

The Evolving Threat from Jihadist Terrorism in Turkey

*Guido Steinberg**

Theme: If the trend towards the integration of Turkish Jihadists into larger transnational networks continues, the threat from Jihadist terrorism is likely to grow in Turkey and in countries in which there are sizable Turkish diaspora communities.

Summary: In the 1980s and 1990s, Jihadist terrorism in Turkey was an isolated phenomenon represented by two organisations, the Turkish Hizbullah and the Great East Islamic Raiders' Front (IBDA-C). The former was a Kurdish group and the latter predominantly Turkish. Both were nationalist in outlook and strategy. From 2001, however, many Turkish Jihadists have integrated into larger transnational networks, increasingly transcending national affiliations. Instead of fighting Turkish secularists and moderate Islamists, they attack Western targets. They have developed a new interest in Jihadist causes world-wide and have broadened their cooperation with Uzbek, Afghan, Pakistani and Arab Jihadists. The Turkish diaspora in Europe is an important element in this development. If this trend continues, the terrorist threat in Turkey and in countries with sizable Turkish diaspora communities is likely to grow.

Analysis: Turkey is probably the country with the most diverse terrorist scene in Europe and the Middle East. The main threat remains the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK. Since the early 1980s it has fought an insurgency in south-eastern Turkey which subsequently escalated into a civil war. Its aim was to gain independence for the Kurdish people. Although it has never come close to achieving its goals, it has been able to hinder the stabilisation of Turkish rule in the eastern provinces and –mainly from its bases in Iraqi Kurdistan– remains a threat today.

Although dominant, the Kurdish insurgency is only one among several terrorist problems. Turkey was and is home to several left-wing militant groups such as the Revolutionary Left (*Devrimci Sol*) and its successor organisation the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front (*Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi/Cephesi*, DHKP-C), which have lost some of their former relevance, but have remained active in Turkey and among the Turkish diaspora in Europe.

Islamist groups have also been active since the 1980s, with the Turkish Hizbullah (which is not in any way affiliated to the Lebanese Hizbullah) and the Great East Islamic Raiders' Front (*İslami Büyükdoğu Akıncılar Cephesi*, IBDA-C) being the most important until today. Their aim remains to establish an Islamic State in Turkey. Nevertheless, instead of

* Researcher at the Middle East and Africa Division, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin.

fighting in Turkey, some individuals took part in the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya in the 1990s, while others chose to travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan in the 1990s in order to receive terrorist trainings in the camps of al-Qaeda.¹ Ever since, a distinct Turkish Jihadist scene has developed in Turkey and among Turks in the European diaspora which has adopted a more internationalist ideology than their predecessors did. There are indications that the number of Turks travelling to Pakistan to join al-Qaeda and the Taliban and receive training there is growing. Turkish Jihadists are beginning to pose a growing threat to Turkish and European security.

A History of Islamist Terrorism in Turkey

Islamist terrorism in Turkey emerged in the early 1980s, partly in response to three developments in the Middle East: (1) the rise of Islamist movements in the Arab (and Muslim) worlds from the 1960s; (2) the Islamic Revolution in Iran; and (3) the beginning of the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey in 1984. Although Islamist movements in Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s remained focused on their home country, developments abroad did have a lasting impact on the situation. While the Turkish Hizbullah was a phenomenon connected to the Kurdish struggle and (in its formative period) the impact of the Iranian revolution, the IBDA-C has been a Turkish (non-Kurdish) phenomenon.

The Turkish Hizbullah

The Turkish Hizbullah is a primarily Kurdish organisation which has its social base in the predominantly Kurdish eastern part of the country and among the Kurdish populations of the major cities in the West like Istanbul and Izmir. It emerged in Diyarbakır, the largest city in the Kurdish south-east in the early 1980s under the leadership of Hüseyin Velioğlu (1952-2000), but soon split into two factions called *Ilım* ('knowledge' or 'science') and *Menzil* ('way-station').² The *Ilım* branch was led by Velioğlu and was responsible for most of the organisation's terrorist activity. The *Ilım* demanded immediate violent action while the *Menzil* argued for a step-by-step, propaganda-based strategy of winning over supporters before embarking on holy war.³ Differing strategic thoughts led to a bitter power struggle within the organisation. The groups finally split in 1987 and fought each other in the early 1990s. From 1994, the *Ilım* faction gained ground and became the dominant branch.

From 1987, the Turkish Hizbullah posed as a competitor to the PKK among Turkish Kurds in Eastern Anatolia and tried to win the loyalty of Kurds who opposed the PKK's Marxist ideology on religious grounds. A violent struggle between the two groups developed which escalated in the early 1990s. The clash between Hizbullah and the PKK prompted many observers to suspect the involvement of the Turkish security forces. They claimed that the Hizbullah was created in order to fight the PKK on behalf of the Turkish government and armed forces. In fact, on a local level, the security forces and Hizbullah cadres seem to have cooperated closely in their fight against the PKK. It was a common phenomenon in the Middle East of the 1970s and 1980s that governments cooperated with Islamists in order to weaken their secular adversaries. It is rather unlikely, however, that the Turkish army actually founded the Hizbullah in order to use it as an instrument in the civil war.

¹ Several members of the group which perpetrated the attacks in Istanbul in November 2003 had been trained in Afghanistan before 2001.

² Both were named after bookshops, which the respective leaders of the group had opened in Diyarbakır in the early 1980s and where the group had formed. Fidan Güngör opened the *Menzil* bookshop in 1981 and the *Ilım* bookshop was opened by Hüseyin Velioğlu in 1982.

³ Rusen Çakır (2007), 'The Reemergence of Hizbullah in Turkey', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus 74, September, p. 8.

The Hizbullah was also suspected of entertaining close links with Iran. The founders of the movement in the early 1980s were clearly inspired by the Islamic Revolution in neighbouring Iran. This was a common phenomenon in the Middle East after 1979, as Sunni Islamists felt encouraged by the success of their Iranian brethren in toppling a pro-Western ruler. Members of Hizbullah frequently travelled to Iran and received training and other kinds of support by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.⁴ However, the Ilim faction was reputed to be more distant from Iran than Menzil. Relations between the Hizbullah and Tehran seem to have cooled down after the Islamic Republic gave up its revolutionary foreign policy in the 1990s.

Even if there had been some cooperation between the Turkish army and the Hizbullah in the 1980s and 1990s, the Turkish state successfully fought the organisation from 1999. In the meantime, Hizbullah had expanded its activities to the big cities of Western Turkey where it tried to attract Kurds who had migrated in large numbers from Eastern Anatolia. In January 2000, the Turkish police raided a house in Istanbul and killed Veliöğlu. It then came out that the group had kidnapped and executed several dozen businessmen, Islamist and secular intellectuals and journalists. As a result, it quickly lost support among its Kurdish sympathisers. When it tried to retaliate by assassinating the chief of police in Diyarbakır, the government cracked down on the organisation. Many of the top leaders were arrested while others fled the country to Europe.⁵

In recent years, the Hizbullah has reorganised in Turkey and in the diaspora, with its leader, Isa Altsoy, living in Germany.⁶ It spectacularly re-emerged as a non-violent group and has focused on legal public activity. It now follows the strategy originally propagated by the Menzil group. For instance, in 2006 it organised mass rallies of tens of thousands in Diyarbakır, protesting against the Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. After having shunned any public activity until 2000, it has begun to publish books and magazines and has increasingly relied on the Internet to spread its message.⁷ However, the new Hizbullah has not explicitly broken with its violent past, and it seems that –just like the Menzil group in the late 1980s and early 1990s– it sees propaganda activity as merely a phase in a struggle that will ultimately lead to a violent jihad.

The Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front (IBDA-C)

The Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front or IBDA-C was founded in 1984 by Salih Mirzabeyoğlu (Salih İzzet Erdiş, born 1950). In contrast to the Hizbullah, IBDA-C members are mostly (if not all) Turks rather than Kurds, although its leader is alleged to come from a Kurdish family. Mirzabeyoğlu had first joined the Islamist National Salvation Party (*Millî Selamet Partisi*, MSP) of former Prime Minister Erbakan, but then left in order to build a more radical, militant group. He was deeply influenced by the writings and personality of the Islamo-nationalist poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek (1904-1983), who –in a book titled *The Ideological Network of the Great East (Büyük Doğu İdeolojya Örgüsü)*– had propounded the idea of a supranational Islamic state. This state, to be named 'Great East', would comprise the territory of several Middle Eastern states and be ruled by a caliph from Istanbul. In fact, Kısakürek proposed a peculiar mix of Islamism, Ottomanism and Turkish nationalism, which is typical for some Jihadist organisations in Turkey until today.

⁴ Cakir (2007), p. 11 ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶ Altsoy was arrested in December 2007 and remains in prison.

⁷ Cakir (2007), p. 13-15.

Mirzabeyoğlu set out to fulfil Kısakürek's vision by fighting the Turkish state and Turkish secularism as the main obstacles in the way to an Islamic state. The IBDA-C is strongly sectarian and therefore does not share Hizbullah's strong connections to Iran. It is anti-Shiite, anti-Alevite, anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. During the 1990s, the group perpetrated numerous attacks not only on prominent secularists, but also on Jews, Alevites and Christians. It frequently attacked banks and government installations as well as churches, bars, brothels and nightclubs.

IBDA-C was and remains a relatively small organisation with no more than a few hundred supporters. Its resources are limited so that its activities have never been very effective. Furthermore, it is highly fragmented. The group has, however, followed a strategy that was later termed 'leaderless jihad'. The IBDA-C cells normally consist of no more than three to five members and the organisation relies on cells forming independently after having been convinced by the IBDA-C's propaganda activities.⁸ Therefore, arrests of individual members and cells do not damage the organisation as much as in cases of more centralised structures.

As a consequence, the IBDA-C relies heavily on the dissemination of its ideas. Mirzabeyoğlu himself wrote more than 50 books, in which he expounded the group's ideology. Even after he was arrested in late 1998, Mirzabeyoğlu continued his propaganda efforts in Turkish jails and his followers have persisted in these activities. Since 2001 they publish a journal called *The Awaited New Order* (*Beklenen Yeni Nizam*). In 2005, the IBDA-C started publishing a journal called *Kaide* (al-Qaeda) in which the authors openly support Osama Bin Laden's organisation.⁹ IBDA-C activists increasingly publish their materials on the Internet.

Al-Qaeda and the Istanbul Bombings

From its inception in the mid-1990s, al-Qaeda has been an Arab organisation, dominated by Egyptians and Saudi-Arabians around its two leaders, Aiman al-Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden. Until 2001, the organisation had not been able to fully integrate the national or regional groupings into its hierarchy. North Africans, Syrians and Palestinians still tended to organise in nationally or regionally homogenous groups. Some, like the Palestinians and Jordanians under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (1966-2006), refused to join the organisation and preferred to build their own, which was first called *al-Tawhid* ('Monotheism') and then *al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* ('Monotheism and Holy War').¹⁰

Although no reliable numbers are available, Turkish nationals seem to have been a small minority among the volunteers trained in the Afghan camps. Only after the attacks on Jewish and British targets in Istanbul in November 2003 has more detailed information been made available to the public. However, Afghanistan was only one among several destinations for Turkish Jihadists in the 1990s. Turks first seem to have developed a keener interest in the situation of Muslims in the Balkans and the Caucasus. This is due to historical reasons: both regions had at least partly been ruled by the Ottoman Empire and there were strong relations between Islamists there and their Turkish brethren. An

⁸ Lawrence E. Cline (2004), 'From Ocalan to Al Qaida: The Continuing Terrorist Threat in Turkey', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, nr 27, p. 321-335 (p. 325), and Gareth Jenkins (2007), 'Turkey's Islamic Raiders of the Greater East Seeking Ties with al-Qaeda?', *Jamestown Terrorism Focus*, vol. IV, nr 40, 5 December, p. 6.

⁹ 'Kaide (Al-Qaeda) Magazine Published Openly in Turkey', *Memri Special Dispatch Series*, nr 905.

¹⁰ *Tawhid*, 'the profession of the unity of God', is the core concept of Muslim theology. Islamists argue that this principle has been neglected by their adversaries.

unknown number of Turks took part in the wars in Bosnia and Chechnya.¹¹ Among the Turkish nationals who then went to Afghanistan, Kurds seem to have formed a majority. As Kurds mostly live in south-eastern Anatolia bordering on Syria and Iraq and have contact with the Kurdish minorities in the neighbouring countries, they have been more open to influences from the Arab world than the Turks. Some Kurds from Iraq also joined the Jihadists in Afghanistan. This might explain the dominance of Kurds among 'Turkish Afghans' in the 1990s.

Turkey itself was an important logistics hub for al-Qaeda and a way-station for Jihadists travelling to Pakistan and Afghanistan. One important route led Europeans, North Africans and Middle Easterners to Turkey, in most cases to Istanbul first, and thence overland to Iran and Pakistan. In the 1990s, al-Qaeda personnel based in Turkey assisted the volunteers. The most important operative seems to have been Muhammad Bahaiah (Abu Khalid al-Suri), a Syrian.¹² To what extent Turkish operatives have been implicated in these activities has not yet been established. However, the Turkish dimension appears to have been more important than hitherto suspected.

The US war against Iraq 2003 became an important turning point for the Turkish Jihadists. The invasion and the subsequent emergence of an Iraqi insurgency have in general fostered Turkish Anti-Americanism and have prompted even formerly more nationalist-inclined Islamists to target the US and their allies.¹³ A first consequence of this trend was the Istanbul bombings of November 2003.

The Istanbul Bombings of November 2003

Turkey was first hit by al-Qaeda on 15 November 2003 when car bombs exploded outside the Neveh Shalom and Beit Yisrael synagogues in central Istanbul. Suicide bombers in trucks then targeted the local branch of the British HSBC bank and the British consulate, with the result of 62 dead and more than 650 injured. These were the most devastating terrorist attacks in Turkish history and subsequently dubbed Turkey's 'September 11'.

At least some of the perpetrators had undertaken courses in al-Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan. During the investigations, suspects stated that they had discussed possible targets with the al-Qaeda military commander, the Egyptian Abu Hafs al-Masri (died 2001). According to these reports, the al-Qaeda leadership had ordered them to attack Western and/or Israeli targets. Their discussion had centred on an attack at Incirlik airbase in southern Turkey, the most important US base in the country. Because of the tight security around the airport, the group had decided to look for more vulnerable targets. The final decision to attack Jewish and British targets seems to have been taken by the attackers after the invasion of Iraq by US and British forces in the spring of 2003. In October 2003, Osama Bin Laden issued an audio tape in which he called upon his followers to perpetrate attacks on countries which had provided troops to help the US stabilise Iraq, most prominently the UK, Spain and Italy.

Shortly after the attacks, the IBDA-C and the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, a group of online activists not related to al-Qaeda, claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, in the course of the investigation it became clear that the plot was hatched by a local group

¹¹ Chechnya remains an important interest of Turkish Internet activists and the leaders of the Chechen jihad, like Khattab and Shamil Bassajev, have a cult status among Turkish Jihadists.

¹² See Brynjar Lia (2007), *Architect of Global Jihad. The Life of al-Qaida Strategist Abu Musab al-Suri*, Hurst, London, p. 189-193.

¹³ Jenkins (2007), p. 6.

which had trained in Afghanistan and had links to al-Qaeda and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's *al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad*. Several perpetrators had been members or close sympathisers of the Turkish Hizbullah and IBDA-C in the past, but the organisations as such do not seem to have been involved.¹⁴ They rather defined the intellectual and political environment in which their radicalisation had taken place.

The group that perpetrated the attacks was mainly made up of Turkish citizens from the south-eastern part of the country –Kurds from towns where Hizbullah commanded a large following–. The largest single group came from Bingöl, a remote predominantly Kurdish town in eastern Anatolia, where unemployment rates are high and the devastating repercussions of the civil war of the 1980s and 1990s are all too visible.¹⁵ Others came from Malatya, Mardin, Batman and Van, all towns and cities in similarly miserable conditions to Bingöl and centres of Kurdish opposition to the Turkish state for decades.

The Iraqi, Syrian and Lebanese Connections

In the course of the investigation, it became clear that the plotters were not only linked to al-Qaeda in Pakistan but also to terrorist organisations in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, which belonged to the larger network of Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's *Jama'at al-Tawhid wa-l-Jihad* (which later pledged its loyalty to Osama Bin Laden and changed its name to al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia). Directly before and after the attack, some surviving members of the cell fled to Syria, among them Habib Aktaş, a leading personality. He and other members of the group later joined Zarqawi in Iraq and some were killed there.¹⁶ Furthermore, in late 2003, Syria deported 22 Turkish suspects to their home country.

However, close links to Zarqawi's organisation became obvious when it was discovered that the perpetrators themselves claimed to be members of a group called *Beyyat al-İmam* or 'Oath of allegiance to the Imam'.¹⁷ This was the Turkish version of the name of the Jordanian group *Bay'at al-Imam*, which had been founded in the early 1990s by Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, Zarqawi's spiritual mentor, and which was later taken over by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi. The choice of a name which was strange even to the Jihadists' ears was obviously aimed at emphasising the link to Zarqawi and Maqdisi.¹⁸

The link between Zarqawi and the Istanbul plotters became even clearer when news about the financing of the plot was made public. The Syrian al-Qaeda in Iraq operative Luayy Saqqa was named (and later convicted) as the mastermind of the Istanbul bombings and was said to have financed the attacks. Saqqa's (born 1974) family –which is most probably of Kurdish descent– had lived in eastern Turkey until 1960, but then emigrated to Aleppo, the most important Islamist stronghold in Syria. He had first joined al-Qaeda Central in Afghanistan and built up a close relationship with Abu Zubaida, an important logistics official based in Pakistan and a close associate of Osama Bin Laden. In 1997, Abu Zubaida sent him to the Khalden training camp in Afghanistan and later to Turkey in order to build structures there. When he returned to Afghanistan in 1999, however, he moved to Herat with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.¹⁹

¹⁴ Cline (2004), p. 321-335 (p. 322 ff.).

¹⁵ 'Turkish Town's Despair Breeds Terrorists, Residents Fear', *New York Times*, 27/XI/2003.

¹⁶ Habib Aktaş and Gürcan Baç died in Falluja in 2004 and 2005, respectively.

¹⁷ The Turkish press erroneously translated this term as *İmamlar Birliği* or 'Union of the Imams'.

¹⁸ On Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi see Guido Steinberg (2005), *Der nahe und der ferne Feind: Die Netzwerke des islamistischen Terrorismus*, Beck, München, p. 135 ff.

¹⁹ *Der Spiegel*, nr 34, 2005, p. 114-115.

Zarqawi had just been released from jail in Jordan in early 1999 when he returned to Afghanistan, where he had already been staying in the late 1980s. He gained permission to establish his own training camp in Herat close to the Iranian border and far from al-Qaeda's headquarters in Kandahar. It was a camp established exclusively for Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese, who formed the core of Zarqawi's *Tawhid* organisation. Among the first group of activists, which consisted of only five men, was Luayy Saqqa. Zarqawi refused to be incorporated into Osama Bin Laden's organisation. Rather, he asserted his independence and stuck to his original goal, namely to fight against the Jordanian regime and for the 'liberation' of Palestine rather than join al-Qaeda's global jihad.²⁰ In late 2001, Zarqawi fled to northern Iraq via Iran. When it became clear that the US would attack Iraq, Zarqawi took the chance to reorganise his network and redirect it for the fight against the US in Iraq and, increasingly, against the new Iraqi government. He relied on a growing number of Iraqi personnel in his network and co-operated with former regime loyalists.²¹ Most of the suicide bomb attacks in Iraq since the summer of 2003 have been perpetrated by Zarqawi's group.

In order to rebuild his organisation and fight US forces in Iraq, Zarqawi had to rely heavily on new Iraqi recruits, so he was unable to continue to implement his former agenda, focusing exclusively on Jordanian and Israeli targets. According to one of his followers, Zarqawi adjusted his strategy to the new situation: first, the militants would have to expel the Americans from Iraq, where they would install an Islamist regime and then they would extend their Jihad to the neighbouring countries, with the final aim of liberating Jerusalem.²² As it turned out in 2003 and later, Zarqawi targeted Turkey as well as neighbouring Arab countries. Luayy Saqqa was to execute his strategy in Turkey.

In the late 1990s and until 2001, Saqqa seems to have become an important personality in the network. He undertook several dozen journeys between Syria, Turkey and Jordan, and spent time in Afghanistan and Germany.²³ He later joined Zarqawi in Iraq and seems to have been an important node in his network in Syria and especially Turkey. After his arrest in 2005, he claimed to have fought for Zarqawi in Iraq and that he had taken part in kidnappings and executions. Most importantly, however, he seems to have provided the perpetrators of the Istanbul bombings with up to US\$160.000.

Saqqa was arrested in August 2005, when he planned attacks on Israeli cruise ships in the southern Turkish port city of Antalya. The plot failed in its early stages, when some of the explosives caught fire in an apartment in Antalya. Saqqa was subsequently caught in Diyarbakır, carrying US\$120.000 in cash.²⁴

Turkish Jihadists and the Turkish Diaspora

As there is a sizeable Turkish diaspora in Western Europe, and parts of this diaspora have joined the Jihadist movement, the interplay between Turkish Jihadists in Turkey and (especially) Germany –home to around 2.5 million Turks and Germans of Turkish-origin– seems to have intensified in recent years, possibly due to the use of new media, especially the Internet. For many Turkish Islamists since the 1970s, Germany has been a

²⁰ 'How Terror Groups Vied for a Player', *Christian Science Monitor*, 11/V/2004.

²¹ 'The Arab *Mujahidin* in Iraq are 2000', *al-Hayat*, 8/XI/2004 (in Arabic).

²² 'al-Zarqawi: An Islamic Government in Iraq', *al-Hayat*, 10/IX/2004 (in Arabic).

²³ Saqqa's two sisters are married to two German converts. He first met Christian K. in Khalden in 1997. From September 2000 to July 2001 he was based in the south-western German town of Schramberg. See *Der Spiegel*, nr 34.

²⁴ *Der Spiegel*, nr 33, 2005, p. 108-109.

favourite refuge, as their activities were widely tolerated by the German authorities and they were able to act freely among a strong Turkish minority. All Turkish terrorist groups had (and still have) a strong base in Germany, among them the Kurdish PKK. Only after 11 September 2001 have the German authorities cracked down on some of these movements without, however, eliminating the problem. In recent years, there seems to be a strong trend towards Jihadist radicalisation among young Turks in Germany.

The Kaplan Family and the 'Caliph State Organisation'

Turkish Jihadists had an important precursor in Germany: the 'Caliph State Organisation' of Cemalettin and Metin Kaplan. Cemalettin Kaplan (died 1995) a theologian, had been an employee of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey and Mufti in Adana. After the military coup in 1980 and the ban on Erbakan's Party of National Salvation (*Milli Selamet Partisi*), Kaplan fled to Germany and became active in an Islamist organisation close to the Party, the Islamic Union Europe. He soon provoked heated debates within the organisation, because –although a Sunni– he was a staunch admirer of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. In November 1984, Kaplan founded his own organisation, the Federation of Islamic Associations and Communities (*Islam Cemiyet ve Cemaatler Birliği*, ICCB), with its headquarters in Cologne. In its heyday in the late 1980s, his organisation had around 7,000 members.

Kaplan, who was nicknamed the 'Cologne Khomeini' by the German press, aimed at the revolutionary foundation of an Islamic state in Turkey and the restoration of the caliphate. In 1994 he proclaimed himself caliph and called his organisation the 'Caliph State' (*Hilafet Devleti*). By the time of Cemalettin Kaplan's death in 1995, the Caliph State organisation was a highly centralised, authoritarian movement which had lost its charismatic leader. Already by the end of the 1980s, Kaplan had reorganised the movement which had started to lose support among the Turks in Germany. He and his remaining supporters increasingly isolated themselves from their co-religionists, so that the organisation adopted a sectarian, almost cult-like character. This trend continued after Cemalettin's death, when his son Metin (born 1952) followed his father as head of the organisation. Metin lacked his father's charisma, intelligence and talent, so that the organisation almost disintegrated. A rival caliph, Ibrahim Sofu, emerged among the movement's supporters in Berlin. After Metin Kaplan demanded his death in the organisation's mouthpiece, *Ümmet-i Muhammad*, Sofu was assassinated in 1997. As a result, in the late 1990s the numbers of the organisation's members shrank to less than 1,000 from around 3,800 in 1995. In 2000, Kaplan was imprisoned for four years because he had called for the murder of Sofu. In December 2001, the Caliph State was banned and in 2004, after his release from prison, Kaplan was extradited to Turkey. There he was convicted to life imprisonment because he had allegedly ordered a terrorist attack on the mausoleum of Kemal Atatürk in Ankara.²⁵

In 2001 and 2002, the Caliph State was considered to be a possible terrorist threat in Germany. However, its members showed no inclination to perpetrate terrorist attacks and focussed on what they considered an exemplary Muslim personal life. Whether Kaplan's supporters really planned to destroy the Atatürk mausoleum is highly doubtful. Be that as it may, the Kaplan movement was reduced to insignificance after 2005, although it still has supporters and continues some clandestine activities.

²⁵ On the history of the movement see Werner Schiffauer (2000), *Die Gottesmänner. Türkische Islamisten in Deutschland. Eine Studie zur Herstellung religiöser Evidenz*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main.

The 'Sauerland' Plot and its Turkish Dimension

For years after the imprisonment of Metin Kaplan, the German authorities argued that the threat of Jihadist terrorism was smaller in Germany than in France, the UK or Spain because Germany's Turkish migrant community was less prone to Jihadist radicalisation than the Arabs. This assessment proved wrong, however, in the course of 2007, when a Turkish-Kurdish-Arab-German group of Jihadists planned to attack US and possibly Uzbek targets in Germany. In September 2007, two German converts and a Turk were arrested in a small town in the Sauerland region in the state of North-Rhine Westphalia.

The 'Sauerland cell' as they were subsequently called, was part of a larger group of around 30 or more young Jihadists in Germany, mostly ethnic Turks or Kurds living in Germany and some Arabs and several converts, who had been part of a Jihadist network. For the first time, German Turks in larger numbers were radicalised and joined a Jihadist organisation. The nucleus of the group seems to have been formed in the Salafist *milieu* of Ulm and Neu-Ulm in south-western Germany. From 2001, the Multikulturhaus in Neu-Ulm had become a rallying point for young Turks, Kurds, Arabs and German converts alike. As a result of their radicalisation, at least 10 to 20 of them went to terrorist training camps in Pakistan from 2006.²⁶

Training took place in northern Waziristan, in the camps of a small Uzbek group called the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU).²⁷ The IJU is a splinter group of the larger and older Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which is also based in Waziristan. However, the IJU split from the IMU because the latter refused to internationalise its ideology and join the (Afghan) Taliban and al-Qaeda in their fight against Western forces in Afghanistan. The IJU entered into a close alliance with the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Since 2006 it has increasingly recruited ethnic Turks and seems to be aiming to increase its attraction among Turks in Germany and in Turkey itself. The reason for the IJU's success is simple: Turks and Uzbeks are related Turkic peoples and speak similar languages. An Uzbek organisation that operates transnationally and takes an internationalist line is therefore ideally suited for recruiting Turks –either from Turkey itself or from the European diaspora–.²⁸

The planned attack in Germany was an attempt to support the struggle of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. The IJU leadership was mainly concerned with influencing the German debate on extending both Afghanistan mandates. They evidently calculated that attacks just before the Bundestag votes in October and November 2007 could prevent an extension and force the withdrawal of troops.²⁹ The Taliban and al-Qaeda had long regarded Germany as the weakest link in the chain of the major troop providers and wanted to exploit growing criticism of the campaign in Afghanistan among Germans.

²⁶ These are the cases currently known to the author, but actual numbers might be higher. In an interview with a German newspaper, Wolfgang Bosbach, a prominent conservative parliamentarian and specialist in domestic affairs, said that more than 50 Germans (among them an unknown number of Germans of Turkish origin) were at that time training in Pakistani camps. The number of known cases keeps rising.

²⁷ For a detailed discussion of the plot see Guido Steinberg (2008), 'A Turkish Al Qaeda: The Islamic Jihad Union and the Internationalization of Uzbek Jihadism', *Strategic Insights*, 7, nr 3, July, <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2008/Jul/steinbergJul08.asp>.

²⁸ In the al-Qaeda and Taliban camps recruits have to either speak Pashtu or Arabic. Most Turkish recruits do not speak more than their mother tongue and possibly Kurdish, Turks from Germany in most cases do not speak any foreign languages either.

²⁹ This has meanwhile been corroborated by *Der Spiegel*.

Besides training future Jihadists, the IJU has aimed at increasing its attraction among young Turks by using a Turkish language website, which was hosted in Turkey in 2008. Obviously, parts of the group's infrastructure were based in Turkey itself. From September 2007, the IJU started posting an increasing amount of propaganda messages and videos on *www.sehadetvakti.com* ('Time for Martyrdom').³⁰ Most spectacularly, in early March 2008 the IJU posted a video showing Cüneyt Çiftçi, a Turk born and living in Germany training for, preparing and perpetrating a suicide attack on US and Afghan troops in the Afghan province of Paktika.³¹ Ever since, reports of young Germans and Turks joining the ranks of the IJU, Taliban and al-Qaeda have increased in number.

The 'Sauerland plot' itself did have another Turkish dimension, showing the emergence of an Uzbek-Turkish-German network. Members of the network in Turkey sent the detonators for the Sauerland cell to Germany.

Conclusion: Jihadist Terrorism in Turkey has developed from an isolated phenomenon mainly embodied by two obscure groups, which were a minor threat compared to the PKK's insurgency, to a major terrorist threat to the country. From nationalist groups, the Turkish Islamist terrorists have developed into parts of larger transnational networks, increasingly transcending national affiliations, without however giving them up. Instead of targeting Turkish secularists and moderate Islamists, they increasingly attack Western targets like the Israeli cruise ships in August 2005 and the US consulate in Istanbul in July 2008. The anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli dimension of their activities is partly due to their strong connections to Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

There are indications of an accelerating trend towards internationalisation. This trend was foreshadowed on the Jihadist Internet, where Turks in recent years have developed a profound interest in conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and further afield. Subsequently, it has allowed for a greater cooperation with Uzbek, Afghan, Pakistani and Arab Jihadists. Should such a trend continue to unfold, the terrorist threat in Turkey and in countries with sizable Turkish diaspora communities is likely to grow.

Guido Steinberg

Researcher at the Middle East and Africa Division, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin

³⁰ The website has changed its address to *www.sehadetzamani.com*.

³¹ *İslami Cihad İttihadi Basın Açıklaması*, http://www.sehadetvakti.com/haber_detay.php?haber_id=1889, accessed 7/III/2008.