

# PKK Revokes Cease-Fire in Turkey

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The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) ends the six-month cease-fire in a statement published on its news agency, Firat. The statement blames intransigence on the part of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for the decision.

The PKK had said it would hold the cease-fire until June, the month in which Turkey is to hold general elections. Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union list the PKK as a terrorist organization. The group has been fighting a war in Turkey since 1984, in which 30,000-40,000 people are estimated to have been killed.

The status of Turkey's Kurds is among the most politically explosive issues in the country. Any compromise by the government was unlikely in the lead-up to elections, while an uptick in violence could influence voting, analysts said. Opinion polls suggest the AKP will win re-election easily.

In its statement, the PKK said that from now on "our forces will defend themselves more actively, but will not carry out military actions against the forces which do not attack, which do not carry out operations and attack the public."

A spokesman for Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the government was evaluating the statement on Firat, but had not yet formulated a response.

"The real problem is the [AKP] government's approach to this problem, which is tactical and has not abandoned a mindset of denial and annihilation, and policies of aggression," said the PKK statement. The government's policy is one of "assimilating the Kurdish people within the Turkish nation and never recognizing its existence, identity and freedom."

In recent months, there have been numerous unconfirmed news reports of negotiations between the government and Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed PKK leader, incarcerated on an island close to Istanbul since his capture in 1999.

Turkey's Kurds make up an estimated 20% of the country's population of 73 million. Ethnic Kurds also live on the other side of Turkey's borders with Iraq, Iran and Syria. In recent years, the PKK and other Kurdish leaders have abandoned calls for an independent Kurdish state, but their demands for political autonomy and for schools to teach in the Kurdish language have met with strong resistance in Ankara.

In recent years the PKK has considerably reduced the intensity of its military activities, but it also has begun to splinter. One breakaway group claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing in Istanbul's Taksim Square in November, which wounded 32 people and killed the attacker.

Erdogan's government declared a "Democratic Opening" in 2009, which was designed to break the deadlock with the Kurds and to explore a political solution to the conflict. That initiative broke the taboo on discussing the Kurdish issue in Turkey and won praise in the West. But the initiative quickly went into reverse in the face of a public backlash within Turkey.

The PKK statement reiterated the group's five demands for a permanent cease-fire: end military operations against the PKK; release arrested Kurdish politicians; allow Mr. Ocalan to take part in negotiations directly; establish commissions to research the Kurdish issue; and remove Turkey's 10% threshold for political parties to enter Parliament.

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