



Research

The Ideological Evolution of Abdullah Öcalan's Paradim: from nation state to democratic society (1969 To 2025)

Dr. Sait Keskin¹

Lecturer of Political Science and Kurdish Politics at Rojava University in Qamişlo;

saitkesk@yahoo.co.uk

Ahang Habib Hawrami²

²M.A., Researcher, Sbey Research Center, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. Email:

ahang.husein@gmail.com

October 2025



Abstract

This paper examines the Abdullah Öcalan's ideological evolution based on the social and political evolution on his personality, and transformation over four decades. It tracks the changes and developments of the ideology from nation state to the notion of democratic society from 1969 to 2025, inspired by the changes in the global political landscape. The study concludes from the current state of PKK and the phase the party lives in, which is transformative, marking its move towards ending armed straggles and re-shaping the political, national and institutional landscape in Turkey.

Introduction

To comprehend the intellectual trajectory and ideological evolution of Abdullah Öcalan it is important to examine, his early socialization in Kurdish and Turkish society, and the subsequent process he experienced as political socialization, so his political and national worldwide view shaped. As, he transitioned from rural to urban areas in Turkey. The study examines Abdullah Öcalan's socialization, political socialization, political participation, political action and political mobilization as source of formation of his political ideas, and later on worked as foundational pillars of conceptualizing an organization which later on became foundation of forming a party named Kurdistan Workers Party (Partîya Karkerên Kurdistanê), and the party in its formation stage spanning from 1969 to 1988, was primarily inspired by the idea of building a nation state for Kurdish people under the name of great Kurdistan (independent, united, and democratic Kurdistan)

Another phase of the evolution of ideology of Abdullah Öcalan's goes back to the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist system and evolution of industrialized capitalist world, which initiated many successful revolutions, reforms and evolutions, and emergence a new phase of peace process globally. This led Abdullah Öcalan to pursue reform in the internal structure of PKK, especially during 1988 to 1999. At that time his view inspired by the idea that

addressing the Kurdish question requires international efforts, so he gave focus of European Union. He was in to a believe that, giving the fact that Turkey has great ambition to gain EU's membership, EU is able to provide a conducive platform for resolution of Kurdish question in a democratic way. However, this remained as a concept and never came to reality because EU did not adapt it, if it was, it could progress to transformation stage of PKK. This transformation remain the most challenging phase in the history of PKK, and led to the imprisonment of Öcalan and subsequent fragmentation in PKK, and changes in it, but the discussion progressed till PKK went to the re-transformation phase, which based on four decades of armed struggles.

Research Question:

Can the international state system which had helped Turkish state in all these 41 years as a member of the NATO help Turkey to give constitutional and legal guarantees for democratic politics to allow the PKK members to participate to political process as equal partners in Turkey?

Historical Background

Abdullah Öcalan's ideological journey from Amara Village to urban awakening; a path to cosmopolitan awareness

Abdullah Öcalan born in Amara village in the eastern banks of famous Euphrates River, which belongs to Halfeti town of Şanlı Urfa province in south-eastern Turkey (North of great Kurdistan). His socialization started in that small village up to the age of seven to ten. His family and most of the villagers were consisted of the poorest stratum of Kurdish society. Amara village in 1950s did not have a primary school. Som Abdullah Öcalan's father remain with no choice only to register him in Cebin Primary School in 1958, which was about 5 kms away from his village. Cebin used to be an Armenian village, after 1915 Armenian Genocide by Ottoman Empire the village was Turkified. He attended to the school with his classmates everyday walking 10 km on the way of to the school and back, during pray time he acted as the leader of his mates. He learns Turkish in the school and through communication with villagers of Cebin, but at how in Amara he spoke

Kurdish. Because of his family background he also got religious roots in his early childhood Öcalan. He went to mosque with his father, this religious base helped him memorize 30 verses of Quran. In his discussions and books Öcalan confirmed that, Kurdish language was main language of communication between him and his friends in the early stages of his life. When he finishes his primary education after an intense argument with his family, he left his family, and stayed at his maternal uncle's home in the neighboring town named Nizip of Gaziantep province, and start secondary school at uncle's home. Here is where complicity starts in the socialization of Öcalan, because he moves from village to town, this makes him question anything, and everting in his sounding. This stage marks the beginning of political socialization of Öcalan.

In Nizip Secondary School dream of joining military academy at that time and become hierarchy evolves in the mind of Öcalan, but because of his age and been to early to join such a academy, the dream fails. He steps in to his second option which is attending other boarding school exams, he wins a place at Land Registry and Cadastral Boarding School in Ankara, where a more complex metropolitan city. Here is the second step of young, and energetic Öcalan's political socialization starts in Ankara. He starts searching to whether Left or Right political movements to support.

Life in Ankara: crucible of political awakening and admirative

The political literacy of Öcalan started in Ankara, where he joined modern, yet complex and complicated life. He started reading political books, attends a wide spectrum of political debates from extreme right to extreme leftist. The development of political literacy of Öcalan continues till the final year of his education, when he starts recognizing the Alphabet of Socialism, this highlighted when he stated: "Mohammed lost and Marx won". In the phases of ideological evolution of Öcalan considered the second step of his political socialization, choosing leftist socialist ideology.

The completion of this study in Ankara, leave Öcalan with no choice only to return to his family in Amara. This happens in the summer of 1969. He started to apply for a job in closest towns, meanwhile he got a letter from Diyarbakir (Amed)

Land Registry and Cadastral Department to start his job as a civil servant. When he starts his job in Diyarbakir (Amed) Land Registry and Cadastral Department he starts to make differentiate between life in capital and in Diyarbakir, differences in ideology of the people, social classes and ethnical differences. He finds out a wide gap of inequalities between Kurdish and Turkish ethnicities. His job as technician officer of land registry and land survey makes him notice and witness the situation of Kurdish people and be aware of the Kurdish discourse at that time. In 1969 when he started his job in Diyarbakir the hottest discourse of daily life was the events in Southern part of Kurdistan's National Liberation Movements, and their struggle against Iraqi state. He reads newspapers of the time and listens the elders' daily debates on Kurds and Kurdistan while that topic was totally forbidden in Turkey. His daily discussions with people at that time made him realize the reality of people and its relation to political process. This is where the third step of political socialization started in Öcalan's life: the concept of Kurdish nation and Kurdistan in the heart of his thinking started to emerge. The emerge of political literacy of Öcalan, all the unanswered question and the reality of the social landscape he lived in , pushed him towards a greater decision, and made him decide to continue his study in university. He registered at Diyarbakir Ziya Gokalp Secondary School to match the subjects that he did not study while he was in Ankara. After a year completing studying the subjects, he attended to university exams and won his chair at department of law in the Istanbul University. Joining university in Istanbul, city of diverse groups, different political views and greater populations marks another stage of political participation of Öcalan's political view. Here is where he witnessed political struggle among university students. In Istanbul Öcalan has put Kurds and Kurdistan in the heart of socialist ideology and prepared himself ideologically and politically to participate in the debates of that time.

Involvement in the Turkish State's Functional Institutions

Öcalan moved from Diyarbakir to Istanbul, while working and civil servant and studying law. After settling down in Istanbul he started his political activities and became member of DDKO (The East Revolutionary Cultural Associations). As

member of DDKO he attended Turkish leftist revolutionary Seminars: his focus was on National Right and Self Determination of Kurdish people and Kurdistan. During his study he started reading books discussing concepts of National Right to Self-Determination from Vladimir Lenin, and discourse of political action. Meanwhile he continues attending Turkish leftist and Kurdish nationalist seminars. The outcome of all this became the concise manifestation that: Kurdistan is a country and Kurd is a nation. The country is been divided and colorized. For instance, in a seminar arranged by DDKO's Istanbul branch for the first time he mentioned Kurdistan as a country and Kur as a nation.

Studding political science in university of Ankara at that time was one of the dreams of Öcalan, so he took exam to join university of Ankara, as the outcomes came out, he was among one of the 20 students who passed the exam, at that time whoever won the chair, could get scholarship from ministry of higher education. In 1971 Öcalan started studying political science in university of Ankara. On 12th of March 1971 military coup took place in Turkey. Leftist political movements were very active among university students of the time. Öcalan as a first-year student of 1971/72 academic year slowly but steadily observes political developments in the university in the Political Science department. At that time, some leftist students joined PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) in Syrian and Lebanon. They were trained as guerrillas and return to Turkey to start Urban and Rural Guerrilla warfare. During their clashes with Turkish Armed forces their leaders were killed. Öcalan was protesting those clashes and distributing leaflets of condemnations, when he was arrested by the police on 08th of April 1972 and was released on 24th of October 1972. When we released in prison Öcalan found himself in the hottest political debates of his time. Moreover, his political activities in action very much highlighted and progressed in another level. So, he started forming a new organization. He was dreaming an organization different and independent than existed Kurdish nationalist and Turkish leftist organizations. As a second-year student of Political Science in 1973 he chose the most energetic, talented and politically active students. His first attempt with six to eight mates at Newroz 1973, took place in Cubuk Dam in Ankara. Except for Ali Haydar Kaytan all other attendees left the group (Abdullah

Öcalan from Urfa, Ali Haydar Kaytan from Dersim, Halil Aslan from Elazig, Mustafa Aksakal from Hilvan-Urfa, Isamil Bingol from Varto-Bingol and Musa Erdogan from Dersim) arguably two other attendees Faruk and Imad. Among them a loyal comrade who ideologically and politically convinced to his ideological points of view was Ali Haydar Kaytan. Together Öcalan and Kaytan continue their search for a new group of active members from university students mostly from different provinces of Kurdish areas of Turkey. It worth mentioning that, during his search four Turkish speakers (Haki and Baki Karer brothers -Haki was killed in 1977, Baki left the PKK in 1984, Kemal Pir lost his life in Amed prison in 1982 in hunger strike and Duran Kalkan still alive one of the PKK leaders) were ideologically organized and became active members in the group. In 1973/1974 becoming leading member of the Student Union in Ankara. The Ankara Revolutionary Higher Education Association (ADYOD in Turkish) was very active and Öcalan was elected as the chair of ADYOD.

Öcalan and his non-Kurdish friends were ideologically and politically on the same page, when they were joining the debates of that time, the subjects were: Kurdistan is a colony of Turkish, Iran, Iraq and Syrian states, Kurds are a nation. At that time a gap feels by Öcalan and hist fellows, and there was a need of creating **an** organization to fight for the Right to Self-Determination. He continues leading the group, according to the witnesses of the time in any debates Öcalan and his comrades were attended, they were the ideological winners of the debate. The group of comrades that Öcalan was thinking and dreaming for formed. The group intentionally did not name itself, to not to have intelligence and the police intention to outsiders, but internally they call themselves as Kurdistan Revolutionaries. All most all members of the group were from the poorest stratum of Kurdish nation, but from Higher Education Students with the ideas of: Kurdistan is a colony, this colony has been divided into four parts between four colonialist states, the Kurds are a Nation, National Right to Self Determination and a Separate National and Political Organization for Kurds and Kurdistan immediately needs to be organized and an Independent United and Democratic Kurdistan is the ultimate strategic aim. These bold points becoming the main topic of political debates of the time.

A New Chapter in Öcalan's political Journey

From 1969 to 1977 Öcalan's political socialization has gained political experience on the base of observation of the real situation of Turkey (Bakuri Kurdistan). A very nucleus political group has been set up and participants of the group were almost from all Kurdish provinces of the country. Political Socialization and political participation stages evolved, political action and political mobilization in the case Kurds in Turkey's political process was moving forward toward what was ideologically the group aimed for. Öcalan's dreams continue coming to reality, and he thought he should have close observation in the actual field, and see the real socio-political situation, hence he started a long journey to Kurdish areas of Turkey (Bakuri Kurdistan) provinces including; Kars, Agri, Bingol, Elazig, Amed, Urfa and Antep/Dilok then back to Ankara.

Up to 1978 Öcalan's illegal headquarter was in Ankara. In May 1977 one of his non-Kurdish fellows Haki Karer was killed in Gaziantep. Öcalan move from Ankara to Diyarbakir. In Diyarbakir he concentrates on Ideological and Political program of the PKK. He wrote his first manifest of the PKK called The Path of Kurdistan Revolution. The group evaluated the situation then decides to upgrade their political activities to an upper stage. On 27th November of the same year a political party the PKK was established under leadership of Öcalan with 23 of active leading members in Diyarbakir. Political situation of Turkey in 1978 in Turkey was critical, there was a very tense fighting between extreme right nationalists and extreme leftist groups. Kurdish Alevites were under attack in the most western Kurdistan city of Kahraman Marash and martial law was declared. In May 1979 a group of PKK cadres in Elazig city were detained. As a result of martial law Öcalan left Turkey via Kobani in Sirya (Rojava) and moved to Damascus Beirut and spread his organization to European countries. This stage is called the stage of formation of the PKK. Up to that stage one can see the evolution, how Öcalan established the PKK? and how manifested its ideological path?

In 1980 military coup took place in Turkey, its civil government replaced by the military generals. Thousands of Kurdish and Turkish political activists imprisoned.

About 300 hundred PKK members were able to illegally cross the border to Syria and get armed training to become guerrillas. Mazlum Dogan, Mehmet Hayri Durmus and Kemal Pir and Mustafa Karasu were members of the PKK leadership, they were in Diyarbakir`s prison and leading the prison resistance. In Newroz 1982 Mazlum lost his life in in the prison.

The Initiation of Kurdish Guerrilla Warfare

PKK started guerrilla war on 15th August 1984 and set up guerrilla army under the name of (Kurdistan National Liberation Army - ARGK -Arteşa Rizgarîya Gelê Kurdistan), and official declaration of Prolonged Popular War. In1985 a popular front of Kurdistan National Liberation Front - ERNK (Enîya Rizgarîya Gelê Kurdistan) mass political mobilization of Kurdish people in support of PKK led guerrilla movement, spread from Turkey (Bakuri Kurdistan) to all other three parts of Kurdistan and Kurdish diaspora around world.

A Political Party, A Guerrilla Army and a Popular Front according to Prolonged Popular War strategy was set up. According to Prolonged Popular War Theory three stage would have to follow as Defense, Balance and Offence. First stage of Defense was moving on and almost in completion when regional and worldwide tectonic change happened. At the second stage of Balance a Geo-Political and Geo-Strategic Earthquake took place worldwide which was the End of Cold War.

Soviet Union as one of the main Superpower leading Socialist System and the Warsaw Pact was collapsed and most of Socialist and Communist Parties failed in their struggle worldwide. Most of leading Socialist and Communist parties dissolved in East European countries; In South-Africa the ANC leader Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison negotiating peace with De-Clark President of South Africa`s White Supremist Apartheid political system; Israel and PLO negotiations started in Oslo to solve the historical conflict of Arab and Israel; Promotion of EC – European Economic Community to EU – European Union and removal of national borders and passport checks among EU members after the end of cold War; After the Second Gulf War with Humanitarian Military

Intervention by UNSC 688 Resolution – Birth of Kurdistan Parliament in Kurdistan region of Iraq and declaration the KRG Kurdistan Regional government; President of Turkey's 'New Approach' to Kurdish Reality and aiming to solve it peacefully; Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani visiting Ankara; all these new developments caused the PKK to start its re-formation process. It is worth mentioning that, PKK was established according to the mode of struggle of Cold War era and needed to reform itself because the Cold war was ended. The defense mode was moved to the balance mode in which Turkish state could not eliminate the guerrilla army and the guerrilla army also could not eliminate Turkish armed forces in Kurdistan as occupying force, so a stalemate situation existed when all those significant changes worldwide happened.

PKK in Post-Cold War Era

PKK's first ceasefire On 17th March 1993 by mediation of Jalal Talabani to start peace negotiations formed. It was for the first time PKK's leader in a press conference declared that they could negotiate everything with the state on the base of democracy and rule of law for equal partners to transform the republic as a democratic one. Öcalan also declared that there would not be a need for an immediate separation if democratic constitutional guarantees are given. In its 5th Congress PKK took off Hammer and Sickle replacing it with a Flambeau and start reformation in its political strategy from independence to federalism too.

After the Cold War most of the NATO members demobilized the Gladio organization, however, Turkey resisted and did not demobilize the Turkish Gladio in the army. In a Gladio conspiracy President Ozal lost his life with his team who wanted to solve Kurdish Question by peaceful means. Following Ozal's death thousands of Turkish military operations took place inside and outside of Turkey's borders resulted more than 17 thousand of extra Judicial killings and destruction of almost 5 thousand of villages from 1993 to 1998. More than 6 million Kurds moved to diaspora and metropolitan cities in Turkey and worldwide.

Öcalan left Syria to Europe; Greece, Russia, Italy with the purpose to solve Kurdish Question peacefully. U.S and UK supported Turkey; Öcalan was taken

to Greece Embassy in Nairobi- Kenya. The aim was taking him to South Africa. However, U.S did not let Greece and handover Mr. Öcalan to Turkey on 15th of February 1999. The abduction and imprisonment of Öcalan in Turkey caused a national unification among majority of Kurds and created a national reaction.

Öcalan's Political Thought During His Imprisonment

While in prison Öcalan offered Turkish state if either of similar political systems like Switzerland or United Kingdom is established in Turkey, Kurdistan National liberation Movement will consider federal or de-centralization as strategic aim. Therefore, the purpose of Declaration of Democratic Solution and establishing Kurdistan Communities Union the KCK (Koma Civakên Kurdistan) was to bring Turkish state to the table of negotiations.

Since 1999 to 2024 the process of evolution of Mr. Öcalan's thoughts from transformation process continued with two serious attempts have been made in 2005 to 2009 and 2013 to 2015 to secure peace and solving Kurdish question by peaceful political means. Both attempts resulted dramatic and destructive consequences. After ten years consecutive very tough and severe fighting between Turkish state and the PKK guerrillas a new stage has been started. One can discuss that the transformation of the PKK which was started from 1999 and ended in in February 2025 and it has evolved to Re-Transformation process. The aim and the motto of Re-Transformation is peace and democratic society.

After Öcalan's 27th February Declaration asking his organization to disband itself end the method of Armed Struggle against Turkish state, PKK immediately responded and declared ceasefire on 5-7 May in two separate areas of Kurdistan region of Iraq (Bashuri Kurdistan) at its 12th Congress dissolved itself and declared the end of the PKK and end of Armed Struggle ready for peaceful solution and return to Turkey doing political activities legally on condition of, if constitutional guarantees were given.

Re-Transformation process of the PKK started after 27 years of imprisonment of Öcalan, in which he was allowed by Turkish State apparatus to have a video call to his fellows to lay down arms. As a gesture of their good will Bese Hozat, Co-

Chair of the KCK and Nedim Seven, PKK's Central Committee member with 28 guerrillas publicly in front of the world media came out from Jasana historic cave burned their arms in a big cauldron and declared that they are ready to participate political process and be in Turkish parliament to continue their political activities in peaceful political means.

Conclusion

Since 5th of August Grand Assembly of Turkey has set A Commission that is called 'National Solidarity, Brotherhood and Democracy Commission' discussing decommission, demobilization and reintegration of the PKK cadres and guerrillas. However, there is upside downs in the trust of public to the government and they think that if the commission did not discuss solution for Kurdish Question, then it would show that they are not serious about peace.

Evolution from the PKK to KCK was end of the idea of nation-state building and start of democratic society-building. Since 1973 with its positive and negative aspects PKK led movement had created a sense of nationhood among Kurdish people to think that they are a nation they should have the same rights as Turks, Arabs and Persians have a sense of a different national identity among Kurds and internationalization of Kurdish Question worldwide.

The PKK led movement has expanded from a classic party movement to a wide range of social movement which compromised of thousands of civil society associations including women liberated leading movement from Kurdistan to wider Middle Eastern region's multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies (Implementation in Rojava). Women and men hand in hand with Assyrians, Armenians Kurds and Arabs to share the same political space and struggle for equal rights and freedoms. This is a new approach that called Democratic Modernity to empower women and all oppressed people regardless of their ethnic, gender and religious believes to govern themselves freely in combination with Capitalist Modernity. Coexistence of ethnicities, ideas and beliefs in practice in North and Eastern Syria and they are sharing political system under the umbrella of Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Their aim and

strategy are Evolution from Confederation of Communities of Kurdistan to Confederation of Middle Eastern Communities.

The question is whether the status quo and the system of the UN which has based on Nation-State system is a huge impasse facing this understanding or could both Democratic Modernity and Capitalist Modernity be compromised in near future? Time, Space, Change and Continuity will tell. Finally, Öcalan said: 'I believe in the Power of Politics' means that 52 years of struggle and its evolution in many steps could be the hidden answer and self-evidence of the new evolution of Re-Transformation process.