



Photo: Pivox

By placing themselves in the way of tanks, Ankara's civilian population obstructed the attempted coup d'état in July 2016.

to treat the injured until they are handed over to the rescue teams of the regular army. These three parameters enable the PÖH to conduct joint operations with the military at home and abroad.

The Trench Operations

After the parliamentary elections in Turkey in June 2015, the Kurdish terrorist organisation PKK intensified the bomb attacks on the security forces and the civilian population with the aim of plunging South Anatolian cities into chaos. To contain the situation, on 24 and 25 July 2015 the General Directorate of Police launched countermeasures against the PKK, DHKP-C and ISIS in many cit-

ies. The fighting escalated rapidly and led to a war-like situation in the region. The PKK had grown rapidly because it used the "solution process" initiated by the AKP government from September 2013 to July 2015 to reform and prepare for home and street fighting. During these two years, many PKK fighters had moved from the mountains to the inner cities, turning many houses into large ammunition and weapons depots and connecting hundreds of houses with tunnels. During the fighting, the Turkish armed forces, especially the PÖHs in the southeast Anatolian cities of Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Cizre, Mardin and Nusaybin, suffered losses during house-to-house fighting. The trench warfare was ex-

hausting. The terrorists tried to mobilize the civilian population against the Turkish armed forces. City curfews were imposed and large areas were temporarily declared military security zones. Curfews were only abolished once the cities were liberated from PKK terrorists. The PÖHs and army confiscated thousands of large-calibre weapons and defused over 10,000 IEDs. After the fighting, the cities were rebuilt. Almost 40,000 security forces and well over 5,000 terrorists were involved in the fighting - 250 members of the army and police died, and the PKK's losses were well over 3,000. From then on, the population admired the PÖH all the more, and the number of applicants increased rapidly.

The Failed Coup d'État in 2016

The attempt by parts of the Turkish military to overthrow the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the cabinet of Binali Yıldırım (AKP), with the help of US-based priest Fetullah Gülen, is perceived in recent Turkish history as the military's betrayal of its own people. In Ankara and Istanbul, there were serious clashes between the putschists and civilian population. The civilian population obstructed the coup by often grouping themselves in front of tanks, which resulted in dozens of civilians being killed. More than 250 people were killed. The PÖHs and the police, together with the population, joined forces against the putschists and fought them with small arms.

The putschists undertook cruel action against the population. The situation escalated when the parts of the air force attacked the Parliament, the secret service centre Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı (MİT) and PÖH headquarters in Ankara/Gölbasi with bombs. On the evening of 15 July, the senior leadership of PÖH were called to a meeting at the headquarters to discuss how to address the attempted coup d'état. It was at this moment when the F-16 aircraft bombed the headquarters, killing 51 elite police officers, members of PÖH and while an F-16 downed a police helicopter.

All in all, the botched coup attempt damaged the reputation of the army among the Turkish population, and saw thousands of young volunteers applying to join the police service. The destroyed PÖH headquarters was quickly rebuilt and ceremoniously reopened by President Erdoğan, with family members of killed PÖH officers present.

The Turkish Military Offensive in Northern Syria from 2016 to 2017

Turkey's military offensive 'Operation Euphrates Shield', which began on 24 August 2016, saw Turkey become the third country after Russia and Iran to intervene in Syria. Later, the US armed forces would also intervene in Syria, alongside several Kurdish militias, including PYD, the 'henchmen' of the PKK terrorist organization. The reason for the military offensive was an IS suicide attack in Gaziantep on 20 August 2016 that killed 60.

The Turkish military offensive had two aims: first, to ensure security at Turkey's southern border by ridding the region of terrorist groups such as PYD, PKK and IS. Secondly, to preserve the territorial integrity of Syria, which is by no means easy, as it contradicts the intentions of Russia and Damascus government. Alongside regular Turkish forces, PÖH units were involved in the offensive. As in previous missions, their experience in urban combat proved particularly helpful. On 29 March 2017, IS was expelled from the Turkish border region and the offen-

sive was declared over. The PÖH established the Free Syrian Police to resume local police work. Training, equipment and vehicles were provided by Turkey, and the local police will continue to be supported by local PÖH officers. In addition to the special operations of the JÖH, 4000 PÖH police officers will be stationed in the region. The offensive was the first step in creating the basis for further activities in the region. In the meantime, PÖH has acquired additional competencies at home and abroad. In addition to police activities, their paramilitary skills were also put into practice.

The Turkish Military Offensive on Afrin

The military offensive in the city of Afrin in Northern Syria began on 20 January 2018 under the name 'Operation Olive Branch'. The aim was to destroy the Kurdish PYD militias, which Turkey classifies as extension of the PKK terrorist organization, and to expel them from northern Syria and from the border area to Turkey. As a sovereign state, Turkey aims to undermine the autonomy claims of the Kurds in

northern Syria and northern Iraq. Kurdish nationalism supported, in particular, by the two terrorist organizations YPG and PKK. Turkey has notified the US of its offensive against the YPG and its concern for its security interests.

However, Turkey's concerns as a long-standing NATO partner were not heard in the US. Instead, the US provided the Kurdish militias in the Northern Syrian border regions with thousands of containers full of weapons and trained them militarily to help them fight IS. In a speech, a senior US official spoke of 60,000-strong PYD troops. In principle, Turkey's fears should be taken seriously, because the weapons supplied could one day be used not only in Turkey but also in Europe, thereby jeopardising Europe's security. The Turkish armed forces needed about three months to conquer the northern Syrian city of Afrin. On 18 March, the Turkish general staff announced that Afrin was under the control of Turkish troops and Free Syrian Army.

Shortly after capturing the city of Afrin, Turkey began to consolidate its control over the district through a series of measures. During the conquest of Afrin, PÖH

Photo: via author



During 'Operation Olive Branch' in early 2018, Turkish-supported 'Free Syrian Army' fighters hoisting the Turkish and Syrian flag on top of Barsaya mountain.

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