

Suspicion Growing About Possible Link between outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and Israel

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Amid the growing outrage over an Israeli attack on civilian ships in international waters that killed nine Turkish pro-Palestinian activists and wounded dozens last week, there is deepening suspicion about the possible Israeli involvement in the killing of seven soldiers in a terrorist rocket attack on a naval base in Iskenderun, in the southern province of Hatay.

Turkish intelligence organizations are looking into possible connections between the two incidents that occurred on the same day only hours apart. The terrorist act was carried out by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), an outlawed organization that has been listed as terrorist group both in Turkey and in much of the international community. Analysts claim Israeli secret services may have contracted the job to the PKK to send a message to the Turkish government.

Sedat Laçiner, head of the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), told Sunday's Zaman that there are some groups in Israel actively working with the PKK using its Iranian wing, the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), which has been waging a war in western Iran. He said the link is more than a simple conspiracy theory, it's a substantiated one as some members of Mossad and retired Israeli military officers were spotted training Kurdish fighters in the northern Iraqi Kurdish region.

The fact that an attack on Turkish soldiers came on the same day Israeli soldiers attacked a humanitarian aid convoy in international waters led by a Turkish ship raised suspicions that Israel may be involved with the PKK. The fact that the Kurdish terrorist group, based in northern Iraq, announced on June 1 that they had ended their unilateral cease-fire with Turkey has reinforced the theory that Israel is somehow linked with the PKK.

While speaking to reporters last week in Ankara, Interior Minister Beşir Atalay emphasized that they have been investigating both attacks extensively. "We have been working hard, especially to ascertain what happened in the Iskenderun incident," he said, signaling that the government is also looking into alleged connections. Last year Atalay remarked at a party convention that he was deeply offended by the news that the Israeli army trained troops in northern Iraq.

Remarks by some Turkish politicians have also fueled speculation of a possible Israeli link with the PKK. "We don't think the incident [Iskenderun attack] was coincidental," Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Deputy Chairman Hüseyin Çelik said, speaking to reporters at AK Party headquarters in Ankara on Monday.

"As the AK Party, we strongly condemn the incidents. Israel has torn down Gaza. They do

not even let construction materials in. This will be a black mark on the history of humanity. An attack was carried out on our military unit in İskenderun. We condemn this, too. We do not think it is a coincidence that these two attacks took place at the same time,” Çelik said.

The newly elected chairman of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, also said the similarity between the incidents was significant. Speaking at a press conference held at party headquarters on Monday, Kılıçdaroğlu recalled that some circles are concerned about whether the İskenderun attack is related to Israel. “We feel deeply sorry about the incident in İskenderun. We must pay attention to the killings of the seven soldiers. At a time when the Israeli army continues military operations, it is significant that such an incident took place in Turkey,” he said.

Felicity Party (SP) leader Numan Kurtulmuş reacted harshly during a press conference held at the İstanbul branch of the party. While pointing out the timing of both incidents, Kurtulmuş said he hoped the attacks were not related to each other. “Our soldiers were attacked in Turkey. I hope it was a coincidence that Israel began to attack the ship after a brutal attack on a Turkish Naval Forces base in İskenderun. May God bless the souls of those martyrs who died in this vicious attack,” he said.

Laçiner goes further in saying that major terrorist incidents by the PKK that have taken place in big cities bear the footprint of Israel. “These terrorist were trained by Israeli intelligence officers on how to best penetrate cities,” he said, stressing that the Israeli government is not comfortable with the ruling AK Party in Turkey. “They want to portray the Turkish government as very much like the radical Hamas organization in the eyes of world public opinion. The PKK is a mere contractor for Israel to serve that purpose,” he explained.

In an article that appeared in The New Yorker in 2006, US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh wrote that Israel and the US have been “working together in support of a Kurdish resistance group known as the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan.” Then, quoting a government consultant with close ties to the Pentagon’s civilian leadership, Hersh asserted that this was “part of an effort to explore alternative means of applying pressure on Iran.”

Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize winner, wrote two years later in another article that the CIA and the US Special Operations communities also have long-standing ties to two dissident groups in Iran: the Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK) and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), a Kurdish separatist group.

“The Kurdish party, PJAK, which has also been reported to be covertly supported by the United States, has been operating against Iran from bases in northern Iraq for at least three years,” he wrote. In the 2008 article, Hersh said that “PJAK has also subjected Turkey, a member of NATO, to repeated terrorist attacks, and reports of American support for the group have been a source of friction between the two governments.”

Nurullah Aydın, an instructor at Gazi University, claims Israel not only provides training to troops for the Kurdish regional administration but also aids and abets PKK terrorists. “The deposition given by captured terrorists and ammunition seized during raids into terror camps indicate that Israeli army officers have provided training and arms to PKK,” he said, alleging that the governments in Turkey kept this information secret from the public.

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