

ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM AND ARSON ATTACKS ON FORESTS BY THE PKK

OĞUZ GÜNGÖRMEZ, ASLIHAN ALKANAT

SETA | ANALYSIS

DECEMBER 2019 NO.56





ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM AND ARSON ATTACKS ON FORESTS BY THE PKK

OĞUZ GÜNGÖRMEZ, ASLIHAN ALKANAT

COPYRIGHT © 2019 by SETA

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical or other means, without permission in writing from the publishers.

SETA Yayınları

ISBN: 978-605-7544-99-5

Layout: Hasan Suat Olgun

Printed in Turkey, İstanbul
by Turkuvaz Haberleşme ve Yayıncılık A.Ş., 2019

SETA | SİYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI

Nenehatun Cd. No: 66 GOP Çankaya 06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 312 551 21 00 | Faks: +90 312 551 21 90

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | İstanbul

Defterdar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı No: 41-43

Eyüpsultan İstanbul TÜRKİYE

Tel: +90 212 395 11 00 | Faks: +90 212 395 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 1106

Washington D.C., 20036 USA

Tel: 202-223-9885 | Faks: 202-223-6099

www.setadc.org | info@setadc.org | @setadc

SETA | Kahire

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen Flat No: 19 Cairo EGYPT

Tel: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985 | @setakahire

SETA | Berlin

Französische Straße 12, 10117 Berlin GERMANY

Tel: +49 30 20188466

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	7
INTRODUCTION	8
TERROR AND FOREST FIRES: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	9
THE HISTORY OF THE PKK’S FOREST ARSONS	12
RECENT FOREST FIRES AND THE PKK	14
HOW DOES THE PKK LEGITIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM?	17
THE REACTION OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TO THE FOREST ARSONS	22
CONCLUSION	24

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Oğuz Güngörmez

Güngörmez graduated from the Department of International Relations at Sakarya University in 2014, and earned a master's degree from the Faculty of Social Sciences of the same university. His thesis was entitled "Power Balance in the Middle East in the Post-Cold War Era: The Impact of Arming Dynamics on Alliances and Relations with the Great Powers." He is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in Political Science and International Relations at Marmara University, and works as a research assistant at the European Studies Directorate of SETA Istanbul. His areas of interest include the EU, Turkey-EU relations, European politics, and public diplomacy.

Aslıhan Alkanat

Alkanat received her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Yıldız Technical University in 2016 and 2019 respectively. She works as a research assistant at the European Studies Directorate of SETA Istanbul.

SUMMARY

In light of environmental terrorism, this report looks into the forest arsons committed by the outlawed terror organisation PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the rhetoric used to legitimize them.

In light of environmental terrorism, this report looks into the forest arsons committed by the outlawed terror organisation PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the rhetoric used to legitimize them.

Throughout last summer, forest fires both in Turkey and across the world received wide coverage in the public media. As opposed to the fires around the world, many forest fires in Turkey occurred as the result of acts of sabotage by the PKK that has resorted to methods of environmental terrorism. Apparently, the PKK is focusing on environmental terrorism - as it did in the 1990s and the 2000s - as a result of its weakening technological, economic, and political influence resulting from Turkey's effective counterterrorism operations. Environmental terrorism is low in cost, requires less planning, and fewer militants. This report concentrates on academic works that underline the link between terrorism and forest fires. In light of environmental terrorism, it examines the recent acts of forest sabotage by the PKK and the rhetoric adopted by the group to legitimize these acts. The report also discusses the attitudes of various Western media outlets towards the forest fires.

FIGURE 1. THE BALANCE SHEET OF THE FIGHT AGAINST THE PKK IN THE RECENT PAST

A total of 2,700 terrorists have surrendered in the last five years; 1,500 of them are below 18 years of age.
In the last two and a half years, a total of 230,823 internal security operations were carried out, and 3,790 terrorists were neutralized.
A total of 3,934 shelters and bunkers were destroyed in the fight against the PKK.
In the last three years, a total of 15,647 PKK militants were neutralized.
A total of 1,208 security officers have been martyred and 480 civilians have died since 2015.

Source: “Grafik ve Haritalarla Türkiye’deki PKK Çatışması”, Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/tr/content/grafik-ve-haritalarla-turkiyedeki-pkk-catismasi, (Access date: September 24, 2019); “PKK’lılar Artık Dağda da Barınmıyor”, *Sabah*, June 10, 2019; “Jandarma ve Polis Eli Kanlı PKK’ya Nefes Aldırmadı”, *Anadolu Agency*, July 11, 2019; “5 Yılda 1500 Çocuk PKK’dan Kaçtı”, *Yeni Akit*, September 8, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

Forest fires in summer occur in Turkey concurrently with many places around the world. The most significant difference is that some of the forest fires in Turkey are the direct result of PKK sabotage, which forms a part of a planned strategy since the 1990s. Turkey’s successful counter-terrorism strategies and operations both inside and outside the country, particularly since the July 15, 2016 failed coup attempt, have inflicted a heavy blow on the PKK’s operational capabilities. (Table 1) That paved the way for the organization to concentrate again on the methods of environmental terrorism which are occasionally applied by this group in the past. In this regard, the PKK tries to grab attention by setting fire to forests in cities which attract considerable number of tourists in the period of July and August. In this way, the organization aims to harm Turkey’s regional and national economy by paralyzing the tourism sector, whose share in the economy has increased considerably in recent years.

Although forest fires in different places around the world (California, Siberia, Greece, the Amazon, etc.) made it to the agenda of international media outlets, the fact that members of the PKK are the arsonists behind the fires in Turkey was not mentioned at all. In fact, even when they covered the forest fires in the country, the Turkish desks of certain Western media institutions did not include information on the PKK as the perpetrators. Rather than focusing on the reasons behind the fires, they focused on the political debates over the firefighting efforts.

This analysis examines environmental terrorism as a type of terrorism and the relevant concepts generated in the literature in this regard. It underlines that the forest fires in Turkey were adopted by the PKK as a method of environmental terror and it emphasizes the PKK’s role in the recently increasing numbers of forest fires in Turkey. In addition, the report exposes

how this terrorist organization legitimizes the arsons and discusses the attitude of the international media towards them.

As part of the research, the relevant literature was scanned in order to examine the connection between forest fires and terrorism. The report clarifies concepts used in the related work and analyzes the setting fire to forests by the PKK in the context of environmental terrorism. Newspaper articles, news archives, and other open sources were used to obtain data. Furthermore, qualitative analysis of quantitative data was conducted and, at this stage, graphics were generated to provide visual richness for the reader. To understand the attitude of the international media regarding the PKK arsons, the researchers have scanned related news and used the methods of content and discourse analyses; for news scanning, the researchers preferred to utilize the Turkish desks of international media outlets such as the BBC, Deutsche Welle, Euronews, Sputnik, and the Independent. In this direction, the scope of the study was narrowed down to the June-August period due to the increasing number of hot weather-related forest fires and the intensification of the PKK acts of sabotage in this particular period. Various keywords such as “forest”, “fire”, “PKK”, “Turkey”, and “sabotage” were used while scanning the news.

TERROR AND FOREST FIRES: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Terrorism studies today concentrate on identity, motivation, methods, and the arms of terrorists; the targets of terrorists, however, generally fall behind the aforementioned. Developments experienced in terrorism have proven that natural

resources, in particular, may be the cause of hot encounters and, as a result, they have become both a means and targets in terrorist encounters. In this context, environmental factors have seemingly served as one of the priority targets of terrorist organizations. New concepts such as ecoterrorism,¹ environmental terrorism,² and pyro-terrorism³ have been introduced in terrorism-related discussions. In particular, the acts of sabotage targeting forests are included in academic debates as “methods of terror” or the “new face of terror.” Shedding light on these concepts will be complementary to understanding the nature of the PKK’s recent forest arsons and the fact that they are being used as a method of terror.

Ecoterrorism means use of violence and terror by environmentally oriented radical groups in order to prevent the extortion and plunder of the environment.⁴ Ecoterrorists aim to call public attention to slow down the exploitation of natural resources, the damage to the habitat, and the unsustainable cutting down of trees. In this respect, ecoterrorism spans “civil disobedience” and “political activism,” and targets not people but properties and institutions damaging the environment.⁵ The Earth Liberation Front (ELF) is considered the modern representative of ecoter-

1. Ganna Kharlamova, “Ecoterrorism: An Ecological-Economic Convergence”, *Environmental Security and Ecoterrorism*, ed. Hami Alpas, Simon M. Berkowicz and Irina Ermakova, (Springer, Berlin: 2010), pp. 31- 37.

2. Simon M. Berkowicz, “Eco-Terrorism/Enviro-Terrorism: Background, Prospects, Countermeasures”, *Environmental Security and Ecoterrorism*, ed. Hami Alpas, Simon M. Berkowicz and Irina Ermakova, (Springer, Berlin: 2010), p. 16.

3. Robert Arthur Baird, “Pyro-Terrorism: The Threat of Arson-Induced Forest Fires as a Future Terrorist Weapon of Mass Destruction”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, Issue: 5, (2006), pp. 415-428.

4. Elizabeth L. Chalecki, “A New Vigilance: Identifying and Reducing the Risks of Environmental Terrorism”, *Global Environmental Politics*, Vol. 2, Issue: 1, (February 2002), p. 48.

5. Berkowicz, “Eco-Terrorism/Enviro-Terrorism: Background, Prospects, Countermeasures”.

rorism.⁶ The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) is also accused of being an ecoterrorist organization by the U.S.⁷ Their actions are aimed against the roads, constructions, or construction machinery that harm the environment in defense of natural resources.

In the literature, environmental terrorism, on the other hand, differs from ecoterrorism in terms of its intended targets. Ecoterrorist groups, such as Earth First, ELF, and ALF, do not target environmental resources but the elements that harm the environment. Their actions are not described as environmental terror in the literature. From this perspective, environmental terrorism can be defined as the unlawful use of force against in situ environmental resources so as to deprive populations of their benefits and/or destroy other property.⁸ By this definition of environmental terrorism, nature is harnessed as a weapon for ideological purposes.⁹

Such environmental terror attacks are made to involve the noncombatant population in the combat and harm society. In general, the objectives of environmental terrorism include:

- Targeting nature (the damage of water supply, food chain, or forests)
- Harming/destroying living organisms and property (i.e. destroying a dam, nuclear plant)

- Releasing chemical/biological weapons into the atmosphere
- Creating sufficient environmental damage to induce refugee flight and cross-border spillover¹⁰

Acts of forest sabotage and fires have become one of the most important means of environmental terrorism that targets nature.

Terrorist organizations carry out sabotage on unprotected forests and agricultural lands in order to undermine the political will and to cause great economic and environmental damages. Forest sabotage, as a common method of environmental terrorism, has many short- and long-term consequences on local and national economies and adversely affects many sectors.

For instance, forest fires create numerous negative impacts such as losses in forest industry resources (wood and paper industries) and in tourism-related income; damage or destruction of property and homes; irreversible damage to the ecosystem; harm to farming communities and animal life; air pollution; fire-fighting costs; insurance company liabilities; and fatalities.¹¹

In his research on environmental terror, Timothy Schofield cites University of Oklahoma terrorism expert Stephan Sloan as saying, “The old view was that terrorists were concerned about public opinion, now they’re pre-occupied more with their rewards in the next life, not this one, and they view it to be a sacred obligation... to bring civilization to its knees.”¹² According to Schofield, groups and individuals motivated by religious or ideologi-

6. The ELF was formed in 1993 in Brighton, England. In an action purportedly aimed at saving the lynx habitat, the American wing of the ELF burned down a ski lodge in Vail, Colorado in October 1998, resulting in \$12 million in property damage. See Chalecki, “A New Vigilance: Identifying and Reducing the Risks of Environmental Terrorism”, p. 48.

7. “Eco-Terrorism Specifically Examining the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front”, Senate Hearing 109-947, www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-109shrg32209/html/CHRG-109shrg32209.htm, (Access date: September 21, 2019).

8. Chalecki, “A New Vigilance: Identifying and Reducing the Risks of Environmental Terrorism”.

9. Berkowicz, “Eco-Terrorism/Enviro-Terrorism: Background, Prospects, Countermeasures”, p. 16.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 23.

12. Timothy Schofield, “The Environment as an Ideological Weapon: A Proposal to Criminalize Environmental Terrorism”, *Boston Coll Environ Aff Law Rev*, Vol. 26, Issue: 3, (1999).

cal zeal are more likely to engage in environmental terrorism because they believe that they are morally justified in doing so.¹³ The PKK, having strong a ideological basis in this regard, does not seem to have difficulty in legitimizing such terror attacks.

One of the concepts of forest sabotage as a method of terror is defined as “pyro-terrorism.” Pyro-terrorism is the use of incendiary attacks to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, to advance political or social objectives.¹⁴ Pyro-terrorism possesses four generally accepted elements of terrorism: targeting of noncombatants, political motivation, violence with a psychological impact, and organized perpetrators. The concept of pyro-terrorism suggests that the destruction of property or forests through arson is only a tactic, and draws attention to the intended political and psychological effect. In general terms, the concept of pyro-terrorism is not much different than that of the environmental terrorism.

In addition to these concepts, many other concepts such as wildfire terrorism,¹⁵ inferno terror,¹⁶ forest jihad,¹⁷ are also used in the literature.¹⁸ Regardless of the varying definitions environmental terrorism that targets forests uses low-cost terror methods, hence the tendency of ter-

rorist organizations to adopt it is quite high.¹⁹ As will be seen in later sections of the current report, after losing its technological, economic, and political impact because of Turkey’s effective counterterrorism efforts, the PKK has focused on environmental terror methods which have a low cost, and require low-technology, simple planning, and a smaller number of perpetrators.

FIGURE 2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM

Main Characteristics	Explanation
Deprivileging human targets	Although the killing of civilians of enemy states is endorsed, such deaths are perhaps best
Destruction of material targets	Such operations are defined by their aim of causing material and economic damage. Specified targets include forests, agricultural land, largely unspecified economic targets, and equally non-specific buildings.
Country profile	Such operations are called for against the United States, Britain, Israel, NATO countries and, more generally, European states, but also Russia and Australia.
Tactics	Characterized by al-Suri as “civil resistance action,” the discourse focuses primarily on arson but can include acts of sabotage.
‘Low-fi’ operational profile	Such attacks generally involve low costs, low sophistication, and require limited preparation.
Perpetrator outcome	As there is no intrinsic demand to claim responsibility for such attacks, the perpetrator has a far better chance of evading capture, a characteristic which seems to be a particular feature of these types of operation.

13. Schofield, “The Environment as an Ideological Weapon: A Proposal to Criminalize Environmental Terrorism”, pp. 619-647.

14. Baird, “Pyro-Terrorism: The Threat of Arson-Induced Forest Fires as a Future Terrorist Weapon of Mass Destruction”.

15. Ibid.

16. Col. Janos Besenyő, “Inferno Terror: Forest Fires as the New Form of Terrorism”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1341876>, (Access date: September 17, 2019).

17. Sarah Marsden, Daiana Marino and Gilbert Ramsay, “Forest Jihad: Assessing the Evidence for ‘Popular Resistance Terrorism’”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 37, Issue: 1, (2013), pp. 1-17.

18. Throughout the analysis, the term “environmental terrorism” is preferred for its simplicity and easy-to-understand meaning.

Source: Sarah Marsden, Daiana Marino ve Gilbert Ramsay, “Forest Jihad: Assessing the Evidence for ‘Popular Resistance Terrorism’”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Cilt: 37, Sayı: 1, (2013), s. 1-17.

19. Nick Deshpande, “Pyro-Terrorism: Recent Cases and the Potential for Proliferation”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 32, Issue: 1, (2009), p. 42.

The main characteristics according to the literature of environmental terrorism committed through arson and the destruction of forests are presented in Table 2.

Today, environmental elements seem to have become one of the primary targets of terrorist organizations.

THE HISTORY OF THE PKK'S FOREST ARSONS

Many terrorist organizations resort to setting fire to forests as a method of environmental terror. From 1968 to 2005, fifty-six terrorist groups worldwide used arson and sabotage as a tactic.²⁰ Countries such as Turkey, the USA, France, Israel, Spain and Greece, have been the target of terror attacks against forests through arson and acts of sabotage.

For example, in 2003, an act of sabotage involving molotov cocktails and gas bombs in the French Riviera killed at least four people and burned down fifty houses. The mayor's description of the attack as "a new form of terrorism" was particularly remarkable at that time, especially in terms of terrorism studies.²¹

In June 2004, the FBI warned the U.S. fire departments of a possible al-Qaeda plot involving three to four militants setting wildland fires in Colorado, Montana, Utah, and Wyoming. Similar acts of sabotage targetting forests take

place in Israel as well,²² where one third of all forest fires are carried out by elements of environmental terrorism.²³

An extremist group named the Forest Incinerators, who were disturbed by the Soviet monument in the capital city of Tallinn, called for setting all forests ablaze in Estonia in the summer of 2006. UN Global Fire Monitoring Center data reveals that arson and sabotage are common causes of forest fires in Estonia (13%).²⁴

Turkey is one of the target countries of environmental terrorism. The facts that the PKK targets the Turkish economy, deliberately attacks oil pipelines, and sets forest fires near major tourist destinations have even become the subject of scientific research.²⁵

Although the PKK committed its first terror act against Turkish security forces in 1984, it has adopted forest arsons as a strategy since the 1990s. In the early periods of setting fire to forests, terrorists received both ideological and technical (explosives) training in camps in Greece,²⁶ and set forests ablaze particularly in regions that were Turkish tourist attractions.

The incident was covered in the newspapers of the period. The National Intelligence Organization of Turkey (MİT) detected the sabotage carried out by the PKK terrorists in Turkey. This incident was, too, covered in the press. (Fig. 3)

20. Baird, "Pyro-Terrorism: The Threat of Arson-Induced Forest Fires as a Future Terrorist Weapon of Mass Destruction".

21. "Fires Kill at Least 4 and Ravage Forests on French Riviera", *The New York Times*, July 30, 2003.

22. Besenyő, "Inferno Terror: Forest Fires as the New Form of Terrorism".

23. Baird, "Pyro-Terrorism—The Threat of Arson-Induced Forest Fires as a Future Terrorist Weapon of Mass Destruction", p. 418.

24. Deshpande, "Pyro-Terrorism: Recent Cases and the Potential for Proliferation", p. 39.

25. Stephen J. Flanagan and Sam Brannen, "Turkey's Military Options for Dealing with the PKK: A Preliminary Assessment", Center for Strategic and International Studies, (2007), csis.org/analysis/turkeys-military-options-dealing-pkk, (Access date: September 16, 2019).

26. For detailed information, see Oğuz Güngörmez, "Yunanistan", *Avrupa'da PKK Yapılanması*, ed. Enes Bayraklı, Hasan Basri Yalçın and Murat Yeşiltaş, (SETA Yayınları, İstanbul: 2019), pp. 609-659.



Source: *Milliyet*, July 31, 1995.

The forest fires caused by the PKK particularly in tourist regions in Turkey have received wide media coverage since 1994. Many PKK terrorists who were caught red-handed setting forests on fire confessed during their detention that they were trained on building bombs and handling explosives in Greece and that they burned forests as part of this training.²⁸

In the same period, there were many PKK terrorists caught while starting forest fires in many different provinces of Turkey. Forest arsons increased in the second half of the 1990s. The Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry developed joint solution plans to prevent forest arsons. A total of 950 hectares of forest

land were arsoned by the PKK in the first half of 1995. As a result, crisis committees were formed in the cities targeted by the PKK, and exits and entries to forests were placed under control.²⁹



Source: *Milliyet*, June 22, 1994.

Members of the PKK who were trained in Greece confessed their arson plans not only targeting forests but also government institutions. The precautionary measures taken in the 1990s to stop the PKK terrorists from committing acts of sabotage failed. In this period, the PKK continued to set forest fires mostly in the Aegean and Mediterranean regions. In 1997, the group set fire to 650 hectares of forest area and 200 hectares of orchards in Antalya in a single night, and simultaneously attempted arsons in the towns of Manavgat and Belek.³¹

27. Ender Coşkun and Harun Gürek, "Ormanlarımızı Yakan Yunanlı", *Milliyet*, 31 July 1995.

28. "Sabotajcı 12 PKK'lı Yakalandı", *Milliyet*, July 18, 1995.

29. Hülya Akdoğan, "Yangın Mevsimi" için %100 Önlem", *Milliyet*, June 30, 1995.

30. Tolga Şardan, "Müthiş İtiraf", *Milliyet*, June 22, 1994.

31. "Yüreğimiz Yandı", *Milliyet*, July 23, 1997.



Source: Milliyet, August 24, 2006.

The PKK adopted the setting of forest fires as one of its terrorist methods in the 1990s, and continued to do so in the 2000s. The first arsons that come to mind are the forest fires in the Mediterranean region in August 2006.

The PKK, in this manner, not only destroyed the natural habitat consisting of the plants and animals that lived in the forests, but also endangered the lives of civilians working and living in the vicinity of forested areas.

In five days, a total of four million trees burned in forest fires in Bodrum, Kaş, Nazilli, Kuşadası, Selçuk, and Adana. As a result, 2,000

hectares of land were destroyed, 700 hectares of which were in Bodrum, 500 in Kaş, 40 in Nazilli, 300 in Kuşadası, 350 in Selçuk, and 100 hectares in Adana. These consecutive forest fires took place in only five days and the PKK claimed responsibility for them.³³

The PKK, in this manner, not only destroyed the natural habitat consisting of the plants and animals that lived in the forests, but also endangered the lives of civilians working and living in the vicinity of forested areas.

RECENT FOREST FIRES AND THE PKK

The PKK terrorists who had trained in camps in Greece carried out arsons in tourist regions in Turkey in the 1990s and continued to do so in the 2000s. Today, the PKK terrorists, again, target tourist attractions so as to implement their methods of environmental terrorism. As they did in the 1990s and the 2000s, the PKK has claimed responsibility for the recent forest fires. As a result of Turkey's extensive counter-terrorism operations, the PKK has substantially lost influence in urban or rural areas today. However, the group apparently uses low-cost environmental terrorist methods for propaganda purposes and to prove to its grass roots that the organization has still capacity carrying out an attack. It becomes obvious that the organization intends to deal a blow to tourism and negatively affect the regional and national economy by by setting fires particularly in tourist regions in summer, as they did in the 1990s and the 2000s.

The forest arsons in Kartal (Istanbul), and Dalaman and Milas (Muğla) in early July 2019

32. Serhat Oğuz, "4 Milyon Ağaç Gitti", *Milliyet*, August 24, 2006.

33. Oğuz, "4 Milyon Ağaç Gitti".

FIGURE 6. FOREST ARSONS COMMITTED BY THE PKK DURING THE SUMMER



Source: *Terrorizm Analiz Portalı*, Twitter, twitter.com/TerrorizmT/status/1175054586719215616, (Access date: September 21, 2019).

are examples of the PKK's latest acts of terror. The PKK-linked People's United Revenge Militia (HBİM) claimed responsibility for these fires through a statement published by the PKK's news agency, the ANF. In Antalya, 350 hectares of land were burned in the forest fires which lasted three days, and thirty-four houses nearby were evacuated. The PKK addressed tourists and the political will with its message. The organization called on tourists not to prefer Turkey for a vacation since the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) is "nurtured by tourism."³⁴ By addressing tourists, the PKK revealed its purpose: "Don't come to the region that is an income source for the fascist bloc."³⁵

34. "Muğla'daki Sabotaj Eylemini HBİM Üstlendi", The People's United Revolution Movement, July 1, 2019, www.hbdh-online.org/mugladaki-sabotaj-eylemini-hbim-ustlendi, (Access date: September 6, 2019).

35. Ibid.

In order to implement the environmental terrorism methods of today, the PKK terrorists target tourist regions.

All in all, the PKK intends to support the discourse "Turkey is not safe for tourists" by adopting the aforementioned methods of environmental terrorism.

In addition to the miscellaneous forest arsons of the PKK-linked HBİM, many other acts of arson were committed by the Children of the Fire Initiative (another PKK affiliate) in July and August 2019. The latter claimed responsibility for multiple forest fires in different provinces of Turkey between July 11 and August 24, 2019. A chronological list of these attacks appeared on a PKK news portal. Related forest fires are depicted on Map 1 and the list of fires is given in Table 3.

FIGURE 7. FOREST FIRES COMMITTED BY THE CHILDREN OF THE FIRE INITIATIVE (JULY-AUG.)³⁶

DATE	FOREST ARSONS
August 24	8-hectare forest land set on fire in Gediz, Kütahya.
August 24	Forest land set on fire in Tarsus, Mersin.
August 24	Forest land set on fire in Keşan, Edirne.
August 24	Forest land set on fire in Banaz, Uşak.
August 22	Forest land set on fire in Edremit, Balıkesir.
August 22	Forest land set on fire in Marmaris, Muğla.
August 19	Forest land set on fire in the vicinity of Beldibi, Marmaris, Muğla.
August 18	Five hundred hectares of land set on fire in Karabağlar, İzmir.
August 18	Forest land set on fire in Bornova, İzmir.
August 18	The area between the districts of Yağcılar and Demircili in Urla, İzmir, set on fire.
August 18	Forest land set on fire in the neighborhood of Gümüldür, Menderes, İzmir.
August 17	A vast land of forest set on fire in Selçuk, İzmir.
August 12	Forest land and police housing set on fire in Marmara, Balıkesir.
August 11	Forest land around the village of Göçbeyli in Pendik, İstanbul, set on fire.
August 11	Forest land set on fire in Bozyazı, Mersin.
August 11	Forest land set on fire in Deliktaş in the town of Başmakçı, Afyonkarahisar.
August 11	Ten-hectare forest land set on fire in Papaz Bay, Kumluca, Antalya.
August 11	A vast land of forest set on fire in Doruk, in the vicinity of Hisardere, Bursa.
August 10	One hundred hectares of forest land set on fire in Eceabat, Çanakkale.
August 7	Forest land set on fire in Mumcular in Bodrum, Muğla.
August 4	Four-hectare forest land set on fire in Foça, İzmir.
July 24	Forest land set on fire in Soma, Manisa.
July 23	An area including the District Governorate Building set on fire in Manavgat, Antalya.
July 22	Forest land set on fire in Gazipaşa, Antalya.
July 22	Forest land set on fire in Şile, İstanbul.
July 21	Six-hectare forest land set on fire in Nazilli, Aydın.
July 11	Forest land set on fire in Fethiye, Muğla.

36. "Ateşin Çocukları İnisiyatifi: Sürekli ve Kesintisiz Ateşten Eylem Sürecini Başlatıyoruz", Nuçe Ciwan, www.nuceciwan28.com/2019/08/25/flas-atesin-cocuklari-inisiyatifi-surekli-ve-kesintisiz-atesten-eylem-surecini-baslatiyoruz, (Access date: September 6, 2019).

These acts of sabotage especially in the Aegean, Mediterranean, and Marmara regions make it clear that the terrorists target tourist regions just as they did in the 1990s and the 2000s. The Children of the Fire Initiative stated, “Our actions will continue non-stop until the day that official status of the autonomous Kurdistan is recognized.”³⁷ Thus, they made it clear that they plan to continue to pose a threat with more forest fires.

The PKK’s effort to publicize their terrorist acts through social media³⁸ and to announce the news of their forest fires on the organization’s news agencies and portals indicate that the organization not only aims to negatively affect Turkey’s local and national economy, but also to create public fear. As Robert Arthur Baird underlined in his work, the group aims to create “psychological cost” as well.

HOW DOES THE PKK LEGITIMIZE ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM?

There are two legs to the PKK’s arguments to legitimize forest arsons. First, the PKK claims that the Turkish military deliberately set forests on fire as part of the fight against the PKK in the eastern and southeastern provinces of Turkey. The other is the PKK’s intention to stop tourism which has a significant share in the Turkish economy.

The PKK accuses the Republic of Turkey of the forest fires in the Eastern and Southeastern

Anatolia. To this end, the abovementioned PKK affiliates expose their intention to take revenge from the Turkish state by setting fire to tourist regions in the country.

The Human Rights Association (IHD) in Turkey failed to present evidence in this direction. However, it did claim in a report entitled “The Report on Human Rights Violations in the First 6 Months of 2019”³⁹ that forests were set ablaze during the counterterrorism operations against the PKK in the provinces of eastern and southeastern Anatolia. These statements were put forward only on the basis of discourse. The burning of forests was presented as a violation of human rights, but the fires in the touristic areas undertaken by the PKK were not mentioned in any way.

One of the arguments presented by the PKK to legitimize environmental terrorism points to the forest fires in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia immediately after the Resolution Process ended. During this period, the PKK ignored the forest fires in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, but claimed as of July 15, 2015 that these fires were started by the Turkish state.⁴⁰

Not only in national media but also in international media and institutions, the PKK backed the accusations that the Turkish military had deliberately started the forests in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. The news and columns covering the subject in foreign media are also based on the PKK’s claims that the Turkish military started the forest fires after the Resolution Process ended.

37. “Ateşin Çocukları İnisiyatifi: Sürekli ve Kesintisiz Ateşten Eylem Sürecini Başlatıyoruz”.

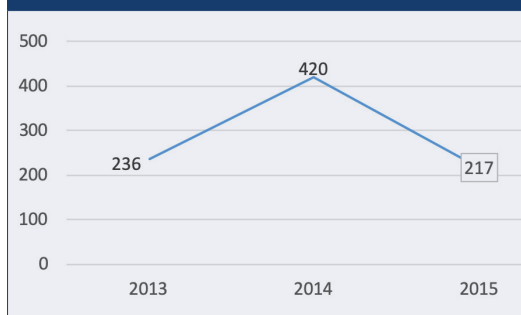
38. Ateşin Çocukları İnisiyatifi, Twitter, (August 27, 2019) <https://twitter.com/CocuklarAtesin>, (Access date: September 16, 2019).

39. “2019 Yılı İlk 6 Ay Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu Bölgesi İnsan Hakları İhlalleri Raporu”, İnsan Hakları Derneği (IHD) Diyarbakır Şubesi, www.ihddiyarbakir.org/Content/uploads/28a2a550-1145-477d-b35f-ad864035564c.pdf, (Access date: September 6, 2019).

40. “Chronology of Peace Process in Turkey”, Hakikat Adalet Hafıza Merkezi, <https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/chronology-of-peace-process-in-turkey>, (Access date: September 6, 2019).

For instance, the news story with the headline “Turkish Army Burning Kurdish Forests: Call for a Delegation”⁴¹ published by the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement and cited by the Institute for Social Ecology claimed that the Turkish army started to burn down forests upon the termination of the Resolution Process in July 2015. Eastern and Southeastern regions of Anatolia were referred to as “North Kurdistan” in the article which called on international political activists, social movements, and NGOs to investigate the extent of the involvement and the role of Turkish officials.

FIGURE 8. TOTAL NUMBER OF FOREST FIRES DURING THE RESOLUTION PROCESS IN 2013-2015 IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA.



Source: "Ormançılık İstatistikleri 2013/2014/2015", The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Forestry.

Contrary of the organization's claims, figures show that the abovementioned forest fires did not take place during the Resolution Process. The claims that forests were burned by the Turkish military were initiated as soon as the Resolution Process ended. Such claims contradict the data on forest fires nationwide. The data released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

proves that the forest fires causing the destruction of vast land in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia took place between 2013 and 2015, referred to as the period of Resolution Process. (Graph 1)

According to the statistics obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, offered in Graph 1, a total of 236 forest fires took place in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in 2013, destroying 519.3 hectares of land.⁴² The ministry's data for 2014 reveals a total of 420 forest fires in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, destroying 523.6 hectares of land.⁴³ The data for 2015 shows a total of 217 forest fires in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, destroying 715.6 hectares of land.⁴⁴

The data reveals that the PKK's argument that "no forest fires occurred during the Resolution Process, but Turkish military initiated them upon the termination of the process" does not reflect the truth. Similarly, there were fewer forest fires in 2015, which marks the end of the Resolution Process, compared to 2013 and 2014. This also proves that the PKK's false claims are a part of deliberate disinformation and black propaganda by the organization so as to legitimize environmental terrorism.

Contrary to the false claims by the PKK, it is known that the PKK set forests on fire in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, and blames the police and the military in an effort to instigate a social reaction against the state. It is a fact that

41. Ercan Ayboğa, "Turkish Army Burning Kurdish Forests: Call for a Delegation", Institute for Social Ecology, <http://social-ecology.org/wp/2015/08/turkish-army-burning-kurdish-forests-call-for-a-delegation>, (Access date: September 23, 2019).

42. "Ormançılık İstatistikleri 2013", The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Forestry, www.ogm.gov.tr/ekutuphanesi/Sayfalar/İstatistikler.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fekutuphanesi%2Fİstatistikler%2FOrman%C4%B1%11%C4%B0%20statistikleri&FolderCTID=0x012000301D182F8CB9FC49963274E712A2D00C&view=7b4b3B693B-B532-4C7F-A2D0-732F715C89CE97d, (Access date: September 9, 2019).

43. "Ormancılık İstatistikleri 2014", The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Forestry.

44. "Ormançılık İstatistikleri 2015", The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, General Directorate of Forestry.

PKK terrorists burned forests for an easier escape route during the counterterrorism operations of the Turkish military against the terrorist organization in the region. The statements of the terrorists who were captured reveal this fact.⁴⁵ For instance, in his statement to the police after being caught, a terrorist with the code name Gulan, who left the southern province of Hatay for the southeastern province of Diyarbakır and joined the PKK, revealed the following,

We came here to keep guard of marijuana fields. Another team after ours was supposed to come to fetch us. (...) A clash started. We said to the peasants, "Come here and set this forest on fire to save us. We are stuck." Then, I ran out of bullets and I surrendered.⁴⁶

On the one hand, the confession of the PKK terrorist that they set fire to forests in order to escape from the counterterrorism operation of the Turkish military in the region, rebutted the accusations of the PKK against the Turkish soldiers in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. On the other hand, it revealed that the real motive behind forest fires is purely political. In other statements, the PKK's efforts to legitimize environmental terrorism through the remarks of "revenge" are seen more clearly. For instance,

We have constantly announced for months that we, as the Children of the Fire Initiative, carried out the forest fires in Turkey and the plunder in Hasankeyf as retaliation against the forest fires in the mountains of Kurdistan. We declare in advance that from now on, for every two oak and acorn trees that were set on fire in the mountains of Kurdistan by the police and soldiers, we will burn hundreds of hectares of land to ashes in Turkey in return. What we

have done demonstrates what we will do. Our response to the barbaric enemy who does not give our nature, history and people a chance to live will be in its own language. We declare that what the police and soldiers do against civilians in the Kurdish cities, we will retaliate in kind in Turkish metropolises in different ways.⁴⁷

The Children of the Fire Initiative published a list of terror acts they committed in July and August, 2019 and similarly justified their actions with groundless accusations against the police and the military. The terrorist organization threatens the political will by stating that forest destruction will continue. The PKK underscores that they resorted to environmental terrorism methods not only as revenge for fires in the region, but also because of their political demands.

Although the PKK's senior administration recently disclaimed these fires, it should be noted that the disowning was again part of a disinformation strategy. Mustafa Karasu, a member of the so-called Executive Council of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan* in Kurdish), said that the burning of forests by the PKK is a fabrication. Karasu rejected the idea that the forest arsons were by the PKK. "None of the PKK affiliates said 'I burned this place and that place.' The PKK has no such policy. They themselves set forests on fire."⁴⁸

Historically the PKK issued a directive to "burn forests"⁴⁹ in the past, as well. The reason for the PKK's refusal to accept responsibility of the recent arsons despite the statements of its affiliates is the significant rise of environmental awareness in recent years in Turkey. The PKK

45. Selami Haktan, Twitter, September 8, 2019, https://twitter.com/slmhkt/st_atu/1170664319090069504?s=20, (Access date: September 9, 2019).

46. Selami Haktan, Twitter, September 8, 2019.

47. "Ateşin Çocukları İnişiyatifi: Sürekli ve Kesintisiz Ateşten Eylem Sürecini Başlatıyoruz".

48. "Karasu: En Meşru Mücadele Kürt Gençlerinin Dağa Çıkmasıdır!", ANF Türkçe, September 10, 2019.

49. "Kandil'den 'Ormanları Yakın' Talimatı", *Akşam*, June 24, 2016.

administration believes that in terms of conjuncture, it is not the right time to assume responsibility for the environmental actions of its autonomous units due to widespread environmental sensitivity.

It is well-known that the PKK laid down arms in 1999 upon the apprehension of its founder Abdullah Öcalan and remained inactive between 1999 and 2004. However, the organization, which resumed acts of terror in 2004, formed a subcontractor group, the Kurdish Freedom Hawks (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan*, TAK), to carry out suicide attacks against civilians in cities and acts of terror against nature and factories. The TAK carried out its first terrorist attack in 2005 by detonating a bomb in a minibus in Kuşadası, İzmir.⁵⁰ However, according to the official website of the organization, their first terrorist act was a bomb attack on the Malatya Police Headquarters on April 2, 2006,⁵¹ and the last action undertaken by TAK was another bomb attack on October 31, 2017, at the TÜPRAŞ İzmir Refinery.⁵²

Recently, the PKK claimed that it had nothing to do with the acts of sabotage of its affiliated organizations, such as the HBİM and the Children of the Fire Initiative, and used the same strategy for the terror attacks and sabotages carried out by the TAK. Although the TAK claimed responsibility for the attack that killed 37 people and injured 412 on March 12, 2016, in Kızılay, Ankara,⁵³ the PKK denied,

again, any link to this attack. Cemil Bayık, the co-chairman of the so-called Executive Council of TAK, concerning the attacks in Ankara said, “These actions have nothing to do with the PKK. It is an organization outside of us. We don’t know who they are and who is in it. Probably some of those who have left us may have taken part in it.”⁵⁴ Bayık rejected the idea of TAK as an autonomous organization linked to the PKK. In this regard, however, a terrorist, code-named Zanyar, who is a part of the PKK’s armed action team, stated that the terrorist organization TAK was founded by the PKK and that the number of urban recruits has increased in the PKK after Öcalan’s arrest. Zanyar stated,

Some of the newcomers received military, ideological, and technical training. In the meantime, the urban formation began and was finalized in the military council meeting in 2003. They organized the youth, who are born and raised in metropolises, and sent them to Turkey. They gave the instruction, “You will cut ties with the organization and its legal and illegal branches. You will have no connection with the organization.” It was advised to follow Öcalan and the organization through media and act accordingly. Meanwhile, they have been granted unlimited authority to take initiative.⁵⁵

The terrorist confessed that the PKK realized the attacks against the environment and civilians, and that the attacks, for which they hesitate to claim responsibility, were carried out by their autonomous subcontractor, the TAK, by giving it “unlimited authority.” Nizamettin Taş, one of the founders of the PKK, who quit the

50. Fethi Yılmaz, “PKK Başka TAK Başka Diyenler Yalan Söylüyor”, OdaTV, December 12, 2016.

51. “2006 Eylemlerimiz”, Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kürdistan (TAK), www.teyrenbaz.net/2006_Eylemlerimiz.html, (Access date: September 24, 2019).

52. “2017 Eylemlerimiz”, TAK, www.teyrenbaz.net/2017_Eylemlerimiz.html, (Access date: September 24, 2019).

53. “2016 Eylemlerimiz”, TAK, www.teyrenbaz.net/2016_Eylemlerimiz.html, (Access date: September 24, 2019).

54. “Cemil Bayık: TAK’ın Eylemleri Durmuyor Çünkü...”, *BirGün*, April 25, 2016.

55. “PKK’lılar TAK’ı Anlattı: Türkiye’de Uyuyan 150 Hücresi Var”, *haberler.com*, March 18, 2016, www.haberler.com/eski-pkk-li-turkiye-de-150-uyuyan-tak-hucresti-8271274-haberi, (Access date: September 24, 2019).

group later, stated that the most important reason behind the formation of the TAK was that the group carried out difficult/critical terror attacks and in this way they did not harm the diplomatic and public relations of the PKK.⁵⁶ The PKK's current administration's refusal to accept responsibility for the sabotage and suicide attacks committed by the TAK, one of their autonomous subcontractors, brings to mind the terrorist organization's recent strategy. In order not to harm its public relations, the PKK assigns certain critical tasks to the TAK, the HBIM, and the Children of the Fire Initiative - the PKK subcontractors who allegedly have no link to the organization. These critical tasks are difficult to claim responsibility for since they include suicide attacks on civilians and the destruction of the environment via arson. Thus, the PKK tries to camouflage itself and runs for cover before the international public.

It is a well-known fact that depending on the conjuncture the PKK sometimes assumes responsibility for the terror acts undertaken by its autonomous groups, which are affiliated with the PKK but kept on a long leash for security reasons. The latest example was the assassination of the Turkish Consul Osman Köse during his duty in Erbil, Northern Iraq. Baho Erdal, a member of the so-called PKK administration, said the following about the incident, "It seems to be the action of some young people who are committed to our movement. But whoever did this, it is a good job, a successful one. Great job, we congratulate the perpetrators."⁵⁷ Thus, Erdal claimed responsibility for the action of the autonomous groups. For this reason, it is known

that the PKK resorts to its autonomous affiliates for many actions. In addition, it has become evident by the perpetrators who were caught in the act that the PKK itself carried out the recent forest arsons rather than its affiliate subcontracting groups, such as the HBIM or the Children of the Fire Initiative. For instance, it received wide coverage in the media that Yakup Akman, who was caught trying to start a fire in Aydos Forest in Pendik, was linked to the PKK and that other perpetrators also confessed taking orders from the PKK.⁵⁸

The arguments used to justify the acts of sabotage by the Children of the Fire Initiative clearly show that the organization is nourished by chaos and calls on the public to join in creating this chaos. In fact, the terrorist organization has brought many issues related to domestic politics, such as forest fires or the appointment of trustees in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, to the forefront and, in this manner, tries to legitimize environmental terrorism. This rhetoric indicates that the goals of such acts of terror are extensive and that many factors are used to legitimize them.

In this aspect, in search of support for the methods of environmental terrorism, the terrorist organization refers to the domestic political developments in Turkey. For instance, the PKK terms the People's Alliance as "fascist centers" and calls for terror acts against the supporters of the alliance. In their statement on the forest arsons they carried out, the Children of the Fire Initiative spell out their main goal as the establishment of the "autonomous Kurdistan." Although the organization's arguments include accusations against the police and the military, the main purposes of their terrorist acts are to estab-

56. Yılmaz, "PKK Başka TAK Başka Diyenler Yalan Söylüyor".

57. "Erdal: Xerib'in Katili Olan MİT'çiyi Cezalandırınları Kutluyorum", ANF Türkçe, July 24, 2019.

58. "İşte Orman Yakan PKK'lı", *Yeni Şafak*, September 21, 2019.

lish a free and autonomous Kurdistan, to stand against Turkey and its government, to act on divisive motives, to take revenge, and to conduct the PKK's propaganda. In this context, Schofield's remarks⁵⁹ that terrorist organizations believe that they are morally justified in any case, appear to hold true for the PKK.

THE REACTION OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA TO THE FOREST ARSONS

The forest fires in Turkey occupied a place in the national media, but were processed differently in the international media. The international media outlets only discussed the methods of putting out these fires but never mentioned the fact that the forest fires in Turkey were part of the PKK's strategy of environmental terrorism.

As can be seen in Table 4, the international media gave rather extensive coverage to the summer fires. Although the publications in English did not give too much importance to the fires in Turkey, the Turkish desks of the same media outlets covered a varying number of new stories on the fires. However, they completely ignored the information that the PKK claimed responsibility for the fires and that they carried out the arson. Only Independent Türkçe (Turkish) published the news with the title "İstanbul ve Muğla'daki Orman Yangınlarını PKK'nın İçinde Olduğu HBİM Üstlendi" (The HBİM of the PKK Claimed Responsibility for the Forest Fires in Istanbul and Muğla).⁶⁰ Sputnik touched on the issue through a news story that published the statements of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli concerning the relevant PKK ar-

FIGURE 9. NEWS ON FOREST FIRES IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA (JUNE 1- SEPTEMBER 1, 2019)			
	Total Number of Reports on Forest Fires	Number of Reports on Forest Fires in Turkey	Number of Reports on the PKK's Role in the Fires
Euronews (İngilizce)	52	0	0
Euronews (Türkçe)	38	13	0
BBC (İngilizce)	46	0	0
BBC (Türkçe)	14	8	0
Deutsche Welle (İngilizce)	41	0	0
Deutsche Welle (Türkçe)	11	1	0
Sputnik (İngilizce)	41	0	0
Sputnik (Türkçe)	154	108	2
Independent (İngilizce)	31	0	0
Independent (Türkçe)	66	42	1

59. Schofield, "The Environment as an Ideological Weapon: A Proposal to Criminalize Environmental Terrorism".

60. "İstanbul ve Muğla'daki Orman Yangınlarını PKK'nın İçinde Olduğu HBİM Üstlendi", Independent Türkçe, July 13, 2019.

sons.⁶¹ Neither the Turkish nor the English desks of the other international media outlets published any news on the PKK's claiming responsibility for the forest arsons.

There were news stories in the Western media particularly on the two largest forest fires (the Izmir and Muğla fires) carried out in two months by the PKK. However, these reports criticized the statement of Minister Pakdemirli that the Turkish Air Authority's (THK) aircraft, which were used in putting out the forest fires in Izmir, were unsafe. Instead the report emphasized that the responsibility for the failure to extinguish this forest fire, carried out by the PKK affiliate Children of the Fire Initiative, is on the ministry. One of the related news stories was a commentary published by Deutsche Welle Türkçe with the heading "İzmir Yangınına Bakanlık Müdahalesi İncelenmeli" (The Ministry's Interference in the Izmir Fire Should Be Investigated).⁶² The commentary published prior to the Izmir fire criticized Minister Pakdemirli's statement in which he had said that firefighting with the THK helicopters was not safe. The commentary included the following statements,

The minister continues to talk about the cost of the aircraft; however, he has not announced the real cost of the fire. When he will, he will claim that the ministry interfered in the situation in the best way. Everyone is free to believe what they want, but while public suspicion arises, citizens should have the right to demand an examination or even an investigation into the issue because forest fires are vital to an extent that they cannot take a minister's

persistent mistakes and his possible personal intolerance.⁶³

The news article claimed that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry neglected the forest fires in Izmir and that forest fires are a vital issue. In his statement concerning the forest fires in Izmir, Minister Pakdemirli said that the criticisms against the ministry were unfounded and that Turkey was one of the leading countries in firefighting in the world. He said,

They worked with self-sacrifice. We had fellows who were injured and affected by smoke. They are doing these tasks by risking their lives. (...) Two days and five hours later the fire was taken under control. Our organization is by far the leader in firefighting. The world says so. We reduced the first response-time from 18 to 12 minutes. All our efforts are to have one less tree burned. We worked with 19 helicopters and 1,200 personnel. Until the last smoke, the necessary number of people, personnel, work machines, and helicopters will continue to remain on the field.⁶⁴

Minister Pakdemirli added that the fire department fulfilled its duty to put out the Izmir fire, and on the contrary, far from being negligent, Turkey is the world leader in this matter. The department did not only extinguish the fire but also used various technological developments. Pakdemirli added,

Technology was also used to great effect in fighting the ongoing forest fire in Izmir. The signals coming to the helicopter by infrared rays were sent to the teams working on the field; therefore, the flames were reached in a shorter time. On the other hand, camera traps

61. "Erdoğan'dan Su-35 ve Su-57 Açıklaması: Rusya'ya Boşuna mı Gittik?", Sputnik Türkçe, August 29, 2019; "Pakdemirli: Yangınları Üstlenen PKK'yı Lanetlemelerini Bekliyorduk Ama Olmadı", Sputnik Türkçe, September 2, 2019.

62. Banu Güven, "Banu Güven: İzmir Yangınına Bakanlık Müdahalesi İncelenmeli", DW Türkçe, August 22, 2019.

63. Güven, "Banu Güven: İzmir Yangınına Bakanlık Müdahalesi İncelenmeli".

64. "İzmir'de Alevlerin Genişlemesi Durduruldu", *Habertürk*, August 20, 2019.

were placed in various parts of the forests to identify those who burned the forests.⁶⁵

When the literature that examines the connection between forest fires and terror is perused, it is interesting to note that the incidents taking place in Turkey are excluded in such examinations.

In the international media, mostly in the European media, no information about the forest fires started by the PKK in Turkey was found and it is seen that the minister's remarks were taken out of context and that the Turkish government is criticized under the pretext of the forest fires. The international media refrain from any criticism when the PKK is the perpetrator of fires that annihilate forests, humanity's common heritage. All the more, the media do not even include this information in the cases when the terrorist organization assumes responsibility of the forest fires. This, in fact, shows that the international media, which always speak of humanism, human rights, and the protection of nature, put all these values aside - even when it comes to the issue of the environment - when it comes to the PKK and do not care about the principles of broadcasting.

CONCLUSION

The PKK has been active since the 1970s. It carried out its first terrorist attack on security forces in 1984 and continues its separatist terror activities by implementing different methods. Since the 1990s, the terrorist organization has adopted

environmental terrorism methods and has turned them into one of its strategies. Recently it has resorted to this method again and has oriented itself towards small-scale terrorist actions by targeting more vulnerable national assets. The real reason for this orientation is not "revenge for the burning forests in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia" as presented by the PKK, but the fact that as a result of the extensive counterterrorism operations inside and outside the country, the organization has lost the capacity to carry out armed terrorist attacks against the Turkish state. Particularly, with the elimination of the FETO terrorist organization by the Turkish Armed Forces after the July 15 coup attempt, Turkey has gained significant momentum in the fight against terrorist organizations.

In May 2019, regarding the number of PKK terrorists, Interior Minister Süleyman Soyulu stated, "There were 12,000-15,000 terrorists in Turkey's mountains. Today, that number is slightly over 600. For the first time, the number fell below 700."⁶⁶ The statement makes it clear that the PKK has lost a great deal of power. In addition, the PKK now has quite limited cross-border mobility owing to Turkey's counterterrorism operations inside the country and its military offensives outside its borders, including Operations Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, and Claw. All these are indications that the PKK has been losing power recently. The organization's weakening capability for action is revealed in the statements of its so-called leaders. The statements often emphasize the need to modernize the forces of the organization.⁶⁷

65. Ibid.

66. "İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soyulu: Terörist Sayısı İlk Kez 700'ün Altına Düştü", *Akşam*, May 26, 2019.

67. Paul Iddon, "How Could the PKK Modernize Its Forces", *Rudaw*, www.rudaw.net/english/analysis/13092019, (Access date: September 18, 2019).

The progress Turkey has made in the fight against the PKK after the July 15, 2016 failed coup attempt has resulted in the terrorist organization trying to attract attention, to find its way to the agenda, to hide its weakness by resorting to environmental terrorism, and to start forest fires rather than engage in an armed struggle. Particularly the rhetoric of “Turkish soldiers burning forests in Kurdistan” exposes that it is fabricated to conceal the fact that the PKK’s mobility and power to act have decreased, and that the terrorist organization resorts to the methods of environmental terrorism to hide this fact.

Concordantly, the international media ignore the acts of arson that the PKK claims responsibility for and never mention the terrorist organization while presenting news on forest fires in Turkey; they only criticize the government for not taking sufficient measures to put out these fires. This clearly unveils the indifference and ideological and biased position of the Western media outlets, in particular, towards acts of terror committed by terrorist organizations, such as the PKK, in Turkey.

In addition, when one examines the literature that analyzes the connection between forest fires and terrorism, it is interesting to note that the incidents taking place in Turkey are excluded. Turkey has been fighting against the PKK since 1984. However, the forest fires that are started by terrorists and environmental terrorism

have preoccupied media and the public opinion since the 1990s.

Despite the confessions of the terrorists caught by the security forces that expose the fact that the abovementioned forest fires are part of a strategy, these terrorist acts, interestingly, have still not been the subject matter of Western academic works. In this scope, it is extremely important to contribute to international literature by researching forest arsons along the axis of studies on terrorism in Turkey. On the other side, decision-makers and the institutions highlighting the fight against terror should not forget that once the PKK faces financial difficulties, the organization will gravitate to low-cost methods of terror, such as forest fires.

Lastly, the recent factory fire in Tuzla,⁶⁸ Istanbul, undertaken by the autonomous PKK affiliates, brings to mind that the terrorist organization, which is weakening in cities and rural areas, aims to broaden the scope of its acts of sabotage and carry out attacks not only against forests but also against economic assets. In this context, it is likely that the terrorist organization will sabotage important investment and economic assets, such as critical infrastructure facilities, bridges, dams, and power plants. Decision-makers and security forces should be prepared for these possibilities.

68. “Tuzla’daki Fabrika Yangını PKK Üstlendi”, *Yeniçağ*, September 19, 2019.

ENVIRONMENTAL TERRORISM AND ARSON ATTACKS ON FORESTS BY THE PKK

OĞUZ GÜNGÖRMEZ, ASLIHAN ALKANAT

SETA | ANALYSIS

In light of environmental terrorism, this report looks into the forest arsons committed by the outlawed terror organisation PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the rhetoric used to legitimize them.

Throughout last summer, forest fires both in Turkey and across the world received wide coverage in the public media. As opposed to the fires around the world, many forest fires in Turkey occurred as the result of acts of sabotage by the PKK that has resorted to methods of environmental terrorism. Apparently, the PKK is focusing on environmental terrorism - as it did in the 1990s and the 2000s - as a result of its weakening technological, economic, and political influence resulting from Turkey's effective counterterrorism operations. Environmental terrorism is low in cost, requires less planning, and fewer militants. This report concentrates on academic works that underline the link between terrorism and forest fires. In light of environmental terrorism, it examines the recent acts of forest sabotage by the PKK and the rhetoric adopted by the group to legitimize these acts. The report also discusses the attitudes of various Western media outlets towards the forest fires.

www.setav.org

ANKARA • İSTANBUL • WASHINGTON D.C. • CAIRO • BERLİN