What Are Kurdistan Freedom Hawks Fighting For?

The number of news releases in the Turkish and international mass media accusing the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (Falcons) (also known as “TAK”) of the involvement in brutal acts of terrorism in Turkey has been on the rise lately. It is alleged that the organization is a brainchild of a group of radical Kurdish activists who split from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (KWP) in the early 2000s. Turkish authorities classify TAK as a terrorist group being a youth extremist wing of KWP and thus do not differentiate between KWP and TAK. Meanwhile, members of KWP and the “hawks’ deny their alleged “kinship.” Moreover, TAK militants make it clear that they are not affiliated with Kurdish parties, whose leaders (they believe) betrayed the interests of the Kurdish people. Several extremist Kurdish organizations (e.g. Falcons of the East, Avengers) sprang to life after KWP adopted a resolution to temporary cease combat operations at its 7th extraordinary convention in 2000. TAK, however, tops the list in terms of the number of crime reports it has been mentioned in.

For example, this group claimed responsibility for the March 13, 2016 Ankara bombing that killed 37 and left more than 120 people injured. Militants said that they wanted “to bring to justice the Turkish government led by the Justice and Development Party (JDP) for the genocide of the Kurdish population in the southeastern Turkey, where Turkish troops continue a punitive operation against the Kurds.” This group also claimed responsibility for the February 17 act of terrorism near the building of the General Staff in Ankara that claimed lives of 28 people, mostly military personnel.

The list of the TAK’s “acts of heroism” also boasts a mortar attack at an Istanbul’s airport at the end of December 2015, in which five aircraft were damaged, with two female janitors who happened to be near one of the jets being injured (later one of them died), and many other terrorist acts.

Assessment of this terrorist group’s activities leads to an inevitable conclusion—they discredit the national movement of Kurds and aggravate Turkish authorities inciting them to initiate new large-scale punitive operations against the Kurds.

While KWP consistently engages all available methods in its struggle for rights and freedoms of the Kurds, including cessation of hostilities with Ankara, and strives to spare lives of peaceful civilians even at the times of military conflicts, TAK, on the contrary, targets not only military facilities and their staff (or police forces), but public places and tourist centers using suicide bombers and cars stuffed with explosives to carry out their acts of violence. The methods TAK’s militants use resemble those radical Islamists and international terrorists opt for.

So far, little information has been released on whether Turkish authorities managed to apprehend any activists and militants of this group or not. Nobody knows the location of the group’s HQ, its structure, composition, charter or program. What is the source of such a generous financial support the “hawks” enjoy? Ultimately, to execute a large-scale terrorist act similar to the explosion in the Ankara’s government quarter near the General Staff and parliament, militants had to undergo an extensive training, possess powerful explosives and have a considerable amount of funds as well as a reliable cover. The clear-cut plan, boldness and effectiveness of this bombing that obviously exceeds the capabilities of the “hawks” makes one wonder whether this group indeed acts on its own. Two possible answers to this question come to mind: either TAK is a well disguised, hard-to-detect group with mysterious sponsors, or it has patrons in the Turkish special services.
The fact that TAK strikes exactly when the authorities need it the most is also noteworthy. For example, Erdogan’s plan to earn enough votes for his party to transform the government into a presidential republic during June 2015 parliamentary election did not work out. At the same time the pro-Kurdish opposition party HDP (Peoples’ Democratic Party) received 13.1% of votes and, consequently, 80 seats in the parliament. Immediately a snap election was set for November 1, 2015. And shortly, (on July 20 to be exact) the town of Suruc in Turkish Kurdistan fell victim to a terrorist bombing with 32 Kurdish activists killed and 104 injured. Kurdish extremists from TAK retaliated by killing two police officers violating the truce achieved between KWP with Ankara and sparking a new wave of military and police operations against the Kurds. A campaign of repressions was launched not only against KWP, but also against the legitimate parliamentary HDP. Despite a new anti-Kurdish campaign, HDP still managed to cross the 10% barrier in the November’s early parliamentary election, but got only 59 seats in the parliament (21 fewer than in June).

Another peculiar coincidence: the inter-Syrian negotiations were resumed in Geneva on March 14, 2016, and the participation of the Syrian Kurds in the talks was deliberated at the top level. At that time, Erdogan tried to convince the UN and its Western allies that not only Turkish KWP, but also Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) were involved in the recent acts of terrorism committed in Turkey and demanded to restrict the Syrian Kurds from participation in the Geneva talks. Apparently, the prospective of the Syrian Kurds gaining autonomy (in any form) scares Erdogan to death as it might trigger a chain reaction pushing Turkey toward federalism.

The hastiness with which Turkish authorities make statements accusing TAK and the Kurds (as a whole) of the involvement in the recent acts of terrorism is also noteworthy. Usually it works like that: even before conclusions have been made in the preliminary investigation, and even before the responsibility for the act of violence has been claimed, mass media puts out information confirming that the suicide bomber was Kurdish. Immediately (within a day) air raids are launched against KWP camps in Qandil mountains of Iraq, or shelling of the Syrian Kurdistan begins, or a martial law and a curfew are enforced in the Turkey’s southeast.

There is also a possibility, however, that the secretive organization of Kurdish “hawks” was devised by the Turkish special services or acts in compliance with their prompts. In tsarist Russia security department used to create terrorist organizations with an objective to discredit the revolutionary movement.

Turkish special services have a profound experience in the arrangement of such groups as well. Take, for example, the Asadulla—a newly created in the Kurdish regions of Turkey Islamist nationalist group. Although the ethnicity or party and religious affiliations of its members have not been identified yet, the fact that its members serve in the government bodies and in Turkish army suggests that this organization was established by MIT—a Turkish special service—and is its subordinate. Recently, some evidence was made available proving that Turkish intelligence was recruiting members of ISIS and other radical Islamist groups for a new anti-Kurdish combat organization. It is quite possible that the high-profile act of terrorism in Suruc was carried out by a Turkish citizen—an Asadulla agent.

Another widely known fact is that Turkish special services have connections and contacts with the Grey Wolves (an ultra-right extremist Turkish organization), whom they also deploy to execute “special tasks,” including acts of aggression against the Syrian and Turkish Kurds in the borderline regions of Syria.

A well-known Russian political expert Alexey Malashenko argues that allegations of TAK’s possible affiliation with Turkish special services have to be backed up with some solid evidence, which is not available as of today. But then he also proposes his own, rather similar vision of the situation. According to Alexey Malashenko, Erdogan drove himself into a corner. “Lately, he has been making one mistake after another. He fell out with Moscow over the Russian combat aircraft that had been shot down. His inflexibility in relations with Turkey’s western allies marred his relations with the US. He masterminded a major confrontation with the Kurds in Turkey and Syria. He lost the Syrian campaign from a military point of view. The impudent March 13 bombing in Ankara is a blow to the image of the Turkish President, who initially managed to consolidate the nation, but now is incapable of asserting its integrity and security. It could be the case that people from Erdogan’s entourage, who want to dismiss him from the post of the president, devised this act of terrorism. The Turkish leader was the mastermind behind the creation of a multitude of nationalist and Islamist groups, which get out of hand and threaten the Turkish leadership from time to time,” says the expert.

Thus, no matter who is pulling the strings, the fact is that the terrorist group Kurdistan Freedom Hawks throws a shadow on the Kurd national movement and stymies Kurd’s achievements in their struggle for national rights and freedoms.

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