

Michael Rubin

“Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence”

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“Marcus iç savaş yıllarını (1984–99) etkileyici bir biçimde ele alıyor; temel konuyu röportajlarla beslediği anlatısı zengin ve kolay anlaşılır. Pek çok gazeteci ve yazar, irtibat kurduğu kişilerle birer kez görüşmeyi yeterli bulurken, Marcus, konuşma özgürlükleri olmadığını gördüğü aktif PKK militanları yerine, eski PPK üyeleriyle, köylülerle ve militanların akrabalarıyla görüşüp ifadeleri defalarca sınamış. Ayrıca, Türkiye medyasının bakış açısını ve Türk yetkililerin açıklamalarını da çalışmasına dâhil etmiş.”

Most writers on the Kurdistan Workers' Party, best known by its Kurdish language acronym, the PKK, substitute advocacy for accuracy, so their books about the PKK tend to have limited practical use for policymakers. But Marcus, a former international correspondent for *The Boston Globe* who spent several years covering the PKK, has done important work in *Blood and Belief*. While sympathetic to her subject—the substitution of "militant" for "terrorist" grates—she retains professional integrity and does not skip over inconvenient parts of the PKK narrative such as its predilection to target Kurdish and leftist competitors rather than the Turks; the patronage it has received from the Syrian government; and the important role of European states and the Kurdish diaspora in its funding.

Blood and Belief has four sections: on PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's life and the PKK's beginnings; the PKK's consolidation of power; the civil war; and the aftermath of Öcalan's 1999 capture.

The Kurds inhabit a region that spans Syria, Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, and Marcus does not let national borders constrain her analysis. Events in Iraq—such as the squabbling between Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leader Jalal Talabani and Kurdistan Democratic Party leader Masoud Barzani—influenced Öcalan, who concluded that he should tolerate no dissent. "We believed in socialism, and it was a Stalin-type of socialism we believed in," one early PKK member relates.

Steeped in Kurdish and Turkish history, Marcus provides better context than many other journalists who have tackled this subject. The PKK took hold, she shows, largely because of the weakness of the Turkish state in the 1970s. Between 1975 and 1980, the Turkish government barely functioned. After the 1980 coup, the Turkish military restored order. But when Barzani offered the PKK shelter in northern Iraq, the group remained beyond reach, allowing it to plan and launch a full-scale guerilla war against Turkey. Marcus concludes that the group's continued survival in Turkey is because, at

some level and among some constituents, it remains popular; its support is not all driven by intimidation as some Turkish analysts claim.

Marcus impressively covers the civil war years (1984-99), and her narrative, combining dialogue and context, is rich and accessible. While many journalists and authors satisfy themselves with a single round of interviews, Marcus concentrates not on active PKK members, who she realizes do not enjoy the freedom to speak, but rather on past members, villagers, and family members whose accounts she cross-checks. She also incorporates Turkish language press accounts and interviews with Turkish officials.

It is unfortunate, though, that her coverage of PKK resurgence, between 1999 and 2007, is just thirteen pages long. An exploration of how Öcalan has retained control while in prison and where he and his henchmen might take the PKK has seldom been more relevant. One hopes that this new chapter of PKK history will become the basis for a sequel.

<http://www.meforum.org/article/1941>