



















## Non-PKK Kurds

MEQ: How can the Kurds achieve greater unity?

Öcalan: When the Turks stop interfering, Kurdish unity will be there. The Turks say “let one dog kill the other” when they deal with the Kurds. The Kurdish National Congress will be a solution for the Kurdish divisions.

MEQ: When will you create this congress?

Öcalan: We are not very far from it. The PKK will be the biggest group in it. Then the PUK [Jalal Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan]. The KDP [Kurdistan Democratic Party of Barzani] is near. Also there are many prominent Kurdish personalities like Ibrahim Ahmad and Mahmud Osman who support it. Only [Kemal] Burkay, [the leader of the Kurdistan Socialist Party (Turkey)] is not joining.

MEQ: What do you think of [the Iraqi Kurdish leaders] Barzani and Talabani?

Öcalan: There is a major difference between me and Barzani and Talabani. The PKK is a new movement. Barzani and Talabani are like caricatures of Saddam. Have you ever seen a more poverty-stricken policy than theirs? Why did they have to kiss Saddam? Where are their principles? Barzani is like a collaborator. When Iran asks Barzani to kill Iranian Kurds, Barzani does so. You cannot call Barzani’s movement a Kurdish movement.

MEQ: So who speaks for the Kurds? Who will negotiate for the Kurds?

Öcalan: Barzani and Talabani are like feet or arms, but I am the main head or mind. The United States should speak with me, the mind. I have twentyfive years of experience.

They also killed [former gendarmerie forces commander Eşref] Bitlis.

MEQ: What would a political settlement mean for the future of Turkey? Will Turkey’s granting what you consider to be genuine democracy to all its citizens solve its Kurdish problem and save the country, or would it simply encourage more Kurdish demands and eventually break up Turkey?

Öcalan: A dialogue between Turkey and the PKK followed by an agreement would be good for Turkey and make it stronger. All I am asking for is real democracy in Turkey. I am more Turkish than the Turkish leaders!

MEQ: How much has the PKK been hurt by Turkish military actions in southeast Turkey and northwest Iraq in recent years? Is it true as the Turks say that you have been marginalized?

Öcalan: We don’t have fighting in the towns, but our guerrillas are stronger than before. We are fighting everywhere, even on the Black Sea. It is just a Turkish tactic to say we are finished. Why was it necessary just a few days ago to send 25,000 Turkish troops and 1,100 Village Guards against a small PKK unit near Diyarbakır? We have become even more powerful. Five days ago in Istanbul, 20,000 people made a demonstration for us in Taksim [Square] and just yesterday in Gazi Osman Paşa [Istanbul]. If they really think the PKK is finished, well, let them carry on.

MEQ: Are there any signs that the military leaders, the ultimate source of authority in Turkey, are willing to consider a political solution to the Kurdish problem?

Öcalan: In secret they are saying they want it [discrete negotiations], but not openly. All the Turkish army wants is to finish us. The key is in the military.

MEQ: Is there anyone in the military who can bring peace? How about Deputy Chief of Staff General Çevik Bir?

Öcalan: I am afraid he is playing a game like [former Turkish prime minister Tansu] Çiller. Çevik Bir i America's man in Turkey. If he wanted to, he could bring a settlement very quickly.

MEQ: What happened to the 1996 agreement of cooperation you signed with Dev Sol [a leftwing Turkish terrorist movement now called the Revolutionary Peoples Liberation Army Front or DHKPC]?

Öcalan: We tried, but since they killed some people in Turkey like [prominent businessman Özdemir] Sabanci we cannot work with them. We have no agreement with Dev Sol. It is opposing us on many fronts. Dev Sol is an instrument of the Turkish police. It is the same situation as with [Abdullah] Catlı [of Susurluk notoriety].<sup>1</sup> The Turkish police use Dev Sol on the left and [used] Catlı on the right.

MEQ: What is the relationship between the PKK and the Islamists in Turkey?

Öcalan: There is no cooperation between us. Çevik Bir is saying that there is only propaganda.

### **THE PKK**

MEQ: Whom does the PKK represent?

Öcalan: Clearly, the PKK speaks for Turkey's Kurds. If anyone doubts this, let them have fair, democratic elections and see what happens. But the Turks are not even brave enough to consider the concept.

MEQ: Are there divisions within the PKK?

Öcalan: We have suspicions regarding [PKK commander Şemdin Sakık a.k.a. Parmaksız] Zeki. Sometimes Zeki says we should

---

<sup>1</sup> A Nov. 1996 traffic accident in the town of Susurluk uncovered how the Turkish state, among other misdeeds, hired rightwing criminals on the lam to murder extrajudicially hundreds of Turkish civilians of Kurdish ethnic heritage in an attempt to silence their support for Kurdish rights and the PKK. In exchange, the state turned a blind eye to their drug trafficking and other criminal activities. For an account, see James H. Meyer, "Çiller's Scandals," *Middle East Quarterly*, Sept. 1997, pp. 2930.

not kill soldiers and other times he wants to even kill civilians. The first time civilians were killed in Turkey was by Zeki. We removed him from his duties.<sup>2</sup>

MEQ: How are you able to maintain control of your organization from what appears to be this relatively isolated place?

Öcalan: I keep in daily contact with my associates by telephone and radio. Still, there are major organizational problems in running the PKK and its related organizations abroad. The PKK is fighting a big war and it is very difficult to control people. At any moment somebody could stab you in the back. It is more difficult to change the traditional Kurdish ways than to split the atom.

MEQ: At its fifth congress in January 1995, the PKK removed the hammer and sickle from its flag and continued to deemphasize its earlier Marxism. What do you say to those who say this was a cosmetic change and that you are still a Marxist, a communist?

Öcalan: This is just propaganda. It is not possible for us to be communists. Why did the Soviet Union collapse and the United States has not? It is because communism made the government everything, but the human being nothing. The United States represents development.

MEQ: When will the next PKK congress be?

Öcalan: At the end of 1998.

MEQ: What role will you and the PKK play in Turkey if the current struggle comes to a negotiated end?

Öcalan: We can play an active role. If there is a federal state, we will want to run it. The PKK is the voice of the [Kurdish] people.

MEQ: Will you seek to play a role in Turkish politics?

Öcalan: Yes, of course.

---

<sup>2</sup> Zeki defected to Mas'ud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, an opponent of the PKK, just days after this interview, and shortly afterwards was captured by Turkish commandos.