

Imset, Ismet G. *The PKK: A Report on Separatist Violence in Turkey (1973-1992)*. Ankara: Turkish Daily News Publications, 1992.

Ismet G. Imset, a Turkish journalist born in 1959, is the most knowledgeable authority on the PKK or Kurdish Workers Party's decade-old insurgency within southeastern Turkey. The present compilation of many of his earlier reports represents the best analysis of the overall situation available, and is therefore required reading for anyone who wants to begin understanding the current Kurdish situation in Turkey.

Unlike one-sided Turkish denunciations of PKK inhumanity and terrorism that ignore legitimate Kurdish demands on the one hand, and self-righteous, human-rights reports critical of the Turkish government that ignore legitimate Turkish concerns on the other, Imset brings a much appreciated balanced objectivity to his analysis that illustrates well both the Turkish government's and the PKK's strengths and failings.

Imset's analysis begins with a chronological history of the PKK's early years from 1973 to the formal establishment of the party on 27 November 1978 under Abdullah (Apo) Ocalan and the Turkish military coup on 12 September 1980. Although the military initially succeeded in curbing terrorism,

one major mistake in the official policy towards separatist activities as such was the tendency to handle secessionist demands with a reluctance to accept that they had any sort of social and economic backing. (p. 7)

Indeed, Imset argues that "had, perhaps, the escape of certain crucial leaders been prevented and social and economic measures followed the military crackdown of that period, the PKK threat could have been avoided from the very beginning." (p. 30) These first chapters also contain a great deal of detailed data on the early years from 1973-86, such as the initial camps and alliances, as well as the party structure and activities.

"The year 1987 was a turning point for the PKK which attracted international attention to its activities in the Southeast mainly with attacks on civilian targets which claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent children and women." (p. 49) Imset calls this the period of the PKK's "professionalization," when "armed propaganda activities which in other words means attacks that would attract public attention to the region" (p. 55) were implemented. Indeed, Imset devotes an entire later chapter to the concept of psychological warfare and finds that while the PKK has achieved great successes here, the government has committed many blunders. The SS decree or press ban imposed by Ankara in 1990, for example, badly backfired when "Istanbul papers were gradually replaced by [PKK] organizational documents or political magazines when the locals turned to them as the only viable solution under those circumstances to follow what was happening in their own region." (p. 312)

Imset also analyzes the village guards system of local pro-government militia created by the state beginning in 1985 and argues that it was a successor to

the Hamidiye regiments of the 1890s. “‘*Kurdu Kurde Kirdirmak*’ or ‘having the Kurds break up the Kurds’ was being put into practice.” (p. 203) The so-called “Hezbollah-contras” or reputed secret government hit squads that killed Kurdish nationalists are also analyzed. Imset warns that they “could become even more dangerous than the PKK in the future – operating in an area under the influence of regional religious trends.” (p. 125)

One of Imset’s most valuable discussions is his structural analysis of the PKK; “Although the PKK appears to be a single entity ... it is actually formed out of different groups and subdivisions, which came to be mainly in the 1987-88 period.” (p. 128) Citing Ocalan himself, Imset states that “the PKK consisted of three structures, which were the PKK Central Committee (CC or Party), the ERNK (Front), and the ARGK (Army).” (p. 131) Although “in reality, it is very difficult to distinguish between militants of the ARGK and those of the ERNK, since all are or can be involved in armed activities despite claims that the latter is only a propaganda division,” (p. 132) “in its simplest sense, the ARGK is composed of the ‘mountain units’ of the PKK while the ERNK is composed of ‘urban-rural units’ living in settlements.” (p. 143) The former are actual party members, wear military uniforms, and number some 10,000. The latter are what has been called the party’s militia, are not necessarily party members, and number more than 50,000.

Additional chapters analyze Ocalan’s “guerrilla’s handbook,” PKK financing, internal PKK divisions and executions, foreign and domestic PKK relations, and recent events in the 1990s, including the return to power of Suleyman Demirel. Imset notes that PKK finances consist of voluntary donations, taxation, protection money, small and medium business investments, robberies, and narcotics. Although “former Soviet officials, according to many other PKK sources, intervened frequently on behalf of the organization to prevent Damascus from banning it from the use of Syrian territory,” (p. 174n), “what Turkey failed to see was that the PKK’s dependence on foreign support had been declining rapidly” (p. 198) during the 1990s. Analyzing the 1992 *Narwoz* violence, Imset concludes that “the reason for the bloodshed was actually the excessive use of force on the part of security officials” (p. 280), and argues that “most of his [Ocalan’s] successes are owed not to his personal efforts, but to the policy mistakes which have armed him with loads of excuses and arguments to activate the people.” (p. 333)

Seven appendices then conclude the lengthy analysis. In the second one Ocalan himself declares that a federation offers hope for the future:

Turkish history, when we look at the past century, has lost much from the approach that ‘we are mighty and we will crush anyone to counter us.’
... If there had been an opposite approach instead of this based on democracy then the Turks would have reached positive results. (p. 341)

The final two appendices are a very useful listing and brief description of some twenty-eight “separatist organizations in Turkey during the 1970s-1980s” and some thirty “Marxist organizations in Turkey” during the same time frame.

Since Imset's analysis is mainly a compilation of his earlier in-depth reports, his book at times appears disconnected and repetitious. Occasionally, the author even contradicts himself when, for example, he declares in one place that "Turkey's people of Kurdish origin ... constitute at least one-fourth of the country's population," (p. 303) while in another "that at least one-sixth of Turkey's 60 million population is made up of Kurdish-origin citizens." (p. 321) Although reasonable people can argue over the precise figure, the difference between Imset's two estimates is 5,000,000 people.

Even more glaring are the constant grammatical, stylistical, and typographical errors. The entire manuscript begs for the hand of an editor, skillful in the norms of the English language. In addition, there is no index, an oversight particularly troublesome for an analysis so rich in detail. A bibliography would also be helpful. Finally, the price of \$100 for such a paperback will make this analysis difficult to acquire for all but the most specialized and dedicated of scholarly libraries. Nevertheless, for those interested in the current Kurdish insurgency in Turkey, Imset's study is the best factual analysis in existence.

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White, Robert W. *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History*. Westport, CO and London: Greenwood, 1993.

If you believed that Irish republicans were irrational, marginalized individuals whose "terrorism" is an illegitimate assault on British liberal democracy, then this book may perform a positive function. The problem is that not very many academics or journalists – not to mention policemen and soldiers – who deal with the IRA believe anything as manifestly untrue as the straw man which White has written this book to demolish.

As he states in the first chapter, one of the objectives of the book is:
... to have the perpetrators and supporters of clandestine political violence present their own interpretation of their behaviour. Too often state censorship and a conservative agenda on the part of social scientists deny even the possibility that perpetrators of violence have legitimate needs and concerns. (p. 10)

The core of the book is a series of interviews with 69 republicans which are used as the raw material to illustrate his main arguments. There are massive problems with this approach. How are we supposed to evaluate the arguments of the book which do little more than recycle the republicans' own articulate and well-organized view of the reasons for their struggle? While it may be clear at the end of it all that they