs, in order to earn their livelihood. It is only because I sided with the Turkish state as a repenters, against the organization, which has been carrying out its intimidation procedures in this clever way. They do not punish us, but the ones we love. Once, my father visited the Batman City Municipality, and asked for a worker's position for one of my brothers. He was insulted in front of everyone and had been told, "How do you dare to come here and ask for a job for your son? Go back now and take care of your repenters bastard first!"

Because of all these things occurring outside, it was desperately hard to wait in here. Moreover, most of our repenters friends, who could not take those pressures any more, began to switch to D-Type Facilities, one by one. The comrades who left us, often said, "Why should I side with the Turkish state if we, repenters and the political guerilla convicts are sentenced to the same punishment? At least my family and parents will be okay, if I transfer to the political

convicts. They will be given a job, with a monthly salary, and will also be welcomed with respect in the neighborhood.”

In 2010, when I was first incarcerated, there were 19 comrades in repenters’ cell. There are now only seven left. Before those comrades left, they all explained their reasoning to us. For instance, the one that left us last week said, “I surrendered myself because I trusted Turkish government. However, so far, they have neither protected nor helped us. I, as a repenters and a political guerilla suspect were put in front of the judge in the same trial. I told the judge, in a polite manner, that I wanted to benefit from the repentance law. I even told him that I wanted to work for the Turkish government. The political prisoner, on the other hand, swore at the judge and mocked him in front of the crowd. In the end, we both received the same punishment. So, why should I continue to remain on side of the government, if it does not bring me any benefit?” Unfortunately, those comrades are right in their reasoning.

I do not know if the people who worked at the judiciary and security agencies in Turkey were dumb, or if they knew something of which we were not aware. They could benefit from the people who voluntarily surrendered themselves, if they would conduct a deep investigation into finding out why a former guerilla now wanted to side with the government and, only after then, use the ones that they felt were fully trustworthy. If we really wanted, we could easily go to Iraq or one of the European countries. I could even stay in Turkey, with a fake ID. But, despite all those opportunities, I surrendered myself to the security forces.

There were even frequent skirmishes between the Turkish security forces and the organization in 2011. I wrote a letter to the commander back then, asking, “Why do you make those repenters wait in their cells? You have been giving statements to the media, saying that you have been establishing a special troop and that you are recruiting people for a professional

army, similar to the one in the United States. You cannot find more professional soldiers than these repenters incarcerated in prisons. I argue that your 20-trained marron berets cannot fight as effectively as a three-year-trained guerilla. It's because those repenters were former guerillas! They knew the fighting strategy of the organization, from ambushes to explosives. They've spent their life in the mountains, during the hot weather in the summer and cold in the winter. They lived on the edge of life and knew how to struggle against the hardships of the life."

The officials assumed that the organization would change the tactics, locations of arms and provisions, codes, and other things after each repenter surrendered himself or herself to the security forces. This was partly true. Yes, the organization had to take some measures when a guerilla deserted from a specific region. However, even though the locations might change, the former guerillas could still correctly guess the potential future locations and hideouts of the organization in the region from which they came. Therefore, those repenters should not be a burden on the shoulders of the state, but should be employed in areas that for which they are best suited.

For example, on the evening of the day that I surrendered myself to the gendarme, the thermal cameras, used by the security forces, received an image of a group of guerillas from Garzan State. They showed me the pictures. I asked them at what time the thermal cameras recorded those images, and they said it was recorded at 12.30 a.m. I checked the time, and found it to be 3:00 a.m. It had been two and a half hours. I thought for a while and then said, "That guerilla group must be at the foothills of this mountain be now. They will walk only until 4:00 a.m., and then they will find a place to hide and rest before sunrise." Of course, the soldiers did not trust me, but I insisted, "Look! Carry out a land operation to those two spots and you can arrest them all without any killing." I heard that some of the gendarme officials said that they

could not trust me at this point. I responded, “I really do not care whatever you do! But, the group is there.”

The gendarme ignored what I said. In fact, the gendarme forces were regarded, within the organization, as the most awkward and least dangerous security force in Turkey. The police were the most dangerous enemy for the guerillas. In fact, the police never encountered the guerilla in the countryside. The Turkish police had established a kind of special operation team in recent years, but I never encountered those teams in the areas in which I fought. The reason why the police were regarded as more dangerous for the organization was the cruelty and pressure they applied to local civilian Kurds living in cities. If you went to Iraq and picked a random guerilla and asked him or her if they wanted to kill five soldiers or two police officers, without exception, all of them would say that they were possessed with killing police officers. The only reason for this was the injustice and inhumane attitude of the police officers towards the civilian Kurds. The soldiers carried out operations to engage in skirmishes with us and faced us directly. In those skirmishes, either they would kill us, or we would kill them. It was the rule of the game! However, the police did not play the game according to its rules. They treacherously pushed the civilian Kurds into a corner, in order to hurt us.

The public, especially the youth in the southeastern cities of Turkey, would occasionally organize a peaceful demonstration march. We watched those mass movements on the TV, and sometimes the police were so cruel towards the civilians that we, who are thought to be terrorists, even could not bring ourselves to watch them. The police were indiscriminately beating up women, children, and elderly people. All the guerilla units in the training camps were required to watch those videos of the demonstration marches. I once received a DVD of police cruelty from 2006. The funerals of 13 organization members, who were martyred in the countryside,

had been brought to the city of Diyarbakır in March, (I think on the 26th.) Six of those comrades were going to be buried in a graveyard in Diyarbakır. If I am not mistaken, eight civilian Kurdish people were killed by the security forces during the funeral ceremony. Believe me, when a guerilla watches those videos, he or she wants to tear apart the first police officer they see—so eager were they to seek revenge.

There was another video from the city of Van. The police had caught a nine-or ten-year old child and intentionally broke his arm by twisting it. I still cannot forget the screaming of that poor Kurdish child. I cannot understand how a human being could be so cruel towards a child. We would explode with anger when we watched those types of videos, and that was the reason that we hated the police more than any other security forces in Turkey. I think it was in 2006 that Cemil Bayık officially ordered all the guerillas, operating within the borders of Turkey, to make their priority target the police, not the soldiers.

When I was being questioned at the police department, I explained all those misapplications of duty, to the directors of the police. “You are following a mistaken policy. You will lose the hearts and minds of the public, if you continue to behave in that way. Try to cause the Kurdish youth to admire you, when they are around! Approach them while they still live in the cities, otherwise, you will encounter them fighting against you in five to ten years, in the countryside.” This would not have been something difficult to achieve. Two or three official committees could have been formed, and one of those committees could engage the Kurdish youth living in the cities, while the other one could visit their parents on a regular basis. In this way, they would become acquainted with the Kurds more closely. Then, they could have established one other committee to take care of religious affairs; having them visit the mosques and religious organizations, and a talking regularly with them. This would have created an



atmosphere in which those three committees could work efficiently together. Also, they should have stopped marginalizing the Kurds. Stopped seeing every single Kurd as a potential enemy. Stopped disseminating propaganda on the TV by continuously saying, “Those are not Kurds but are Armenians, or Zoroaster, or atheists.” Those types of derogatory statements, in fact, made the public even angrier. And they still did not see the fact, that every single Kurdish household had at least one member fighting for the organization.”

Almost 90 percent of the people living in that region were Muslims! Who cared what they believed before? If they were now called infidels, Armenians, or atheists, the love of those people was lost, and those insulting words pushed the Kurds of the region into the arms of the organization. For example, not too long ago, in 2005, after the statement of Prime Minister Erdoğan towards the people of Hakkari directing them, “You people either will love this country, or leave this country,” the applications from Hakkari to join the organization tripled. I can even say that the city of Hakkari, as a whole, joined the organization. They should have stopped bitching with words such as, “The people who support PKK are not Muslim Kurds, but Armenians.” Instead, they should have organized teams who could communicate, who could understand the grievances of the Kurds in the east, and employed equal numbers of men and women in those teams, letting them engage with the public. Let them show their love and respect to the Kurds. Let them socialize with the Kurds. Stop seeing them as your enemies. If you really wanted to gain the hearts and minds of these people, you had no other option but getting close to them!” I explained this on several occasions. It only passed over their heads. It has been almost six years since I was incarcerated. The officials have neither established a committee nor developed any projects to socialize with the public.

Members of the Turkish government did not fulfill their obligations but then questioned why the Kurdish people felt such a profound sympathy towards the organization and why the peasants aided and abetted the guerillas. So, what have they done so far for the Kurds that they feel as if they had the right to call the Kurds into account for supporting the organization? When they saw a Kurdish child on the street, did they caress his head, ask if he needed anything, or give him a piece of candy? Did they meet with his parents, talk and socialize with them, and let them see their sincerity and love? If they had done what I told them, that family would never forget their favor, and they would not have encouraged their children to go up to the mountains and kill security officers.

### **RUINING THE LIFE OF THE LOVED ONES**

We repenters did not only ruin our own lives but also the lives of our families. Consider the comrade who came here from Iraq and surrendered himself to the security forces on the promise that he would be soon freed. His brother used to work for the city of Batman Municipality. When he decided to stay in the repenters' cell, his brother was fired from his job. His brother's whole family, including his wife and children, were put into a very difficult situation. Since all the doors were closed to them, the whole family had to immigrate to the west, to the city of Izmir. They had to leave the place where they were born and lived for so many years, just because one of the siblings took the side of the security forces. We learned later that his brother now works there as a painter.

My situation was the same. None of my brothers were eligible to apply for a job at the municipality, just because I sided with the Turkish government. Moreover, my poor father became ill because of me. I caused him to have many psychological illnesses. He was always

thinking and worrying about me while I was in prison. I am also a financial burden for them. They feel as if they need to send me money all the time.

No matter whether it was accepted it or not, the organization had full control on local matters. It had the power to put pressure on any family it wanted, whenever it wanted. Consider the prisons. Many of the employers were closely associated with the organization. For example, on February 19, 2009, my region commander was arrested. Only six days later, I was able to read all the statements he gave to the police and the gendarme on February 25th. I was able to obtain all that information, taken during the questioning stage at the security forces, despite the fact that I was incarcerated in the repenter convict's cell. That meant that even his lawyer was not present, leaving only three options for any leakage—someone from the police, the gendarme, or the prosecutor's office.

If your government claims that it has full authority all over of Turkey, then they should at least control who is assigned to work in its prisons, but, at least 70 percent of the prison staff worked for the organization. Those prison guards do whatever they are told by the organization. Let me give you an example that occurred recently. A new repenter comrade had just been brought to our cell three days ago. He had been in the snow for a prolonged period of time, while he was fleeing away from the organization. His toes were all frozen and he as in very bad straits. The doctors had to cut off all the toes on one of his feet, and two toes on the other one. Only one day after that operation, he was discharged from the hospital, and immediately transferred to the prison, and put in a bed in the prison infirmary. A clown, who had been arrested on a criminal case, kept calling him, "The repentant asshole," and no one, from the doctors to the prison guards, had even attempted to stop him from throwing those cusswords. The patient had also been subjected to similar cusswords, all during his stay in that infirmary. I

still find it hard to accept those situations. Something on that level would not even occur in Kandil camp, a place that was under the full control of the PKK. However, it was occurring in a prison, which was officially under the control of the Turkish Republic.

On the third day of his arrival to the infirmary, that comrade was brought to our cell in order to prevent potential quarrels among him and the other convicts. We were all shocked at how the Turkish state could incarcerate a person in such a bad shape, before properly treating him in a hospital. He was not even able to go to restroom by himself, he was in such miserable condition. Yesterday, we took him to the open area, attached to our cell; first shaving him, and then giving him a bath.

Believe me, if he were among the political prisoners, he would be taken care of so well. The prison administration would probably even bring a special physician from outside, treat him properly. He would even stay in the infirmary until he was fully recovered. They would have taken good care of him.

Now, look how he has been treated, just because he surrendered himself. His feet are still bleeding. The administration should have at least asked him if he were able to stay in a cell. We current residents of our cell forced the administration to accept him back into the infirmary, and he stayed there for two more nights. Again, one of the clowns there swore at him for being a repent. Therefore, he sent us a message to please carry him back to the cell, despite the fact that he needed infirmary care. If you remember, all the beds were located on the second floor. This boy could not even go to restroom by himself, let alone be climbing up the stairs. He is still sleeping on the first floor in the kitchen area.

We take to heart those kinds of insulting actions and experience them all the time, when we visit the infirmary or go to the sports hall. Everyone looks at us as the enemy. Not only the

guards but also the criminal Kurdish convicts treat us as if they would kill us at the very first opportunity. Everyone here has a connection with the organization—some having their siblings, relatives, parents, or friends fighting it the mountains for the organization. It is the same for both the prison staff and the other convicts. We seven repenters are stuck among all those organization supporters. They sometimes smile to our face, but we know that they want to kill us, because we are repenters in their eyes.

We feel devastated because the Turkish state does not protect us in their own prison. Many of our friends have requested their transfer to organization supporters' cell just because they could not take the Turks' negligence. Many of us transferred there, despite the risk of being mocked at for years.

When a repenter is transferred to a political guerilla prisoner's cell, he or she is left isolated for at least for 6 to 10 months as a kind of punishment. They will always wonder, "What did this repenter do with the Turkish government? What kind of information did he leak to the security forces? Has he ever lead military operations, by showing them the secret hideouts? Which militants were arrested because of the information he provided to the Turks?" They will look at you as a traitor for a very long time. Therefore, the problems do not end, even when we change sides. But, despite all this isolation and prejudice, many of the repenters switch to the political prisoners' cell.

I heard from the old repenters, that it was not like that in the old days. Until the year of 2000, no one would dare to say something bad to the repenters, because the security forces needed their help and experience. Back then, they were taken out to the countryside to fight alongside the security forces. Now, the security forces do not need them anymore, so they are no longer valuable to them.

I told the prosecutors all those problems, especially during the initial years of my incarceration. I talked with them for hours. Two guerillas were put on trial. The same prosecutor prepares both files. One of the guerillas says, "I quit the organization and I am sorry about whatever happened in the past, but I am now siding with the Turkish state." On the other hand, the second guerilla says, "Down with the Turks!" He openly declares that he is still in the organization. The prosecutor asks for the same punishment for those two. It has always happened this way.

Is it right to give both of them the same punishment? Where is the justice! We often got angry with ourselves for having surrendered to the security forces. We think again and again about the circumstances we suffered, the life conditions to which we were subjected, and the punishments we endured. This upsets us all. Everyone in the cell gets especially angry with me, since I did not go to Iraq or Europe and live a free life, even though I had that opportunity. I respond to them, admitting that I was a fool. Two other comrades, Engin Papatya and Şükrü Arslan, who had been deceived by the MIT [Turkish National Intelligence Agency] and brought from Iraq, said the same thing. They both left the organization in 1987 and had been living a regular civilian life in Iraq, for almost 13 years. They were employed as workers at construction sites. They had not committed any crimes or carried out any missions while they were in the organization. The lying state knocked on their doors, and told them, "Come back to Turkey. We will try you both, and then set you free!" However, they were both sentenced to life in prison. Their wives and children were left high and dry. What kind of justice was this? If you were the son of that man, would not you get revenge from the Turkish state? Would not you want to kill the intelligence officer who deceived your father? Would you not want to annihilate the chief

Justice of Diyarbakır 7th court, who ruined his life in 2000 despite the fact that he knew the truths?

Consider the most recent repentance law that was put into effect by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The politicians were saying that they would not punish the organization members who had not participated in any guerilla missions. I do not understand this mentality. What good is it for the state to convince guerillas to lay down their arms that had not carried out any missions? I am sure that 90 percent of the organization members have participated in at least one mission. As a state, you were putting into force a bullshit repentance law, which targeted the inexperienced newbies, who literally know nothing about the organization. And since your target group was very specific, you achieved nothing by that law.

There has been no repentance law designed, so far, that targeted the commander cadre of the organization. Convincing one commander to surrender himself, is equal to defusing at least thirty guerillas. Because, if you can achieve that, the state in which that commander used to work cannot carry out any missions for at least a year. However, the organization does not care whether ground guerillas, most particularly the newbies, desert the organization, because there is no information that can be leaked by a newbie. Those types of issues should be carefully examined, when designing the repentance laws.

The officials must do something so that the repenters do not feel so alone. I have already mentioned that there were so many things that could have been done. Nevertheless, if a general amnesty law was put into effect and freed all the repenters and political guerilla prisoners at the same time, you would lose the hearts and minds of the repenter convicts and their families, simply because the organization would argue that the general amnesty was granted because of its negotiations with the state. They would say that such an amnesty would not have been granted,

if it were not for the organization. Our problems would not vanish, even we were set free. The political guerilla prisoners would be welcomed as heroes, when released. We, on the other hand, would be regarded as traitors in the community.

The organization was also against the word “amnesty.” For example, if the Turkish government today declared that it was forgiving all the political guerilla prisoners, the organization would harshly object, because no one who served the organization, including myself, would think that they had committed crime. Amnesty is granted for criminals. We were not criminals. We simply defended our rights against a racist and oppressive regime. Thus, the government should also be careful in selecting appropriate language before carrying out its plans. For example, officials could say that they are freeing all the convicts because of a mutual agreement they had signed with the organization.

On the other hand, even if the state were unable to free all those repenters, who were sentenced to life, they should at least release the ones who had served ten to 15 years. The officials should consider applying a positive discrimination towards the people who deserted the organization and sided with them. For instance, there was a former militant, named Faruk, in our cell. He had never been to the mountains, and he had stayed with the political guerilla prisoners during the first eight years of his incarceration. He later switched to the repentant cells. He is now 60 years old, and has been here for almost 23 years. He has never been given a reduction in his sentence due to good conduct. I do not understand why the officials are keeping him incarcerated. Let him go! Let him live out the last days of his life with his parents.

I had explained all those situations to many senior officials, but no one had paid any attention to me. I think they thought that I was asking for those changes for myself. If they



implemented what I told them, they would have already weakened the organization. They would have had high dropout numbers from the mid-level members of the organization.

As a state, if you do not offer a way out for the guerillas who have already engaged in an armed conflict, you can never end this problem within Turkey. No one will give up on fighting, if the state continues to sentence guerillas to life whether or not they voluntarily surrendered themselves. In each of the prisons, especially the ones located in the east, there were staff members who worked for the organization under the guise of state employees, and those prison employees were in a close daily contact with headquarters. They informed the outside guerillas about how badly the repenters were treated by the state, and how they were discarded by the security forces. Do you think that someone who wanted to desert the organization would leave it, upon hearing of this negligence?

Forget the arguments about providing reduced sentences for the repenters and even about providing financial help to the repenter convicts, but at least have visits to the cells of repenter convicts, just to show them that they were not alone. The organization, morally and financially, supports the political guerilla prisoners. Many of the prison guards also support the political prisoners. However, the repenters are all by themselves. No one was expecting anything financial but just showing your love and interest to those people would mean so much. But everything is denied to the repenters, and all is left to the control of a corrupt prison administration. If they were allowed, the prison administration would even disarray our cells.

I wish it were only us getting affected by those mistreatments, but our parents also go through many hardships, because we sided with the Turkish state. A while ago, my parents would not even dare to visit me in this prison, because the visitors were first required to wait outside the facility, until their paperwork was done. Each week, hundreds of people came here

to visit their loved ones; most being relatives of the political guerilla prisoners. I do not know whether the prison guards or the organization instructed them to do so, but the visitors of the political guerilla convicts always threatened our parents when they encountered them. For a long time, my parents could not come here to visit me because they were so frightened by those threats.

Another comrade's family came here three times and left without having a chance to talk with him. The visitors of the political guerilla prisoners had threatened his wife and small children. They frightened the wife saying, "Are you here to visit your repenting dog?" The Turkish soldiers guarding the main entrance of the prison never intervened in those threats, so the wife and children had to leave the area, even though guarded by Turkish soldiers. That repenting friend could not take that treatment of his wife and children anymore, so he requested his transfer to the political prisoners' cell.

We repenting convicts could endure many difficulties, but our parents were not like us. They were more vulnerable than we. They were in the public's eye 24/7. They had to go to the grocery stores, coffee shops, schools, and other places, and were constantly being denigrated at these places, when they came across any of the organization supporters. Remember that many Kurds supported the organization, so they faced problems daily, and life was very hard for them. We are even lucky compared to our families. We are locked up in a cell every day, and only left when we visited the infirmary. We did not have to come in contact with anyone, but our parents did.

One of our comrades' father has not visited his son in prison for the last 15 years. The old man could not take the pressure of being insulted at the coffee shops, grocery stores, parks, and other social activity places. People had said to him, "What kind of bastard did you bring up?"

He's a traitor to the Kurdish cause!" That poor man has had serious psychological problems because of that abuse and is still refusing to see his son.

Finally, the psychology of prison is very difficult, and you cannot understand what I mean, unless you are incarcerated. We always think and worry about our parents and family members. Some comrades here are married and have children. Their situation is even worse compared to mine. They always think about their sons and daughters and have missed all those beautiful years with their children.

Once a month, we were allowed to have conjugal visits with our wives. Since I am not married, I meet with my parents during those days. Occasionally, my parents miss that day, and it is really tough on us when they do not come. We wonder, over and over if something bad has happened to them, and lose our sleep until we hear from them. In the best-case scenario, it takes weeks to learn whether they are okay or not. During that time, our attitudes, behaviors, and even appetites change, including our tones of voice!

## CHAPTER 23

### PENITENCE (SECOND THOUGHTS)

I do not regret anything I have done, except for two incidents. I fought against the Turkish state for legitimate reasons. We, as the organization, have never demanded anything illogical. We initially set out to achieve a free Kurdish state, but after 1993, we changed our minds. We decided that an autonomous region in the Turkish Republic would be best for the interest of the Kurds.

The first incident, for which I am still deeply regretful is the one I had with the Kurdish village protection guards, during the initial years of my career in the organization, and it still psychologically disturbs me. I feel extremely sad, whenever I remember what happened on that day.

I still do not understand how we carried out that massacre. I just do not get it! It haunts my sleep. It was normal to have a fight with a soldier, village protection guard, or a police officer. Either you killed them or they killed you. It was completely normal—the rule of the fight. However, we should never have killed those civilian Kurdish peasants. Those people should not have been harmed in this fight. The very reason of starting this fight against the Turkish state was to protect the rights of these poor Kurdish peasants. If we, as the organization, harmed the people that we were, in fact, supposed to protect, then we had a serious problem.

The second thing that I still regret is the assassination that I committed in the city of Siirt, in 1993. I felt very guilty by that assassination, because I did not know the man I killed. Who he was, or what he was doing there. He died for nothing. His only fault was to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

After that sad incident, I always raised my objections to the missions to be carried out in the city centers. I never approved of carrying out bombing or assassination missions within the city centers. But I accepted the fact that those types of missions strengthened the hands of the organization, because whenever a bomb went off in a city center, the organization had more power with which to negotiate with the government. It was easy to kill by hiding inside of a crowd. However, there was always the risk of killing civilians by mistake. Many innocent civilians, in fact, lost their lives during our city missions. Furthermore, it was not just about the people who lost their lives. Think about the psychological effects of the people in the city. Do you think people can continue to behave normally, after a bomb goes off in a familiar place? The fear of uncertainty is really difficult.

After such an incident, the public would be nervous for a long time, wondering when it might happen again. Once that psychological fear dominates a society, it affects everything from the social life to the economy. In the past, there occurred a bombing mission in Diyarbakir, in the district of Baglar, in which a couple adults and three children lost their lives. We were getting news from our civilian organization members that the psychological damage was serious. Parents would not let their children play outside very often. And when they did, the mothers ran out to check on their children whenever they heard a loud noise in the neighborhood, on the assumption that another bomb had exploded. Society is unable to live a normal life under that uncertainty. After anything unusual happens in that neighborhood, mothers will worry about whether their child has been killed or whether something has happened to another of their loved ones. Several times, I faced this situation with the seniors of the organization. I said to them, "If we really need to carry out a mission in a city, the target must be clear and only the target should be killed. We should stop using explosives, since innocent civilians and children also die. If

necessary, we should train more assassins for those kinds of mission so that we do not kill anyone mistakenly.”

Other than those two incidents, I feel absolutely no regret about anything I did before. I have a clear conscience about my missions in the organization. I am aware of what I did and why I did it. All my fight was for the righteous struggle of the Kurdish cause. Twenty years of experience within the organization taught me many things. I had a close brush with death many times and was seriously wounded at least six or seven times. I never had a guarantee to live one more day when I was in the organization. We were, in fact, aware that we could lose our lives in any moment.

Just before graduating from the ranked guerilla school in the organization, each cadet was given a document with close to 100 questions in it. There were every kind of question you could imagine. For example, have you ever had a guilty conscience regarding what you have done so far? That question is specifically asked of the guerillas in the commander echelon on many occasions. Ranked guerillas were required to provide a detailed written response to that question. There were other similar questions in that document, such as, “Which guerilla mission had you enjoyed the most? What kind of missions were you planning to carry out in the future? In which regions did you want to fight and why?” All your answers were recorded in your electronic file and kept at the organization’s archives. Let’s say you were going to be assigned to a position, the seniors would check your answers to those questions to determine whether you would be qualified for that future position, figuring out your personality, through inspection of your files.

Headquarters did not send me to another mission in the Turkish state-sided Kurdish villages, because of the report I wrote after completing that mission. I was not sent on any other

mission, even though I was a good fighter. It was simply because the seniors knew that I could not take such another horror. I would have gone crazy, if I were forced to engage in another civilian massacre. In that bloody mission that we carried out in a village between the towns of Şirwan and Hizan in 1993, I had harshly argued with the platoon commander, even though I was just a squad leader at that time. The argument became so serious that we were just about to kill each other.

The mission we carried out was successful. All of the village protection guards that worked for the Turkish state were killed. There was left only the women, children, and elderly people in the village. The platoon commander ordered our comrades to put the rest of the people into a line to be executed by firing squad. There were six children between the ages of four to five in that line. After the quarrel I had with the platoon commander, I headed towards the line and took out all the little children. At that moment, I realized that there was also an old man, probably at his 60s. I remember it like it was yesterday. He said to me, “My son, I have one last request before your friends kill us.” I said, “Please tell me.” He asked me to give him a cigarette. I took out my tobacco box and rolled up a cigarette for him. In the meantime, the platoon commander began yelling at me, “Deniz, what the hell do you think you are doing? Leave the group! We will start shooting them now!” I was already upset with him about this whole execution thing. It was completely unnecessary. Angrily, I said to him, “We are not going to kill this old man!” I held his hand and took him out of the group. I said to him, “Please take these children with you and go away from here as soon as possible!” You should have seen how happy that old man was. He tried to kiss my hand to show his respect for me, but I did not allow him to do such a thing, and said to him, “Grandfather, take the children and leave now. There is nothing more I can do for you.”

I headed back to the platoon commander and continued to quarrel with him. I still had hopes that I could also save the rest of the group. I said, “Look at me! You cannot kill innocent women and elderly like this. It would be justifiable to kill them if they had fought against us! But, they did not! What good does it do to kill these people now? They’ve surrendered to us, so what is the rationale to kill them? Please, let them go with their children!”

The platoon commander burst with anger. He would have even shot me if he had had that authority. I had chastened him in front of the other guerillas. However, those 24 innocent civilians were all executed by the firing squad. I still feel guilty about that incident. If I had tried harder, I might have been able to convince the platoon commander to leave the village without killing those women and elderly. Nevertheless, I was young; only 21 years old, and arguing with a 40-year-old platoon commander. I am still unable to remember that civilian massacre, without remorse. There has been a pain in my heart because of that day and it will remain until the day I die.

Back then, I had notified headquarters about that incident, with a written complaint. Later, even Apo harshly criticized me, as I was being trained at the guerilla-training academy in Syria. I was the only one left alive from that mission that was carried out in 1993. Many of those comrades had died before 1996. Apo did not know all the details of that mission that I had argued with the platoon commander to not kill those civilians. How could he? Since I was the only survivor of that massacre, he had called me on the carpet. “How could you be that brutal and unmerciful? How could you kill those civilians without feeling any remorse?” He gave me a roasting for more than an hour for that massacre.

I could have said to Apo that I had taken no part in that massacre. I mean, I could easily blame the fallen comrades, who carried out the execution. However, that would have been



unethical. Therefore, I kept quiet and did not let him know about what had actually happened there. Apo was a smart person and he remembered me at the graduation ceremony of the academy, and said, “Deniz, you will not kill civilians anymore. I do not want to ever hear of something like that.” I said, “I promise, leader Apo! I will never ever do anything like that again.”

Even though I promised him, it was sometimes difficult to fight in the countryside without killing innocent people, for reasons that were out of our control. For example, we would sometimes be put under heavy fire from a house in a village. Someone would be shooting at us from the door or the windows of the house. We would not know who else might be inside the house, but in order to protect ourselves in those situations, we would use a rocket-propelled grenade to destroy the house. However, we never had a clear conscious about whoever else might have been in that house. There was no way of finding out if there had been women, children, or elderly people hiding in there, therefore, it was morally difficult for us to attack an enclosed target.

Other than that, we would sometimes kill innocent people out of revenge. The passion for revenge was something that we guerillas had to be extremely careful. In some missions, we lost comrades we had known for years with whom we had eaten our meals, and with whom we shared memories. In such circumstances, our eyes would be completely blinded, and we desired to kill anyone related to the enemy, regardless of their gender or age. Those were the times we lost our rational thinking and sought nothing but revenge.

As I mentioned, in general, I do not have feelings of guilt for anything I did, except for those couple of incidents. I had legitimate grievances for which to fight. Moreover, even though I deserted the organization, I am still a Kurd. I will continue to fight for those rights until they

are granted to my people by the Turkish state. I am telling you—even if I am released at the age of 70, I will again fight for the right to speak in my mother tongue.

For years, we Kurdish people asked for two simple things: the recognition of the Kurdish identity by the Turkish Constitutional Law, and the use of the Kurdish language, for public services in the cities that are dominated by large Kurdish populations. Were these requests really too difficult for the Turks to provide? We only wanted to protect our basic rights. We did not ask to be provided with any extra rights that would compromise those of Turks—but simply to be able to freely speak in our own language and to have our separate identity be recognized. I wanted this stupid denial thing to end.

This is why I do not feel any regret and said, when I surrendered to the Turkish security forces, “I left the organization on my own, but that does not mean that I have stopped being a Kurd. I am a Kurd and I want my right to speak Kurdish. I want my identity to be recognized. I am demanding those rights as a citizen of the Turkish Republic.”

Tell me if there is any other country in the world like Turkey, who treats its own citizens in this restrictive manner? At the time I was incarcerated, in 2010, it was legally forbidden to speak Kurdish in public institutions. My mother would come to the prison to visit me, and we could only communicate through hand gestures behind the glass. She could not say anything, because she did not know Turkish. The prison guards would mute the microphone if my mother accidentally spoke something in Kurdish. In all of those visits, we would mostly spend the time looking at one another.

I witnessed the same thing when I surrendered to security forces. My mother, father, uncle, and a relative ranger came to visit me. I told the ranked gendarme officers there, “Look! My mother does not know Turkish, so I will have to speak Kurdish.” At first, they agreed.

Nevertheless, after only two or three minutes, they openly showed their discontent with my speaking Kurdish to my mother, and I had to ask her to stop talking. You can imagine how hurtful was that for my mother.

Look! We are now in 2015. There has been no improvement of the circumstances. When my mother goes to the hospital, in an emergency, she is unable to explain anything, because she is unable to communicate with the doctor or the nurses. She must have one of my siblings accompany her whenever she visits a public institution, including the hospital, because she is unable to describe her discomfort to them. That is what many other Kurds in Turkey daily experience in their lives. Would it really be too difficult for the Turks to assign doctors, police officers, teachers, and other public servants who can speak Kurdish to the eastern cities where the majority of the population is Kurd? Is it really a matter of honor for the Turks? The society in this region is unable to associate itself with the state, because they do not speak the same language, nor do they understand Turkish, and it is same for every single public service, including the courts. Kurdish peasants are appealing to your courts to fix their legal issues. However, in most cases, they are unable to state their problems, because they are unable to communicate with the judges, the prosecutors, or even with the attorneys. So, they do not bother themselves anymore to apply to the courts of Turkish Republic. Instead, they submit their legal matters to the mobile courts, established by the organization, in the mountainous areas, because the PKK officials, who work at those mobile courts, speak the same language as the Kurdish peasants. They should not be blamed for doing that!

I wish all of those basic rights had been safeguarded, within the constitution, during the initial years of the young Turkish Republic, as it had been promised, before the War of Liberation. We would not have had that bloody war if it had been written in the constitution, that

all societies, that live in Turkey, are the citizens of the Turkish Republic. (The present constitution states, “All the people who live in Turkey are Turks!”) Whether or not the Turks accept it, there are hundreds of thousands of other nationalities in this country, including, but not limited to, Armenians, Christians, Lazzas, Alewis, Arabs, Circassians, and, of course, the Kurds. What good was it do deny the identity of those groups? Why have they been alienated, by using such fascist statements in the constitution?

If it were written, that anyone living within the borders of Turkey was a citizen of the Turkish Republic, no one would be offended, because people could have freely stated, “I am a Kurd, Armenian, Laz, or whatever, but I am a citizen of the Turkish Republic.”

Another irritating thing was that for tens of years, the mandatory daily utterance of the Turkish Vow at primary schools was ordered. Thank God, the former government rescinded its use. Before that, every morning, the primary school aged children, began their first lesson reciting the vow, saying, “How happy is the one who says he or she is a Turk!” As a state, they have thousands of schools teaching this to the children in the eastern parts of the country, where the majority of the population is Kurd. Those kids do not even know how to speak Turkish but you force them to say that they are happy to be a Turk when in fact they are Kurdish. Why were they made to say that for so many years? Was it to satisfy their fascist sentiments? It is time to realize that not only Turks live in this country. In fact, since these Kurdish children could not speak Turkish, they got nothing from the schools until the third grade. There was even a movie produced, in which an inspector, sent by Ankara, Ministry of Education, was asking Kurdish children what they had learned before the start of third grade. One of the children gave an exemplary answer, saying, “I learned nothing, because I spent the first three years simply looking at the teacher.” Unfortunately, this was the case in many Kurdish villages across the

eastern parts of Turkey. When those youngsters returned home, their parents and the people around them continued to speak Kurdish, and he or she was being called a Kurd at home. But then the state forced them to say in school, “How happy is the one who says he or she is a Turk!” Imagine the psychological dilemma imposed upon those children.

Furthermore, there is a highly erroneous assumption, frequently used among the Turkish society and the media, stating, “If we legally accept the Kurd’s cultural and linguistic rights, then they would demand endless requests, including independence.” People who say things like that are not thinking rationally. Was there any obstacle in front of the PKK to fight for independence? Could not the organization apply its old fight strategy if it really wanted that? What could the Turkish government do if the organization returned to its previous strategy?

If the government were thinking like the Sri Lankan government, which killed all the members of the Tamil Tigers, they would be seriously mistaken. We were in no way similar to the fight that occurred in Sri Lanka. Turks and Kurds had intermingled with each other through marriage bonds. Moreover, there were Kurds now living in every single city of Turkey. Turkey cannot say that that it could destroy the whole eastern Anatolia, even using a hundred fighting jets, or hundreds of thousands of troops. Listen to me carefully. Those two societies were highly intertwined. If they carried out such an annihilation mission, the whole country would be in worse condition than what Syria is now. A civil war would break out, and the Kurds and Turks would kill one another, until one day you would look outside and see the United Nations’ troops building a green line between the two communities, and on that day, it would be the end of the emotional ties between the Kurds and the Turks.

The PKK has reached to a position today where they have hundreds of contact offices all around the world, let alone having institutions within Turkey. Accept it or not, the organization

acts like a government in the eastern parts of Turkey. Do you know how many television channels the PKK have airing in the east? At least five, and they all broadcast over satellite. These TV outlets have viewers, not only from Turkey but all over the world. The organization spends terrific amounts of money to keep those TV channels operating, though they do not have any advertisement revenue as do the Turkish TV channels. Furthermore, the organization has dozens of radio channels. Wherever you are in the world, you can listen to their radio channels, which broadcast in Kurdish.

Let me mention you about the institutions. Is there an alternative religious leaders union in the eastern cities in which the Kurds form the majority? Yes, there is. The members of this union are assigned and paid by the organization. If you travel in those cities, look to see whether the Kurdish people are praying at the mosques operated by the Turkish government or the ones operated by the organization.

Check the courthouses. Other than some serious murder cases, the number of cases the Turkish Republic courts look at each year, in the eastern parts of the country, are very low. The Kurdish people take their cases to the courts of the organization, since the Turks do not offer judiciary services in Kurdish.

This has been the situation since 2006 in the eastern cities of Turkey. The Turks do not see their own mistakes but always complain that, “The PKK has established tax collection tents, and received taxes from the public, and they have established mobile courts in which to try the public.” The Turks should understand that no one is being tried forcefully. The Kurdish public appreciates those services from the organization. The people would come to us and say, “I have an issue with that man. I would like you to establish a court and try us.” Therefore, the Turkish government is losing their influence in the east. Why? Because the PKK offers services that are

not offered by the state. Everyone in the region is happy about the existence of those services, except for the government. However, be honest. Who would not want to be judged in a court that offers services in his or her native tongue?

Again, other than serious criminal cases, none of the Kurds would choose to go to the courts of the Turkish state in the east. Can you give me at least one example of the Turkish state resolving a conflict between two Kurdish tribes? You cannot, because there are none. The most tragic cases in the east are the tribal fights, and there recently was one between two tribes. Fifty people from both sides lost their lives. The security forces had to apply a three-day curfew. Who do you think resolved that conflict? Not the government! The PKK intervened. They established a court, appointed an attorney and a judge, and brought peace between those two tribes.

In return for providing those services, the organization would collect taxes from the big companies, such as the water dam construction companies, and other facilities in the region. Moreover, those tax revenues were not shared among a few influential and rich elites, as happens in Turkey. The money generated from the taxes would be shared among the poor Kurdish people and the incarcerated guerillas, who fought for the organization.

The PKK not only provided social justice in the east, but it also ended many of the old traditions. For instance, it was the PKK who ended the tradition of polygamy in the region. A man, who was married to two or more women, was rejected from benefiting from the public services provided by PKK nor was he allowed to be hired by any employer in the region. When the people saw those examples, they figured out that the PKK was harshly against polygamy, and they stopped the practice. Has the state ever done anything like that?

Consider the old days. There was a male-dominated society here in the east? The women were considered as something to be bought and sold. They were beaten without the worry of criminals sanctions. They were killed because of honor issues and even forced to commit suicide, because of some simple mistake they had committed! The PKK, not the Turkish government, put an end to those practices.

Today, if a man beats his wife in the territories that are unofficially controlled by the PKK, that man would be kept away from his house and his salary would be stopped by the organization, and his whole salary would be given to his wife. The husband would only be able to return to the house whenever his wife agreed to it.

Do you think the state would provide that same protection to Turkish women? The PKK has also been providing help to tortured, beaten, and raped Kurdish women. How many times have you witnessed, on the news that the women, under the protection of the Turkish government, were killed by their disgruntled husbands?

Today, PKK has even established some small-sized urgent care facilities in the region within the borders of Turkey. The Kurdish soldiers, who fought against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, were even treated at those facilities, but the Turkish police once raided one of those hospitals, and detained eight injured Kurds, just because they fought against ISIS.

Why do I tell you all about this now? I mentioned those things to you, because the Turks' claim of, "If we give them what they want, they will ask for even more," is nothing but bullshit, and headquarters repeats, "We want independence as it was in the old days, not an autonomy."

The Turkish government should provide the Kurds, in Turkey, with their basic human rights, without imposing upon the organization the pre-condition of laying down arms. Turkey



knows very well that “laying down arms” is the very last condition of peace with terrorist organizations, around the world. The President has been reiterating that Ankara has been applying the model of peace that was previously adopted between England and Ireland. Erdogan, himself, knows that the laying down of arms was the last phase of the peace agreement in Ireland. In that case, the Irish people were first given their cultural and political rights, and only then did they lay down their arms.

But the state will not even change its constitution, by accepting the fact that there are people living in Turkey, other than Turks. They do not allow the others the right to education in their mother tongue and are constantly looking for excuses to end the peace process. And now, they ask the organization to put down their arms! For example, in 2013, three private schools that taught in Kurdish were opened in the cities of Diyarbakır, Hakkari, and Cizre. All of those schools were closed down with lame conditions and were only opened again after those ridiculous conditions were met. Have any of those schools caused any segregation between the Turks and the Kurds? No! Give those rights to the Kurds, protect them with a new constitution, and then the organization will lay down their arms. You would not even have to ask them to do it, because if they did not, their reputation would be blackened in eyes of the world powers. Even worse, after all those amendments, if the organization still resisted stopping the armed struggle, Turkey would have a legitimate right to use force against the Kurds, and none of the world powers would criticize the Turks for killing organization members.

Nevertheless, if the Turks insist on the PKK’s laying down arms as the pre-condition of peace, the organization would not consider sitting at the negotiation table, let alone the Kurds who live in Turkey. Nothing is really certain about the Kurds of Syria, Iraq, and Iran. The organization needs some safeguards for the well-being of the Kurds in other countries. Let’s just

say that the PKK laid down their arms now. Who is going to stop the ISIS barbarity in the Middle East? Who is going to defend the innocent Kurds, who otherwise might be killed by ISIS terrorists? Furthermore, the Middle East is a complex place. Take Iran, for instance. I heard from the news that Iran bombed the PKK camps in Kandil. If the PKK had no guerillas now, who would call Iran to account for that bombing? Would Turkey protect the Kurds in those three areas (Iran, Syria, and Iraq) as a state?

I wish the bureaucrats and the politicians in Turkey would at least exercise half of a brain. They are not aware of the opportunity they have in front of them—if they, as a state, established peace with the PKK now and told the organization, “Do not lay down your arms. We, as the Turkish Republic, will provide you with official uniforms and monthly payments, if you act as our military post in the Middle East. We’d like to see you working officially for the Turkish Republic, in which Turks and Kurds live in peace.” If you Turks could achieve something like that, then Iran, Iraq, and Syria would not stand against Turkey, and Turkey would be the leader of Middle East.

There are many governments in Europe, which want to put the guerilla forces of PKK under their control. Has not the United States government just declared that their strongest ally in the fight against ISIS are the PYD guerilla forces? Has not the president of France hosted PYD representatives in his official office? For God’s sake! Is it that difficult to understand? If you assure the Kurds that you would provide them with basic human rights and if you aimed to use PKK as an armed force rather than planning to annihilate it, believe me, the Turkish Republic would be in a much more stable position than it is now. However, the Turkish politicians are not that smart, because the Turkish state knows very well that if the PKK gives a promise on anything, it would assuredly keep it. It would never turn back on them.

It is now your government's call. As I said, the PKK is an excellent opportunity for the Turks. Just like America, which has military posts in Germany, Saudi Arabia, and Japan, the PKK can become the military post of Turkey in the Middle East.

I do not remember exactly, but eight or nine years ago, there were again discussions about laying down arms. It was either Apo or Cemil Bayik that said, "The guerillas' presence throughout the borders of Turkey, is an assurance of safety for Turkey, because we control and protect the borders of Turkey." Has not this statement proven itself this year? Has a single bullet ever reached into Turkey, from the field where PYD is positioned against ISIS? Just ask the military generals. They will all tell you that Turkey feels the most secure on its Syrian border. They all know that a potential danger coming from there would be blocked by PYD guerillas, even though the PYD is regarded as a terrorist organization.

The Turks might not like some of the demands proposed by the organization, but most of those demands are related to basic human rights. Such rights should have never been a subject of bargaining, but the government has wasted a lot of our time discussing them. In 2013, the organization set free 15 of its captives, including district governors, police officers, and state employees, when the peace process began. It asked for only one favor in return for this gesture. There were some incarcerated political guerillas with terminal illnesses, and it asked the Turkish government to set them free during the last days of their lives, so that they could spend that time with their parents and families. It is now April, 2015, and the Turkish government has not freed any of those prisoners with terminal illnesses.

Maybe you do not see it, but this situation breeds hatred among Kurdish people against the Turks. As a state, which claims to be the future leading actor of the Middle East, would not

they at least bargain for the release of prisoners with terminal illnesses? Most of them have cancers in their last stages.

These kinds of amnesties were occasionally granted in the past. For example, during the years of 1992 and 1993, not only releasing prisoners with terminal illnesses, the state even swapped incarcerated high-ranked guerilla commanders for captive Turkish soldiers. Rıza Altun, who was recently arrested for being a KCK member, was also released in those days, along with other important figures, such as Mustafa Karasu and Hamili Yıldırım. All those people were released by the Turkish government. Did not they hold top positions in the organization, when they were arrested? Were not they the founding members of the organization, and attended the initial meetings of the organization, which were held at Ankara-Dikmen in 1976? All of those high-ranked guerillas were arrested in the 1980s and then were set free in 1992 after bargaining processes.

As a human being, I am running into some conflict in this matter. You set the high-ranked commanders of the organization free, after bargaining, but now insist on incarcerating regular guerillas with terminal illnesses. Do you know how many Palestinian soldiers were released by Israel in return of one low profile Israeli soldier? The government of Israel set 1,000 incarcerated Palestinian soldiers free in return for a single Israeli soldier.

Contrary to that example, a human being has zero value in this country. In 2008, the organization took eight soldiers as captives in Hakkari, Çukurca. The organization then set them free, without bargaining with the Turkish government. The Minister of Justice at the time, Mehmet Ali Şahin, said, “I wish we had received their corpses rather than getting them alive.” We guerillas were all shocked by this statement, coming from a senior Turkish politician. Mehmet Ali Şahin later explained that the Turkish state was highly humiliated when those

captives were released by the organization. That is the value of a human being in Turkey. The Vice President at the time, Hüseyin Çelik, made a similar statement, saying, “We will not gather the deputies of the Turkish Grand National Assembly simply because a few Turkish soldiers died.”

### **THE PEACE PROCESS AND DERSIM (ALEVI) KURDS**

One of those who deserted the PKK wrote a newspaper article stating, “The guerillas from Dersim are being targeted by the headquarters management of the organization!” I personally witnessed that the guerillas from Dersim often had a complicated mindset. Most of the people from Dersim still vote for Republican Public Party, a party who killed and tortured thousands of people from Dersim during the initial years of the Turkish Republic. Moreover, whenever the organization would begin a peace negotiation with Ankara, Dersim Kurds would harshly object. Those were the things that always confused my thoughts towards Dersim Kurds. On one hand, they would support democracy and liberalism, but, on the other, they would be against the peace process.

Consider the history of the Turkish Republic. All of the cruelties, tortures, and assimilation programs against the Kurds began with the government of the Republican Public Party. So, how could they still vote for the same party? Look at the recent news regarding the Dersim massacres. New excavations are being carried out, and despite this, those people continue to vote for their own murderers. The AKP still cannot find a constituency there. The HDP (People’s Democracy party) won the local elections for the mayoral position but was unsuccessful in the general elections. Therefore, the Alevi Kurds, especially those from Dersim, do not provide much trust in the organization. We never knew what their real agenda was.

In fact, the organization would take into account how Dersim Alevi Kurds would react before carrying out all of its strategic movements. The headquarters would definitely consider the reaction that would come from the Alevi Kurd guerillas. Of course, there were a couple of exceptions. Mustafa Karasu was also an Alevi Kurd. Everyone liked and respected him. Similarly, Ali Haydar Kaytan was also a respected Alevi Kurd, with the rank of commander. Nevertheless, Alevi commanders, like Hamili Yıldırım, and a few others from the HPG commanders, would be considered as unreliable Alevi Kurds in the organization. We could never fully trust them.

I would find it very strange that whenever the organization would attempt to enter into a dialogue process with Ankara, the guerilla cadre from Dersim would fiercely stand against it. The organization had that type of obstacle in front of it, when it came to peace negotiations. Nevertheless, those problems were so large, that they could not be resolved by the seniors.

The Alevi Kurds, (also some of the rank-and-file from the general population) would also not want to enter into a peace process, because the seniors did want it. They explicitly stated that, “If we were going to make peace with the Turks—if we were going to give up our independence, after securing our cultural rights, and the rights of education in our mother tongue—then why the hell have we lost so many of our comrades to this fight for so many years! The fight we had pursued until now had fallen on stony ground. By sitting at the table with the Turks, we were betraying our martyred comrades of this war. They gave their lives for nothing!”

The seniors from the organization responded to those pro-fight guerillas, with, “Comrades, those deaths were necessary, because initially our presence was being denied. We had to pay the price to make ourselves recognized by the Turkish officials. Today, it has paid off. We are on a different level from yesterday, and we cannot continue in our present fight

strategy. We have to move on. Now is the time for securing peace. Before, the Turkish governments denied our existence, by saying that there was no such place as a nation of Kurds. We were called Armenians, Jews, mountain Turks, or even the agents of foreign powers. The Turks officially denied our presence back then. However, we Kurds are sitting at the negotiation table with those who doubted our existence. The Turks now say, "We have Kurdish citizens. They have their own rights and they will receive all those rights as the conditions improve." That is why we should move on! We cannot continue fighting forever!" I remember that day of discussion and the middle echelon was somewhat calmed down, by being told those things.

In a similar way to Alevi Kurds, I still do not understand the mentality of the Turkish people. They interpret the incidents occurring around them in a very emotional way, not thinking rationally. I think it is mostly because of the media's reporting. What the Turks and Kurds have gone through during the last forty or so years has damaged both sides, which have suffered thousands of martyrs. The PKK that was once underestimated is not a simple ordinary organization today. The United States officials have met several times with PKK seniors before they invaded Iraq. The Germans, French, Brits, and many others visited PKK headquarters regularly to exchange opinions on several matters and held meetings with the seniors. Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Barzani's regional administration were all intimidated by the guerilla forces of the PKK, and the Turks have not yet seen the bigger picture. The PKK is, in fact, a unique force, which could contribute to the military power of Turkey and could potentially side with the Turkish government against all their enemies. If they would just establish the Goddamn, long-delayed peace treaty, and use this ready-trained power for much bigger goals in the Middle East. I cannot readily believe that the Turks have not had one single politician, who had an idea like this.

The Turkish Society have all put on blinders caused by the greedy politicians and their corrupt media outlets. They still think that peace between the two communities is not possible, since so many innocent people, rangers, and soldiers have lost their lives during the past 40 years. Similar to mid-level guerillas, the Turkish politicians frequently claim that establishing peace would be a betrayal to the ones who lost their lives in this fight. Therefore, they support the continuance of military struggle against the Kurds. Such lame excuses!

If the Turkish government really wanted to end this fight, it could double, even triple the number of Turks who would also want peace, if the politicians were sincere and demonstrated a desire to end this bloody fight. There would then be no legitimate reason to continue the fighting.

The parents, families, and children of the martyred soldiers should be approached first and consulted about a peace process, so that they would not feel as if they had lost their sons and fathers to a hopeless cause. The government officials should say to them, “My dear brothers and sisters! The Kurds are a distinct society from us Turks, and they had some requests from us, such as education in their mother tongue and the recognition of their distinct identity, which was formed even before the foundation of the Turkish Republic. We have neglected those demands for years and rejected their very presence, referring to them as the pioneers of the foreign powers. Our politicians were not mature, and the bureaucrats were illiterate. At this point, we understand that we are unable to solve this problem by fighting and killing each other. Yesterday, your sons, brothers, uncles, and fathers died. Tomorrow, you, your sons, your brothers, or uncles will die if we insist on continuing this war. It would benefit both Turks and Kurds, to end this fight.”



## **THE RIGHT WAY TO ESTABLISH THE PEACE**

The Turkish society is not knowledgeable enough to see what is going on behind the scenes in the political arena. Rather than reading and thinking over the issues, they unconditionally accept what the media imposes upon them and this is not beneficial. However, this situation could be used for a good purpose if the harsh opinions of the Turkish public regarding a peace process could be changed by their respected journalists, writing articles with a more soothing language. This would help ease that process rather than fueling the atmosphere of differences and polarizing the conflict between the Kurds and Turks. The TV commentators could actually explain why the society desperately needs peace.

Of course, there would still be people who would want to sabotage the peace process and support the continuance of the fight, thinking, “My son, or my husband, died in this war, and the fight should not stop until we defeat all the Kurds. So, for that purpose, more sons and fathers should also die, if it is necessary.” That is a seriously mistaken rationale.

The good thing is that aside from this group of people who do not think rationally, there are also many people who do support the peace process. For example, when the peace negotiations first started, a group of intellectuals were tasked by the Turkish government to organize meetings in 20 different locations with the families of Turks who had lost their loved ones in this fight. Except for one or two, none of the families raised their objection to the establishment of peace through dialogue. Many of the families explicitly stated, “Stop this war. My son died for it, but I do not want others to experience the same pain!” We witnessed it on the news. The society was eager to see peace. However, the politicians slowed down the process by making excuses as to how they were to persuade the people.

The AKP government should have established a special ministry to handle the works related to the peace process, by employing highly intelligent people from the areas of politics, international relations, psychology, and sociology. This ministry should have oversight of the media and press and not allow broadcasts that would further polarize the Kurds and Turks. Instead, it would encourage them, as well as talk shows, to publish and broadcast news that would contribute to the peace.

This is the right time for it, because there have been no soldiers' funerals in the past two years, from west to east. People are happy about that, and the public should be informed about those positive sides to the negotiations. The officials should report, "If this war ends, both sides will win and our economy will grow stronger. The money that is currently spent on arms, weapons, and security forces, would be spent for health, education, and many other beneficial programs." Who could be disturbed by those things as long as they thought rationally? The Kurdish society, in the east, is already fed up, living under war conditions for so long. The people there ask for nothing, but to live a normal life without the threat and oppression of the security forces. They simply want to live without the worry of losing their children to the war. The tradesmen there also want this fight to end. They want an end to their store windows being broken every day. They want the end of Molotov bombs burning their work places. They want to live just like a normal human being. Therefore, a ministry, which should have been established years ago, would not only prevent polarizing ideas but would also help to inform both Turks and Kurds about the potential positive gains of peace.

Some sects of the Turkey public have constantly used the media and press for discrimination and polarization towards the Kurds. For example, the Turkish society has suggested for years that Apo, the leader of the organization, was a monster, a bloodthirsty baby

killer, and even a sex addict. Sadly, the public has believed whatever the media spewed out to them, and never searched for the truth. If Apo were really a dictator, do you think those millions of Kurds would have followed him to their death? Cannot the Turks see this? At least? In actuality, this person they slandered as a baby killer has never even touched a gun in his life. I had been personally responsible for Apo's protection while he was still in Syria. When Apo took a walk, there would be one comrade in front of him, and two behind, for security reason, and he would get really upset if one of those "close protection guards" passed by him, with their gun showing. He would quiver with rage. He hated any type of arms or weapons. Therefore, we even disguised our guns while protecting him. When he was asked the reason for starting an armed rebellion against the Turks, despite the fact that he hated the use of guns, he would say, "The Turks gave us no other option but the armed struggle." If you read the recent history of Turkey, you would understand that our political parties shut down, one by one, and so the organization gravitated towards an armed struggle, but only after all the political channels disappeared.

I wish the Turkish media had been more objective, specifically about Apo. I wish they had reported Apo's unifying and integrative statements regarding the Turkish and Kurdish societies. Then, you would understand whether Apo was, in fact, a terrorist, or used as an unsuspecting opportunity to establish government unity within the Turkish borders.

The peace will only come if the media stops reporting the news given to them by greedy people, who benefit from this fight, politically and economically. We repenters watched the news a few days ago, and could not help laughing. Six different TV channels broadcasted a specific news item with the exact same words. The only difference was the tone of the speakers. It was about the clash that occurred between the PKK guerillas and security forces in the city of

Agri. Not only did the Turkish state not allow the full details of the incident to be heard by the public, it was also apparent that it had ordered the TV channels to present the news in the way in which it had been ordered. In fact, a publication ban was applied, shortly after this initial news. It was a shame, since the organization news reaches us here, even though we are incarcerated. But remember the connections the organization had with the prison guards. We learned about the details of this incident through a pamphlet sent by headquarters.

Mr. President Erdogan had stated in his public speech that, “Our soldiers have been fighting against the terrorists in order to rescue our captured soldiers.” He further claimed that 15 Turkish soldiers were left unattended, by the Kurdish public, until they died.

Actually, those 15 soldiers had been intentionally sent close to a group of guerillas, during the darkness of night, and the guerillas had been shocked to see those “sitting ducks” in front of them. It was a highly unusual situation, and they figured out that there was something fishy going on, since the organization and the Turkish state were in a peace process negotiation back then. They just could not understand the reason why those soldiers were sent to die. So, before carrying out an attack against them, the guerillas had responded in an intelligent way and contacted headquarters to inform them of this weird situation. Headquarters replied, telling them not to carry out an attack to annihilate the soldiers but only to defend themselves.

You know how this incident was reflected to the public? Erdoğan appeared on TV and said that 40 terrorists had encircled Turkish soldiers in order to put an end to the peace process. Let’s imagine, for a moment, that the guerillas had, in fact, laid an ambush on the Turkish soldiers. Even if it were true, would you report it to the public as if you were giving happy news? It seemed, from Erdogan’s speech that the Turkish public was looking forward to hear of soldier’s funerals. Those 15 soldiers were intentionally sent there to be martyred by the

guerillas. The incident took place just before the national parliamentary elections, and the goal was to gain the votes of nationalist Turks by provoking their fascist sentiments. Thank God, the PKK was not taken in by that scheme. Those soldiers, mostly the sons of low-income Turkish citizens from different parts of Anatolia, were of no importance to the government. That's why they had sent in as sitting ducks. The guerillas could have easily annihilated them, if they had acted irrationally.

As these types of clashes began to occur, the organization disseminated a public statement. "We are about to run out of patience. The Turkish government will either keep its promise or pay the price for betrayal." Believe me, we Kurds are fed up with their deceitful tricks.

In this context, it is very essential to have an impartial watch committee. The government kept posting public statements that the organization did not fulfill its promises, attacked our soldiers, and ambushed security forces. If they were openly honest, they would not object to the forming of a watch committee, which would examine all the incidents that occurred during the peace negotiations. If we had had something like that, the Turkish officials would not have been able to apply a media blackout in order to disguise their dirty schemes after each of the sensational martyr news reports.

The committee did not need to include only the Kurds. It would have been acceptable for others to be included, as long as they were reasonable and objective people. The governments, which in fact, ended up with terrorism in their countries, had all established such committees. In some countries, those committees were formed with the participation of objective third party states, while in the others they were formed with the participation of objective, intellectual people from both sides of the conflict.

Before the last peace process began between Turkey and the PKK, the seniors at the PKK asked the Turks to accept the mediatory role of the U.S. officials, or, as an alternative, the seniors also agreed that it would be acceptable to have unbiased, academic and intellectual people present during the peace talks. Turkish officials rejected both of these offers.

It was very important to establish this peace watch committee as soon as possible, so that this committee could examine all the incidents which might occur during the peace process and inform the public which side had not fulfilled its promises. In this way, the Turkish government could not blame the PKK for every single incident by using its huge media and press outlets. With the establishment of such a committee, both the Kurds and the Turks would have an opportunity to learn the facts about any incidents that might be carried out in an attempt to deter the peace process.

Let me explain this through an incident that occurred in the city of Agri. If there had been a peace watch committee, the public would have instantly learned the truth, and the government would not have been able to apply a broadcast ban in order to disguise its guilt in the incident. The governor of Agri delivered this absurd statement after the incident. “The security forces were informed that a large group of terrorists would be visiting the festival area to carry out an attack against civilians, and that is why we dispatched those 15 soldiers, in order to ensure the protection of the festival ground.” There were way too many contradictions in that explanation. I have never heard such an ignorant public statement before. If the security forces heard that a large group of terrorists were coming, then why the hell did the officials dispatch only 15 soldiers? Moreover, it was the middle of the night. They knew that a group of forty guerillas were coming, but they sent only 15 soldiers to fight against them. This is bullshit.

Anyone with a half a brain knows that 15 soldiers cannot stop 40 guerillas. The security officials knew this better than anyone.

After that incident, non-governmental organizations met with the guerillas who had taken part in that clash. The guerillas explicitly stated, “We figured out that the Turkish soldiers were sent there to be martyred, and since we knew it was a scheme, we shot them in non-lethal parts of their bodies, just to protect ourselves.”

The organization lost two guerillas in that fight and if I am not mistaken there were five wounded Turkish soldiers. Believe me, if the guerillas had, in fact, wanted to annihilate them, they would. It was a flat terrain and under the darkness of the night; those 15 soldiers would have been easily killed by 40 guerillas. The Turkish press later disseminated inaccurate information about the incident. The guerillas were said to have used 10,000 bullets in this incident, which was impossible. Forty guerillas cannot even carry such a large amount of ammunition. Moreover, the empty shells that were shown on the news were the types that could only be used on G-3 NATO standard rifles and Turkish made rifles by MKE. Everyone knows that the organization uses Russian made Dragunovs.

It was nothing but a scheme, planned and carried out by some deep, dark powers rooted in the bureaucratic and political institutions of Turkey. If you remember, the AKP government even attempted to blame the head of general staff for the failure. The Chief General acted very cleverly and said to the media, “We Turkish soldiers had nothing to do with this operation. The operation was carried out with the direct orders of the governor of Agri, without notifying us.”

It was risky business that anyone would dare to spoil the peace process. Turkey gave large promises to the organization in the presence of the United Kingdom in the Oslo peace talks. Therefore, whoever dishonored its words would pay the price. Hence, the schemes against the

organization had to be carried out in such a manner that no one would suspect that it was, in fact, planned by the government.

The governors in Turkey worked under the authority of the government. If the news of the funerals of those 15 soldiers were disseminated to the cities in Anatolia, who would benefit the most from it? The government! Thanks to this incident, which happened just before the elections, the AKP would get the votes of the MHP. Unfortunately, the Turkish public again was once again fueled with hatred, and since there was a publication ban, no one learned what did actually happen there.

### **POTENTIAL THREATS**

A fight, which lasted more than 40 years, cannot end without paying a price for it. If the officials are, in fact, sincere on ending this fight, the Turkish government should take any precautions it could and prevent provocative actions that would potentially damage the peace process. For example, Tony Blair started the peace process with the IRA and during the initial years of the talks, the IRA would occasionally carry out missions against British targets. However, in the sixth year of the process, after the Irish people were given all the demands for which they had asked, allegedly some pro-fight guerillas within the IRA, carried out, in London, the largest and the most lethal mission of the organization. It was later discovered that the mission was not carried out by the IRA but by a group of Brits who were highly discontent with the peace process.

I tell you this, because similar incidents are highly likely to occur in Turkey, as well, and the Turkish public should be ready for that. Elites, who would be economically affected by the peace process, will definitely encourage sabotage missions. The government officials would be



hesitant to disappoint those rich elites and would worry that the constituency support for the AKP would decrease if they pissed off the economic elites by establishing peace. Actually, I think it would be just the reverse. The government, which could end this long-lasting fight, would make history in Middle East. The people, both Kurds and Turks, would never forget the leader who established partnership between the two nations. But the politicians are unable to risk losing their economic resources. They do not understand that peace is a kind of war, without guns. Just as you paid the price with your soldiers in war, you would also pay a price for the peace but not with martyrs.

Unfortunately, there is no other option left between the two societies. This peace process will either be concluded with the establishment of peace, or there will be the continued division of borders between the Turks and Kurds. If the Turkish government does not keep its promises that were given in Oslo, this fight will begin again, and this time, it is not going to be out in the countryside. It will be right in the heart of cities. The country will experience a situation very similar to what is now happening in Syria. The YDGH, the city branch of the PKK, has been arming itself for the last two years. The missions that were previously carried out in the countryside would be carried out by YDGH in city centers. I am not sure whether the AKP government would take such a risk just to keep its economic elites happy.

Therefore, if this peace process does not end in success, the YDGH is the group of which people should be afraid. The members of the YDGH are highly trained in city fights. They know the location of every district, street, apartment, building, and hideout in the cities. I am sure that the security forces are aware of the situation, since they witnessed it in the town of Cizre. The security forces could not get into the town, because of the armed siege carried out by the YDGH members. In those clashes, heavy artillery weapons were used against the Turkish

security forces. No one wondered, then, how that artillery had gotten into a town controlled by Turks. Those weapons had already been in Cizre for years. The organization followed the same strategy in most of the towns and cities in the east, and they were to be used when the time came and it was high time for Cizre. That is why the guerillas used bazookas, Russian made PKs, missiles, and other things, because one can destroy both armored vehicles and helicopters using that type of weaponry.

No one should fool themselves. There would be no stopping us if we really wanted to take it back. The town of Cizre is no longer under the control of Turkey, but is a liberated zone. The government could only recapture it by targeting everyone living in that town; however, the cost would be very heavy. Turkey would have a hard time to rationalize the civilian killings in the international arena.

## CHAPTER 24

### THE TURKS, THE KURDS, AND THE LAST CHANCE

The alternative to the American airbase in Incirlik, Turkey is now being built in Erbil, Iraq. This is not a short-term, temporary project for the U.S. America has invited the Iraqi Kurds to be committed to it. This situation is very risky for Turkey. Just ask the Kurds in Syria and Iraq who have protected them against the ISIS threat, and they will tell you, “The United States!” You’ve always proclaimed that the Turks were the sincerest and best friends of the Kurds, but you have not protected the civilian Kurds from the torture and killings of ISIS. The Kurds will never forget that!

In case of a possible alliance or a coalition in the future, the Kurds will most probably be in cooperation with the United States, not the Turks, and Turkey is the loser in the eyes of the Kurds, because of the betrayal they experienced during the ISIS attacks. If Turkey had provided the military support to the Kurds when ISIS attacked the town of Erbil in Iraq, they would now be considered heroes of Kurds all over the world, and the Kurds in Turkey would be especially grateful for such a help. Unfortunately, Turkey wasted that opportunity.

ISIS laid siege in Kobane, Syria for more than four months, and the terrorists were able to invade half of the territories of Kobane. When the Kurds, clashing against ISIS in Kobane ran out of ammunition and weapons, they begged the Turkish officials to open their border gates, so that they could protect themselves. Salim Muslim, the leader of the Kurds in Syria, twice visited Ankara and met with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs to try to convince him to open the borders. This was broadcast on the media. Muslim said to the Turkish minister, “We understand that you Turks do not want to help us militarily-wise, but at least open the border gates so that

we can resupply our arms and weapons through northern Iraq.” But he could not convince the them.

Furthermore, on the night of October 3rd, 2014, the President of the HDP [a Kurdish political party in Turkey], Selahattin Demirtaş, notified the Turkish Prime Minister about the same concerns. Davutoğlu, the Prime Minister said, “Do not worry! We will do whatever is needed to protect the Kurds in Syria,” but he did not take any concrete steps, until October 6th. The Syrian Kurds, fighting in Kobane, informed the HDP that night that, “Do whatever you have to do! This is our last day. Either you will have this border gate opened, or we will lose Kobane, and ISIS will carry out a massacre here.”

The clashes that occurred between the security forces and the Kurdish civilians in Turkey on October 6th, and the following days, were the direct consequence of the negligence of the Turkish government. The disregard of the Turks in the situation of the Syrian Kurds clashing in Kobane upset the Kurds living in the country. The HDP could fight a circle saw back then. One hundred fifty Kurdish corpses had already arrived to the city of Diyarbakir-Turkey. The sons of the people in Turkey were going to the war in Syria, in order to protect the Kurds in Kobane, but the government was not supporting them, and the ISIS terrorists advanced. The Kurds in Diyarbakır were furious about this situation and they explicitly threatened the Turkish state by saying, “You will either open the gates, and allow the Kurdish fighters to resupply their needs, or we will start an internal disorder similar to the one in Syria.” Those are the truths behind the clashes that occurred on October, 2014.

In that period, even though ISIS terrorists constantly made border breaches and passed into Turkey, the Turkish military ignored them. However, when the Kurds, fleeing from the ISIS barbarism, entered into Turkish territories, the Turkish military killed those innocent people,

calling it a border breach. Check the archives of the security forces; see how many Kurds were killed on the borderline from the towns of Afrin to Qamişlo.

Along the same border, during the night, the ISIS terrorists hid under a bridge that belonged to Turkey, located between the towns of Suruç and Kobane. During the daytime, those ISIS fighters left their hideout and passed into Kobane in order to kill more Kurdish civilians. All those images were broadcasted live on the TV, and everybody watched it. Naturally, the Kurds in Diyarbakir/Turkey became nervous and called the Turkish state into account, saying, “You Turks tell us that the people in the region are our brothers, but once they cross the border, you shoot them. But, when ISIS terrorists hide in areas, under your authority, you do nothing!” After those incidents, the Kurds significantly lost their trust of Turkey.

Turkey became angry against the Assad administration in Syria and followed a mistaken policy out of that anger. It acted as if Assad should just fall and then anyone could do whatever they wanted. So, to be able to reach that goal, Ankara paid no attention to the situation of the Kurds in Syria. The opponents of the Assad regime were invited to Istanbul more than ten times. However, the Kurds in Syria were not invited to any of those meetings.

The United States, at one time, harshly warned Turkey not to arm the Al-Nusra fighters, but Turkey disregarded those warnings. Ankara wanted to use those opponents as its own fighters against the Syrian government. So, what later happened to the Al-Nusra militants? They all joined ISIS and got out from under the control of Turkey. And Turkey will continue to have many hardships, because of the political mistakes it has made during the past three to four years. ISIS currently has powerful committees and hidden cells in many cities across Turkey. Last year, ISIS supporters carried out a march in the center of Istanbul.

Ankara thought it had the capacity to control those types of organizations, but it was mistaken. Turkey is not a powerful country in the arena of politics, like Iran or the United States, and Ankara actually fed ISIS terrorists within its borders. Iran is a clever state, and although it seems to be disturbed by the activities of ISIS within Iraq and Syria, it, in fact, covertly supports ISIS. Can you see the difference between Tehran and Ankara? Those smartass Persians never carry out their schemes within their borders.

Ankara's biggest mistake was to allow the opponents to settle and grow within Turkey, because ISIS recruiters were able find new recruits from within Turkey. However, Iran did not let such a stupid thing occur within its border and has always carried out its activities outside the country, so they would not be affected by the consequences. Tehran, too, protected its own people from this trouble by following a similar policy. Today, neither the politicians nor the security forces, can deny the existence of ISIS bases and hidden cells of ISIS sympathizers within Turkey. Even though they deny it now, they will be in a difficult position when it is discovered by the world powers. I believe Ankara has actually realized its mistake, but it is too late. It is going down a one-way road, and there is no going back. The Turks have joined, hand in glove, with ISIS, so much so, that one cannot determine for sure who is the boss and who is the servant.

That was the very reason Ankara intentionally let the ISIS terrorists lay siege to the Turkish Consulate General in Mosul. At that time, there was to be a coalition force established against ISIS, under the leadership of the United States, and there was going to be an extended air and land operation against ISIS targets. Turkey was, of course, supposed to take part in it as a member of NATO. Ankara intentionally created a series of excuses in order to not take part in that coalition force.

They had been become close knit with ISIS in order to get rid of the Assad administration. If Turkey had taken part in the coalition force, ISIS supporters within Turkey were going to start a civil unrest. They were going to carry out missions in city centers. By allowing the capture of the employees of the consulate general, Turkey managed to keep itself out of the coalition forces, saying to United States, “I have captives in the hands of ISIS terrorists. I cannot risk their lives by siding with you.”

Today, ISIS has been completely removed from Kobane/Syria. However, since the Turks did not help the Kurdish fighters back then, Kurds from all over the world, view the United States as their protector and savior. Apart from supplying the Kurds with arms and weapons, the United States acted wisely and sent American soldiers to Kobane. It was reported on the news that six former American soldiers, from the U.S. Army, voluntarily went to Syria to help the poor Kurds. I said to my friends in the cell as soon as we watched that news, “Those soldiers did not voluntarily go there to fight. The real reason behind their dispatch to Kobane was to provide land coordination to the U.S. Air Force, for their air strikes.” I was right, because shortly after those so-called six voluntary former American soldiers arrived in Kobane, the U.S. Air force carried out more than one hundred air strikes and annihilated the ISIS targets, one by one. During those attacks, not even a single YPG warrior (Syrian Kurd) got injured. If those land coordinates had not been provided, it would have been impossible for the U.S. pilots to destroy those ISIS targets.

The fact that the Americans reached out to help the Kurds in Kobane, it created a huge respect and love towards the Americans by the Kurds of the world. Unfortunately, Turkish politicians were not intelligent enough to use that opportunity. They, in fact, followed a scandalous and shameful policy, which will be included in history books in the future. Anyone

with half a brain should know that ISIS would never be recognized as a state in the world, no matter what they do. They will eventually be annihilated. However, the Kurds have been your neighbors, your religious partners, and even your relatives for thousands of years. If Ankara had been cunning enough in planning and carrying out a smart policy, the Kurds of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey would have already been deeply committed to them.

ISIS terrorists will have to abandon that region eventually, and the Turks will be left there, together with the Kurds, once again. How will they, as a country, look at the faces of those innocent people to whom they shut their border gates and did not protect them against ISIS barbarism?

If Turkey continues to view the Kurds as an enemy, the Kurds will share their financial wealth with other countries in the world. For instance, the oil extracted in the Kurdish Federal Region is marketed to other countries now, and if those hostile attitudes continue, the Kurds will definitely look for an alternative route to market their oil resources. If you look at the recent situation in the Middle East, you will see that Barzani has come very close to the Mediterranean Sea, along with the regions controlled by the Syrian Kurds (PYD). This would mean that the Kurds would have an alternative route and would not need Turkey anymore. Barzani could set forth his final opinions in scathing terms.

The Kurds will definitely reach to the Mediterranean Sea, from the area remaining in the city of Hatay. Qamişlo, Afrin, and Kobane lines had already fallen under the control of the Kurds (PYD), since the war in Syria erupted. There was only one small town left between the territories controlled by the Kurds and the Mediterranean Sea, and this town has a very complicated structure. There are Armenians, Christians, Arabs and Muslims, all living together. Since Turkey does not look like a reliable friend, the people in the town will eventually want to



live under the authority of Syrian Kurds. If necessary, Barzani will pay the money to buy that town, and everything in it. And when it goes under the control of the Kurds, there will emerge an alternative oil delivery line to Turkey.

If Ankara continues to ignore the historical brotherhood between those two societies, because of some short-term political goals, the Kurds will definitely open this line and reach to the Mediterranean Sea. And once opened; Kurdistan will no longer need the help of Turkey. Right now, Barzani has to get along with Turkey, because the oil extracted from the Kurdish Federal Region is marketed to Europe and other countries in the world through the pipelines in Turkey.

As I mentioned, this town is very small, and the Kurds would not even need to invade it. Barzani could make some kind of deal with the people living there. Kurds have been thinking about this project for a long time, but some claim that a united Kurdistan is nothing but a dream. That is not true. Kurds in the Middle East have never, in their history, been so close to their political goals and are united in them. They fought together against their common enemies. Look at Syria and Iraq. Today the PKK, the PYD, and Barzani forces have been fighting together against ISIS terrorists in the cities of Kirkuk, Erbil, Maxmur, and Şengal, and are no longer enemies, as they were in the past.

A grave danger is awaiting Turkey, very similar to the one which destroyed Iraq, Syria and other Middle Eastern countries. There are some “fault lines” in Turkey that could have the capacity to trigger a huge eruption. The society in Turkey is highly cosmopolitan, with several different ethnic groups, nations and religious beliefs represented. Sooner or later, Turkey will definitely play the trick it played on the Assad regime, and there would be no escape from that. Assad will never forget how Ankara treated him prior to the civil unrest in Syria.

In this context, there are two potentially big risks facing Turkey. The first one is with Iran, which has always been an important ally of Syria. It will not remain quiet against the intervention occurring in Syria now. Tehran will likely join this fight, but not explicitly as it did during the last three years. Iran will first make Ankara pay the price. As you know, Tehran has an important religious base within Turkey through the Hezbollah organization. Iranian officials will definitely use this organization to begin a source of unrest within Turkey. Even though the Hezbollah in Turkey was established by the Turkish state itself, the important figures and sympathizers fled to Iran after the police operations against it during the year 2000. Those people returned to Turkey, only after they had been trained in Iran for a long time. Therefore, the Turkish Hezbollah is not under the control of Turkey any longer.

Second, Assad will definitely prod the sensitive veins in Turkey into action in order to start turmoil within Turkey, and he will specifically use the Alewis for that purpose. Assad can carry out any kind of mission, any time he wants, because Turkey has a border problem. Though protecting it with soldiers, Turkey does not even have a fence along the entire (more than 500 miles long) Syrian border, and anyone can easily pass through it. We see on the news that Syrian opponents have been crossing in and out of the Turkish border whenever they want. There are dozens, maybe even hundreds, of intelligence services' agents among those opponents, who cross the border every day.

I strongly believe that Assad will use the Alewi population in Turkey to get his revenge from the AKP government. Nevertheless, whether Assad will be successful or not still depends on Turkey. Just as Turkey has to recognize the basic rights of Kurds, Ankara should also make peace with the Alewi population within Turkey and recognize and protect their political, cultural, and religious rights with the constitution.

This cosmopolitan structure of Turkey is, in fact, a wealth and power in itself. If Turkey can secure the peace within, and if Ankara can achieve peace not only with the Kurds but also with the Alewis, the Greeks, the Armenians, and all the other minorities, all the doors for a potential civil outbreak would be shut permanently. It would become a model democratic country in the Middle East. In such a situation, none of the countries of the world would be able to carry out their businesses in the Middle East without first consulting Turkey. However, Turkey is being kicked out of the game in the Middle East, and has become the losing side in Syria, Egypt, Libya, and Iran. But Ankara has not yet come to the end of the road as have Iraq or Syria. Nevertheless, if it continues to ignore the demands of minorities within Turkey for another year or two, it is highly likely that Ankara will experience the same fate as Iraq and Syria: a civil war followed by a division of the country.

I wish Turkey had some politicians and bureaucrats like the ones in Iran, who could design strategic policies for the next ten, twenty, or even thirty years. Similar to Turkey, Iran is a cosmopolitan society. However, Iran is smarter than Turkey in terms of taking necessary precautions against foreign interventions into its domestic affairs. Tehran would never allow a civil unrest within its borders. When the PKK began to fight against Iranian forces to protect the rights of Iranian Kurds, Tehran immediately went to an agreement with the organization in 2007. According to this agreement, the organization would be allowed to carry out any type of political activities within Iran. In return, it would not apply an armed struggle again. But Iranian politicians are clever, and they explicitly told the organization, "Come and settle in our country and carry out your struggle in the political arena. We will welcome you, as long as you do not engage in armed struggle."

Moreover, Iran has begun to carry out important reforms within itself. In the past, it had been prohibited to use the internet in Iran, and women were not allowed to drive. Those prohibitions were removed one by one. Furthermore, Iran began to start a new page with western societies. Tehran was showing its interest for integrating with the West and the United States. With those reforms, and new diplomatic relations, Iranian officials prevented a potential unrest within the public. Now, look at Turkey! Its relations with the West have been worsening; freedoms and rights had begun to be ignored, and people have been incarcerated just because they did not think in the same way as the AKP government. Most importantly, people were being pushed towards polarization, because of their political and religious views. The country is heading towards a dictatorship, and an atmosphere of clash had already been created. It just needed an ignitor to start the fire.

### **THE NEW RADICAL KURDISH YOUTH**

The incarcerated leader, Apo, still had an influence and control over the members of the organization, but his authority had been diminishing, because he had stayed away from the headquarters for more than ten years. If Ankara cannot secure the peace within the next two or so years, Apo will have no longer have control over the guerillas.

Apo's recent prison speeches even indicated this. In his last statement, Apo said, via his lawyers, "If Ankara fails to take concrete steps towards the peace soon, the Turkish officials should stop visiting me here." He told the same thing to the Kurdish peace committees, visiting him at the prison. "Do not bother yourself with visiting me here, until the AKP government does something toward the peace."

I know the internal workings of the organization very well, and if Apo delivers similar public statements a few more times, the organization will get the message that Apo has lost hope in the peace talks, so they should plan new fight strategies in order to forcefully bring the Turks back to the negotiation table. Kandil, the headquarters of the organization, would immediately declare war on Turkey, and after Turkey was brought back to the negotiation table, the demands of the organization would be completely different. I do not think that the organization would continue to follow a policy based on the fellowship of Turks and Kurds after so many betrayals. If the AKP fails this process, these two societies will no longer live under the same flag. The situation is very risky. There would be no other alternative but separation after such a war.

Turkey now has an excellent opportunity in its grasp. However, I am not even sure if the politicians are aware of it. Apo has control over the Kurds in Syria, and the PYD has been unconditionally accepting Apo's orders. If the Assad regime falls, or not, the region, which is under the control of the PYD in Syria, would then belong to the Syrian Kurds. If the greedy Turkish politicians had even half a brain, they would have protected the Kurds living in the region instead of blocking the military and humanitarian aids going to Kobane. Then, partnering with Apo, that region would be completely made a part of Turkey.

Even the territories controlled by Barzani in Iraq could be an autonomous part of Turkey in the future, but only if the politicians in Ankara learn to use their heads, as these opportunities are elusive for Turkey. However, we are still unable to figure out what in hell the politicians in Ankara are planning by spoiling the relations with the Kurds in Iraq and Syria. They are constantly uttering, "The Kurds' real goal is not a self-governing, or an autonomous region within Turkey, but to establish the Great Kurdistan, with combining parts from Iraq, Syria, and Iran." These are really mistaken excuses. What could Turkey do now if the organization said,

after having an autonomous administration within Turkey, that it was returning to its old fight strategy to establish the Great Kurdistan? They have been fighting against the organization until now anyway. All they could do would be to continue the fight in order to prevent the establishment of that great state.

The organization does not have a secret agenda concerning this peace process. The seniors are all very sincere, and the guerillas in the camps have been trained about what they were going to do after the peace with Turkey. The seniors believed Erdogan and his cabinet, and I hope Erdogan does not fail them for some other goals. Otherwise, the results will be disastrous.

The guerillas have been used as a scapegoat, through the peace process of the last three years. What do you think would happen if the seniors abruptly told them that the peace process was over, and they were returning to the fight strategy? The guerillas would definitely go crazy and not listen to the seniors any longer. There was a large number of middle-class echelon in the organization with a considerable amount of influence, and if this group adopted a particular attitude, the senior management could have a hard time to do what they wanted. The middle class would criticize the fight strategy (assuming that Turkey fulfilled all of the promises given at Oslo) by saying, “You, seniors have trained us for peace for the last three years and have talked about living together with the Turks. You asked for education in the mother tongue and for the recognition of the Kurdish nationality as a distinct group. Turkey has fulfilled all these demands, so why are we now returning to the fight strategy again?” Guerillas were sick of fighting and they wanted this fight to end, as soon as possible.

Besides, there is no other option left between the two communities. Of course, that would be a whole other story, if Turkey should risk division of its territories, chaos in the country, or a turmoil similar to the ones, which erupted in Syria and Iraq. Kurdish scholars and

politicians, Şerafettin Elçi and Leyla Zana, have repeatedly said during the last two years that they both believe that this peace process is the last chance for Turkey to secure a permanent peace within the country, remarking, “If Ankara cannot settle this problem with this generation of Kurds, they will be unlikely to make peace with the next generation.” This is very true, and this is why I have said several times that this peace process is the last opportunity for Turkey.

With more than 20 years of experience within the organization, I partially know of the oppressions and tortures with which the Kurds were subjected in the old days. I very well remember the pressures that took place during the 90s, but I do not know what happened on and after the September 12th, 1980 Military Coup and the March 12th, 1971 Military Memorandum. Nevertheless, the Kurdish youth living in the region experienced violence on a daily basis. They all sacrificed their fathers, brothers, sisters, or uncles to this fight. They were in clash with the police every day. Their psychology and way of thinking was very different from us, old guerillas.

If Ankara continues to delay the establishment of a permanent peace, while the wise seniors of the organization, such as Cemil Bayık and Murat Karayılan, are still alive, their chances of making peace with the new radicalized Kurdish generation is extremely low. The new generation considers Turkey an enemy because of the losses they have suffered so far and are unable to think rationally. They do not want to live within the borders of Turkey, as the seniors of the organization would have them to do. Rather, they want to establish a Free Kurdistan by carving territories out of Turkey. If these highly radicalized and politicized Kurdish youth have a voice in those matters in the future, their demands will be different than the demands of the current seniors of the organization. They will say, “We are a distinct society, and each society has the right of governing itself, and determining its own fate. Since we are a

society of 40 million, including the Kurds in Syria, Iran, and Iraq, we can also have our own state.” The new generation thinks like that!

The Kurdish youth, in this region, follow the world and Turkish politics more than the Turkish youth in the West. Moreover, the organization, the PKK, intentionally tries to put those young people into the middle of ideological and political issues. There are always guidance and inducements towards certain subjects. If Turkey does not keep its promise in the peace negotiations, this radicalized Kurdish youth will carry out large missions in the metropolises of Turkey. The PKK has already thought about every possibility, and if the negotiations end with peace, then the seniors will convert the energy of this Kurdish youth into social economical activities. But, if they once again end with disagreement, then this radicalized youth will be motivated to start turmoil and chaos in the big cities of Turkey.

The stupidity of the Turkish police officers and military personnel also contribute to the radicalization of that youth. Those government officials have always approached that youth with hatred and have punished them with severe beatings. The police officers working in the region had to be specifically warned and then trained about those issues. If there is a demonstration march, let the youth spend their energy by walking peacefully and do not block them! Do not irritate them. If this Kurdish youth has no encounters with the police when they march, they will give up carrying out demonstration marches after a couple of trials, and they will not take part in protest activities any longer. However, if the police directors continue to assign 1,000 police officers for only a 100 young protesters, these youth will become further radicalized, and, in the end, you will not be able to control them. Unfortunately, the directors of the police and gendarme forces are both inexperienced and uneducated in these issues. They place the police officers among the Kurdish youth and that creates an atmosphere of stress. For this reason, if the



peace process fails again, the organization will spread the war out to cities and metropolises through these youth. Remember the Kobane incidents, which occurred in 2014. Throughout those two days, life was paralyzed in Diyarbakir, Turkey. Both the police and other security forces were up against the wall. Except for periods of the military coups, tanks went down the city roads for the first time in the history of Turkey. The organization had that ready potential. It could easily cause similar turmoil and chaos in the metropolises of both the east and the west of Turkey, by using these youth as it did in Diyarbakir.

### **EXTERNAL POWERS**

I believe that the conditions, which required an armed fight, have now been vanquished. In the past, the Turkish state followed the policy of denying the Kurdish national identity. The officials used to say, “There is no such nationality as Kurdish, but just Turks living in the mountains.” Therefore, the Turks systematically tried to assimilate them into the Turkish society using that bullshit as a cover, and that is what initially caused the armed struggle. Thanks to this 40-year long fight, we Kurds have finally made the Turkish society accept our identity. From politicians to journalists, and from the bureaucrats to the security forces, our presence is accepted. No one denies us anymore. Kurds are now active in almost every field, including health, education, senior positions at municipalities, and even the Turkish Grand National Assembly. But there is still more for the Turkish government to do for us. Our basic human rights, including education in the mother tongue and acceptance of our cultural and national rights, have not yet been granted and secured by the constitution. However, I do believe that those rights can be obtained through political negotiations, and therefore there is no more need for an armed struggle.

Turkey cannot say that it will not provide those rights to the Kurds under the current order of the world politics. Ankara can only delay it, especially after the recent developments in the Middle East of the struggle of Kurdish fighters against ISIS. Neither European countries nor the United States government would let the Kurds be deprived of those basic rights. Additionally, the Kurdish political party, the HDP, can also start a great initiative, which would probably force the Turkish government into taking concrete steps toward peace. The only thing they need to do is to follow the path of Martin Luther King.

The HDP should encourage and organize large masses of Kurds in eastern Anatolia to march towards Ankara, the capital of Turkey, holding Turkish flags in their hands, but to be forewarned to not engage in any violence, no matter what happens. Let them march singing peace songs, and let this peace march be heard all over the world, via the visual media and press. Ankara would then have to recognize the cultural and identity rights of the Kurds, whether or not it really wanted it.

Even the organization takes into account every possible criticism that might come from the United States or the European Countries before carrying out a guerilla mission. Similarly, after such a large participant peace march, Turkey could no longer ignore the reaction that would come from the domestic and foreign governmental organizations around the world.

There is now no reason for Ankara to delay the recognition of those rights. In fact, if the Turkish officials are smart, they should give those rights before foreign powers begin to pressure them, and force them to do so. The truth is, if Ankara recognizes those rights by its own initiative, it would win the respect and sympathy of the Kurds. However, if the Kurds have to take those rights by armed struggle, or by the help of Western powers, then the Turks would lose the hearts and minds of this society forever.

Many foreign powers do not want Ankara to resolve its conflict with the Kurds, because they know that if Turkey solves this problem on its own, it would become a powerful player in the Middle East. None of the governments in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel, could compete with such a country, which would then be both open to the West, and experience no internal problems. But, for this reason, many states would, in fact, oppose and stall a peace process, as it has always been the case in the past—via writers, journalists, media institutions, and even bureaucrats and politicians, who have been bought with money.

If both Kurds and Turks can display a serious attitude for the resolution of the conflict and can resist the schemes carried out by the external powers, they can achieve a permanent peace. Otherwise, I do not even want to imagine what would happen next. There could be chaos, division, civil war. Once again the poor people of Anatolia and Kurdistan would lose their lives, while greedy politicians and elite groups would benefit from that war. In such a situation, Turkey would no longer have a stable economy or internal peace. Only after Kurds and Turks kill thousands on each side, some foreign powers would appear as saviors and take control of the situation. Then, that external power would become a hero in the eyes of the Kurds and Turks, although it would no doubt be acting in their own interests.

The PKK has always acted professionally in terms of its connections with foreign powers. Apo has never acted according to the wishes of the British, German, American, or other Western powers, even though he was offered great incentives to do so. Apo, in fact, was different from Mesut Barzani in this aspect. Apo was never gotten by the short hairs. He has never trusted the sincerity of the United States, England, or Germany. Apo knew very well that those big powers were regularly paying visits to the PKK headquarters, not because they liked or supported our struggle but because of their own benefits in the Middle East. Analyze the records

kept in the archives of the organization in Kandil, and you would be surprised at how many times those big powers met with seniors of the organization. You would also be amazed to see what kinds of demands they required of the organization, and what they offered in return of those demands. Only then could you understand what I mean.

Today, the PKK is not that novice organization that it was 30 years ago. It has learned how to handle politics very well. For example, the organization did not trust the sincerity of the USA. However, it used its relationship with Washington DC, when necessary, to achieve its strategic goals. Go back to the Kobane incidents. After Ankara finally agreed to open its borders, so that help could go to the Kurdish guerillas fighting in Kobane, did not the Kurdish youth chant in the streets of Turkey, “Biji Obama! (Long Live Obama?)” Why did the youth cheer for the United States, even though they knew that it was the Turkish officials who opened the doors? They did that on purpose, because the organization wanted to send a message, maybe a warning, to Ankara. It implicitly said, “If you do not protect us, we will join the side of the power that would be willing to protect us.”

Barzani and Talabani are still novice in this aspect. They trust in the U.S. too much. Once, Talabani had visited Apo in Damascus and asked him why he was objecting to the U.S. Apo never changed his mind set about the U.S., despite all those pressures coming from his friends. In fact, history proved Apo right. The U.S. desired to hand over the PKK to Barzani. A national congress of Kurds was supposed to have been held for the last four years. The Kurds in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey would gather in this congress, and discuss their concerns about the future of the Kurds in the Middle East. Therefore, if this congress does happen, the Kurds, for the first time in their history, would have a common political force with which to handle their

relations. For instance, when the Kurds of Turkey have a problem with Ankara, the representatives from this committee would visit Turkish officials and seek a resolution.

However, the United States has not allowed this congress to gather, even once, by using its pawn, Barzani. The USA knows very well, that if this congress occurs, the PKK members could easily acquire important positions in the newly formed political force. So, when Apo discovered that the gathering of the congress had been postponed, each time with trivial excuses, he made an offer to Barzani, “Gather the congress, and appoint yourself as the president of it, and we will assign a woman co-president under you. Start the initiatives to establish a common defense force. This defense force would be under the control of the organization. In return, you will have full control on all the other institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Presidency.” Of course, Barzani, who acts under the control of Washington, DC, did not accept this offer.

The U.S. government knows the PKK very well. They know that it would capture the control of any place it entered. Right now, in northern Iraq, a political party of the PKK has already won 40 percent of the constituencies of Barzani, and he is very nervous about that. If the management system of the PKK finds a place for itself in Iraq, Barzani and his family could not rule in northern Iraq anymore, and Barzani enjoys acting like a king. Look at the autonomous administration in northern Iraq! The prime minister, the regional president, the head of intelligence, the head of the general staff, and the head of almost all important institutions are filled with appointments from Barzani’s relatives. There is not a single high-ranked official from the Kurdish public. If the organization’s party achieved a victory there, it would never allow that nepotistic system to continue, and, eventually, that is going to happen. The organization will destroy that management system based on family ties. The U.S. government is not okay with

that risk now. It can now control Barzani the way it likes. American officials know that they cannot make the organization listen to its instructions, unconditionally, as they can with the Barzani administration.

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Sometimes, I very much miss the life in the countryside; the fresh air, the silence of the mountains, peace and true friendship atmosphere. But, here I am, always stuck among four walls. Even worse, I know that I am going to end my life here.

Sometimes you see the sun, and sometimes you cannot. I have never cried until recently, but I have come very close to that several times. I drew this destiny with my own hands. I am totally responsible for the incidents that took place after I deserted the organization, and I sometimes feel very angry with myself: I was not such an idiot once. I was not as blind to see ahead of me. I do not understand how I put myself into such a situation.

I think about my parents a lot. I am so embarrassed for them. After I was incarcerated, my parents struggled much because of me. They relocated from Istanbul to Batman. They have been subjected to many pressures and threats in their neighborhood in Batman. They have been insulted in front of my siblings, and, besides that, they now have to look after me as well. They are already poor, but they still try to send me some money each month, as if it were not enough for them to have moved to Batman just to be close to me. They also visit me every week, and that is an extra financial burden for them.

I cannot take this situation anymore. I not only destroyed my own life, but I also put my family in a difficult situation. I blame myself continually for this. Because I have never contributed financially to my family, and now I have become a financial burden on them.

I know my parents, but I do not even know my siblings. When my father first visited me in prison, he brought pictures of my siblings. That was such a weird feeling. I could not recognize some of them. I asked my father to write their names on the pictures, so that I could memorize them.

In the second visit, there was a girl about 18 or 19 standing just behind my mother. I asked my mother who she was. “She is your sister, my son. You have never seen her before,” she said. I felt so strange. My sister took the handset, on the other side of the glass, and said, “I want to call you my brother, but I do not know you at all,” and then put the handset on the table. She started to cry. I have been emotionally affected by such things. It has been almost six years, and I have just started to get acquainted with my sister.

Despite all of these things, I never lost my hope. In fact, my hopes are the only thing that keeps me going in here. One cannot live here without hopes and dreams. I always dream of leaving here one day. The thing that I want the most is to spend time with my nephews and nieces, for at least a few days before I die.

## CHAPTER 25

### LESSONS FROM A TERRORIST'S OWN STORY

Turkey was in an ongoing peace process with the PKK when Deniz was incarcerated. Nevertheless, there is now a renewed conflict which is very similar to what occurred in 1990s—unaccounted murders, repression, denial of identity, declaration of state of emergency, curfews, and forced migration.

Between 2005 and 2016, the state and the organization has undergone three failed peace attempts. Beginning with 2015, Turkish security forces started to carry out operations against the PKK militants and arrested hundreds of Kurdish civilians for their alleged ties to the PKK. In the meantime, young Kurdish militants who were clandestinely positioned in the city centers started to take control of the some Kurdish towns and the neighborhoods and declared war against the Turkish government. During these clashes, hundreds of people, including; Turkish security officers, Kurdish civilians, and PKK members lost their lives (Basar & Ozturk, 2015; Cagaptay, 2015; Srivastava, 2016; Uras, 2015).

The fights lasted for months and many town centers in southeastern Anatolia were completely destroyed. More than 200,000 Kurdish civilian were forced to leave their homes and relocate to other parts of the country (Srivastava, 2016). On the other hand, as the corpses of the Turkish security officers were delivered to their home towns in the western parts of the country, the ethnic tensions have risen, several arson attacks took place against Kurdish-owned property and many HDP offices. As such, the insights offered by Deniz are likely to continue to be relevant for some time (Marcus, 2015; Yeginsu, 2015).



Of course, the generalizability of Deniz's insights is a relevant issue. Those who are recruited to relay a life-history tend to be special and talented; thus their perceptions and views may be unique. The insights provided by a single person might not reflect the ideas and opinions of the others from the same group. Accordingly, there are always issues of generalizability with a life history.

Still, although this dissertation employed the story of only one subject, Deniz was a "freedom fighter" for nearly 20 years and rose to a position of leadership. He was ideally situated to share insights based on years of experience and on access to meetings and relationships that few would have. He was able to provide a rich, textured look into what a life of a terrorist is like and into the inner workings of a terrorist organization. Thus, he offered us lessons that can be tested with other life histories of PKK freedom fighters and of those drawn from other terrorist insurgencies.

In this regard, this final chapter will focus on—and draw lessons about—the nature of terrorism, especially for those who continue to join the PKK. Building on the work of life-course scholars, Deniz's experiences will be assessed through the lens of a life-course perspective. The discussion thus will focus on the onset, persistence, and desistance of his career as a "freedom fighter." The dissertation will conclude by drawing lessons about the future of the terrorist conflict in Turkey. Deniz's insights will be used to address the key issue between the PKK and Turkey: Is peace possible? Or what would it take for freedom fighters such as Deniz—and he represents the steady flow of Kurdish young adults into the PKK—to stop fighting Turkey and become peaceful? .

As a prelude to this discussion, the recent development regarding the conflict between PKK and Turkish government will be examined. Again, this set the context for why more

Kurdish “freedom fighters” will be recruited and engage in terrorist acts—and why the insights from Deniz’s life history will continue to be of special value.

### **THE CURRENT STATE OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE PKK AND TURKEY**

When Deniz turned himself in 2010, Turkey was in a peace process with PKK. People, especially the Kurds of Turkey, were hopeful that the peace process would work this time, since unlike the former governments of Turkey, the AKP (The Justice and Development Party) government came to power with strong and functional influence on major state institutions, (Dalay, 2015). Neither the opposition parties had enough seats in the parliament to block the progression of the peace, nor the military structure was strong enough (as in the old days) to undermine the wishes of the political structures. There was basically no obstacle in front of the AKP for not ending this long term conflict. However, there is now a renewed bloody conflict between the both parties.

#### ***Meeting the Standards of the Copenhagen Criterion***

Holding the majority of the seats in the parliament since 2002, the AKP government has achieved a major progress in the resolution of the Kurdish conflict by enacting liberal laws, which was unthinkable only two decades ago. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Erdogan, the AKP abolished the state emergency rules in Kurdish populated areas, eliminated the legal restriction on the use of Kurdish language, and lifted the ban on Kurdish publication and broadcast (Ensaroglu, 2013). Even though the AKP government applied these changes simply because it was trying to meet the standards of Copenhagen criterion—which was an absolute necessary to be a member of the European Union—these were unarguably major reforms which gave rise to a major hope for the peaceful resolution of the conflict between the Kurds and Turks.

More than the Turks, the Kurds of Turkey welcomed these reforms with joy and excitement. They even provided greater support for the AKP government in the upcoming elections, since they had suffered the most serious consequences from consequences of this fight (Ensaroglu, 2013).

### ***Official Recognition of the Kurdish Problem***

Even more important than implementing these reforms was that in 2005, the Turkish Republic had officially recognized the existence of the Kurdish problem for the first time in its history after so many years of repression, denial of identity, unaccounted murders, kidnapping, village evacuations, and forced migration (Akyol, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Ensaroglu, 2013). Under the auspices of Prime Minister Erdogan, the AKP government declared that they would facilitate reconciliation by implementing democratic measures, including the grant of equal citizenship status to Kurds. Unlike the former governments of Turkey, Erdogan and his cabinet rejected the view that the conflict with the Kurds was solely a matter of terrorism. Instead, they intended to apply social and democratic measures to tackle the roots of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (Ensaroglu, 2013).

Nevertheless, the politicians and bureaucrats failed to take into account an important side effect of this democratic peace approach. A majority of the Turks, especially those who had lost their loved ones in this fight—did not welcome the AKP's conciliatory approach toward the Kurds. Because the democratic reforms for the Kurds were applied without fully informing the public first, nationalist and Kemalist Turks began to view the peace process as a betrayal of the martyred security officials and murdered innocent individuals who had lost their lives during this 40-year-long fight (Ensaroglu, 2013; Marcus, 2015).

In protest, thousands of Turks took to the streets of major cities to demonstrate against the AKP government. Faced with the prospect of losing support of their political constituency, the AKP government halted the implementation of the democratic measures until the climate had become less heated—that is, until four years later (Ensaroglu, 2013).

### ***The National Unity and Fraternity Project***

In 2009—a year before Deniz surrendered himself to the security forces—the AKP government restarted the peace process with the slogan of “Kurdish Opening.” To make the reform more palatable to the Turkish public, bureaucrats later changed the name of the process first to “The Democratic Opening.” Then, at the request of Prime Minister Erdogan, the name was changed again to the “The National Unity and Fraternity Project” (Dalay, 2015; Marcus, 2015; Srivastava, 2016).

Unlike the peace process that was started in 2005, this initiative attempted to move forward by securing wider community support. This included the participation of more diverse social groups, think-tanks, NGOs, universities, public intellectuals, and other political parties. Thus, in a way, all segments of the Turkish society were given the opportunity to offer their ideas and suggestions with regards to the resolution of the Kurdish problem. In the meantime, the visual media outlets were encouraged to broadcast TV shows to inform the Turks citizenry about the possible benefits of peaceful resolution of the conflict. Additionally, Prime Minister Erdogan carried out several visits to South Eastern Anatolia (Kurdistan) and held meetings with the Kurds to show the warm face of the state to the neglected ones (Ensaroglu, 2013).

### *Attempts to Undermine the Peace Process*

Unexpectedly, beginning with April 14, 2009, the Turkish National Police started to carry out operations against the pro-Kurdish groups. They, raided the offices and homes in various cities of Turkey and arrested more than 140 people, including mayors, students, Kurdish politicians, human rights activists, and union members. Many of these people were accused for representing the urban wing of the PKK. Pictures showing these people—including mayors and Kurdish politicians—handcuffed in front of the Diyarbakir courthouse caused huge resentment and hatred across Turkey in the Kurdish society. Because the police carried out these operations during a ceasefire period, everyone, including Prime Minister Erdogan, was shocked (Akyol, 2015; Ensaroglu, 2013).

Even though the peace process was not heavily injured by these unexpected operations carried out by the members of the Turkish police, another development that occurred a couple months later seriously undermined the healthy progress of the process. Despite securing wider community support, popular reactions again undermined the progress of the peace process because of another fatal mistake committed by the government.

As a sign of good intention, Abdullah Ocalan asked some senior PKK guerillas to leave their camps in Iraq and surrender themselves to Turkish security forces (Akyol, 2015). As a result, in 2009, 34 guerillas entered into Turkey from the Habur border gate with an open top bus. Approximately 50 thousands Kurds from the region welcomed them as heroes, singing victory songs with PKK flags in their hands. As the Turkish media aired these celebrations, hundreds of protests and marches erupted across the country organized by nationalist and Kemalist Turks. Thousands of Turks spilled on to the streets saying that they were sold by the AKP politicians (Akyol, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Ensaroglu, 2013, Marcus, 2015; Milliyet, 2009).

The most serious damage to the AKP government occurred on September 13, 2011 when sound recordings were leaked to the internet of one of the secret meetings between the head of Turkish National Intelligence Agency, Hakan Fidan, and the senior PKK administrators of Mustafa Karasu, Zubeyir Aydar, and Sabri Ok. The peace process was sabotaged again, and this time the damage proved fatal. The recordings indicated that the negotiations between the government and senior PKK members had begun even before 2009 and the meetings had been secretly held in Oslo, Norway (Hurriyet, 2011; Milliyet, 2011; NTV, 2011). On February 7, 2012, the Turkish police attempted to arrest the head of the National Intelligence Agency on the accusation of engaging in talks with terrorist group members on the grounds that directly engaging with a "terrorist" organization was a constitutional crime (TRT, 2012).

Holding direct talks with the PKK could actually be a milestone of this peace initiative. These meetings were the first time in history that a Turkish government had sat into the negotiation table to learn exact demands of the PKK without using intermediaries. Fearing a potential negative reaction from the Turkish public, the meetings had been held secretly. Nevertheless, this initiative also failed due to the leakages about the talks to the media.

### ***The Wise People Commission***

After these successive sabotage attempts, the peace talks restarted again in 2013. The AKP allowed the Peace and Democracy Party members to meet with their incarcerated leader Abdullah Ocalan in Imrali on a regular basis to discuss peace terms. After months of negotiations with the Turkish government, Abdullah Ocalan issued a historic letter on March 21, 2013 to be read during the Newroz celebrations in the city of Diyarbakir (Akyol, 2015; Ensaroglu, 2013).

We have now reached a point where guns must go silent and ideas and politics must speak. We will unite in the face of those who try to split us. From now on, a new period begins when politics, not guns, will come to the fore. It is now time for armed elements to withdraw outside the country. (Abdullah Ocalan, 2013)

Thus, in return for political reforms to be carried out by the AKP government, Ocalan openly instructed Kandil to abandon its armed struggle against Turkey and called for the withdrawal of PKK insurgents outside the Turkish territories (Akyol, 2015). Only four days after the delivery this speech in Diyarbakir, the PKK management in Iraq declared a ceasefire and reassured their loyalty to their leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

On April 3, 2013, the AKP government started the initiative to establish an independent third-party committee that would help the government to persuade the society about the benefits of the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue. As a result, a committee under the name of “Wise People Commission” was established in 2013. The committee consisted of 63 people drawn from varied backgrounds, including academics, intellectuals, NGO representatives, and even well-known movie actors. To help shape the public opinion on the peaceful resolution of the conflict, the committee held several meetings with the public in seven different regions of Turkey (Gursel, 2013). Erdogan also ordered the establishment of a parliamentary commission that would assess the progress of the peace process under the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Nevertheless, the main opposition parties—the Republican People’s Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)—declared that they would not participate in this parliamentary commission (Akyol, 2015; Gursel, 2013, Marcus, 2015).

In the meantime, the withdrawal of Kurdish guerilla forces from Turkey started on May, 2013. Nevertheless, the PKK administrators halted this process as soon as it was determined that the Turkish soldiers were taking over the Kurds’ abandoned positions and building new, fortified

mountain outposts (Albayrak & Parkinson, 2013; Marcus, 2015; Miller, 2013). In response, the PKK administrators in Kandil ordered the establishment of political dominance over the southeastern Anatolia region through the use of pro-PKK institutions (Marcus, 2015). Because the Turkish government wanted to avoid any conflict that might potentially spoil the peace process, PKK guerillas were given a free hand to carry out many activities, including setting up checkpoints and disseminating propaganda material within the areas largely dominated by the Kurds (Akyol, 2015).

### ***The Civil War in Syria***

The civil war that erupted in Syria worsened the situation in Turkey. Suddenly, the Syrian wing of the PKK, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), became the hero of the West as it fought against the ISIS threat. The U.S. military began to carry out joint operations with the YPG guerillas in Syria. YPG guerillas were armed by the United States and acquired a significant amount of territory across the border of Turkey by taking advantage of the failed Assad regime. The growing power of the PKK through its Syrian wing—the YPG—made Ankara highly nervous (Anna, Gordon, & Smith, 2015; Akyol, 2015; Jones, 2016; Marcus, 2015).

Toward the end of September 2014, the Kurdish YPG militants fighting against ISIS—mainly in Rojava, the Kurdish part of Syria—ran out of ammunition and other supplies. Large demonstrations occurred in various cities of Turkey, because the Turkish government refused to open the nation's borders so that military and economic aid could reach Syria from Northern Iraq. Seeing the AKP government's unwillingness to allow the transfer of Northern Iraqi forces into Syria through Turkish territories, the Kurds of Diyarbakir organized one of the largest protests against the AKP government; this lasted from October 6 to 9 in 2014 (Radikal, 2014).



During the heavy clashes between the demonstrators and the police, more than 50 civilian Kurds lost their lives (Barbard & Gordon, 2015; Marcus, 2015; Nissenbaum, 2015). Thus, the insensitivity of Turkish officials in to the sufferings of the Kurds at the hand of ISIS, as well as media depictions of alleged aid given by the Turkish government to some Islamic groups in Syria, seriously damaged the peace process (Dalay, 2015).

### ***The Defeat of the AKP in the June 7 Elections***

On June 7, 2015, even though it acquired the largest percentage of the votes, the AKP experienced a serious defeat in the general elections since it was no longer eligible to govern Turkey as a unified government, as it was the case since 2002. By surpassing the ten percent threshold that was needed to enter the Turkish Parliament, the pro-Kurdish political party, the Peoples' Democratic Party secured 80 seats and the AKP, for the first time in its history, could not secure an outright majority in the parliament.

Being denied the parliamentary majority needed to make constitutional changes, Erdogan was upset with this major victory of the HDP (Akyol, 2015; Basar, 2015; Baser & Ozturk, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Imogen, 2015; Marcus, 2015). No one was expecting the HDP to surpass the election threshold. In fact, the HDP was the first pro-Kurdish political party to achieve this level of success the history of the Turkish Republic. This defeat denied Erdogan the ability to alter the constitution to strengthen his power and autocratic control in the country. According to some commentators, Erdogan reacted by intentionally undermining the peace process, as AKP had lost its majority in the parliament as a result of the HDP's success (Akyol, 2015; Basar, 2015; Imogen, 2015; Marcus, 2015).

### *The Renewed Conflict*

First, the AKP intentionally failed to form a coalition government with the other political parties in order to push the country towards snap elections scheduled for November 1, 2015.

Later, the verbal fight among Erdogan and the pro-Kurdish politicians began to occur as a result of the Syrian war, which resulted in the increased national sentiments among the Kurds. In June 2015, Erdogan announced that Ankara would never allow anyone to establish a state—namely a Kurdish state—across its borders (Barnard & Gordon, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Marcus, 2015; Nissenbaum, 2015).

On July 20, 2015, an ISIS suicide bomber carried out an attack during a press briefing in a Kurdish city and killed 32 pro-Kurdish activists who were just about to set off for Kobane to fight against ISIS. The same day, the KCK President Cemil Bayik ended the peace process and encouraged the Kurds within Turkey to prepare for a civilian outbreak against the Turkish government (Marszal & Akkoc, 2015). The PKK central command claimed that even though the attack was carried out by ISIS, it was aided by the Turkish government. Hostilities began between the both sides again. The PKK openly accused the Turkish government and then ended the two-year-old peace process by killing more than 60 police officers and soldiers within a month's period (Akyol, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Marcus, 2015).

As a result, beginning with July 2015, the peace process that started early in 2013 had broken down again. Turkish security forces started to carry out operations against the PKK militants and arrested hundreds of Kurdish civilians for their alleged ties to the PKK. In the meantime, following the orders of KCK, young Kurdish militants who were clandestinely positioned in the city centers started to take control of the some Kurdish towns and the neighborhoods, and they declared war against the Turkish government. The street fighting

among the police and the militants was so intense that, after a period, the AKP government decided to hand over control of some Kurdish cities to military officials (Basar, 2015; Marcus, 2015).

The militants dug trenches and placed bombs into the streets under their control so that security forces could not enter into their zone. The fight among the military and the Kurdish youths lasted for months, and in the end town centers were completely destroyed. Extreme violence applied by the both side. Hundreds of people, Turkish security officers, Kurdish civilians, and PKK members lost their lives during these fights. Approximately 200,000 Kurdish civilian evacuated their homes and relocated to different cities as a direct result of this conflict (Marcus, 2015; Yeginsu, 2015). As the corpses of the Turkish security officers were delivered to their home towns in the western parts of the country, the ethnic tensions have risen. Several arson attacks took place against Kurdish-owned property and many HDP offices.

On October 10, 2015, a suicide attack was carried out in Ankara by an ISIS member in a peace rally—Labor, Peace, and Democracy Rally—organized by the major leftist groups in Turkey, including the pro-Kurdish political party, the HDP. This attack resulted in the death of more than 100 activists. Reports indicated that another 500 people were seriously wounded (Letsch & Shaheen, 2015). Since the bombing events occurred only 21 days before the snap elections of November 1, 2015, some claimed that this increasing level of terrorist threat were planned by the AKP government to undercut the HDP's electoral appeal in the forthcoming elections (Basar & Ozturk, 2015; Don, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Lizzie, 2015).

Indeed, the AKP was able to obtain the majority of the seats in the parliament in the November 1, 2015 elections. During the five months period prior to the elections, the country had experienced substantial economic and political instability due to the dramatic ISIS attacks in

Ankara and Suruç, the increased violence among the security forces and PKK militants, and the economic slowdown and decreasing value of the Turkish Liras against the foreign currencies (Imogen, 2015). People experiencing this insecurity and economic instability voted for the AKP, believing that a strong, unified government could return Turkey to its previous period of security and wealth period (Basar & Ozturk, 2015; Cagaptay, 2015; Srivastava, 2016; Uras, 2015).

For some, the strategy devised by President Erdogan actually worked. The AKP secured 319 seats in the parliament by winning constituencies from two different groups: Turkish nationalists who wanted to get revenge from the PKK militants, and the Kurdish voters were tired of the repressive measures applied by the Turkish security forces. In fact, many Kurds blamed the PKK for the escalation of violence in Kurdish cities and, as a result, voted for the AKP in the snap elections (Cagaptay, 2015).

Holding the AKP government responsible for failing to provide the security for the October 10 peace rally, the PKK carried out a suicide mission against a military convoy carrying both civilian and military personnel in the city of Ankara on February 17, 2016 and killed 30 people and injured 60 (Srivastava, 2016). Following this incident, the security forces increased their crackdowns against PKK militants who positioned themselves in the city centers in southeastern Anatolia. Harsh military measures were applied. Civilian casualties increased, and curfews paralyzed the social and economic activities in those cities. The AKP government blamed the HDP for carrying out the terrorist activities of the PKK in the cities. Tens of HDP leaders across the Turkey were arrested and then charged on the grounds of promoting a culture of violence and terrorism (Jones, 2016).

In retaliation, two months after the first suicide mission on March 13, 2016, the PKK carried out another suicide attack by targeting a bus carrying civilian commuters in Ankara. This

attack killed another 37 civilians and injured 125 people (Osborne, 2016). In response, Erdogan publicly announced that there would be no more effort to return to the peace process with the PKK. For him, the time for negotiation had passed; the only remaining option was the complete liquidation of the PKK and its extensions from the region (Jones, 2016). Today, many Kurds and pro-peace groups have lost all hope that the peace process will resume. Accordingly, the conflict between the Turkish government and the PKK will continue unabated. More “freedom fighters” similar to Deniz will be recruited and engage in terrorist attacks. In this context, the Deniz’s insight about his joining, being a part of, and leaving the PKK will retain much salience.

### **TERRORISM ACROSS THE LIFE-COURSE**

As Sampson and Laub (1993), the life course of individuals consists of pathways and turning points. For Kurdish young adults such as Deniz, the decision to change the trajectory of their lives and pursue terrorism—freedom fighting in their eyes—represented a remarkable turning point. Using a life-course framework, this section attempts to discuss the key factors that led Deniz—and likely others like him—to experience a turning point that led to the onset of their becoming a terrorist. A life-course perspective also sensitizes us to the importance of explaining persistence or stability—in this case, why Deniz remained as a terrorist for nearly two decades. This issue is thus addressed. Finally, a life-course perspective leads us to ask why individuals desist from a given activity. Why did Deniz decide to leave the PKK and no longer pursue fighting for the freedom of the Kurdish people?

#### ***Onset: Becoming a Terrorist as a Turning Point***

Radicalization experience of Deniz that resulted in terrorist action also developed as a result of a number of life course events that occurred mostly during the childhood and early

adolescence of the subject. These complex set of factors—turning points—that combined to entrench Deniz on terrorism pathway can be grouped under four categories: (1) a sense of injustice, (2) personality traits, (3) opportunity structures, and (4) sense of duty and honor.

The events that occurred under these four main categories of turning points explains how grievances and vulnerabilities were transformed into hatred of the Turks and how hatred was transformed into a justification for violence for Deniz.

***Sense of Injustice.*** The key factor that led Deniz—and likely other Kurds—to join the PKK was the feeling of injustice and resentment caused by the agents of the Turkish state. In fact, Deniz and his siblings became exposed to the feelings of discrimination and alienation beginning with their early childhood. Since the use of Kurdish language was forbidden by the Turkish state, Deniz’s parents had been using a radio to secretly listen to the news related to the Kurds from a radio channel—The Voice of Erivan—that broadcasted from Armenia. As he note din his life history, “We listened to this channel religiously”. (p. 256)

Additionally, his cousin, who lived at that time in the city of Diyarbakir would visit the family time to time and give them cassettes to play at cassette players that would teach them about the history of the Kurds and the Kurdish culture. This cousin would caution Deniz and the other siblings to be very careful when listening to these tapes. “Listen to them” he cautioned. “Hide them well. Don’t ever let the soldiers see them, or they will set your house on fire.” (p. 256)

Because Deniz was only a child at that time, he was unable to grasp why they had to be extra careful when listening to a tape that told stories about the history and the culture of the Kurds. Nevertheless, these verbal warnings that he received from his parents and his cousin—and the beatings applied by the agents of Turkey—slowly created an “us-versus-them” paradigm

in his mind. Thus, cognitive individual experiences of Deniz—his knowledge and thoughts—slowly shaped the way how he should think about the Turks. As Deniz noted in his life history:

Since I was young, I couldn't understand very well what it all meant. The only concept which I think I understood, was that the Turkish soldiers didn't like anything Kurdish. (p. 257)

I was young and the truth was new for me, so I was very curious about what I was learning. (p. 257)

...we were very careful to hide the tapes. When the soldiers performed raids, they would sometimes find these tapes, and then beat everyone in the entire household, breaking all the tapes. (p. 257)

As the years passed, Deniz experienced an enabling environment for radicalization, which was essentially characterized by a widely shared sense of grievances and injustice among the Kurdish villagers.

His eldest brother secretly dropped out of primary school because of the abuse that he suffered while attending. There were two main reasons for this mistreatment. First, even though he was a Kurd and only spoke Kurdish, the education was only provided in Turkish. Due to the mandatory use of Turkish language at the schools, thousands of Kurds in fact had little choice but to leave and forgo formal education at schools. Worse still, even though the local Kurdish population had to pay an education tax, their children could not benefit from the education service. This situation caused deep resentment among the Kurds. Those Kurds who continued their education experienced considerable stress at the school because they were unable to communicate with the teachers. In Deniz's words:

.....my brother complained that he didn't understand the language spoken there, saying, "I don't understand any Turkish. I speak Kurdish at home, at work, and in the marketplace through the evenings. I understand nothing in that school." (p. 258)

Second, the teachers, who were appointed by Turkish officials in Ankara were cruel in their attitudes toward the Kurdish children who were unable to speak Turkish.

They beat the children in the school. They make us stand on one foot for minutes at a time, and they rap us on our knuckles until I can't even feel my fingers. (p. 259)

In fact, the harshness of the Turkish teachers encouraged many of the Kurdish youth to drop out of school without—often without their families' knowledge. They would wander around in the countryside until the school was finished for the day. The Kurdish families learned about this fact only when they received the school report at the end of the year.

As a direct result of these mistreatment, neither Deniz nor any of his siblings finished even their primary school education when they lived in the village. Listening to the injustices applied to his eldest brothers, Deniz had no desire to start a formal training at the school.

I never went to school. I never liked school. It had no charm for me, and I had been affected by my brothers' experiences as well. (p. 259)

Worse still, many families were pessimistic about future of the Kurds because the longstanding historical injustices and concrete grievances that endured by the Kurdish people over the course of the previous century. Deniz's father had witnessed some of these incidents with the Turks, and he had reached the conclusion that the Kurds had no prospects for a good future. Their identity was so suppressed that he did not even object to Deniz's rejection of education, arguing that "We are Kurd, and would never be rewarded by the unyielding state, no matter how hard we might study in school." (p. 259)

The life history of Deniz also indicates that the excessive repression applied by Turkish state authorities contributed to a climate of mutual distrust among the Kurds and Turks, which caused Kurdish antagonism to grow:



Every two days, those soldiers would gather up all the males in the village, into the village square, except for the very young boys. We had no idea what they were planning. Even as children, the one thing we understood clearly, was that whenever soldiers arrived, they brought beatings along with them. First, they would force all the men they had gathered into the square, to lie down on the ground. Then they would beat them with rifle butts or their boots, smashing their heads until they lost consciousness. The women and the children weren't subjected to such treatment, but they were forced to watch this cruelty, screaming out at what they witnessed. No matter what happened, no one was allowed to leave the scene until the Turkish military commander allowed them to leave. (p. 262)

... the beatings were extreme. True beatings! (p. 265)

As a child, Deniz was forced to watch while his father and the other adult males in the village while they were beaten by the Turkish soldiers. Without doubt, these excessive measure applied by the Turkish military fueled the feelings of rejection among the Kurds, including Deniz, and over time turned some of them into bitter enemies of the Turkish society to which they no longer experienced any meaningful form of bond.

By that time, I had not personally been beaten by the Turkish soldiers. But the soldiers' treatment of the other members of our village was more than enough to spark my desire for revenge, and this spark grew rapidly. (p. 266)

Over time, these beatings became a routine that was carried out once every two nights. The men in the village became so sick of the beatings that they started to develop tactics to evade the oppression.

Since the soldiers' arrival was always unpredictable, and usually at night while everyone was asleep, the men in the village had no time to hide. Eventually, the male elders became so fed up with beatings that they would sleep in the barns, hidden inside the straw, to avoid the assaults. (p. 263)

Even though Deniz was not directly subjected to this physical abuse, these practices were experienced by his elder brothers and parents. The subsequent feelings of injustice, exclusion, and humiliation have been powerful forces in Deniz's mind and shaped his attitudes toward the

Turks. Thus, his radicalization process was advanced by how he framed as unjust the unsatisfying events and grievances that occurred early in the life of his brothers.

Over time, Deniz became more and more prone to radicalization—and the possibility of becoming a terrorist—he grew increasingly resentful of the injustice practices of the agents of the Turkish state. The feelings of discontent and perceived adversity formed the foundation for stepping onto the path to extremism. Eventually, he developed the “us-versus-them” paradigm.

The language they spoke in the school wasn't the same language we spoke at home or in the village. That language was only spoken by soldiers or teachers, who treated people badly. Both groups were cruel. (p. 259)

Initially, the Kurdish villagers did not even know why they were being subjected to such harsh and cruel treatments at the hands of the Turks. They were being arrested, subjected to torture, and then released on a regular basis. Many of them experienced stress and mental confusion in response to these practices.

It was a confusing situation in the village, and although our people hadn't done anything wrong, we hid to avoid these attacks. (p. 263)

Although they hadn't committed any crime, they ran away simply to avoid getting beaten. Their wives and children got left behind. (p. 264)

Over time, the villagers figured out that there was a group called “Apocular” and the Turkish soldiers were raiding their village to punish the sympathizers of this group.

When Turkish soldiers arrived in the village, they would ask, “Have you seen the ‘Apo Sympathizers? Have you fed any of those men? Have they passed by the village?” At that time, we didn't know what the term even meant. We first learned of the existence of Apo, and his group of Kurdish Freedom Fighters, from the Turkish soldiers trying to eradicate them. (p. 264)

So, in a way, the oppression carried out by the Turks not only informed the Kurdish villagers about the existence of the PKK but also pushed them toward this organization who fought for them. As the Kurds—who were not sympathizers or part of this subversive activity—were

targeted by the state and labeled as the enemy, they reasoned that they might as well support the Kurdish movement if they were going to face repression in any case. Thus, many repressed and tortured people later joined to the PKK or other groups who opposed to the regime in Turkey.

We had no concept of a Kurdistan, or even that we were Kurdish, and certainly no idea about any “Apo Sympathizers,” until the soldiers came to our village and told us. (p. 266)

So by beating all the men in the village over and over, simply on the suspicion of sympathizing with this “Apo,” the Turkish soldiers, themselves, educated us about this group that stood in defense of villagers like ourselves. (p. 267)

Because of their inhumane and unjustified attacks, the Turkish military had spontaneously caused neutral villagers, such as ourselves, to actively seek to find and join this group of rebels, whose name we had never heard, except from Turkish soldiers. (p. 266)

Not surprisingly, therefore, as a child of a father who was constantly beaten by Turkish security forces, Deniz grew up to violently oppose and mistrust of his perceived oppressor, the Turks. At the cognitive level, what Deniz knew and believed about the Turks affected how he perceived them.

These were really bad days. Being forced to watch my father, my elder brothers, and the other respected men of the village getting severely beaten, broke my heart as well as the hearts of all the other boys in the village. But, being just a few, and young, there was nothing we could do. We could only stay silent or weep in despair. If there were a hundred people in the village, there were two thousand soldiers. We were helpless. And that helpless suffering planted the seeds of hatred in our hearts. We had begun to learn to hate. We hated not only the soldiers, but our hate grew to include the Turkish people, and even the Turkish language. (p. 266)

Accordingly, the personal experiences and the major life events that occurred during Deniz’s childhood created a fertile ground for his radicalization. That is, the oppression provoked political violence (Fanon 1965; Schmid 1983). Deniz often cited as a prime motive for the joining the PKK the injustice of their treatment by Turkish government that wished to rob them of identity, dignity, security, and freedom.

Further, the existence of shadowy forces used by the Turkish security forces against the Kurds was another factor that contributed to Deniz's radicalization. Hezbollah (different from the worldwide known Lebanon Shia group) is an ethnic Islamic movement that mostly fought against the leftist-based PKK in Turkey between 1980s and mid-1990s. Although the Turkish Hezbollah did not directly attack the secular Turkish state, many members and sympathizers of the PKK were killed by this conservative religious group (McDowall, 2000, p.434). The Kurds soon figured out that the Turkish security forces were using Hezbollah against the nationalist Kurds, mainly the PKK members. On any given day during the 1990s, it was common for Hezbollah to kill a PKK member or a sympathizer in broad daylight (McKiernan, 2006). Nevertheless, no suspects were arrested for the commission of these crimes, even though perpetrators were known Hezbollah members.

This practice of turning a blind eye to those atrocities committed by Hezbollah further antagonized the feelings of Kurds against the Turkish security forces.

During this period, there were so many "unsolved" murders that everyone knew it was Hezbollah, if the manner of death were a cleaver or a beheading. (p. 280)

...while the Patriotic Youth were subject to such oppression and torture, the members of Hezbollah could go around freely carrying anything they liked—knives, cleavers, or guns. The police did nothing to Hezbollah members, even if they were found with these weapons. (p. 259)

Throughout this period, Hezbollah had killed many of our friends. They practiced many kinds of nastiness then, from unidentified murders and kidnapping to literal back-stabbing. The fact that Hezbollah committed those murders with the support of the state was yet another factor that pushed us into the arms of the PKK. We had started to think that we could cope with these horrors, only if we joined the PKK. (p. 278)

In sum, it is clear that Deniz's radicalization was enabled by an environment that was characterized by a deep sense of injustice tied to the oppressions, exclusion, cruelty, and

humiliation that the Kurdish people suffered at the hands of the Turkish security forces. These sentiments played a significant role in shaping Deniz's attitudes toward the Turkish state. As a direct result of these sentiments, he became more and more prone to radicalization and to becoming a "freedom fighter."

***Personality Traits.*** It is important to note that the subject of this life story, Deniz, was neither an offender with varied criminal background nor drawn from the social or economic margins of Kurdish society. Instead, he was a person with strong ethical values. For the most part, his family background was not problematic. Deniz did not come from a broken family and did not suffer parental abuse or the use of violence as a means of discipline and communication within the family. As he noted about his family:

My father has always been so sensitive. He never physically abused any of his children, through his entire life. In the culture of our family, children should never be beaten; neither girls nor boys. Discipline in the family was maintained through discussion. Our elders would always caution us, saying "Do this like that, or don't do that. That's bad, or, don't let anyone talk poorly about us. Don't tarnish the name of the family!" (p. 260).

Additionally, Deniz's parents were highly strict on ethical values. They always cautioned their children specifically about two moral values; (1) always telling the truth no matter what the consequences would be, and (2) not stealing from the others. His parents' teachings of ethical values clearly shaped Deniz's character. Even when he experienced serious events that had the potential to cause him trouble and bring punishment, Deniz refused to lie to disguise his responsibility.

I didn't understand the reason, but my family was very sensitive about lies and theft. (p. 255)

Throughout my childhood, I had never lied. I had always been honest. Even if I made a mistake, I always confessed it. (p. 261)

Aside from being frank and straightforward all the time, Deniz was highly disturbed when others around him lied. Whenever such an incident occurred, he would openly warn the person by publicly criticizing him or her.

Since I never lied, I could not stand hearing others telling lies. Once, when my elder brother was telling a huge lie, I was so upset by it that I told my father everything that had really happened. (p. 262)

Other than these personal qualities, Deniz's childhood has no sign of him being action-oriented or manifesting a proclivity for aggression or violence. He was a person who kept himself away from problematic situations. He knew how to properly act and behave against other people. Even when he was confronted with tense and problematic situations, he would act calmly.

I never caused any neighbors to talk badly about me—in any of the places we lived. I never had a fight with my siblings, or with the neighbors' children. I always kept myself away from such problematic situations. When someone swore at me or humiliated me, I would never retaliate at that time. I would leave the scene and look for something to occupy my mind, and although I was furious, I would hold my tongue, bottle my anger and try to keep command of myself. I would make peace, leaving no ill-will behind. (p. 261).

Moreover, Deniz did not suffer from any psychological problems. On the contrary, he was smart and quick to grasp the things occurring around him. He knew how to learn from the past mistakes. Even though he had no actual school experience, he learned how to read and write by himself.

It is important to note that feuds between rival groups were common among the Kurdish communities during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, Deniz's tribe was a part of feud that took many lives on both sides of the fight. In fact, his family had to abandon their village when Deniz was only six years old due to fear of retaliation from the other side.

.....the other side attacked my family and killed three people. Then we attacked, and killed seven of them. Every day, the fighting was ferocious, and gunfire was so loud and frequent, that we couldn't even leave the house. (p. 267)

As a result of this feud, many people from the opposing families were killed. Therefore, on the night of the incident, we fled the village. We left behind every animal, and all of our belongings. We ran to a different village, very far away, and settled there for our safety. (p. 268)

As a result of these fights between the families, violence had become an everyday element in handling conflicts in Deniz's community. During these continuous battles among the two tribes, Deniz became familiar with the use of guns, fights, and killing of other people.

Over time, my personality began to be altered by the repetition of incidents such as this. Although I did not yet participate in the violence myself, the beatings, blood, and gun battles had become an ordinary part of my environment. Gunshots no longer caused me panic. Everyone in the village used guns. It became so common, that it no longer seemed to be a crime, but just a fact of life. So, then, even if a gunshot were heard right in the center of the town square, nobody would investigate. (p. 267)

Not only did he come to see such acts (the use of guns and applying to violence to resolve conflicts) as normal but also learned the value of courage through the incidents occurred during those battles.

During one battle, a wounded neighbor was carried into our place. A group of women gathered and began to clean his wound. When they extracted a bullet from his chest, they realized he had been shot in the back, and so must have been running away. The women instantly stopped taking care of him. One of them even said, "This coward has sold out his friends, he was shot while leaving them, let's just let him die." I remember this very, very well. (p. 267)

The fact that the women in the village had refused to treat that wounded neighbor, once they decided he was a coward, inspired Deniz to act bravely in every situation in the future—including in situations that might cost him his life. Thus, courage became one of the most important virtues in the eyes of Deniz.

Due to the abundance of this deadly encounters among the Kurdish tribes, the use of firearms was common not only among the males but also among the females of the Kurdish community of that time. Deniz also stated that he loved to learn how to use guns. He found it exciting and thrilling to use such weapons:

I was always shocked and amazed at the weapons I saw on him during those short visits! The fugitives sometimes had weapons that we didn't even have in the village. I loved weapons, and I envied the people who used them. In my father's absence, my uncle had taught me how to use an AK-47. I had learned everything about it; how it worked, how many bullets could be loaded into it, and how it was cleaned. Everything. (p. 268)

In sum, Deniz did not suffer from any psychological, mental, or personality disorders that would predispose him towards the use of violence. On the contrary, he had high moral values and empathy for the others around him. Not only was he a strong person with high personal qualities such as being straightforward, courageous, and rational, but also he was a valued member of his family and community. He thus chose to become a "freedom fighter" not due to an underlying pathology but because he possessed the positive traits of moral conviction, attachment to others, and physical courage, including a willingness to use firearms if necessary.

***Opportunity Structures to Recruit.*** Even though Deniz's family members were able to protect themselves from retaliation by relocating to another village, the family could not provide sufficient livelihood because they had left all their belongings in the first village they lived. As a result, the family had to move to the city of Batman to have access to more job opportunities that would help them recover financially.

Deniz had difficulty adapting city life initially. He literally had no social life for the first couple years. He would go to work early in the morning and only return to home at late night.

Our social life was nonexistent. Even family members had no time to visit each other, since it was such tiresome work. We would hit the pillow as soon as we had finished



dinner. Then, the next morning, we would arise early, have a quick breakfast, and set off back to work. (p. 272)

One inadvertent consequence of moving to the city was that Deniz encountered increased opportunities to become familiar with the group he had only heard about until then, the PKK.

The only thing I liked about the urban period was that, as my awareness of this group who protected us, the Kurds grew, living in the city gave me opportunities to meet some sympathizers of this group in person. Thanks to demonstrations held in the city, and the television and radio programs broadcasting the speeches given in the teahouses, I had the chance to be better acquainted with the PKK. (p. 274)

Various ideological activists played leading roles in the radicalization of Deniz in the city life. Thus, Deniz began to join to the mass protests and meetings organized by Kurdish activists in Batman. The speeches delivered by some of the influential Kurdish politicians of that time—including Leyla Zana and Nizamettin Tonguc—played a significant role in his radicalization.

Social identification with these groups in the city life inarguably influenced Deniz's decision to join the organization. Seeing that these politicians were resourceful, educated, and well-integrated—and even considered as role models in the context of the Kurdish community—Deniz began to identify with the organization. Through participation of these meetings and protests, he reinforced his previous experiences on the sense of injustice.

From these social events held in the city, Deniz surmised that the Kurds were systematically deprived of their rights to equal opportunity, that they were obstructed from expressing their cultural identities, that they were excluded from political participation through legitimate channels, and that they were even forbidden to use their language.

I remember, in those city days, the demonstrations held before the 1991 elections. Big Kurdish names, such as Leyla Zana and Nizamettin Tonguç, would gather the masses and deliver powerfully influential speeches. People from every neighborhood and district would join these demonstrations and listen very carefully to what was being said. We came to understand from the speeches that there was an ethnic minority population in Turkey called the Kurdish, and that we, ourselves, were members of this population. We

learned that this minority population had been consistently oppressed. Only Turks had had the right to speak on the record at the highest levels of Turkish Parliament. These speeches declared that we Kurds also needed access to the parliament, and from now on, we wanted to be there, to be heard, and to be given the right to affect decisions that influenced our own region. (p. 272)

Thus, even though Deniz was spending most of his time working long hours at the factory, he attended these gatherings at every opportunity available to him. Deniz indicated that the propaganda delivered by these politicians played a key role in his radicalization process. Indeed, the incidents he had experienced previously in the village seemed to lend credence to the claims made by the Kurdish politicians during demonstrations.

The way the teacher had beaten up my elder brothers because they didn't speak Turkish; the oppression and torture against our male villagers, after the military coup, and even in the present day. (p. 273)

In Deniz's eyes, these politicians were charismatic and motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice, responding to the real suffering of others. They shaped his thinking:

Soon, I was going to the demonstrations whenever I had an opportunity. I was very young, so I was easily influenced by what was said. (p. 273)

These speeches offered doctrinal arguments that served to legitimize extremist positions for Deniz. They disseminated propaganda supported by real grievances. These Kurdish ideological leaders were thus able to transform the widespread grievances of the Kurds into an agenda for violent struggle. These politicians specifically highlighted the fact that Turks and Kurds were two different groups, and, as a group, the Kurds had been unsuccessful in obtaining a desired place in the society because of the discriminatory policies applied by the Turks. This situation of goal blockage had created frustration for many of the Kurds. There was, they claimed, only one option: it was crucial for every Kurdish youth to join the PKK, given that the

current authoritarian Turkish regime and the absence of alternative methods of political participation.

Every individual who gave us beatings, who oppressed us, who tortured us—from police officers to teachers to soldiers—all spoke Turkish. Suddenly, we clearly understood the differences between us. Turks were not Kurdish, and they did not like us. A kind of “isolating” emerged. We, as the Kurdish populace, had been alienated, and I began to absorb the meaning of my identity as a Kurd. (p. 273)

In short, these politicians were able to mobilize hundreds of young Kurds to join the PKK by mixing together emotional and rational considerations together and by highlighting that there was only one solution to ending the Kurdish subjugation—participation to an organization that offered the only effective means and thus hope to Kurdish liberation.

In addition to these ideological activists, Deniz’s cousin, who had a university education background, played a large role in his and his friends’ decision to join the PKK. Deniz showed great respect to his cousin because it was extremely rare for a Kurdish youth to have a university education under the circumstances of that time. According to Deniz, his cousin was a charismatic person motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice.

He was once thrown into jail because he joined a demonstration. He was placed in Diyarbakır Penitentiary and was constantly tortured while there. All his teeth were removed with a pair of pliers! He didn’t have a single tooth left inside his mouth. Yet no amount of torture had made him change his beliefs. One day he gave my friends and me a very effective speech: “We are Kurdish, and we own our Kurdish lands, so why don’t we have someone from our people representing us in the decision making levels of state affairs? Why can’t those officials who are obliged to serve us Kurds actually speak any Kurdish themselves? Why do they always treat us so poorly? Why can five or six soldiers gather all our villagers and beat up all the men in front of their wives and children?” (p. 277)

Moving to the city, Deniz also acquired more access to broadcast by news outlets. The systematic anti-Kurd slandering campaign presented by these sources deepened his antagonism

toward the Turks. Without exception, the news related to the Kurds was humiliating and provocative in nature, and incited the need for revenge or action.

If a few of our people disappeared in a neighborhood, it would hit the news with a deliberate spin against us. “Those who have gone up to the mountains are either the Armenians’ unacknowledged children or bandits. They are irredeemable. They are traitors.” (p. 277)

Moreover, through his participation to demonstrations, Deniz met and developed close relationships with new friends who shared similar opinions and beliefs. Soon, he felt a part of this small group of like-minded individuals. The similarity of ideas and the friendship bonds bred further a connection among the group members, which deepened as they experienced a series of events. They engaged in various activities, including field trips to learn more about the history of the Kurds and the solutions to overcome the current state of oppression and discrimination. By talking to each other and meeting with PKK ideologues at nearby locations, these friends reinforced each other by transmitting radical ideas and attitudes. Accordingly, the social network ties of Deniz fostered his radicalize as he increasingly adopted the attitudes and behaviors of other in the network.

I soon developed a very close circle of friends in Batman; about six or seven people, and we were spending most of our time together. We were all smoking back then, but never used alcohol or drugs, and never committed even petty crimes, like theft. (p. 273)

During this time, we began to gather into groups and listen for hours to Kurdish-language tapes. But all of this had to be in secret, because speaking Kurdish or even listening to something in Kurdish was forbidden. (p. 273)

Over time, in-group socialization occurred. The feelings of injustice and aggression were displaced onto causal agent, the Turks. The Turkish security forces were vilified and began to be regarded as the enemy. As the anger towards the Turks built, Deniz and his friends became increasingly sympathetic towards extremist ideology.

In the meantime, a new phenomenon began to occur frequently in the neighborhood in which Deniz lived. The youths with whom Deniz played in the streets would disappear suddenly, and no one would hear from them again. Deniz and his friends later learned that these young Kurdish boys and girls were leaving their homes to serve in the PKK as a guerilla in the mountains and countryside. Deniz and his friends were impressed as they saw how those young Kurds sacrificed the comfort of their homes and the best years of their life to serve their nation's cause. Moreover, leaving home to join the fight was regarded as an essential element of being a good Kurd by the community.

Meanwhile, a new phenomenon had begun. The neighborhood friends with whom we always met and played suddenly started to disappear, and we never saw them again. Gradually we understood that they had all joined the PKK. So, we then came to see the disappearance of our youth as ordinary. For most families, it became a point of pride in the fact that their children had joined PKK. Sometimes a single person, or at times, a few people would disappear all at once. This impressed us a great deal, as we grew older. (p. 274)

Deniz and his close friends started to talk about this new phenomenon of disappearance, and they started to discuss the idea of making the same sacrifice for the sake of their community. Without informing their parents, they began to travel to nearby locations where participation in the PKK was high in the hope for gaining more information about why and how people were going up to the mountains.

We started talking about these issues within our circle of friends, and began thinking and discussing together what we could do for the cause of helping secure the freedom of our Kurdish people. We knew that PKK participation was high in the regions of Silvan and Hasankeyf. We began exploring these regions, in our time off from work, in order to get more information about the PKK. We talked to people there, and tried to understand why they left daily life in favor of heading up into the mountains. (p. 274)

Through these field trips, they also acquired the contact information of local intermediaries who could help them to join the organization.

Once our decision was made, I got in touch with the people who were going to take us to the mountains. I knew someone from another neighborhood who made these sorts of arrangements. (p. 281)

Because Deniz grew up in a village and spent most of his time as a shepherd grazing the animals over the mountains, his friends had confidence that he could enable them to reach the mountains. Deniz not only was familiar but also experience with the hardships of life in the mountains. He knew requisite survival techniques. Thus, his past experience with countryside life actually further encouraged his friends' desire to join the movement.

Though we didn't have a leader, I knew better than my friends what was involved. Not only did I know the intermediaries who would take us to the mountains, but also I had once lived in the villages. Since I had been a shepherd from when I was little, I knew the conditions in the mountains very well. The other members of the group had all grown up in the city, and had always enjoyed a comfortable environment. They knew nothing about roughing it, or had no idea where to take shelter; what to eat, or where to find clean water in the mountains. The fact that I was experienced gave my friends confidence. (p. 281)

Notably, even though Deniz's parents were familiar and sympathetic to struggle given by the PKK at that time, they never approved or encouraged their children to join the movement. Moreover, as the disappearance of youngsters became more frequent, Deniz's mother increased her warnings to her children, cautioning them not to leave the family to join the organization.

She would say to us, "Now this family's son or daughter has gone missing. They have probably gone up into the mountains. I agree that there must be a separate Kurdish state, a new Kurdistan, and the oppression should decrease against us Kurds. But, rather than joining a rebellion, it is more important that we should stay together as a family. So, my sons, please do not ever go up to the mountains. Don't ever join the organization." (p. 275)

Nevertheless, for Deniz, belonging to a group and being accepted by peers overruled most other considerations, including the frequent warnings of his mother. By socializing with his friends, Deniz gradually adopted the idea of joining the PKK. He and his associates made

the transformation from being PKK sympathizers to active supporters, ready to join the organization.

My mother's constant warnings did not work on me. Within our friends' circle, we had already decided to go up to the mountains and join the organization. (p. 275)

In summary, as Cloward (1959; see also Cullen, 1984) have noted, criminal or deviant roles cannot be undertaken unless actors have access to the opportunity to learn the requisite values and skills and have access to the means to discharge the role. This is the case regardless of whether a person wishes to become a jack-roller (Shaw, 1930), professional thief (Sutherland, 1937), gang member (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960), or PKK "freedom fighter." In this regard, by moving to the city, Deniz was able to become a terrorist because he could learn the ideology, have the network support, and be sufficiently close to the "mountains" to join the PKK and be a terrorist.

*A Sense of Duty.* Although Deniz did not have a regular job, he was not a socially alienated individual who left society for this reason. He did not join the PKK because of the so-called economic opportunities provided by the organization or out of boredom and a desire to have an action-oriented adventure. He was not drawn into terrorism because he found it thrilling or because he was seduced by its excitement. He did not have fantasies about the heroism associated with being involved in the guerilla struggle. In fact, it was not a life that he wanted to pursue.

On the contrary, Deniz and his friends were pushed toward terrorism by ideological and related beliefs. He joined the PKK in pursuit of a cause he regarded as just. He had been forced to watch helplessly as his father and other adult men of the village were severely beaten. He had to see the Kurds regarded as second-class citizens of Turkey—their identity as Kurds rejected

and their basic human rights denied by the Turkish state. These experiences upset him and the other young Kurdish boys in their village. As a result, Deniz and his associates felt obliged to participate to the organization because they would be disloyal to their Kurdish community if they did not do so.

We all strongly believed that we had to do something for our oppressed people. We were all the right age, each between 17 and 19 years old. (p. 281)

Our economic situation was bad. Our family was leading a poor life, but no one came to us to make any promises. We weren't offered money or authority in return for joining the organization. This is what I want the state officials and then the Turkish people to understand. What do they think someone would prefer; to leave the compassion of their parents and family, and all the comforts of home, in favor of a challenging life in difficult conditions? For people to choose this kind of life voluntarily, there must definitely be a strong reason behind it. I still don't understand how the people living in the other regions in Turkey could not grasp this. (p. 281)

The acts of security forces had provoked these feelings of humiliation and revenge and had served to forge a bond between Deniz and the ideological preachers, catalyzing his acceptance of the radical narrative and its associated values. After a while, not only Deniz but also the other young Kurds began develop a sense that they had an ethical responsibility to defend the Kurdish nation against the suppressive regimes.

When we looked around, we realized that those who were oppressed, beaten, and killed were always Kurdish. Kurds were the ones killed with chemical gases by Saddam in Iraq. Kurds were the ones tortured by soldiers in Turkey. Kurds were the ones who were suppressed by the regime in Iran. Kurds were the minority who lived in Syria, but did not even have their own ID cards—their own ethnic identity. (p. 277)

These statements clearly indicate that Deniz was attracted to the fight carried out by the organization because of the legitimate grievances disregarded by the Turkish state. His grievances were gradually transformed into hatred of the Turkish security forces, and this hatred was regarded as a legitimate justification for revenge through violence. That is, Deniz ultimately



decided to engage in terrorism because he experienced a cognitive transformation in which a deep sense of honor and duty motivated his joining the PKK.

Indeed Deniz and the other Kurds who joined the organization regarded themselves as the “givers” of their community—they had more concern for their nation’s well-being. These Kurdish youngsters believed that they had an obligation to fight for on behalf of the Kurdish people’s future—even though participating in the war against Turkey would likely cost them their lives.

The indifference of the state towards the people of our region; our torture; the oppression and torture in the neighboring countries against Kurds—collectively created our natural desire for revenge. (p. 278)

And that helpless suffering planted the seeds of hatred in our hearts. We had begun to learn to hate. We hated not only the soldiers, but our hate grew to include the Turkish people, and even the Turkish language. (p. 266)

We agreed, saying, “Since the Turkish Government does not recognize our national identity, and since it either ignores us or oppresses us, then why shouldn’t we join this organization which fights for us?” (p. 278)

So, all of us got very clear on one point. We were going to get revenge for what the soldiers had done. And we were going to get it by joining with these Apo sympathizers who were such a threat that the Turkish soldiers felt compelled to hunt them down everywhere. (p. 266)

Therefore, many Kurdish youths joined the PKK not because of their violent propensity or to fulfill some social or psychological needs such as excitement or identity. Rather, they become terrorists because of the injustices and violence they were subjected to at the hands of Turkish security forces and the subsequent sense that they have the obligation to defend their people through armed insurrection.

### ***Persistence: Being a Terrorist***

This section will explore the factors that led Deniz to persist in his role as a "freedom fighter" in the PKK for approximately 20 years. The factors that led Deniz and potentially other PKK recruits to stay in the organization despite all the hardships of guerilla life can be grouped under six main categories: (1) a strong sense of purpose, (2) a belief that death was inevitable, (3) personal traits, (4) support from his "comrades", (5) military success, and (6) advancement in the PKK organization.

***A Strong Sense of Purpose.*** Deniz believed that he was part of a legitimate fight for freedom that would be pursued according to high ethical standards. Accordingly, he viewed himself not as a murderer but as a soldier in a war to free his people. Thus, having a strong sense of purpose was a fundamental component of Deniz's life. When he woke up every day in the guerilla camps, he never wondered what he was going to do with himself. Rather, he took control of his own life and engaged with a meaningful goal: destroying the security forces to make the enemy sit at the negotiation table. Accordingly, he channeled his mental activities towards achieving this altruistic purpose—that of sacrificing his own life for the future generations of the Kurds.

I have a clear conscience about my missions in the organization. I am aware of what I did and why I did it. All my fight was for the righteous struggle of the Kurdish cause. (p. 935)

On several occasions, Deniz indicated that the root cause of the guerillas' fight against the Turkish government arose from two main factors: the denial of the Kurdish identity by the fascist statement in the Turkish constitution, and the legal restriction that prohibited the use of Kurdish language. He expressed how Kurdish people were unable to communicate with the state when they needed to see a doctor, when they had a judicial problem, or when they were in the

need of other kinds of public services. He stated how Kurdish children were indirectly denied access to education because they were unable to speak Turkish. He cited how the names of the Kurdish towns were replaced, one by one, by Turkish names as a policy of cultural repression. By citing these legitimate grievances, Deniz fought for the organization for approximately two decades.

We only wanted to protect our basic rights. We did not ask to be provided with any extra rights that would compromise those of Turks—but simply to be able to freely speak in our own language and to have our separate identity be recognized. I wanted this stupid denial thing to end. (p. 939)

At the time I was incarcerated, in 2010, it was legally forbidden to speak Kurdish in public institutions. My mother would come to the prison to visit me, and we could only communicate through hand gestures behind the glass. She could not say anything, because she did not know Turkish. The prison guards would mute the microphone if my mother accidentally spoke something in Kurdish. In all of those visits, we would mostly spend the time looking at one another. (p. 939)

Look! We are now in 2015. There has been no improvement of the circumstances. When my mother goes to the hospital, in an emergency, she is unable to explain anything, because she is unable to communicate with the doctor or the nurses. She must have one of my siblings accompany her whenever she visits a public institution, including the hospital, because she is unable to describe her discomfort to them. That is what many other Kurds in Turkey daily experience in their lives. Would it really be too difficult for the Turks to assign doctors, police officers, teachers, and other public servants who can speak Kurdish to the eastern cities where the majority of the population is Kurd? Is it really a matter of honor for the Turks? The society in this region is unable to associate itself with the state, because they do not speak the same language, nor do they understand Turkish. (p. 940)

Deniz truly believed in the legitimacy of his cause and continued to live his life accordingly. Despite the fact that he deserted the organization in 2010, on several occasions, he reiterated that he would continue to fight for these rights—if he were released from prison at some point in the future—until they are granted to the Kurds of Turkey.

I am telling you—even if I am released at the age of 70, I will again fight for the right to speak in my mother tongue. (p. 938)

Beyond believing that the Kurdish cause was righteous, Deniz also felt that his “freedom fighting, was guided by high ethical standards. As he indicated in his life history, neither the Kurdish politicians who indoctrinated young Kurds in town centers nor the PKK ideologues who trained guerilla at the training camps used an ideological curriculum that aimed at the dehumanization of the Turks as a whole.

The organization leadership had very firm standing orders prohibiting missions against anyone but the security forces. (p. 360)

The problem for the organization was the system, not the people. In other words, the PKK’s only issue was with the political authorities who didn’t recognize the democratic rights of the Kurdish people. So, our trainings included absolutely nothing about seeing the civilian Turks as enemies. (p. 295)

Accordingly, Deniz and other recruits were continuously cautioned to kill or attack only specific targets, which was often the security forces. The PKK never allowed its members to carry out attacks against the Turkish civilians in the city centers. Therefore, even though dehumanization of “the enemy” as a whole has been the constant feature of the indoctrination process of almost all terrorist groups in the world, it was not the case for the PKK.

Instead, Deniz—and potentially other guerillas—had a clear sense of purpose in his mind: fighting ethically for the rights of Kurdish individuals. In fact, many incidents noted in his life history suggested the Kurdish guerillas rarely acted militarily in an opportunistic way even though doing so would bring them huge advantage over the enemy. For example, Deniz and his team did not even taken advantage of the opportunities that arose when the enemy suffered natural catastrophes. Thus, on August 17, 1999, an earthquake killed approximately twenty thousand people in Turkey. As noted in Deniz’s account, the PKK announced that it was ready to declare a ceasefire and help in the search and rescue activities as soon as the news about the earthquake hit the media. Unfortunately, the Turkish officials rejected this offer. Notably, in the

midst of the ensuing chaos from the earthquake, the PKK could easily have attacked from the southeastern borders of the country and have captured a sizeable territory.

I mentioned before that the organization never considered the civilian Turkish public as enemies. In fact, helping each other after the earthquake would have been a great opportunity, for both the organization and the Turks, to put away their long-standing hatred toward one another. We were even ready to transfer thousands of our people to take part in search and rescue activities. (p. 600)

In another incident, Deniz and his guerilla friends were informed by the villagers that a Turkish military outpost had been hit by an avalanche and the entire unit—approximately 40 Turkish soldiers—had been buried under the snow and killed. The villagers offered to go the military outpost and collect all weapons and ammunition as a war booty. Nevertheless, the guerillas harshly object to this offer by arguing that;

A natural disaster happened, and it would be against the morals of the organization to profit from the spoils in such a situation. (p. 290)

Finally, Deniz noted on various occasions how foreign governments' officials approached to the PKK to use its force as leverage against Turkey. For example, whenever Ankara started peace negotiations with the PKK, Iranian officials would contact the organization's headquarters and offer incentives in return for the continuance of war against Turkey. Or, as depicted in the life history, foreign involvement was clearly evident in 2001 economic crash that shook Turkey. As Ankara was crippled with chaos and facing the grave danger of a social outbreak, many nations—including Iraq, Iran, and Syria—had contacted PKK headquarters and encouraged them to deal the deathblow by declaring its independence. The seniors of the PKK regarded these kinds of acts as treacherous.

...the organization was wholeheartedly pursuing peace when Iran was offering excessive incentives to continue fighting Turkey. "If you begin fighting against the Turks again, we will supply all your ammunitions and weapons free of charge! You will no longer have to worry yourselves over finding money for access to weapons!" (p. 643)

Shortly after the 2001 economic crash in Turkey, many foreign agents contacted the organization, stating, “Do not let this opportunity pass by you! Now is the right time to separate from Turkey and declare your independence!” Those agents, in fact, had also reached out to the ground guerillas. Affected by those agents’ support, many guerillas were insisting to deal a deathblow to the Turks in 2001. Back then, the senior commanders at headquarters settled the ground guerillas’ discussions by telling them, “This is a plot imposed upon us by some foreign powers, for their own benefits. We should never, ever achieve our goals in a dastardly way!” (p. 807)

In short, Deniz was able to persist in as a terrorist because he was motivated by a strong sense of purpose that he was carrying out a legitimate fight to free the Kurdish people according to strong ethical principles. He was thus engaged in a moral crusade that supplied motivation for him to carry on the fight over the course of nearly two decades.

This is what I want the state and then the Turkish people to understand. What do they think someone would prefer; to leave the compassion of their parents and family, and all the comforts of home, in favor of a challenging life in difficult conditions? For people to choose this kind of life voluntarily, there must definitely be a strong reason behind it. I still don’t understand how the people living in the other regions in Turkey could not grasp this. (p. 282)

***A Belief That Death Was Inevitable.*** Deniz was well aware of the fact that death was, for most “freedom fighters,” a near inevitable reality. By participating the organization, he knew that his chances of being killed was something that might occur at any moments when deployed on missions. Thus, the decision to remain in the PKK was a fate Deniz had intentionally chosen—and thus not to be feared.

As guerillas, we never dreamed of living a long life. We could be martyred any time, and we were very aware of this. Sometimes you would lose a friend who had stood by your side night and day. Therefore, death had become common for us. This outlook motivated us to do anything to fulfill our duties. (p. 368)

When Deniz joined the organization, he never thought about the possibility of ever returning to his, getting married, or raising children. He abandoned all these hopes so that he

could carry out missions as bold as brass. He was not scared of the death. Rather, he was willing to sacrifice himself if it would serve for the interests of the Kurds.

We had left our families in order to fight. Any militant who joined the organization, had already abandoned all hope that he would ever go back home. That's why we were brave. We had already given up everything. This was a big disadvantage for the military and a great advantage for the organization. (p. 320)

I had a close brush with death many times and was seriously wounded at least six or seven times. I never had a guarantee to live one more day when I was in the organization. We were, in fact, aware that we could lose our lives in any moment. (p. 935)

After all the repression, torture, and denial of identity experienced by his Kurdish people, nothing would scare Deniz and his friends. They were no longer afraid of the security forces. What more could the Turkish government do to them? The worst they could do was to kill innocent Kurds and they were already doing that anyway. So, these guerillas who went up to the mountains had nothing to lose. They gave all their free will to the organization. They became willing to carry out any mission they were assigned.

Remember when Apo was arrested by the CIA and then being handed over to the Turkish officials in Africa. The guerillas in the camps located in Syria and Iraq had become frenzied as soon as the Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit declared to the world that Apo had, in fact, been arrested. As noted in the life history, the PKK's senior leaders had a difficult time trying to calm down the foot soldiers. Within hours, thousands of guerillas had submitted their letters volunteering to carry out suicide missions against the Turkish government. When their applications were rejected, some of the guerillas had even set themselves on fire to protest their leaders' decisions.

Many comrades voluntarily submitted applications to be part of the suicide missions. The organization only accepted three hundred applicants out of thousands of applications.

These soon-to-be suicide mission members were all from the higher ranks, and experienced guerillas. (p. 587)

Another sign that death did not scare Deniz was his eagerness to be assigned to a position in the north—in Turkey—even though the risk of losing his life was much higher in that sector because of its proximity to the enemy forces. In fact, Deniz had many opportunities to stay safely in the camps located in Iraq and to live a luxurious life for years to come. He was offered a position to serve in the close protection guard of the leader Apo. He was even offered a position in one of the European capitals to work as the political representative of the organization. Nevertheless, Deniz turned down these offers simply because he wanted to fight in the war zone in defiance of Turkish tyranny. Accordingly, he persisted in his military activities because death—the inevitable outcome for the PKK guerilla—was to be embraced, not feared..

***Personal Traits.*** Deniz had the ability to endure not only the years of physical hardships of guerilla life but also the psychological and emotional consequences of killing enemy forces and of seeing his close friends being killed one after one. As depicted in his life history, pursuing a guerilla life was often characterized by total misery. Most of the time, the PKK guerillas had to travel during the darkness of the night so as to avoid being detected and risk being captured or killed. Sometimes, they had to travel in bitter cold weather when visibility was very low due to fog or rain. In the winter, their freedom of movement was severely restricted since walking on the snow left footprints for the security forces. In the summer season, it was challenging to travel on foot due to the extreme heat. When traveling, they could only rest when they could find a secure place. For that, they had to know where the Turkish troops were located, which paths through the mountain were reliable, whether the surrounding area was mined, and so on.



Being unaware of the enemy's position or the use of high-tech devices by the enemy made them highly vulnerable.

...that I have said it before, that you can't force someone to stay in those conditions. Combat aside, sometimes people just couldn't handle the difficulty of our daily life and returned back home. Whomever wanted to leave, would just depart. (p. 338)

It was 2:00 p.m., and the weather was so hot that, because of the heat, we were not able run even a hundred meters. (p. 703)

We had to walk all the way north, under the darkness of night during this cold season. (p. 679)

It was so snowy outside, and, at some areas, the snow had piled up for more than two meters. It was freezing cold and also snowing non-stop. Normally, it would take only three hours of walking, between our camp in Muş and Dorşin camp, but, that day, we walked from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and could still see our camp field in Mus. In eight hours, we had only been able to cover a distance of less than two kilometers. (p. 833)

It was -22 Fahrenheit, and we had to regularly move our bodies, even though they were warmed up from the heat of the fire. Otherwise, the bloodstream in your body would stop flowing. In order to stay awake, we chatted with each other until sunrise. I was hitting my comrades' heads with my cane when they closed their eyes. (p. 835)

In the winters, they had to spend at least three to four months underground. They had to build bunkers that included rooms in which to live, a kitchen, and a bathroom. They also had to acquire supplies from the town centers and carry them to the countryside without being noticed by the security forces (including drones). Then, they had to spend the entire winter—approximately four months—in these small quarters. .

...we were all ensconced in camp, we all knew that, short of an emergency, nobody could leave. (p. 334)

With the supplies purchased, now the most difficult part of the task had just begun. We had to carry all of these staples we had just secured into the countryside. (p. 436)

We would travel each of these planned paths twice, without carrying anything, before loading and transporting the supplies by mule. (p. 436)

Once they settled in their camp, they were aware that none of them could leave until the winter was over. Thus, they had to be precisely accurate in predicting the amount of their needs including, food, clothes, fuel, ammo, training materials, weapons, and all other materials. They had to follow other strict precautions as well. For example, even though they had stoves, they were able to light them only when it was dark to prevent detection by the security forces—a hardship they had to endure no matter how cold it became during the daytime.

Life was hard in underground. We were definitely not allowed to use the wood stove to heat the bunkers unless there was rain, snow, or fog, because the security forces could detect our location from the smoke. (p. 748)

Beyond these physical hardships, there was always security concerns. For example, during some winter camps, Deniz and his friends had to depart their underground bunker before the spring came because they suspected that the soldiers might raid their location. Enduring freezing cold weather, they had to leave all the food and camp materials behind and exit the camp on bare foot by stepping on the rocks to not to leave any footprints.

Their troubles did not end with the conclusion of the winter season. At this juncture, they faced the challenging of finding food on which to survive, aside from planning missions against the enemy. Beginning with mid-1990s, the PKK guerillas had difficult meeting their basic needs because almost all villages were emptied by the Turkish government as a measure of counterterrorism policy.

Also, our ability to meet our needs was diminishing, as more and more villages were abandoned. It began with simple shortages. For days, we'd be unable to drink tea, simply because we didn't have any. We would finally get tea, only to run out of sugar for it. Tea and sugar would finally present themselves in sufficient quantities, and that's when we'd run out of flour to make bread. But we survived all that. Things got hard, but we all did our best to meet every challenge with fortitude. (p. 368)

The possibility of being killed at any time was another burden the guerillas had to bear in their daily lives. As noted in the life history, Deniz witnessed the deaths and injuries of his comrades many times. On the second day after Deniz joined to the organization, the place at which he was staying was razed to ground, and several of his comrades were killed by Turkish fighter jets attacks. On the night he set off for his reach his first assigned place, the group he was travelling entered into a mine field and three mines exploded. Several of his comrades were seriously wounded, and some of them lost their lives. Even though he was just a new recruit, Deniz was able to cope with these extreme hardships that transpired in the first days of his life in the PKK.

A huge noise woke us up on the second day. Of course, we didn't yet understand everything, since we were new, but, we were terrified. The experienced ones warned us, "Fighter jets! Air attack!" (p. 289)

The campground was hit every half hour by six alternating attack aircraft. After the heavy sorties were over, we came under fire by Cobra style helicopters. (p. 337)

Three mines exploded as soon as the front group passed the border. Nine people were seriously wounded, including the battalion commander. Someone barked, "Everyone stay in place! Don't move!" The commander in the back of the group marched to the front to help the injured and stepped on a mine before he got to them. We were new, and we had no idea what was happening. The casualties were heavy. The mine completely severed the feet from the nearest three people. Two more of our comrades lost their eyes from the shrapnel, and five people sustained serious wounds in various parts of their bodies. (p. 319)

Death was a natural part of the guerilla life, and it could come to anybody at any time from endless list of possibilities: sometimes from the military operations carried out by the security forces, sometimes from the mines planted by the security forces, sometimes from natural disasters, sometimes from a traitor infiltrated into the organization by the enemy, or sometimes even from regular training activities as a result of a simple mistake.

Sari Ibo's death affected me deeply. The day before it happened, we were together eating dinner and chatting happily about general things, and then, the next day he was gone. I was in a tough, unbearable emotional state. It was even more unbearable when you lost someone you loved, and Sari Ibo was loved by me. (p. 726)

The operation against us had destroyed all our food and clothing. Our entire regional force was physically and emotionally drained. Can you imagine how it would feel to lose 40 comrades all at once? (p. 400)

We were just about to lay siege when suddenly the sound of explosions crashed through the darkness. Five of our comrades had their legs, ankles, and feet injured from the explosions and pieces of shell fragments. We were completely demoralized by the serious injuries that befell them. (p. 553)

...a lightning strike hit the top of that very hill. When we arrived, the view we encountered was horrific. They had all been martyred. The death of those comrades and the female company commander within that very same week affected all of us psychologically. (p. 656)

There was an accidental detonation of a mine, and one of our comrades lost his eyes and another one's leg was torn apart. (p. 656)

In fact, one of our own people martyred those seven comrades. Afterward, he surrendered himself to the security forces. (p. 765)

...the guerilla force in Dorsin had been completely destroyed by a traitor in the cave where they were camping. (p. 795)

One of our comrades had killed seven others, while they were on sleep and had then fled. This tragedy had, unavoidably, created an atmosphere of nervousness and distrust among the guerillas. (p. 820)

Indeed, Deniz came close to death several times in his PKK career, despite experiencing serious injuries, he never considered leaving his life as a guerilla. In 1993, he was ambushed and was shot from his lower abdomen. His friends thought he was dead so they left him behind. For more than 24 hours, he waited for someone to come and take him to a place where he could receive medical treatment. In 1994, a hand grenade exploded just in front of him, seriously damaging his face and knees. Because of the shell fragments that remained in his knees, he had to use a cane after that year. In 1996, a sniper bullet stripped his skull and broke the skull bone.

Again, his friends thought he was dead. If Deniz did not have a strong personality, he would have given up fighting.

When the bomb exploded, the shell fragments hit my knees, elbows, and cheeks. I still have shell fragments in my cheeks. I did not want them to be removed, because the doctors would have had to cut through my cheeks to get them. I was told that three points on my face would need to be cut to take remove the pieces, but I did not want to have scars on my face. (p. 704)

My wounds were severe, and I was not able to stand and walk. I was losing a lot of blood and had fallen unconscious from time to time. (p. 353)

I suddenly felt a pain in my head [the bullet struck his skull]. It was as if I had been hit with a very solid object. I do not remember anything after that. (p. 450)

I only fully understood the damage through which my body had gone in all the battles when I asked to be reassigned in the north. In 1993, I was wounded in an ambush in the Siirt Valley [after he carried out the assassination mission]. A hand grenade had exploded in front of me in 1994, and, in 1996, I nearly died from a bullet that had stripped my skull. (p. 708)

After all these unfortunate injuries, PKK headquarters wanted to assign Deniz to Damascus—next to the President Apo—for advanced ideological training. It was a golden opportunity for him to rescue himself from the hardships of the guerilla life. To the surprise of everyone, Deniz refused this offer by arguing that he needed to gain more military experience in the field of war.

A couple years following this invitation, Deniz was invited to Damascus for the second time. Again, he rejected the offer to remain there, arguing that his battalion had just suffered a serious defeat and lost 60 guerillas, including the battalion commander. Again, relocating to Damascus would have offered Deniz physical comfort, but he chose to stay in the north because he did not want to leave his fighters without an experienced commander.

Then, through the radio, he told me, “You are wanted in Damascus. Prepare ASAP!” But I told him....one of our best platoon commanders just died. I’m the only leader left who really knows the area. Can we wait until spring?” Not that I did not want to go to

Damascus by the personal invitation of our leader! I did. But it was even more important to me that I not abandon my responsibilities. (p. 440)

Therefore, the life of a guerilla is characterized by pain, suffering, desperate conditions, misery, deprivation, and the risk of death. Not all PKK guerillas had the physical and psychological capacity to endure such hardships—especially over a lengthy period of time. As Deniz noted in his life history, those who could not bear these difficulties would either be allowed to quit the organization or ask to be assigned to less overwhelming positions. Unlike many of his comrades, Deniz had the personality to endure years of physical and emotional hardship.

After all, we had been well aware before even joining the PKK that life in the organization was not going to be easy. (p. 368)

***Support from His Comrades.*** Another factor that led Deniz to stay in the PKK for approximately two decades was the existence an environment that nourished friendships and social solidarity in the organization. The PKK leaders were committed to creating strong friendship ties among members. For example, the first day Deniz and the other new recruits arrived at the training camp area, they were instructed to everyone “comrade” regardless of the rank or the status an individual might hold. In the eyes of organization, friendship came before anything else, including hierarchy and authority.

It was our first day in Gabar, when the senior militants first taught us to call each other “heval” (Comrade). We were going to call everyone “comrade,” no matter what authority or rank they had. (p. 287)

Thus, esprit de corps—a sense of friendship unity—was a very important issue for everyone in the organization. The guerillas had to have rapport among each other.

For the organization to function, it was required for you to be close to everyone and never “on the out” with anyone. Because the advent of personal discrimination in the

organization begins the dissolution of the sense of brotherhood, which leads to loss of confidence—then to loss of effectiveness, and then to failure. (p. 337)

Deniz stated that whenever PKK members faced stressful situations or difficult times, fellow “comrades”—especially senior ones—provided vital sources of support that helped them to cope with their feelings of depression or anxiety. These supportive interactions among the members strengthened social bonds.

They were also always helping us in many ways. There was a powerful atmosphere of friendship and brotherhood. Some of the newcomers frequently got tired and lost their motivation, but no one would yell at them. On the contrary, they would be approached in a friendly manner, and asked, “What’s the matter? Is this too much of a load for you to carry? Are you ill? If you want, we can give your burden to someone else.” (p. 288)

When Deniz personally experienced difficult times, there was always someone that he could talk to receive advice or help. Seniors in the organization conveyed that they were always available when a member might be stressed. They welcomed talking about concerns and were willing to provide practical and emotional support. Thus, Deniz and the other guerillas knew that they were not on their own. There was always someone that they can count on.

...when we had a problem, we were to inform the person whom they appointed as the squad leader. If he wasn’t available, we were told whom next to contact. (p. 286)

This company commander had a big hand in shaping my personality and character...while he was my commander, I took all of his actions and demeanor to heart. I looked up to him as a role model, and I always tried to act as I imagined that he would. I so wanted to emulate him with his ability to fight; his character, and his behavior throughout daily life. He was one of the rare people in the organization who was loved by everyone. Whenever someone had a problem or had failed at something, he would talk to that person for hours. Every guerilla knew that commander Orhan was someone who would think rationally and take care of everyone. (p. 379)

The guerillas could ask for help even for mundane and simple things. Deniz, for example, noted in his life history that a senior and well-known PKK member—Sakine Cansiz—

helped him to write his report regarding the criticisms and opinions about the training that he had received before being transferred to his first duty area.

She was someone who valued the new young comrades and was constantly trying to help them. In particular, she would handle comrades plagued by psychological distresses and would try to solve their problems by talking with them. She had already told me that she would write the report for me. I gave her just a few main points. She was able to write a report which was about four pages in length, just using my brief information. (p. 316)

Seeing how his seniors listened to every word expressed by troubled guerillas, responded to every cry for help, and offered advice when needed, Deniz in turn learned to support the guerillas under his command when they needed him. Even though he was given an opportunity to settle in Syria for further ideological training, Deniz turned down this offer so as not to leave his comrades without an experienced commander in the middle of the winter.

Torn as I was, my gut told me it would not be right for me to go to Damascus at that time. We had already lost 50 to 60 guerillas the previous spring. The entire executive board had been dismissed, and the membership of two region commanders had been suspended. Moreover, the platoon commander had just been martyred. If I had accepted Apo's invitation, despite such conditions, I would have left my company in a dire situation. If I thought about nothing but my own interests, of course I would have gone straight to Apo in Damascus! But I liked my men very much. They were very committed to me. If I left them alone in winter camp and something happened to them, I would regret it for the rest of my days. (p. 440)

This friendship atmosphere was so real that over time, Deniz and the other guerillas began to see their comrades as their own family members. For example, Deniz regarded some of his commanders as his parents and, as he rose to a leadership position himself, regarded the guerillas under his command as his own.

Since I had been so young, commander Orhan would always advise me as if I were his own son. (p. 379)

.....when your commander dies, you feel as if you have lost every member of your family. A commander becomes everything you have. They are irreplaceable. (p. 726)



I said, “Mom, do not worry about me. I have 80 children here who take care of me so well.” I, of course, was referring to the guerillas in the battalion. (p. 716)

Between the years of 1992 and 2005, I had never spoken to my family. Not face to face or on the phone. .... I had a new and larger family within the organization. I viewed my superiors as my father and mother. The guerillas that fought in my battalion were also part of my family, and I viewed them as my blood brothers and sisters. Similarly, they also viewed me as their elder brother or even a father, in some cases. I was all they had. They would come to see me if they were hungry or in need of new uniforms, if they were sick, or if they were stressed, and I would take care of all their worries. Thus, I had become part of a larger family. I just did not have the time to think of my birth family. (p. 713)

Deniz put more than five requests to be reassigned to north once he was forced to stay in the camps located in Iraq and Syria towards the end of his career due to his health conditions. He cited the existence of the high-quality friendship and support among the guerillas in the north when he was asked for the rationale behind his insistence to be transferred. When his commanders told him that his physical condition precluded an assignment to the north, he responded to them by arguing that he very much missed the true friendship environment among the guerillas in the north. The comrades in this network offered support, encouragement, and help—even it was sometimes at the expense of their lives—and, as a result, he warned that he would travel to the north on his own if permission to do so was not granted.

“You can send me there or not, but I will form a group with them, and we will go [to north] anyway!” At this, the region commander became very angry, “If it were anyone other than I that you spoke to in this way, you’d be arrested. (p. 727)

.....there is a tight bond of friendship in the north. ...just to protect you, a comrade in the north would sacrifice himself without hesitation. You will not find friendship ties like that in the south, because guerillas here only think about their comfort, whereas there is loyalty, sincerity, and fellowship in the north, and that’s why I want to go to there.” (p. 683).

Support from his comrades was thus one of the most significant factors that kept Deniz in the organization for so many years. These ties had an important place in his heart. In his final interview, he lamented the loss of the context of friendship provided by his former life.

Sometimes, I very much miss the life in the countryside; the fresh air, the silence of the mountains, peace and true friendship atmosphere. (p. 983)

***Military Success.*** Another factor that helped to entrench Deniz in the PKK for nearly two decades was his belief the organization's armed struggle against the enemy could in fact be effective. He was well aware that the guerilla fighters had superior qualities that would allow them to defeat the enemies' regular army. As he noted in his life history, guerillas joined to the PKK to sacrifice their lives, whereas Turkish soldiers were counting the days before they could return to their homes after their compulsory military service. This level of commitment was a great advantage for the PKK because the guerrillas were fighting bravely without any concern for the future.

.....the difference between our mentality and the soldiers' was our greatest advantage in battle. Mentally, the soldiers were family men. They wouldn't take any risks. They spent their downtime counting the days to return home. Even during a battle, they were inevitably thinking of their homes, families, and their children. We were exactly the opposite. We had left our families in order to fight. Any militant who joined the organization, had already abandoned all hope that he would ever go back home. That's why we were brave. We had already given up everything. (p. 320)

On the other hand, the majority of the guerillas were already familiar with hardships of the countryside life because they were often the children of Kurdish peasants who lived in the region. By contrast, the Turkish security forces—especially the military forces—were composed of young, inexperienced soldiers who joined the military only because it was as a mandatory requirement for all Turkish citizens. They also often grew up in the city and were trained only

for three months before being sent directly to the battlefield to fight against experienced guerillas.

Being accustomed to the terrain was also a plus for us. There was a big difference between a city-raised, briefly trained Turkish Soldier and the village-born guerilla, who had survived off the land and its harsh conditions for many years. (p. 320)

When we performed a mission in the summer, they would follow us just long enough to make a good showing. Then, they [the Turkish soldiers] returned. It was like a sport. They didn't risk going into the forest or steep areas. They were so predictable. (p. 386)

Moreover, the guerillas were much more nimble due to their command structure and the size of units. As Deniz stated in the life history, units consisting of a very small number of guerillas—usually 15 to 20 members—were operating across an entire region within Turkey, which made it extremely difficult for the Turkish soldiers to come into close contact with them. Additionally, the guerillas often were able to inflict damage on the enemy because the Turkish soldiers were dispatched to countryside in large numbers.

We do not need to carry out missions against you anymore by laying siege to the military posts or infiltrating the cities, because you come to us with hundreds of sitting ducks. (p. 877)

I still do not know why those soldiers were so confident of their safety. They walked one behind the other, just like sitting ducks, without leaving any space for security. Just three of us could easily have killed them all with Kalashnikovs. (p. 764)

Further, the guerillas were trained to quickly divide their units into even smaller groups to maneuver and attack enemy forces without being noticed, whereas the security forces had to act with large forces and often depended on orders from the hierarchy that delayed their ability to counter guerilla threats. In fact, Deniz noted in his life history that the unwieldy decision chain of Turkish soldiers often spared the guerillas from heavy casualties because they were able to flee conflicts while soldiers were awaiting the order to attack.

We are able to move in small groups; are highly maneuverable, and each squad commander is empowered to use his own initiative. (p. 335)

Because, in a regular army no individual has the right to act based on their own initiative. All movements are connected to, and hindered by, the chain of command. So, all we had to do with a conventional army was to take our precautions until some soldier made a decision in the chain of command. (p. 325)

In fact, they cannot act at all, without the approval of their superiors. This strategic bottleneck was a big advantage for us. The bureaucratic delay induced by the enemy's hierarchy, often postponed their utilization of long-range artillery or airstrikes, because they needed to get permission for everything. Their hierarchy was that strict. (p. 335)

To thwart a blockade, for example, we divided ourselves into small contingents of just 15 to 20 people. This dramatically increased our ability to maneuver and attack. Had we attacked in a large group, it would have been impossible to go unnoticed. But, in small units, and in the darkness of night, we could all pass undetected through a narrow corridor. (p. 321)

Other than these qualities, the PKK guerillas had also the advantage of hiding among the civilian population, seeing to be normal Kurdish peasants. Deniz and his friends would carry out missions and then disguise themselves and blend into the large crowd. Even though the soldiers knew that they were hiding among the civilians, they were unable to counterattack due to the risk of causing collateral damage.

...what could the military do to us? Their hands were tied. We were among the civilians so they couldn't risk attacking us from the air; they could only fly by with their combat helicopters and try to intimidate us. (p. 403)

The PKK had the further advantage of employing civilian Kurds to carry out its reconnaissance activities in urban areas. The organization relied on its civilian urban sympathizers to collect information about the enemy so that the guerillas could enter the cities and carry out missions. As noted by Deniz in the life history, the organization was even able to collect intelligence on the president of Turkey via a Kurdish civilian who disguised himself as a

journalist. This gathering of intelligence was in preparation for a potential future mission that would be carried out if the AKP would not keep its promises regarding the peace process.

The organization had a tradition where each region in Turkey had a civilian camera crew that consisted of five people: a head cinematographer and his or her assistants. Disguised as tourists, these teams would go around their assigned regions to videotape and photograph the terrain—mountains, military posts, police districts, villages, lodging places, caves, and other places, in detail. This was really grueling work. It would take at least four to five months to completely videotape an entire region within Turkey. All of these videotapes and photographs would be delivered to headquarters management to be used for training purposes. (p. 741)

Comrade, go to this ceremony and take as many pictures as you can. I especially want to see the people sitting in the VIP seats, so focus on that area. Take as many pictures as possible, regarding the protection detail. Studying these pictures, I was able to figure out how many guards were on duty, how they were positioned, the position of the civilian police officers, the locations and numbers of jammers, and all the other details regarding their security precautions. (p. 858)

I puzzled for hours over those pictures taken by my comrade, and reached a simple conclusion. If we really wanted, the prime minister and the other VIP guests could be easily killed in Turkey. (p. 858)

The police officers were often negligent, and we had witnessed this fact on many reconnaissance missions. The police officers were extremely inattentive and like sitting ducks for us. We knew what kind of vehicles they were using, where they hung out in their spare time, where they shopped, and at what time they started and ended their work at the police station. (p. 786)

...in 2008, I sent one of our comrades to the downtown area of Muş to collect intelligence about critical infrastructure that we might attack. He had carried out an awesome reconnaissance. We bought a car for four thousand dollars and loaded it with explosive materials. There was a bus, which would be transporting 40 mid-to high-ranking soldiers every morning from the downtown of Mus to their duty posts at the airport. This bus would also bring them back to downtown at the end of the day. We were going to park our explosive-loaded vehicle on the bus route and detonate it when as bus drove by. (p. 826)

The PKK had more than a thousand already planned missions in its pocket to carry out in Turkey when the time came. For all those future missions, the reconnaissance would be completed, and the explosives, mines and the weapons would already be arranged. (p. 827)

Due to these tactical advantages of guerilla warfare, the PKK was able to fight against thousands of soldiers using a relatively low number of guerillas. As Deniz noted in his life history:

They [Turkish soldiers] use all kinds of advanced weapons. But personal resilience and strength of character are diminished. We knew this, and used it to our advantage. How else could we have ever engaged a regular army brigade of 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers in battle with just one platoon of about 50 to 60 guerrillas? We could defend ourselves against such a large force without any loss of efficacy, because guerrilla warfare is irregular warfare. (p. 335)

Even though Deniz lost many of his comrades during these encounters with the Turkish security forces, he knew that the enemy was suffering even worse casualties as a direct result of their guerilla missions. Thanks to their guerilla tactics, Deniz and his friends were able to capture military bases located in isolated areas in the mountainous terrain. As the organization wiped out the military posts one by one via its ambush, infiltration, and raid tactics, the rest of the Turkish posts were deserted by the soldiers due to an increased level of demoralization and the incoming threat that awaited them. Of course, leveling those military posts provided extra benefits for the PKK organization. As the soldiers fled to the posts located close to the city centers, they left behind virtually all their belongings. Seizing the enemies' technologically advanced weapons and ammunition not only increased the moral of the guerillas but also their combat effectiveness.

...this mission had skyrocketed our troop morale, besides securing our revenge. (p. 331)

...this battle had been a good morale booster for us since we had sustained only a few losses but had caused many casualties on the other side. (p. 382)

...the soldiers there knew we would be gunning for them next. So, in the summer of 1994, before we could attack the station, the military evacuated their post and withdrew to the city center. (p. 389)

...the military finally understood that we guerillas had the power to even capture their bases. That's why the bases in the unsafe regions were abandoned, one by one, and the military force was gathered in specific central locations. (p. 297)

The security forces brought panzers against us that first day, but when our ambush groups destroyed the tanks, the rest of the soldiers withdrew... (p. 403)

During this process, we almost completely destroyed five of these military posts. Rather than fight back against us, many of the Peshmerga forces ran away. (p. 548)

We knew that after we destroyed one of the ranger teams, the rest would withdraw. (p. 434)

Beyond the effects of these carefully planned guerilla missions, the guerillas were able to intimidate the Turkish soldiers through simple land mining and assassination missions. As Deniz noted in the life history, assassinating one Turkish soldier while he was on guard was more than enough to cause panic among the entire military battalion. The uncertainty of when and where death occur seriously limited the mobility of the Turkish security forces. Deniz recounted how the military would leave its positions after the PKK had carried out two or three successful assassination missions.

The military now had no will to remain in their positions—not only because of the mines, but because of the snipers we sent to demoralize them. Our men were hiding in the steep and wooded field at a distance of 150 to 200 meters. When they found an opportunity, they would shoot a soldier with a Dragunov assassin weapon and then retreat. We caused the military to feel so frustrated and disheartened, because now they were the ones unable to move freely throughout the autumn. Finally, they left all three of the hills and withdrew to their headquarters. (p. 434)

These lethal missions not only defeated the enemy but also increased the Kurdish villagers' respect for the PKK. Over time, many of the villagers' opinion—not only the neutral ones but also the ones registered in the village protection system—changed, and they began supporting as the PKK proved itself against the Turkish security forces.

We wanted our message to the public to be clear—that we could control any roads we wanted, wherever they were, for however long we wanted. This was not an easy feat to accomplish in 1995, and it made a strong impression on the populace. (p. 403)

This mission made a great impact on the region. A ranger had bashed the dead body of a guerilla into pieces, and that ranger and his team were completely eliminated, before even a month had passed. All of the rangers in the region became afraid of us after this mission. They were now more careful. From their disrespect of our fallen comrade, we had taught them complete respect. (p. 385)

They were no longer afraid of their government. ...the fact that our own Kurdish people were organizing these kinds of revolutionary activities in the city centers, and finding their courage to stand up against the cruel acts of the security forces, was a great morale booster for us guerrillas in the field. (p. 367)

Deniz also believed that the armed struggle against the enemy was effective not only in eliminating the enemy forces but also in forcing Turkish state officials to sit at the negotiation table. Deniz and the others in the organization were well aware that the years of repression, denial of the Kurdish identity, and the ban on the use of the Kurdish language was in fact halted by the Turkish officials only after successful guerilla missions that inflicted heavy casualties on their military forces. In fact, as noted in the life history whenever a tension occurred among the guerilla wing and political wing of the PKK, the ground guerillas would say; “Look my friend, if it were not for my hard scrabbling in the countryside, you wouldn’t even be able to talk to the public now. You wouldn’t have been granted the right to enter the Turkish Parliament and play the role you do in the mechanisms of decision” (p. 422).

The seniors from the organization responded to those pro-fight guerillas, with, “Comrades, those deaths were necessary, because initially our presence was being denied. We had to pay the price to make ourselves recognized by the Turkish officials. Today, it has paid off. We have to move on. Now is the time for securing peace. Before, the Turkish governments denied our existence, by saying that there was no such place as a nation of Kurds. We were called Armenians, Jews, mountain Turks, or even the agents of foreign powers. The Turks officially denied our presence back then. However, we Kurds are sitting at the negotiation table with those who doubted our existence. The Turks now say, “We have Kurdish citizens. They have their own rights and they will



receive all those rights as the conditions improve.” That is why we should move on! We cannot continue fighting forever!” (p. 296)

Our violent missions were only justified because that’s what it took to bring the state to the negotiation table. (p. 296)

Deniz fought for the organization for approximately 20 years in large part because he witnessed that their successful guerilla missions had proved themselves effective in depleting and weakening the enemy forces, in changing the balance of forces between the enemy and the organization, and in forcing the state to consider settling this dispute through negotiation rather than fighting with arms. Various ingenious methods of fighting that were devised by the organization—including the use of civilian sympathizers to collect reconnaissance, land mining, assassinations, sabotage, ambushes, infiltrations, raids, and also suicide missions—not only paralyzed the normal functioning of the Turkish state but also annihilated its security forces.

***Advancement in the Organization.*** The final factor that kept Deniz and potentially other guerillas in the organization was the existence of opportunities to advance within the organization provided by the PKK. As an organization, the PKK had various positions distributed across a hierarchy of ranks. Thus, the guerillas regarded membership in the PKK much like a military career rather than as a cast system where they had to be happy with their assigned low-level status for the rest of their lives. Anyone who started a career in the PKK could rise from being a ground guerilla and to the ranks of squad, platoon, company, battalion, region, province, and field commander over the years. Doing so, of course, depended on their possessing the capabilities to fulfill positional duties and to satisfy specific criteria outlined by the PKK, such as esprit de corps, loyalty to the party, discipline, and being experienced in guerilla tactics.

There were some certain criteria that must be satisfied, in order to earn promotions in the guerilla force. A leading criterion was to have self-command of the standards of the party. You must be committed to your comrades, without any discrimination. You must protect your comrades under any circumstances and think of them before yourself. You should never relinquish your air of military discipline. You must be experienced in guerilla combat tactics and style of action and even conduct missions yourself, when necessary. Insufficiencies were especially impossible to justify in someone appointed as a commander. Finally, no one could request a certain rank or position. You had to understand that duties were only appointed to you based on your own performance and the needs of the organization. (p. 378)

Thus, merit and qualifications were the main criteria when a member was appointed to a position as a commander. As Deniz noted in his life history: “We sometimes witnessed a newbie being appointed as a commander over those who had been in the organization for fifteen years” (p. 337).

Deniz also revealed in his life history that, even though anyone who qualified for a ranked position was promoted without discrimination, the organization would take into account candidates’ experience and skills when appointing them to a specific zones. For example, Deniz indicated that only the best applicants would be sent to the posts located in Botan and the Middle Field due to the strategic importance of these two sectors for the organization.

There was a hierarchy to the zones of responsibility, which is taken into account when guerrillas were selected for promotion to the level of field commander. For us, Botan Field was the most important, both because of its proximity to the south, and because it had a force of 4,000 to 5,000 guerrillas, where most other zones only had a few hundred guerrillas...Equivalent in importance to Botan Field, our Middle Field was strategically crucial because all our forces used it to transfer from one field to another, such as the Northern Field and Amanoses. On the other hand, it was in the center of everything (hence its name), and the Middle Field was also our center of greatest contact with the public. All the city centers in the Middle Field were under the control of the PKK. Therefore, the most experienced and skilled commander would be appointed to this field. (p. 412)

As promotion was provided, so was demotion. It is important to note that no member’s position was guaranteed forever. The organization would demote even a commander to ground

guerilla if that person no longer possessed the characteristics of being a good commander. In fact, as Deniz noted in his life history that the PKK never refrained from discharging the entire command cadre of a region whenever it was deemed necessary.

If a person was assigned as a commander and later couldn't fulfill all the regulations, he would be dismissed and someone else appointed in his place. (p. 337)

Basically we were to either come to our senses, or the PKK was going to change the whole command structure that served across the region. There were hundreds of other people within the PKK that could be appointed in our places. We were not irreplaceable. (p. 695)

He told me, "If the organization appoints you to a position, you don't have the luxury of refusal. They think you deserve this promotion and you will do your duty. Don't worry," he added dryly, "If you don't perform well, they won't hesitate to fire you." (p. 380)

There was no exception for anybody. Even the brother of Apo, Osman Ocalan, was expelled from his position at the PKK central command and demoted to a normal guerilla position when it was heard that he was secretly engaging in talks with foreign state agents.

He was dismissed from his post in the PKK central command, and his membership to participate in decision-making and missions was suspended until the fifth congress (until 1995). This was the most severe punishment for him. During this time, he was assigned to the most basic labor forces. He dealt with kitchen chores, cooking, washing-up, baking bread, and keeping watch. He had no one's respect; neither did he have any friends. As I said before, whatever your rank or authority is, if you commit a crime, you get punished—even if you are Apo's own flesh and blood. (p. 376)

In sum, the final factor that led Deniz to persist in his career in the PKK was the existence of nondiscriminatory advancement opportunities. Beginning as a rank and file guerilla, Deniz quickly ascended up the ladders of the PKK hierarchy due to his dedication and motivation in the ideology of the organization. He was very young when he was first appointed as the platoon commander.

I was so young that I rejected the assignment at first. I told the leadership that the job would be too challenging for me, and that I simply couldn't accept it. (p. 380)

A few days before leaving the winter camp of 1994, I was appointed as a platoon commander, even though I was quite young. Since I was pretty inexperienced, I had hard times adjusting to being in this position of authority. Almost everyone in my team was older than me, and it was very difficult for me to give orders to these people. Guerillas, who were almost the same age as my father, were under my command. (p. 378)

Nevertheless, his character, knowledge of the terrain, experience in combat, unique ability to guess the plans of the enemy by analyzing the existent information, and attitudes toward his comrades ensured his promotion to one of the leading positions in the PKK.

### ***Desistance: Leaving the PKK and Giving Up Terrorism***

The goal of this section is to explore the factors that lead to desistance among the PKK members. The life history of Deniz indicated that various factors contributed to why individuals left the PKK and desisted from terrorist activities. Thus, some guerillas quit terrorism simply by getting killed. Some left the PKK due to the rigors and hardships of life as a guerilla. Some left because they made a mistake and did not want to suffer the consequences. And some others left to surrender themselves to the security forces in the hope for seeking revenge for an injustice they attributed to the PKK. Therefore, the factors that led the guerillas to stop being a terrorist can be grouped under four main categories: (1) casualties of war, (2) challenges of life as a terrorist, (3) fear of accountability, (4) retaliation for unjust treatment.

***Casualties of War.*** This category includes not only the guerillas who were killed in the course of the fight against the enemy, but also those who were wounded and suffered from debilitating physical conditions. These might be caused by stepping on minds or by being shot. At times, they involved serious illness or problems such as frostbite.

When we finally made it up the mountain, four of our comrades had frostbite on their feet. Unfortunately, all of them had to have their feet amputated at the ankles. (p. 606)

The casualties were heavy. The mine completely severed the feet from the nearest three people. Two more of our comrades lost their eyes from the shrapnel, and five people sustained serious wounds in various parts of their bodies. (p. 319)

With the tanks not allowing us to move, the enemy executed an intense bombardment of the summit by combat helicopters. Since we had no reinforcement, we lost our positions at the top. At least ten guerillas lost their lives and 12 guerillas were seriously wounded, waiting for death. We took the wounded to the field doctor, where they were treated, but without any high hopes. (p. 395)

Indeed, six of our comrades got wounded in that particular battle, and three of their conditions were serious. Each were shot in their chests. Without surgery, they would die, but there was no way to bring a doctor from a hospital to the countryside. Therefore, all these comrades did die. (p. 438)

I started to amputate the legs of our comrades one by one. I would first cut the flesh horizontally up to a point and then open the flesh on the sides to find the main arteries inside. After tying off the veins with a cord, I cut the flap three centimeters below the level of the tied veins and threw it away. After this procedure, the bone and the flesh surrounding it was left behind. Using one of our Swiss-made saw blades, I was able to cut the bones in the leg in only about fifteen minutes. (p. 555)

Thus, the people in this category desisted from the PKK because they had little choice after suffering from serious debilitating injuries—they step on mines, their legs were amputated, or they went blind. As noted in the life history, these debilitated guerillas either quit the life in the PKK fully or were transferred to non-war zones and carried out the more passive works of the organization.

It is upsetting to see your formerly healthy comrades become amputees, and one begins to wonder if the same thing might happen to you one day. This also leaves our disabled comrades unable to fight as guerillas anymore. Their options are to either be employed behind the front lines in passive work within the camps or to be transferred to European countries and employed to our political organizations to handle relations with the European states. (p. 556)

Meanwhile, those with the amputated feet were sent to Apo, in Damascus, to serve the organization from the background. (p. 319)

***Challenges of Life as a Terrorist.*** This category includes the recruits who could not cope with the dangers and hardships inherent in life as a terrorist. As outlined previously, not everyone who joins to PKK is able to endure the physical and emotional hardships of the guerilla life. Therefore, these people would be given the opportunity of either quitting the organization or working behind the scenes in less grueling works.

After all, we had been well aware before even joining the PKK that life in the organization was not going to be easy. While those who could endure all of these privations became guerillas, those who couldn't bear them worked instead to support our activities behind the scenes in the European countries and in southern Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq and Syria. (p. 368)

As noted by Deniz in the life history, the guerillas were free to leave the PKK as long as they did not harm the organization by helping the security forces. Thus, the PKK allowed the guerillas to depart without any fear of retaliation. In fact, Deniz conveyed that there were hundreds, sometimes thousands, of guerillas in each camp, and so it was impossible to watch every guerilla 24/7. Therefore, the PKK would simply let the guerillas quit their membership if they did not want to serve any longer.

If someone wanted to leave the organization voluntarily, and if he or she had not harmed his comrades or the organization, then they were free to go, and the organization would not hurt them or their family members. The organization would never forcibly make guerillas stay. One can leave whenever he or she wants, and that system has been the same ever since PKK was established. (p. 521)

You could never force someone to stay in the mountains. In some camps, there were hundreds of PKK members; in some of them, thousands. There were a great many chores and a lot of work to be shared. Now tell me, how would you force people to stay in a working camp like that? Would you follow them 24/7? It is impossible. (p. 281)

Cemil Bayik seemed to be very sad when he heard the news and said, "Do not bother yourself and just let him escape! No one will go after him. He should stew in his own juices for now." In truth, it would have been easy to catch Şemdin because there was only one escape route from our camp area to the other regions. We could have had these places guarded before Şemdin reached them, but no matter how we insisted, Cemil Bayik did not want anyone to go and catch him. (p. 562)

...they do not care about, or spend time and effort to find a foot guerilla, who served the organization for a couple months and then deserted. (p. 520)

However, the organization does not care whether ground guerillas, most particularly the newbies, desert the organization, because there is no information that can be leaked by a newbie. (p. 928)

Notably, the life history of Deniz also indicated that some guerillas who were unable to cope with the hardships of the life would simply commit suicide to relieve themselves from the misery. Committing suicide as a way of desistance was especially common for those who were unable to endure the harsh winter conditions.

After we buried Xelil's body in the snow, we had not even walked 15 meters away when a comrade shouted at me, "Comrade Deniz, I am exhausted and I cannot even move my legs. You go on. I will stay here." His name was Hebung. The three of us spent quite a bit of time convincing him to continue with us. We rubbed his hands and feet but nothing worked. He insisted on staying there. Since we were all waiting in the snow, the other two comrades told me, "Comrade Deniz, if we keep waiting here, we will all die. We should continue on, whether Hebung comes with us or not." We set up a tent and left a lot of firewood in front of it. We started a fire and left his share of food in the tent and then set off. Hebung had committed suicide in the tent. He shot himself in the head. (p. 835)

Thus, the people in this category usually leave the PKK early in their careers because they cannot take the rigors of the guerilla life or they miss their family. They do not have the ability to endure the hardships of life so they simply quit or in some cases commit suicide. The important thing is that the PKK allows them to leave on the promise that they will not damage the organization by leaking information to the security forces.

***Fear of Accountability.*** This category includes the leaders and others who made mistakes or did something wrong that would subject them to prison or even execution. As noted in the life history of Deniz, many of the guerrillas, especially those holding senior positions, ended their career in the organization by fleeing so as to avoid capital punishment or imprisonment.

The company commander had been sentenced for a mission he had enacted. He ran away because he just could not bear his punishment. (p. 441)

...so when he unexpectedly did join the congress, their plan fell apart, and they both fled from where the congress was being held. Sarı Baran took refuge in KDP Management, and Şener was killed by the organization while hiding in a house in Syria. (p. 515)

Because of all his previous atrocities, Hogir (Cemil Işık) fled the area. Mehmet Şener and Sarı Baran also ran away so as to avoid execution. (p. 533)

Botan and Ferhat then declared that they were sorry for what they had done, and they would respect the decisions made by the organization from then on. However, as soon as the organization lifted the ban on traveling outside the congressional field, Botan, Ferhat, and 15 other senior leaders fled and took refuge with Jalal Talabani. The organization asked Talabani to hand over the runaways, but he rejected their request, saying that he would not fulfill such a demand since American authorities were backing the group. (p. 663)

As soon as Osman Öcalan heard that he was sentenced to death, he fled from the PUK and took shelter in Iran. Osman knew that the PUK's military force wasn't strong enough to protect him from the organization. (p. 373)

One of our comrades had killed seven others, while they were on sleep and had then fled. (p. 818)

...in 1989, he executed two entire villages, complete with women and children, for no reason. Directly after this incident, Cemil Işık was brought under internal investigation. While under inquiry for this, Işık ran away to save himself from the same fate befalling the rest of the cabal he had established. (p. 505)

Nevertheless, as Deniz reiterated several times, the PKK would never give up its pursuit of deserters who committed the crimes of treason and murder of another comrade. Therefore, even though guerillas who were sentenced to death penalty often fled the organization to save their lives, the organization would usually find and then execute them.

[Apo is talking] This organization would never leave someone alive once we have issued a death penalty in his name. Tell Selim that we have issued no death penalty. If we had, he would already be dead. (p. 505)

As I mentioned previously, the PKK banned capital punishment for all crimes except the crime of infiltrating the organization. Working for the enemy was unforgivable. Above all else, if you killed one of your comrades, without pity, there was zero chance you



would be forgiven. Even if you deserted, the organization would never give up trying to find and execute you. (p. 725)

In 2003, one of the guerillas killed his comrade and fled to Barzani, the Peshmerga force in northern Iraq. The organization did not go looking for him, but, when the Peshmerga forces would not deliver him, they were given a large amount of money, which convinced them to turn him over to the organization. That guerilla was taken to the camp and executed in front of three battalions of guerillas. (p. 521)

In sum, people in this category desisted from terrorism because they committed grave errors and physically attacked others. Understanding that they would be placed on trial, and harshly sanctioned, they fled to escape such accountability.

***Retaliation for Unjust Treatment.*** The final category that led PKK members to desist the organization involved those who felt unfairly treated by the PKK and, in turn, took the side of the security forces. The main character of this life story, Deniz, falls into this category. Because his girlfriend was driven to suicide and he did not believe he could receive justice in a rigged trial against him, he left the PKK in hopes of killing the leader he held responsible.

In 2010, Deniz was incarcerated by the organization for a crime he allegedly had not committed. Despite the fact that he was ready to defend himself in front of a formal trial committee, he became highly suspicious of the situation when he was asked questions regarding past events that were unrelated to the current investigation. The investigation committee had brought up past incidents in front of Deniz for which he had not accused previously. Some of these questions were phrased in a way that they directly blamed Deniz for defying of Apo. Thus, Deniz became convinced that he was not going to find justice in that forum.

I was kept in the jail longer than I thought. It had been almost six days, and the committee was meeting regularly and asking me to talk about past incidents, which were not even related to my present incarceration. I was now in serious danger since I was being tried and accused for different occurrences—such as Deniz, who had not killed the rangers who martyred our comrades, or, Deniz did not kill the man who stole the tax

revenues of the organization. The committee began to ask me questions on incidents that had occurred in the past. (p. 847)

There were 22 questions in the draft and only three of them were related to my so-called affair with Silan. The remaining questions were about me and our leader, Apo. They had gone too far. I was being accused of being disrespectful to our leader. As soon as I saw the draft, I figured out that Hakkı was not trying to discharge me from my position. It was even worse. He was trying to sentence me with capital punishment. (p. 851)

...one of my older guerillas visited me and said, “Comrade Deniz, this is between you and me but be very careful now. Hakkı has already sanctioned you to execution. No matter what you do or whomever serves on your trial, you will be seriously harmed. Hakkı even ordered us to kill you if you attempt to flee. They will kill you even for a shadow of mistake!” (p. 860)

Even more dangerous than these accusations, rumors had spread in the camp that Deniz could in fact be an agent working for the Turkish security forces. Thus, he began to be subjected to extreme beatings while his ankles and hands were tied in his cell. Deniz noted in his life history that three of his teeth were broken during those beatings (p. 851). Moreover, before his trial had started, Deniz’s girlfriend, Asmin, committed suicide as a protest to the slanderous accusations made about Deniz and the treatment to which Deniz was being subjected.

The suicide of his girlfriend was the final straw for Deniz. He had not thought about running away until Asmin was pushed into committing suicide. Deniz initially thought that he could acquit himself from all the other accusations because they were simply not true. Hakkı and others did not have any solid evidence that could result in Deniz’s conviction and receipt of capital punishment. Nevertheless, upon Asmin’s death, Deniz changed his mind about defending himself. He decided to leave the PKK and then seek revenge against the people who caused Asmin’s suicide.

I looked at the faces of the people on the committee and said, “I would even have sacrificed myself for Asmin. Nevertheless, since this organization caused to her to take her own life unjustly, I can now even stand against this organization and secure revenge for her! Those who played a part in it will suffer the consequences! I have fought among

you for almost 20 years. I have fulfilled all the duties that I was assigned. However, if necessary, I will make no bones about fighting against you all to get revenge for Asmin! (p. 861)

I could not help myself from thinking about how to kill Hakkı. (p. 862)

As I had fought for my people, the Kurds, for 18 years, without even blinking an eye, I would fight for the woman I loved for the rest of my life. That innocent Asmin committed suicide by shooting herself in the head only 30 meters away from me. I was depressed, demoralized, and tired. I said to myself, "Fuck this shit!" Right then, I decided that I could not be part of this organization any longer, when people like Hakkı were highly valued and respected. I stomped with rage. (p. 863)

Thus, Deniz had a unique set of reasons to desist from the PKK. He desisted in the hope of exacting revenge on those who had pushed his girlfriend to commit suicide. There was no way he could stay in the PKK. He was abandoned by his friends, subjected to harsh beatings, and he was accused for incidents that occurred years ago. As a direct result of these pressures, he felt a deep sense of injustice and a desire for revenge.

Thus, revenge for unjust treatment was the main reason for Deniz's desistance from the PKK. For that, Deniz planned to surrender himself to the security forces. He thought that he could convince them to give him the opportunity to kill Hakkı if he helped the security forces to prevent some already planned future missions of the PKK.

I could easily have gone to the south—to Iraq or Syria—and live there until the end of my life. I also could have gone to Europe. I had connections that could guide me until I reached Germany or France. However, I was so blinded with the desire for Asmin's revenge. (p. 868)

I had thought that, if I surrendered myself to the security forces, I could be saved from obsession with Hakkı, who not only pushed Asmin to kill herself but had also blamed me for being an agent for the security force, despite my successful career in the organization. (p. 868)

It is important to highlight that even though Deniz left the organization due to his desire for vengeance, he never defamed the PKK as a whole. Rather, he reiterated that he had a

problem with a single individual, and, given the context, he concluded that he could not contact headquarters to make his voice heard. Further, he knew that he could be murdered by one of Hakki's men if he had continued to stay in the camp until the end of his trial. That is why he chose to desert.

I do not want to hold the organization responsible, as a whole, for whatever I was exposed to back then. All in my life, I have never dished on someone. If I told you that all those things occurred because of the general characteristics, culture, morals, and ethics of the organization, it would be a complete lie. It would not be right. Nevertheless, just as you have corrupt politicians in your government affairs, we also had corrupt guerillas who would do most anything for their own gain. (p. 868)

In sum, Deniz did not leave the PKK because of reasons often cited in the terrorism literature; apprehension by security forces, disillusionment with the reality of life in PKK, experiencing a sense of changing priorities, or the burden of his own internal moral limits. He never longed for the freedoms of a normal life; for being able to live settled life, of for going about his own affairs without the fear of enemy threat. Rather, Deniz desisted from terrorism due to his growing desire to exact vengeance. A wide variety of triggers led to the desistance of Deniz; feeling of mistreatment, his comrades' hypocrisy, being undervalued, the dissemination of scandalous rumors, and finally the suicide of his girlfriend.

There were in fact too many factors that might potentially inhibit Deniz from disengaging from the PKK. Deniz made approximately a two-decade investments in terms of friendship and social support. The organization provided him a substitute "family" and identity, security against enemies, and the opportunity to pursue a righteous cause. As outlined in the previous section, one of his key motivations in his lengthy persistence as a "freedom fighter" was the sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals. By leaving the organization, Deniz

sacrificed many of these to be a member of the PKK—status, authority, respect from others, and a sense of self-importance.

By leaving the PKK, he also risked his life. He well understood that the organization would not allow someone at his rank to depart in this way without imposing a significant penalty. As he mentioned in the life history, only the new recruits, who had hard times getting used to the rigors of the guerilla life, could leave without any consequences. However, it was different for long-time guerillas who had been part of the core group and who knew sensitive information about the PKK that might cause serious problems if it were shared with the security forces.

I do not know if I am on the execution list, but the organization does not let high-ranking deserted guerillas, who collaborate with the security forces and who give secret details about the organization, live very long. On the other hand, they do not care about, or spend time and effort to find a foot guerilla, who served the organization for a couple months and then deserted. (p. 520)

Even though he had many options in front of him, Deniz chose to surrender himself to the security forces to order to exact revenge on behalf of the women he loved. Nevertheless, without moral support and protection from the Turkish security forces, Deniz found himself in a social vacuum. Having broken away from an intense daily life and social group, he described his new life as being characterized by loneliness and social isolation. He even repented about his decision to surrender on various occasions. He explicitly stated that his career prospect was ruined.

I drew this destiny with my own hands. I am totally responsible for the incidents that took place after I deserted the organization, and I sometimes feel very angry with myself: I was not such an idiot once. I was not as blind to see ahead of me. I do not understand how I put myself into such a situation [surrendering himself to the security forces]. (p. 983)

## **CONCLUSION: IS PEACE POSSIBLE?**

In this final section, the daunting issue of the possibility of peace is addressed. To be sure, this is a complex issue that involves political interests and forces that are not easily resolved. However, the purpose here is to approach this policy debate in a different way—by drawing in most respects from the insights offered by Deniz. Beyond the internal politics of Turkey, his views are particularly relevant in revealing why military repression is almost certainly to be a failed solution. Given the organizational strength of the PKK, the attempt to eradicate the PKK is likely to be ineffective or, if effective, to generate the use of more lethal methods of terrorism. In addition, it might ultimately prove useful to listen to Deniz, a PKK member and devoted Kurd, in terms of what he sees as the only pathway to peace.

### ***The Futility of a Military Solution***

Two important lessons can be drawn from the life history of Deniz on the issue of Turkey's military approach to the eradication of the PKK terrorism. First, the PKK is a decades-old, very sophisticated military organization. Attempts to eradicate it through a concerted Turkish military campaign are unlikely to be effective. The PKK can replace its members through recruiting, knows how to adapt to Turkish attack strategies, can blend into the population, and is well-trained, well-armed, and well-financed.

The PKK has its own strengths that cannot be disrupted easily by the military efforts of Turkey. It has a strong code of ethics that governs personal conduct, military conduct (e.g., they do not go out and kill just anybody, all killings must be justifiable), and organizational conduct (how people are treated within the PKK). The organization has a merit and accountability system; all actions, especially in military operations, are reviewed and assessed. Members who

are rise up its leadership hierarchy; those who prove incompetent go demoted downward in the organization. No one is immune to being reviewed and sanctioned. Even the leaders of the PKK are held accountable—and demoted or executed when their strategic failures or personal misdeeds call for such punishment. Promotions are held to be based on merit. There is no favoritism. Thus, promotion and demotion are standard practices.

The PKK is an organization that attaches high importance to equality and social integration. Everyone is seen as a comrade, including women where gender equality is stressed. This facilitates social integration and provides high participation rates from the Kurdish women. The ideology of the PKK is based on Marxist theory, not on religion, which distinguishes it from other Islamic terrorist groups where there is no clear end goal beyond religious hegemony. The PKK guerillas are rational. They want their political freedom and the recognition of their ethnic identity. These people view themselves as moral crusaders. They have a strong ideological goal; they fight for justice. Even though the Turkish government has portrayed them as terrorists, separatists, or baby killers, these people are viewed by their community as “freedom fighters.” As a result, the Kurdish public feels a duty of loyalty to the members of the PKK who have willingly given their lives for them.

The PKK embraces democratic socialism. Everyone shares the same food and same clothes. Everyone can speak up against the wrongdoings. Everyone, including the seniors can be criticized. There is a real sense of equality. Each individual is as valuable as everyone else. There is no place for favoritism in the PKK. These values and procedures not only tie Kurdish people into the organization but also make the PKK very effective.

The PKK has its own tactical expertise and ability to learn from its past mistakes. It is constantly evolving and developing military knowledge of effective planning. The

organization's leaders regularly train their members. The PKK has support from the Kurds in the region, including often the village protection guards that are armed and salaried by the Turkish Republic. It is funded by different sources. It has a huge financial support from Europe and other places. More importantly, the PKK has safe havens in the region. It can hide out in Iraq, in Iran, in Syria, and even in many European countries.

As well as having these strengths that made its military defeat unlikely, the PKK has weaknesses—as any organization would. For example, there are power struggles among the leaders in the PKK, which occur regularly (not just in times of succession). There is goal conflict, when the goal of the PKK is in dispute (e.g., war or peace—continuing armed conflict or entering negotiations?). There are leadership failures at all levels that can exact a high cost (e.g., when they occur, guerillas are martyred). There is the challenge of adapting to expensive high tech military technology used by Turkey. There is also the changing politics and the instability of the region—the Middle East.

Despite the existence of these challenges, it is almost impossible to eradicate the PKK, especially when people such as Deniz exist in large numbers are willing to sacrifice themselves for the future of the Kurds. Today, approximately 28 million Kurds live in the region across Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. These people are not willing to abandon their sons, daughters, uncles, or fathers fighting at the mountains. This is the reason why the PKK is still thriving. It has unlimited recruitment resources. Even if the Turkish government murders hundreds of PKK members, the PKK has resources to resupply its guerilla force. As Seyit Riza stated in 1937 just before he was executed by Turkish officials;

I am 75 years old, I am becoming a martyr, I am joining the Kurdistan martyrs. Kurdish youth will get revenge. Down with oppressors! (Dersimi 1987, p. 229)



There will always be more Denizs who are willing fight for the PKK. As Deniz noted in his life history, the PKK has thousands of volunteers who are ready to undertake suicide missions. Therefore, even if the PKK has organizational flaws, it also possesses positive attributes that will nourish its viability for the foreseeable future. Given what Deniz informed us about the nature of the PKK organization, the ability of Turkey to solve its Kurdish problem via military methods seems certain to fail. Thus, Ankara appears misguided in its message to the Turkish people that the PKK will be eradicated through military repression.

In fact, Turkey has been using the military and cultural repression measures—village evacuation, expropriation of Kurdish areas, mandatory deportation, a ban on the use of Kurdish language, destruction of the houses, murder of innocent Kurds, depopulation, unaccounted murders, degradation, violence, and torture—since the beginning of the 20th century, even before the PKK emerged as an organization. In these past times, tens of thousands of Kurds were killed, extreme human rights violations occurred, millions of Kurds were displaced, and the social and economic structure of the region was damaged. Notably, none of these measures proved effective.

[1920s]...the assimilation against the Kurdish identity started in the new republic. Many governmental positions in Kurdistan were filled by Turks. Ankara started a campaign to delete everything referring to the Kurdish language. In this context, Kurdish place names were all replaced by Turkish names (Lewis, 1968; McDowall, 2000).

[1924]...the law number 1505 allowed the state officials the expropriation of the Kurdish areas by the state and then the redistribution of these lands to Turkish speaking population (White, 2000, p. 72).

[1925]...The court of Tribunals of Independence moved from one city to another, thousands of Kurds were slaughtered without trials. (Romano, 2006, p. 35).

[1927] “Whole villages were burnt or razed to the ground, and men, women and children killed” (McDowall, 2000, p. 196).

[1932] Approximately 3,000 non-combatants were killed and their villages were burnt down (McDowall, 2000, p. 206).

[1932] ...the Kurdish population was going to be dispersed to remote areas to extinguish their language and Kurdish identity. The records indicate that approximately one million Kurds were displaced until 1938 (O'Ballance, 1996, p. 16).

[1937]... The homes were destroyed, villages were burned down and depopulated, and the civilians who hid in the caves and animal barns were killed by poisonous gas and artillery. The Alevi Kurds committed collective suicides to escape from the brutality of the Turkish soldiers (Dersimi, 1992).

[1937]It was found out that 40,000 Dersim Kurds died during the military offensives (McDowall, 2000, p.93; White, 2000, p. 83,).

[1940]... After the rebellion was suppressed, a brutal campaign of repression started against the Kurds in the region. Hundreds of villages were destroyed, and thousands of innocent women, men, and children were killed (Romano, 2006, p. 35).

[1967] ...in 1967, Ankara enacted a law forbidding the publication, taping, and recording of any kind of materials in Kurdish (Izady, 1992).

[1967] ...a special commando unit was sent to the region, and a clearing operation was started. Tens of Kurds were killed, and thousands of them were tortured and severely beaten (White, 2000, p. 133).

[1980] ...the law number 1587, prohibited naming Kurdish children with Kurdish names (McDowall, 2000)

[In 1983] Two-thirds of the whole Turkish army was deployed to Kurdistan to suppress the Kurdish national aspirations (McDowall, 2000).

[1986] In 1986 Ankara renamed 2,842 villages out of 3,524 in major Kurdish cities by Turkish names to erase the Kurdish identity in the region (McDowall, 2000).

[1989]....a village (Badan) was blamed for providing new recruits for the PKK, and thus the entire population of the village (children, women, elderly people) was held for a day under the burning heat of the sun in the garrison compound (de Bellaigue, 2009, p. 228).

[1991] The tribes that did not want to join the village guard system were expelled from their lands, and military forces destroyed their houses (McDowall, 2000, p. 425).

[1992] The police and the military units were allowed to apply a special terror law according to which they could detain anybody for 45 days without any charge (McKiernan, 2006, p. 105).

[1993] Villages that supported the PKK were burnt, and the peasants were arrested and subjected to torture (de Bellaigue, 2009).

[1999] By 1999, it was reported that more than 3,500 villages and pastures were forcefully relocated to destroy the potential safe havens for PKK fighters. The witnesses of these relocations indicated that they were subjected to inhumane actions including; degrading behavior, arbitrary arrest, violence, torture, extra-judicial killings, sexual victimization, and the destruction of their livestock and food stocks (McDowall, 2000, p. 440).

[2010] A judicial inquiry, which occurred during the 2010s, later found that an execution squad was formed during [prime minister] Tansu Ciller's government that was responsible for the death of more than 5,000 Kurds between 1993 and 1996 (de Bellaigue, 2009, p. 224).

[2016] The fights lasted for months and many town centers in southeastern Anatolia were completely destroyed. More than 200,000 Kurdish civilian were forced to leave their homes and relocate to other parts of the country (Srivastava, 2016).

All these historical excerpts clearly indicate that attempting to solve the Kurdish problem within the context of security policies and through the application of military measures have been tried many times over. Again, no evidence exists that they have been effective in any enduring way that has brought peace to all parties involved. Unending violence and terrorist acts loom on the horizon. Many people, on both sides, are likely to perish.

In fact, the PKK emerged only after these years of military and cultural repression measures. That is, not only were these measures ineffective, but they also created resentment among the Kurds and led to the establishment of the PKK as a means of resisting inhumane policies and practices. Therefore, the PKK is not only part of the cause of this bloody fight, but also the direct result of the denial and annihilation measures applied by the former governments of Turkey.

Second, even if the Turkish military is successful in using its latest technology and fighter jets to inflict large casualties on the PKK, there is likely to be two unanticipated

consequences—according to Deniz. One of these is that a concerted military campaign to eradicate the PKK will generate much violence and, in turn, foster deeper feelings of grievance and victimization—factors that only make the Kurds increasingly resistant. In turn, this growing sense of injustice will increase participation in the PKK. Thus, the more Ankara cracks down on the Kurd, the more people—especially youths—will be drawn to join the PKK as a matter of duty and patriotism. Thus, the probability that Turkish military is going to subjugate the PKK is highly unlikely. Again, 28 million Kurds live in the area, with new children born every day. These people support the PKK from their heart. There are hundreds of thousands of Kurdish mothers who have lost their sons—and daughters—to this fight. This means that thousands of other Denizens are available to be recruited. The more the Turkish state represses the Kurds, the more the Kurds will join the PKK. Therefore, military measures are limited in their effectiveness.

This assessment does not mean that Turkey cannot kill many PKK members. The Turkish military is skilled and technologically advanced. Thus, Ankara can degrade, hurt, or derail the PKK through military measures; it can inflict serious casualties on the PKK. What it will never be able to do, however, is to destroy the PKK completely as long as there are Kurdish people who are willing to die for the cause of freedom.

Moreover, beyond having unlimited human resources, the PKK also possesses decades of guerilla-fighting experience—knowing how to inflict pain and casualties on the enemy forces. As noted in the life history, Turkey should understand that it cannot stop the PKK from killing more police officers or military personnel. There are hundreds of isolated police stations, military posts, and government buildings across Turkey. The PKK can simply undertake hit-and-run attacks whenever it wishes to inflict damage. Further, one Kurd who is willing to

sacrifice his or her life the Kurdish cause can kill 50 police officers, including in the capital city of Ankara.

A second consideration is that the PKK can respond to eradication efforts by engage in warfare that is even more asymmetrical. Rather than attack military and police outposts with guerillas, the PKK will start to use more bombings by suicide missions. This tactic is problematic for Turkey and its citizens because it is impossible to prevent such self-sacrifice in this kind of war. Still, the reality is that the more the Turkish government presses forward with a massive military campaign, the more likely it is that the PKK will see that their most effective counter-strategy is not direct military confrontation but to employ large numbers of suicide bombers. Notably, the PKK could even start to target the Turkish civilian population, something it has long resisted doing. But if given “no choice,” attacking such targets would seem to be an inevitable outcome. And as Deniz noted in the life story, there are hundreds of thousands of Kurds living in each and every cities of Turkey who deeply sympathized with the ideology of the PKK. Thus, it will not be difficult for the PKK to create chaos in the major Turkish cities using these Kurds.

If the [Turkish] government were thinking like the Sri Lankan government, which killed all the members of the Tamil Tigers, they would be seriously mistaken. We were in no way similar to the fight that occurred in Sri Lanka. Turks and Kurds had intermingled with each other through marriage bonds. Moreover, there were Kurds now living in every single city of Turkey. Turkey cannot say that that it could destroy the whole eastern Anatolia, even using a hundred fighting jets, or hundreds of thousands of troops. Listen to me carefully. Those two societies were highly intertwined. If they carried out such an annihilation mission, the whole country would be in worse condition than what Syria is now. A civil war would break out, and the Kurds and Turks would kill one another, until one day you would look outside and see the United Nations’ troops building a green line between the two communities, and on that day, it would be the end of the emotional ties between the Kurds and the Turks. (p. 942)

### *Political Obstacles in Turkey*

Among others, two important barriers will have to be surmounted if peace is to be achieved in Turkey. First, many victims and families of victims of PKK violence are opposed to rewarding the Kurdish organization with peace. They seek not reconciliation but revenge. Second, suspicion exists that Turkish President Erdogan made the decision to use this conflict with the PKK to stay in power and deepen his authoritarian control—and that he will continue to do so.

One of the frequently asked questions during the peace negotiations with the PKK was the following: “How can we make peace when there are too many victims that suffered the worst consequences of this war?” It is true that families of police and military still want vengeance—not peace—and accordingly they protest peace negotiation efforts between the state and the PKK.

Indeed, Deniz noted in his life history that a fight that has lasted for more than 40 years cannot end without paying the price for it. He reiterated that the peace process will be sabotaged by several groups, not only by the primary victims of this bloody fight but also by the groups that would be affected by the end of the conflict.

Deniz’s perception seems accurate. In fact, former leaders of Turkey—Özal, Erbakan, and Ecevit—who wanted to end this vicious cycle of violence through peaceful ways had all been displaced. For example, in 1993, Prime Minister Özal had brought the issue of peace to the point of signing the agreement with the PKK, but he suddenly died of a heart attack (A forensic analysis of Özal’s corpse, which was carried out in 2013, actually indicated that he was poisoned.) A similar fate befell Prime Minister Erbakan. In 1996, he also came close to reaching an agreement with the PKK. The PKK was ready to lay down its arms, when Erbakan

was suddenly overthrown by a post-modern military coup in 1997. In 2000, Prime Minister Ecevit was about to make a deal with the PKK, but the country was suddenly driven into a financial crisis. Similar to Özal, Ecevit was later poisoned by his doctors and left paralyzed. He was overthrown by the forces that who were disturbed by the prospect of peace. Further, when the peace negotiation between the AKP government and the PKK restarted in 2011, Apo told the government officials the following;

Now you are negotiating with me here, and a similar thing can also happen to you tomorrow. They can do to you what they did to Özal, Erbakan and Ecevit. There are many internal and external forces that want to or that may want to hinder the development of this process. This is called oversetting the car for the fourth time. (Candar, 2012, p. 59).

Deniz argued that the groups who may want to hinder the peace process will most likely to use the families of the martyred military personnel and police officers for their purposes. Thus, he cautioned that this group of family members should be approached first and informed about the root causes of the fight between the Kurds and the Turks. That is, they should be told that the Kurds resorted violence only after all the other outlets—including the political ones—were closed to them. Therefore, the PKK is not the sole cause of the fight between the Kurds and the Turks today. Their insurgency is mainly the end result of years of repression, denial, humiliation, and annihilation of the Kurds in Turkey. That is, their very own government bears much of the responsibility for the death of thousands of Turkish security officers.

The parents, families, and children of the martyred soldiers should be approached first and consulted about a peace process, so that they would not feel as if they had lost their sons and fathers to a hopeless cause. The government officials should say to them, “My dear brothers and sisters! The Kurds are a distinct society from us Turks, and they had some requests from us, such as education in their mother tongue and the recognition of their distinct identity, which was formed even before the foundation of the Turkish Republic. We have neglected those demands for years and rejected their very presence, referring to them as the pioneers of the foreign powers. Our politicians were not mature, and the bureaucrats were illiterate. At this point, we understand that we are unable to

solve this problem by fighting and killing each other. Yesterday, your sons, brothers, uncles, and fathers died. Tomorrow, you, your sons, your brothers, or uncles will die if we insist on continuing this war. It would benefit both Turks and Kurds, to end this fight.” (p. 953)

Therefore, this serious obstacle to the resolution of the problem—Turkish public opinion, especially that expressed those who lost their loved ones in this fight—should be addressed through the media, and Turkish citizens prepared for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. They should be told that what the Turks and Kurds have experienced during the last forty years has damaged the both sides. Not only Turkish mothers and wives, but also Kurdish mothers and wives have suffered the pain of losing a loved one in this war. There is no winner in this fight.

The Turkish public, especially the families of martyred security officers, should understand that there will be more bloodshed on both sides as long as this fight continues and is not resolved through democratic means. Military attacks aimed at eradicating the PKK may bring some solace, providing a sense of accomplishment and a measure of vengeance. But this approach ultimate cannot work. Therefore, the Turks should set aside their pride and honor and start to think this issue from a rational perspective. For example, if the peace attempt that was started by Özal—when the guerrillas laid down their weapons and was just about to sign the agreement—could be secured with success, more than three thousands civilians and security officers would have been alive, thousands of wives and children would have had their fathers by their side, and thousands of parents would not be suffering from the pain of losing their sons on this fight today. Moreover, the money that has been spent on the military expenditure could have been used to meet other societal needs. .

If this war ends, both sides will win and our economy will grow stronger. The money that is currently spent on arms, weapons, and security forces, would be spent for health, education, and many other beneficial programs. Who could be disturbed by those things as long as they thought rationally? The Kurdish society, in the east, is already fed up,



living under war conditions for so long. The people there ask for nothing, but to live a normal life without the threat and oppression of the security forces. They simply want to live without the worry of losing their children to the war. The tradesmen there also want this fight to end. They want an end to their store windows being broken every day. They want the end of Molotov bombs burning their work places. They want to live just like a normal human being. (p. 955)

Second, the political parties in Turkey—especially the ones in power—have a tradition of using the conflict with the PKK as a means of gaining the votes of nationalist and Kemalist people in Turkey. Although this maneuver risks ongoing armed insurrection and needless deaths, it has thus reaped benefits for Turkish politicians. Unfortunately, the AKP decided to follow this strategy during the last general elections Turkey, which was held in 2015. Erdogan allegedly sacrificed the peace attempts that were initiated in 2009 in order to stay in power and deepen his authoritarian control in the country. The resumption of violence in the last election ensured his victory when, until that point, it had looked unlikely.

Erdogan controlled Turkey via the AKP as a unified government between 2002 and 2015, for approximately 13 years. Nevertheless, after the June 7, 2015 elections, the AKP was no longer eligible to stay in power by itself. For the first time in its history, the pro-Kurdish political party, the HDP, surpassed the 10% threshold that allowed them to hold seats in the Turkish parliament; they won 13% of the votes and thus secured 80 seats. The success of the HDP in the general election blocked the AKP from its outside majority (60 %) in the parliament. This level of majority was needed by the AKP to legally pass the necessary constitutional changes that would permit Erdogan to establish a presidential system. In such a system, he would enjoy expanded power and move closer to exercising autocratic control in the country (Akyol, 2015; Basar, 2015; Baser & Ozturk, 2015; Dalay, 2015; Imogen, 2015; Marcus, 2015).

At that time, the AKP politicians have two options available: form a coalition government with one of the opposition parties or drag the country into snap elections. Even though it was possible to establish a coalition government with one of the main opposition parties, Erdogan and his cabinet intentionally failed to do so. They did not want to diminish their power and thus control. Therefore, after failing to reach an agreement with the leaders of the opposition parties for a potential coalition government, the AKP announced to the public that a snap election would be held in six months—on November 1, 2015.

Within this six-month period, bombs exploded in major cities of Turkey, leaving tens dead and hundreds injured. The ceasefire between the PKK and the security forces ended. In the aftermath, more than 400 Turkish police officers and military personnel lost their lives, hundreds of civilian Kurds were arrested for their alleged ties to the PKK, the street fights began between the militants and the security officers, Kurdish town centers were completely destroyed during the clashes, military law was applied, and more than 200,000 Kurds evacuated their homes to protect their families.

The country turned back to 1990s in just two months. Economic and political instability increased, and the Turkish lira lost a substantial value against the foreign currencies. The AKP politicians explicitly warned the Turkish public that to ensure national security, Turkey needed a strong, unified government. They claimed that if the public did not vote for them in the upcoming snap elections, this atmosphere of chaos and instability would continue. The citizens accepted this deceptive message. A majority of the public, including the Kurds, voted for the AKP, believing that a strong, unified government could return Turkey to its previous period of security and wealth period (Basar & Ozturk, 2015; Cagaptay, 2015; Srivastava, 2016; Uras, 2015).

It thus appears that Erdogan intentionally called off the peace process so that the AKP would regain its outright majority in the parliament. To achieve this goal, he did not hesitate to invoke the fight against terrorism and exploit the national sensitivities of the Turkish population.

As Deniz noted:

Those 15 soldiers were intentionally sent there to be martyred by the guerillas. The incident took place just before the national parliamentary elections, and the goal was to gain the votes of nationalist Turks by provoking their fascist sentiments. Thank God, the PKK was not taken in by that scheme. Those soldiers, mostly the sons of low-income Turkish citizens from different parts of Anatolia, were of no importance to the government. That's why they had sent in as sitting ducks. The guerillas could have easily annihilated them, if they had acted irrationally. (p. 958)

If the news of the funerals of those 15 soldiers were disseminated to the cities in Anatolia, who would benefit the most from it? The [AKP] government! Thanks to this incident, which happened just before the elections, the AKP would get the votes of the MHP. Unfortunately, the Turkish public again was once again fueled with hatred, and since there was a publication ban, no one learned what did actually happen there. (p. 961)

Because the opposition parties did not support him for more executive power, Erdogan first prevented the AKP from forming a coalition with the opposition parties and then allegedly started a small-scale civil war that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of security officers, Kurdish guerillas, and innocent civilians. Erdogan was well aware that the HDP was able to pass the 10% threshold by winning the support of religiously conservative Kurds who had previously voted for the AKP since 2002. Therefore, he aimed to regain these conservative votes by attacking the HDP and associating it with the leftist Marxist organization PKK. For that purpose, he publicly announced that it was impossible to continue a peace process with Kurdish militants and then urged the Turkish parliament to strip HDP politicians from their immunity of prosecution on the grounds that they had links with terrorist groups.

In the end, Erdogan achieved his goals. He ordered the army to launch air strikes on PKK camps located in Iraq, revived the conflict with the Kurds, stoked Turkish nationalist

sentiments, and undermined support for the HDP by luring away religiously conservative Kurds in the snap election. The increasing level of terrorist threat planned by the AKP government thus undercut the HDP's appeal in the November, 2015 elections. Again, however, this was accomplished at a heavy cost, including the loss of hundreds of innocent lives. Today, Turkey has a government that is increasingly authoritarian and now sits on the edge of civil war. The prospects for peace, which seemed so bright, now have dimmed just because Erdogan used the conflict to fuel his ability to stay in power and have more control.

### ***Listening to Deniz: A Pathway to Peace***

Just as there are factions within the Turkish community that may oppose the government's sitting down with PKK members to make peace, there are some factions within the PKK that do not want negotiations and peace because their only goal is to have a separate independent Kurdish state. As Deniz noted in his life history, differences of opinions have often surfaced inside the PKK cadre over the prospect of establishing peace with Turkey. Some militants who fought for the PKK not only harshly objected to negotiations with Ankara but also threatened to leave the organization if a peace were made with the Turks.

I would find it very strange that whenever the organization would attempt to enter into a dialogue process with Ankara, the guerilla cadre from [the field of] Dersim would fiercely stand against it. (p. 951)

They [Dersim Kurds] explicitly stated that, "If we were going to make peace with the Turks—if we were going to give up our independence, after securing our cultural rights, and the rights of education in our mother tongue—then why the hell have we lost so many of our comrades to this fight for so many years! The fight we had pursued until now had fallen on stony ground. By sitting at the table with the Turks, we were betraying our martyred comrades of this war. They gave their lives for nothing!" (p. 951)

Besides the Dersim Kurds, there are some other small factions within the PKK that emerged after the imprisonment of the leader of the party—Apo. In 1999, while incarcerated,

Apo asked the PKK to withdraw its forces from Turkey as a precondition of the peace negotiations. A small group of PKK commanders had disregarded this order and argued that Apo had handed over the control of the party to the Turks and was acting according to their wishes—that is, surrendering and liquidating the PKK. As Deniz stated in his life history, according to these commanders, the era of the PKK was over, and it was high time for the guerillas to unite under a new organization that would continue to fight for the Kurds.

Some of them wanted to establish a new party; some others insisted on not leaving the north and establishing a new party with the goal of armed struggle. Then, there were those who wanted to arrest the current commanders and elect a new president. (p. 612)

Therefore, the PKK is also not bereft of factions in which guerillas have different goals in their minds regarding the future of the Kurds. These factions within the party may act independently and undermine peace by undertaking terrorist actions on their own. As such, the seniors of the party will first have to overcome this potential resistance that may come from various factions if they want to secure a permanent peace with Turkey.

Nevertheless, as Deniz stated in his life history, even though there may be a small group of factions resisting the peace process, they would be of little importance to the PKK as a whole. That is because the majority of the guerillas, as well as of the civilian Kurds living in Turkey, favor the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Like Deniz, they are weary of the years of repression, denial, relocation, and the killing of their loved ones. Accordingly, Deniz's words on what would it take for freedom fighters to stop fighting Turkey and become peaceful may offer a pathway to peace.

The people there ask for nothing, but to live a normal life without the threat and oppression of the security forces. They simply want to live without the worry of losing their children to the war. The tradesmen there also want this fight to end. They want an end to their store windows being broken every day. They want the end of Molotov

bombs burning their work places. They want to live just like a normal human being. (p. 955).

From his life history, it seems that Deniz desires two concessions from the Turkish community for peace to be achievable. First, he wants the people of Turkey to understand why the Kurdish people feel a deep resentment and grievance towards the Turks. Deniz wants the Turks to know how misunderstandings, false information, and propaganda manufactured by the Turkish government have fueled the conflict for the last four decades.

He would like it understood that the Kurdish issue is not a problem that began with the PKK but rather originated a century ago, as a direct result of the betrayal of the promises given to the Kurds: if they fought with the Turks against external enemies, they would live within the borders of the new state in autonomous regions and could protect their culture, language, and customs. Unfortunately, none of these promises were kept. In 1923, a nationalist state was created in which the Turks were the dominant ethnic group.

Since then, the Kurds have been massacred regularly, repressed, and denied a homeland. Most important, they have been humiliated by the Turkish state by denying them not just political freedom but also the right to their culture, language, and customs. They were not allowed to use their language—or even allowed to give their children Kurdish names. They have even been depicted as animals and lied about purposefully. For example, the Kurds who joined to the PKK to fight for their rights were often regarded as separatists, baby killers, murderers, and terrorists—but not as people who were seeking freedom and justice.

Kurds do not have the faces of human beings; they should be migrated to Africa to join the half-human half-animals who lived there. We need a solution [to the Kurdish question] as sharp as a sword. (p. 206)

According to Deniz, this lack of understanding of why the PKK exists and a main reason why the Kurdish problem continues to this day. The decades of slandering, denigration, and misinformation created such a pride and honor in the Turkish public's minds that it does not allow them to show any sense of respect to the Kurdish cause.

The basic factor in the continuance and growth of this problem is that Turks are still unaware of the goals and the *raison d'être* of this Kurdish organization, which has by now been fighting against them for more than 30 years. They have always denied our presence, never accepted the fact that Kurds have also lived in these territories for centuries, and disseminated sheer calumnies that "PKK is not an organization representing the rights of Kurds but is composed of Armenians and Christians with a plot of foreign powers to destroy the unity of the Turkish Republic!" If they really wanted to end this problem, they would "know their enemy" first. (p. 805)

Instead of trying to set the seal on this problem, the Turkish government has been creating polarization between the two public entities for years by using the propaganda that the PKK was composed of manslayers, Armenians, Jews, and even atheists, besides Kurds. In the near past, around 2012, did not Erdoğan say, "The PKK is composed of a bunch of Zoroaster"? Because of such long established and media backed prejudices, the organization had been unable to express its grievances to the civilian Turks. (p. 806)

The peace will only come if the media stops reporting the news given to them by greedy people, who benefit from this fight, politically and economically. (p. 956)

Therefore, there is an urgent need for an initiative that would provide a platform for the Turks and Kurds to achieve a genuine understanding of one another. As Deniz noted in the life history, the majority of the Kurds, including Deniz, have justified their participation to the PKK by citing these historical injustices and grievances—views given credence by their own personal experiences suffered at the hands of the Turkish security forces. Therefore, the Turkish civil society representatives, political parties, bureaucrats, journalists, and academics should come together and provide more insights into what Kurdish people—more specifically the PKK—actually want and why they want it.

For years, we Kurdish people asked for two simple things: the recognition of the Kurdish identity by the Turkish Constitutional Law, and the use of the Kurdish language, for

public services in the cities that are dominated by large Kurdish populations. Were these requests really too difficult for the Turks to provide? We only wanted to protect our basic rights. We did not ask to be provided with any extra rights that would compromise those of Turks—but simply to be able to freely speak in our own language and to have our separate identity be recognized. I wanted this stupid denial thing to end. (p. 939)

The Turks might not like some of the demands proposed by the organization, but most of those demands are related to basic human rights. Such rights should have never been a subject of bargaining, but the government has wasted a lot of our time discussing them. (p. 948)

Additionally, and equally importantly, Turkish society should be provided with the truth that the Kurdish people do not view the PKK as a terrorist organization, and that they do not like their sons or daughters to be called as terrorists. In the eyes of the Kurdish community, those who went up to the mountains to join the struggle are viewed as heroes. A large proportion of the Kurds supports the PKK's cause. As a result, these kinds of derogatory statements further antagonize the Kurds and only serve to attenuate their emotional ties to the Turkish public. Therefore, the Turkish citizenry should be informed about the necessity of treating the PKK as the legitimate representative of the Kurds and accordingly recognize the PKK's leader, Apo, as a partner in the negotiated settlement of the conflict. As Deniz noted in the life story, Apo's inclusion into the negotiations is particularly important since he is the only person in the PKK that everybody would listen without objection.

...the Turkish society has suggested for years that Apo, the leader of the organization, was a monster, a bloodthirsty baby killer, and even a sex addict. Sadly, the public has believed whatever the media spewed out to them, and never searched for the truth. If Apo were really a dictator, do you think those millions of Kurds would have followed him to their death? Cannot the Turks see this? At least? In actuality, this person they slandered as a baby killer has never even touched a gun in his life. (p. 956)

I wish the Turkish media had been more objective, specifically about Apo. I wish they had reported Apo's unifying and integrative statements regarding the Turkish and Kurdish societies. Then, you would understand whether Apo was, in fact, a terrorist, or used as an unsuspecting opportunity to establish government unity within the Turkish borders. (p. 956)



As Deniz noted in the life history, today, the PKK is an essential part of the Kurdish community. Treating it as terrorist organization thus will not help Ankara achieve the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Instead, it will leave only one option open for Turkey: the use of its security forces in a military operation, something that it has pursued unsuccessfully for the past four decades.

The PKK has reached to a position today where they have hundreds of contact offices all around the world, let alone having institutions within Turkey. Accept it or not, the organization acts like a government in the eastern parts of Turkey. (p. 942)

Has not the United States government just declared that their strongest ally in the fight against ISIS are the PYD guerilla forces? Has not the president of France hosted PYD representatives in his official office? For God's sake! Is it that difficult to understand? If you assure the Kurds that you would provide them with basic human rights and if you aimed to use PKK as an armed force rather than planning to annihilate it, believe me, the Turkish Republic would be in a much more stable position than it is now. (p. 947).

In sum, Deniz wants the Turkish public to understand that historically the Turkish state has not supported true diversity but has engaged in cultural cleansing and annihilation that was very similar to what happened in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia. No people would accept this—certainly not the Turks if the situation were reversed. Peace is only possible if the Turkish public opinion realizes what it means to be a Kurd within the Turkish Republic. Therefore, Deniz wants the Turkish authorities to stop portraying the PKK as a terrorist organization, to regard the guerillas as rational actors, and to try to integrate the Kurds into the broader Turkish community by granting them their basic rights. Not to do so is to consign Turkey to the fate suffered by Serbia, Bosnia, Iraq, and Syria.

...in general, I do not have feelings of guilt for anything I did, except for those couple of incidents. I had legitimate grievances for which to fight. Moreover, even though I deserted the organization, I am still a Kurd. I will continue to fight for those rights until they are granted to my people by the Turkish state. I am telling you—even if I am released at the age of 70, I will again fight for the right to speak in my mother tongue. (p. 938)

I left the organization [the PKK] on my own, but that does not mean that I have stopped being a Kurd. I am a Kurd and I want my right to speak Kurdish. I want my identity to be recognized. I am demanding those rights as a citizen of the Turkish Republic. (p. 939)

Second, Deniz wants the Turkish people to know that the Kurds do not hate them. They simply want to live together as peoples who are connected but diverse. As he noted in his life history, the PKK never inculcated feelings of hatred toward the Turks into the hearts of the guerillas. They did it do so even during the 1990s— a time when the sole goal of the organization was to establish an independent Kurdish state, and, more importantly when thousands of Kurdish youths joined the PKK for the express purpose of seeking revenge against the repressive system that humiliated, tortured, and killed their parents.

In 1992, the year I joined the organization, the main purpose of the PKK was to establish an independent Kurdish state. In other words, it was to set free the areas in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. The guerilla was always motivated by this purpose. But, despite the strength of our mission to establish an independent Kurdish state, the senior PKK executives were always emphasizing that we had no problems with Turkish people. The reason for our fight with Turkey was just the current fascist system. In other words, no matter what, we were going to stay friends with Turkish people forever. (p. 293)

In the period during which I joined the organization, most Kurdish patriots were joining because they had been subject to violence at the hands of the Turkish police or soldiers. We all had friends with the view that “Turkish soldiers tortured my innocent family, and my relatives. Why shouldn’t I take my revenge on the innocent Turks?” These people were objecting to the doctrine that we must stay friends with Turks, as we were being told in the trainings. But the organization was strictly against such anti-Turk sentiments and would prevent them as much as possible. The senior executives were always calming down our friends who joined the organization for revenge. They told them, “We can’t solve the problem by acting from the desire for revenge and killing innocent people. On the contrary, if we used such a method, we would lose the validity of our own struggle. So, although it is right that we fight for our own people, we should never include innocent people in this war. We must respect others.” (p. 294)

This reluctance to vilify the Turkish people is evident when the history of the fight between the Turks and Kurds is examined. With one or two exceptions, the PKK has never carried out missions against the innocent civilian Turks. It has never turned the Turkish cities

into blood baths and created an atmosphere of chaos, even though undertaking such a terrorist mission would have been very easy. The PKK has never seized movie theaters and killed hundreds of innocent civilians to force the government to withdraw its forces from Kurdistan—as the Chechen Islamic radicals did in Russia in 2002. The PKK has never hijacked planes and crashed them into the critical infrastructure, leaving thousands of dead—as the Al-Qaeda terrorists did in the United States. The PKK has never carried out bombing missions to commuter transportation systems and killed hundreds, injured thousands—as ETA did in Spain in 2004. The PKK has never shot innocent children and youths who are in summer camps—as a far right terrorist did in Norway in 2011. The PKK has never used its bombing abilities to kill spectators who stand by the finish line of a marathon—as occurred in Boston in 2013. The PKK has never carried out a series of attacks in a city center that would include suicide bombings, mass shootings at cafes, restaurants, football stadium, and entertainment avenues—as ISIS did in the central Paris in 2015. And the PKK has never instructed its guerillas to drive a truck into a crowd celebrating a national day—as has just happened in Nice, France.

Rather, the PKK has so far followed a rational policy of discriminate war—targeting only the members of Turkish security forces as means of retaliation. And they have done so only because all the other options for conflict resolution have been foreclosed to them. It is important to note that the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, initially started his struggle for freedom and reform in the political arena. He turned to armed struggle only after he lost all hope that the elites in the Turkish political system would listen to the voices of the Kurds. Recall that Ocalan was incarcerated, and the group he was leading was depicted by Turkish authorities as nothing more than a bunch of bandits.

The PKK has engaged in a discriminate war because, as Deniz noted, his life's purpose, as well as that for his guerilla comrades, is not to fight forever. They have been engaged in armed conflict in hopes of securing successful peace negotiation. They have been struggling to attain their basic human rights and freedoms—not to incite hatred and animosity against the Turkish civilians. Today, the Kurds—the PKK—do not even ask compensation for whatever injustices they have been subjected in the past. They want one simple thing—peace and freedom.

The PKK has several times indicated its sincere desire for peace by showing that they are willing to sit at the negotiation table and work out a reasonable agreement. Nevertheless, their patience is wearing thin because each of the former peace initiatives was undermined by Turkish authorities. The PKK and the Kurds have been grown weary of the deceitful tricks played by the Turkish governments. For example, in 1999, while guerilla forces were withdrawing from Turkish territories as a precondition of the peace negotiations, the Turkish military set up tank ambushes and treacherously killed hundreds of guerillas—despite the fact that the PKK was assured by Ankara that no one would be killed during the withdrawal. Or, recently, President Erdogan spoiled the three-years-long peace process as a political means of increasing his authoritarian control in the country. As might be anticipated, these deceptions have created considerable mistrust of Turkish authorities among the PKK.

Beyond the necessity of undertaking confidence-building measures to regain the trust of the Kurds, another grave danger awaits if Turkish officials cannot secure a peace with the current PKK administrators: a highly radicalized Kurdish youth. On various occasions, Deniz and some Kurdish politicians have warned the Turkish state officials that the current PKK administrative cadre is likely the last generation that the Turkish government will be able to negotiate a peace

that includes a democratic union. These PKK seniors have some commonalities with the Turks—they have experiences of living together as they attended to same universities, engaged in activities in the same ideological organizations, or even served together in the Turkish military. By contrast, the Kurdish youths in the southeastern Anatolian cities do not have any commonalities with the Turks that live in the western parts of the country. Even worse, these Kurds have experienced emotional separation from the rest of the country as they grew up seeing their brothers, sisters, and fathers dying at the hands of the Turkish security forces. They are angry with the Turks because ethnic animosity has already started to find a place in their blood.

If Ankara continues to delay the establishment of a permanent peace, while the wise seniors of the organization, such as Cemil Bayık and Murat Karayılan, are still alive, their chances of making peace with the new radicalized Kurdish generation is extremely low. The new generation considers Turkey an enemy because of the losses they have suffered so far and are unable to think rationally. They do not want to live within the borders of Turkey, as the seniors of the organization would have them to do. Rather, they want to establish a Free Kurdistan by carving territories out of Turkey. If these highly radicalized and politicized Kurdish youth have a voice in those matters in the future, their demands will be different than the demands of the current seniors of the organization. They will say, “We are a distinct society, and each society has the right of governing itself, and determining its own fate. Since we are a society of 40 million, including the Kurds in Syria, Iran, and Iraq, we can also have our own state.” The new generation thinks like that! (p. 977)

The Kurdish youth living in the region experienced violence on a daily basis. They all sacrificed their fathers, brothers, sisters, or uncles to this fight. They were in clash with the police every day. Their psychology and way of thinking was very different from us, old guerillas. (p. 976)

That is why it is crucial that Turkish state officials take meaningful steps to secure a peace with the current generation of PKK leaders before the highly politicized younger generation of Kurds succeed these seniors. The establishment of peace requires Turkey to set aside the counterproductive military measures and embrace other solutions, including the treatment of the Kurds with respect, dignity, and peace. From a rational standpoint, granting the

Kurdish people their own cultural and democratic rights would have virtually no negative impact on the Turkish citizenry or society. In fact, PKK will not feel the need to continue its armed struggle if Kurds are allowed to express themselves freely in the Turkish political domain. Now, let us assume that this transpired. Would any Turks be disadvantaged if the Kurds laid down their arms and became engaged in the political arena—instead of continuing to carry out a violent struggle? No! Would any Turks would be disturbed living together with the Kurds under a democratic multi-cultural system based on fraternity and equal citizenship status instead of killing each other? No!

...there is no other option left between the two communities. Of course, that would be a whole other story, if Turkey should risk division of its territories, chaos in the country, or a turmoil similar to the ones, which erupted in Syria and Iraq. If Ankara cannot settle this problem with this generation of Kurds, they will be unlikely to make peace with the next generation. This is very true, and this is why I have said several times that this peace process is the last opportunity for Turkey. (p. 976)

If the Turkish government does not keep its promises that were given in Oslo, this fight will begin again, and this time, it is not going to be out in the countryside. It will be right in the heart of cities. The country will experience a situation very similar to what is now happening in Syria. The missions that were previously carried out in the countryside would be carried out by YDGH in city centers. (p. 962)

There is no reason to be so resistant to allowing the Kurds to possess local autonomy, to open their own schools, and to protect and celebrate their heritage. As mentioned previously, the Kurdish issue existed decades before the PKK emerged. Therefore, it is not an issue of terrorism but a broader problem that involves the ethnic, cultural, legal, and political rights of the Kurds. That is, the Kurdish problem will continue to exist no matter how many PKK members are eradicated in the region. By contrast, as Deniz tells us, Turkey will achieve true peace if the negotiations provide the Kurds with their cultural rights and find a way to integrate the PKK members into legitimate politics.

If both Kurds and Turks can display a serious attitude for the resolution of the conflict and can resist the schemes carried out by the external powers, they can achieve a permanent peace. Otherwise, I do not even want to imagine what would happen next. There could be chaos, division, civil war. Once again the poor people of Anatolia and Kurdistan would lose their lives, while greedy politicians and elite groups would benefit from that war. In such a situation, Turkey would no longer have a stable economy or internal peace. Only after Kurds and Turks kill thousands on each side, some foreign powers would appear as saviors and take control of the situation. Then, that external power would become a hero in the eyes of the Kurds and Turks, although it would no doubt be acting in their own interests. (p. 980)

The PKK is, in fact, a unique force, which could contribute to the military power of Turkey and could potentially side with the Turkish government against all their enemies. If they would just establish the Goddamn, long-delayed peace treaty, and use this ready-trained power for much bigger goals in the Middle East. I cannot readily believe that the Turks have not had one single politician, who had an idea like this. (p. 952)

Finally, there likely will always be those who will engage portray the PKK as terrorists—and not as “freedom fighters.” And there are those who will even resort to violence during talks to create division and incite more conflict. But Deniz is offering a pathway to peace: true mutual understanding and respect. All would do well to listen to his words of wisdom.

## Appendix 1. List Of Major Individuals and Abbreviations In The Life History

### I. Major Individuals

Apo	: Abdullah Ocalan. Founder and the leader of the PKK.
Asmin	: Deniz's second girlfriend. Committed suicide.
Barzani	: Mesud Barzani, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan.
Cemil Bayik	: Code name is Cuma. Number two in the organization.
Deniz Kocer	: The interview subject.
Duran Kalkan	: Code name is Abbas. Senior member of the KCK Executive Committee.
Erbakan	: Former Prime Minister of Turkey.
Erdogan	: The current President of Turkey.
Esref Bitlis	: Deceased commander of the Turkish Gendarmerie.
Fehman Huseyin:	Code name is Bahoz Erdal. Former head of the PKK armed wing.
Hakki Gabar	: The person who caused Deniz to desert the organization.
Halil Atac	: Code name is Ebubekir. Former member of the PKK Presidency Council.
Murat Karayilan	: Code name is Cemal. One of the founders of the PKK.
Nizamettin Tas	: Code name is Botan. Former head of the PKK military wing.
Silan	: Sevin's best friend. Deserted the PKK after Sevin's suicide.
Şemdin Sakik	: Code name is Zeki. Former commander of the PKK.
Talabani	: Jalal Talabani. A Kurdish Iraqi politician.
Turgut Ozal	: Former President of Turkey. Died unexpectedly in 1993.
Zeynep Kinaci	: Code name is Zilan. The first women suicide bomber of the PKK.

### II. Abbreviations

AKP	: The Justice and Development Party
ANAP	: Motherland Party
ARGK	: Kurdistan National Liberty Army
BDP	: Peace and Democracy Party
DEHAP	: Democratic People's Party
DEP	: Democracy Party
DTP	: Democratic Society Party
EMEP	: Labor Party
ERNK	: National Liberation Front of Kurdistan
ETA	: Basque Country and Freedom
HADEP	: People's Democracy Party
HDP	: People's Democratic Party
HEP	: People's Labor Party
HPG	: Kurdish People's Defense Force
IRA	: Irish Republican Army
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
JITEM	: Turkish Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counterterrorism
KADEK	: Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress



KCK : Kurdistan Communities Union  
KDP : Kurdish Democratic party  
KNG : Kurdistan National Congress  
KONGRA-GEL : Kurdistan People's Congress  
MHP : Nationalist Movement Party  
MIT : Turkish National Intelligence Agency  
PCDK : Party of Democratic Solution in Kurdistan (Iraq)  
PJAK : Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (Iran)  
PKK : The Kurdistan Workers Party  
PUK : Patriotic Union of Kurdistan  
PYD : Democratic Union Party (Syria)  
TIKKO : Liberation Army of the Workers and Peasants of Turkey  
YDGH : Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement  
YPG : People's Protection Units

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