

CATS Network Roundup

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the CATS Network Roundup of news, developments, and assessments concerning relevant issues about Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy.

This issue sheds light on the **current state of the PKK disarmament and dissolution process**, roughly one year after the organisation announced its dissolution and formally ended the armed struggle. Although the process appears to have stalled in recent months, it appears to move forward behind the scenes – albeit slowly and amid considerable political tensions. The PKK’s disarmament and dissolution have **consequences for security dynamics in Iraq and Syria, and for Ankara’s relations with regional Kurdish actors**. All of these are discussed in this issue.

This issue was at the later stages of production when a **court in Ankara declared on 21 May the CHP party congress of 2023 null and void**, triggering new political turbulence in Turkish domestic politics. **We have maintained our original focus**. The PKK’s disarmament and dissolution and the crackdown on the CHP are not separate developments, but rather manifestations of the efforts to contain and control parties and groups in the opposition.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please e-mail us at cats@swp-berlin.org.

On the Spot



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A year after the PKK dissolved its congress and declared an end to the armed struggle, **the disarmament process between the Turkish government and the PKK has entered a critical phase**. This is due to the persistent delay of the necessary legislative measures to regulate the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of PKK fighters. For some observers, this may already constitute a stalemate. A more sober reading, however, suggests that **despite its slow pace, the process continues to move forward**.

To begin with, the two lead figures remain visibly committed to keeping the process alive: PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the ultranationalist MHP. **Öcalan’s sustained communication over the past year with Kurdish actors in Kandil and Rojava has reinforced his influence over those structures** and helped prevent the process from derailing. **Bahçeli has consistently advocated measures such as clarifying Öcalan’s formal status**, recognising the “right to hope”, securing the release of Selahattin Demirtaş, and ending the trustee policy, thereby making himself a critical voice on the democratic prerequisites for any meaningful resolution, albeit without success.

Support for the process goes beyond Öcalan and Bahçeli. **The recently ousted leadership of the main opposition CHP – Özgür Özal and the jailed mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu – also expressed support for the continuation of the process**, despite sustained judicial pressure from the government. The party declined to send a representative to the İmralı delegation. Yet, it also insisted that disarmament alone cannot define the scope of the process and called for a democratisation agenda. **The DEM Party, as the primary Kurdish political actor in contact with both the government and other parties, has assumed a facilitative role**: keeping lines of communication open, working to ensure that all parties are engaged in the process, and campaigning for Öcalan to be granted formal status. **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, for his part, has maintained a deliberate distance from the outset**. He neither claimed political ownership of the process nor sought to anchor it within a broader social contract, yet he has been quietly enabling the mechanisms required for it to function.

The perception that the process has stalled is based largely on the delay of the expected legal measures. PKK fighters are still awaiting legislation that would enable their return and open a path to civilian political participation. Ankara is following a different sequence: legal steps only after disarmament, which would be verified through a mechanism under the government’s own oversight. A more workable formula would likely see these tracks run in parallel – visible evidence of disarmament combined with an active legislative drafting process.

“Kurdish communities, weary of prolonged conflict, broadly prefer even a slow and imperfect integration process to a return to war.”

Different sequencing logics are not the only obstacle to the long-awaited legislation reaching parliament before the end of the summer. **Further uncertainty stems from Erdoğan’s electoral calculations and the risk of nationalist parties mobilising against the process**. Erdoğan has most recently stated that he intends to proceed in line with the parliamentary commission’s report and bring the process to a conclusion. Yet, a less likely, though still plausible scenario would involve deferring the legislative process until after the elections. Such a course would spare Erdoğan domestic pressure during the campaign, while potentially enhancing the Kurdish side’s bargaining leverage, particularly ahead of a possible second-round vote. **It remains uncertain how the PKK would respond to further delays in the legislation**.

That said, **Öcalan’s strategic commitment to disarmament – a decision unlikely to be reversed even if the process encounters obstacles – mitigates the risk of a return to armed conflict**. Öcalan’s sustained communication with SDF and PKK structures reinforces this dynamic and limits the room for unilateral escalation. This could change if the escalatory dynamics of the US-Israel war against Iran and developments in Syria were to provide a legitimate justification for a return to armed struggle, which for now remains an unlikely prospect. **The integration agreement in Syria is likely to produce a Kurdish structure embedded within the Syrian state rather than an autonomous one, reducing the perceived threat to Türkiye and giving Kurds a stake in a stable settlement**.

A second mitigating factor is the broader trajectory of Kurdish society towards civilian political engagement. For their part, **Kurdish communities, weary of prolonged conflict, broadly prefer even a slow and imperfect integration process to a return to war**. Those within the PKK who resist laying down arms would face a serious legitimacy deficit. Slow as the current pace may be, continuation rather than collapse remains the more rational course for all parties. Ankara has the opportunity to close a longstanding security file at comparatively low cost. (*Reha Ruhanoglu*)

Three Questions for...



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What have been the implications of the PKK’s announcement of its disarmament and dissolution in May 2025, particularly in Iraq and Syria?

The immediate situation on the ground has not changed substantially, but the medium- and long-term potential is significant: the PKK’s dissolution gives Turkey space to desecuritize its policies towards Kurds inside Turkey, in Syria, Iraq and Iran. In Syria, especially, Turkey’s PKK problem has driven the deep securitisation and militarisation of the Kurdish question for over a decade, costing Syrian Kurds substantially while foreclosing any alliance between Ankara and the Kurds, both before and after the fall of Assad. With that chapter potentially closing, the central obstacle could finally be lifted, opening the way for a fundamentally different Turkish approach to Kurdish actors across the region. Those actors, for their part, share a clear view: they have done their role, and it is now incumbent on the Turkish state to desecuritize the Kurdish issue and accommodate Kurdish aspirations.

How has the recent US–Israel–Iran war so far affected these dynamics?

Turkey’s initiative to negotiate with the PKK may be partly driven by a desire to stabilise its relationship with Kurds inside Turkey, ensuring that shocks in Iran, as previously in Syria, do not place Kurdish actors in direct confrontation with Turkish security objectives. In early March, days after the confrontation began, reports emerged of US support for Kurdish military activity inside Iran. Ankara reacted swiftly in opposition, and the initiative collapsed. Had it materialised, Iranian Kurds, including PKK-affiliated groups, might have become actors of sufficient military and political weight to alarm Turkey.

Meanwhile, between March and April, Iran and its Iraqi proxies launched over 800 drone and rocket attacks on the Kurdistan Region, most targeting Erbil, an Ankara ally, further widening the rift between the KRG and Tehran. These dynamics, unfolding at the margins of the US–Israel–Iran confrontation, collectively pave the way for warmer Ankara–Kurdish relations across the region. During this period, Ankara–PUK relations, long marked by hostility, have also improved. This is not solely a product of the current war, but the broader environment is now more favourable to cooperation than confrontation.

How do you assess the implications of the escalation dynamics since October 7, 2023, for the intra-Kurdish power balance?

A new consensus is emerging among most Kurdish political actors: armed struggle should no longer define or lead Kurdish politics in the Middle East. Instead, Kurdish movements are increasingly oriented towards integration – into the states where they live, and into national economies, governments, elections, and broader civic life. The escalation dynamics since October 7 have reinforced this shift, exposing the costs of remaining locked into militarised postures while regional powers reshape the map around them. The ongoing PKK–Turkey talks can be read as the most concrete expression of this transformation: a recognition that political integration, not armed confrontation, offers Kurds across the region a more sustainable path to influence and security.

Recommendations

In their IstanPol Institute analysis, [Seren Selvin Korkmaz and Riccardo Gasco](#) examine how the Iran war is reshaping Ankara’s approach to the Kurdish question. They argue that Turkey is pursuing a strategy of preventive stabilisation while seeking to manage Kurdish dynamics at home and across its borders in order to limit regional spillovers and maintain greater strategic flexibility amid shifting power balances in the Middle East.

In his OSW commentary, [Krzysztof Strachota](#) examines the collapse of the Kurdish autonomous administration in Syria following a Syrian government offensive in January 2026. He argues that the fall of the Kurdish quasi-state marks a strategic turning point for both Syria’s post-war reintegration and the wider Kurdish political landscape. He maintains that the collapse weakens the PKK’s most developed political project and reshapes Kurdish politics, with implications for Turkey’s ongoing peace process.

In her OSW analysis, [Zuzanna Krzyżanowska](#) revisits the Turkish–Kurdish peace process one year on, tracing developments from the PKK’s dissolution and disarmament ceremony in Iraqi Kurdistan to the stalled legislative follow-through. She argues that despite major Kurdish concessions, the process has reached an impasse, with Ankara linking legal reforms to full demilitarisation while key Kurdish demands remain unaddressed.

In her Foreign Policy publication, [Sinem Adar](#) analyses the structural obstacles to a sustainable resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey, arguing that peace initiatives involving the PKK cannot be decoupled from the broader political context in which they unfold. Rather than treating the Kurdish issue only as a matter of security or national unity, the article calls for recognition of cultural and political diversity as integral to any durable settlement.

In a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace contribution, [Alper Coşkun and Garo Paylan](#) argue that the PKK’s decision to disarm opens a historic window for peace and regional stabilisation. However, the opportunity for genuine reconciliation between the Turkish state and the Kurds could be squandered without meaningful democratic reforms and political inclusion.

Kind regards,
The CATS Team

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