

Turkish Jails: Packed with Kurds, Only Seven Members of ISIS

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– According to a recent public statement by the HDP party, 1,478 Kurdish politicians — including 78 democratically-elected mayors — have been arrested since July 2016.

– The co-heads of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksektas, are also in jail. Prosecutors seek up to 142 years in jail for Demirtas and up to 83 years in jail for Yuksektas. One of the charges directed to Demirtas is “managing a terrorist organization.”

– According to a recent report by Turkey’s Platform for Independent Journalism (P24), 151 individuals are in prison for being journalists or for being employed in the news media. Dozens of TV stations, news agencies, newspapers, magazines, and radio stations have been closed down by the Turkish government.

– In Turkey, it seems, ISIS members are freer than journalists and peaceful, democratically-elected Kurdish politicians.

According to the Turkish ministry of justice, only seven members of the Islamic State (ISIS) have been convicted of crimes and jailed in Turkey in the last year and a half.

The data was made public when Bekir Bozdogan, the Turkish justice minister, was asked in Turkey’s parliament the number of ISIS convicts in Turkish jails.

One of the many ISIS members in Turkey that has been released by Turkish courts is Abdulsamet C., arrested on September 2 of last year on charges of being a member of a terrorist organization.

Abdulsamet C. confessed that he had travelled to Syria to join ISIS in 2014. He added that an Azeri man with

the code-name “Ammar”, who spread ISIS propaganda in an Istanbul mosque, provided him with contact information that enabled him to go to the Turkish city of Gaziantep, through which he entered Syria, where he joined ISIS.

Abdulsamet C. said that he went to the Syrian town of Jarabulus with a group of people, received religious education in the town of Manbij for a month, and then traveled around to Iraq and Syria before returning to Turkey in July 2015.

Seeking to benefit from the “Active Repentance Law,” he was released by a Turkish court on probation. Yet he continued to be in contact with ISIS even after returning to the Umraniye neighborhood in Istanbul, where his family resides.

An indictment drafted for Abdulsamet C. by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office includes evidence showing his connections with ISIS, such as banners, photographs, videos and songs. During a raid on Abdulsamet C.’s house, police also found a book entitled, “44 Ways of Supporting Jihad,” which is banned in Turkey.

Despite all the evidence at hand, Abdulsamet C. was released by an Istanbul court on probation on the grounds that he has a permanent residence in Istanbul. The newspaper Hurriyet contacted the lawyer of the ISIS member, who said he was surprised at the release of his client.

Meanwhile, Turkish courts have arrested several deputies and politicians of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), as well as Kurdish mayors from the Democratic Regions’ Party (DBP). The total number of HDP deputies under arrest is 12. Trustees have been appointed by the government to replace the arrested mayors in the country’s predominantly Kurdish southeast.

According to a recent public statement by the HDP, 1,478 Kurdish politicians — including 78 democratically-elected mayors — have been arrested since July 2016.

The co-heads of the HDP party, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksektas, are also in jail. Prosecutors seek up to 142 years in jail for Demirtas and up to 83 years in jail for Yuksekdag. One of the charges directed to Demirtas is “managing a terrorist organization.”

Journalists critical of the government are also under various pressures in Turkey. According to a recent report by Turkey’s Platform for Independent Journalism (P24), 151 individuals are in prison for being journalists or for being employed in the news media. Dozens of TV stations, news agencies, newspapers, magazines and radio stations have also been closed down by the Turkish government. The Kurdish media in particular is under attack. Many of the arrested journalists work for the pro-Kurdish media.

In the meantime, an Islamic State (ISIS) member who appeared in an ISIS propaganda video threatening Turkey has previously been detained twice in Turkey and released.

According to Hurriyet, the recently identified militant, Hasan Aydin, was detained in 2012 in an operation targeting al-Qaeda in the southern province of Adana but later released. He was again detained in 2015, while attempting to cross into Syria.

Military equipment and a drone were found in the minibus Aydin was using, and he was summoned to court. He was later released on condition of judicial control.

According to Kurdish politician Ayhan Bilgen, the movement of Islamist terrorists from Syria to Turkey has been escalating recently,

During the opening speech of the party assembly at the HDP headquarters in Ankara on January 22, Bilgen, an HDP MP and spokesman, said that members of ISIS, the al-Nusra Front, Ahrar al-Sham, and the Free Syrian Army, which have roots in al-Qaeda, have been moving in large numbers from Syria to Turkey.

“This is loud and clear. A market has been formed in Ankara. There are regular trips between Raqqa [an ISIS

stronghold in Syria] and ASTI [Ankara's main bus terminal] for \$1,250 per passenger. Everybody knows the traffic [of militants] is intense. What are the security and intelligence units in Turkey doing in the face of that? Who took these people there and are they being brought back? And what is expected from bringing back groups such as ISIS and al-Nusra?"

Following these remarks, Bilgen was arrested on "terror charges," on January 31.

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Uzay Bulut, a journalist born in Turkey, is currently based in Washington D.C.

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