

By Aliza Marcus

Solmaz'a bir cevap

Cengiz Solmaz doesn't like my book, *Kan ve Inanc*. He also doesn't think much of me. In a recent article, he accused me of being an arrogant Westerner, an "Orientalist" (which basically means an arrogant Westerner), a bad analyst and an even worse analyst when it comes to the PKK. To his credit, he offered to debate me. K24.com and Basnews both agreed to publish my response.

Before I respond to the specific criticisms, I want to explain what my book is about and why there is controversy about it. *Kan ve Inanc* (which was first published in the U.S., and then published by Iletisim) explains how and why the PKK grew to be the most influential, powerful and popular Kurdish national group in Turkey. It is based on interviews with close to 100 former PKK members, PKK activists, PKK supporters, Kurdish opposition figures, Kurdish politicians and those who worked with the PKK in Europe and the Middle East. I explain, giving details never before published, how a small group of Kurdish idealists managed to emerge as the number one Kurdish force, while all other groups failed. My book builds the history of the PKK using stories of people who were in the PKK. Readers get an eyewitness account of what was happening. What Solmaz really doesn't like is that my book looks at the PKK from all the angles, including the PKK response to dissent (like the Semir Olayi), Ocalan's role in certain decisions and some other issues. But critics like Solmaz miss the bigger story. Without Ocalan, the PKK never would have emerged and it never would have survived. There's a lot about the PKK, like any underground armed rebel group, that isn't very pretty. That's not the point. **The PKK is now arguably the most important Kurdish movement in the region, not just in Turkey. The group stands ready to rule over a huge territory stretching from northern Syria across to eastern Turkey. It is very important to understand and know the PKK.** My book gives the first -- and still only -- detailed history of the PKK. This means the good and the bad. But don't let me tell you -- read it yourself.

Now let the debate begin.

1. Cengiz Solmaz misrepresents my discussion of the 1960 coup (which is only one paragraph in my book). He says that I called the 1960 military coup a “liberal coup”. This, according to him, proves I don’t understand Turkey and I don’t understand the Kurds. It’s Cengiz Solmaz who doesn’t understand. I didn’t call the coup liberal. Coups are by definition anti-democratic. I didn’t say that the coup led to a real democracy. I certainly didn’t imply things changed for the Kurds. To quote from my book: “Ironik olan, egitimli seckinlerin arka ciktiği darbenin, yurttaşların group gorebilecigi en liberal donemin onunu acmis olmasiydi....Kimi Kurt eylemciler yeni liberal atmosferi dogrudan dogruya sinayip hayal kirikligini ugradi....Oyle gorunuyordu ki Turkiye’nin liberallesmesi buraya kadardi.” p.36-37
2. Cengiz Solmaz accuses me of distorting the PKK’s early years. I wrote that the PKK sought to undermine groups that stood in its way. He says that on the contrary, the PKK was attacked by other groups. He cites a relative who was attacked by both KUK and the Turkish left because he was close to the PKK. Cengiz may be right about what happened to his relative, but he’s wrong about the bigger picture. First, it’s surprising to hear this argument because the PKK’s early aggressiveness is rarely disputed. Why would it be? The PKK attracted the most active and the most committed Kurdish nationalists. The PKK didn’t want to waste time giving speeches. They didn’t want to risk their lives to put out a newspaper. In other words, they didn’t want to join Kemal Burkay’s party. The PKK’s first cadre was ready to fight for what they wanted. Abdullah Ocalan created a group that gave them that opportunity. This was a big reason for the PKK’s popularity. I’m sure Solmaz has read Ocalan’in Elazigi 1977 konusmasi (Ilk Konusmalar, Wesanen Serxwebun, 91). Ocalan is very clear about his views towards other groups, accusing them of “isbirligi” (s. 88). Don’t misunderstand. The PKK wasn’t the only group that fought Kurdish rivals. Most Kurdish groups, especially KUK (as Solmaz notes) were intolerant of each other. Across the border, the PUK and KDP also were attacking each other. This intra Kurdish violence wasn’t surprising. These groups all believed they were right and they wanted to lead. But the PKK’s plan to make revolution immediately, and its very active and committed cadre, made it more often the aggressor. However, it’s

those very same qualities that made it possible for the PKK to survive the 1980 coup, build itself up and launch its fight. Other groups, obviously, disintegrated after the 1980s coup. But not the PKK. Where Solmaz sees a slur against the PKK, I see an analysis that helps us understand what gave the PKK its strength and helped make it so popular.

3. Solmaz distorts what I say concerning the PKK's first years. I state very clearly – and often -- that the PKK emerged precisely because of factors that included a lack of space in the legal field to operate. There are many examples of this in my book. Here are just three of them: “Bariscil bir gosteriye katildigi gerekcesiyle tutuklanmis olmak Ocalan'i, Turkiye demokrasisinin eylemde bulunabilmek icin pek az alan sagladigina ikna etti. (s.44)”; “Turkiye demokrasisinin bir gizli yuzu vardi, sakat bir demokrasiydi...Turkiyedeki idare tarzindan kurtulabilmek icin yasal ya da demokratik yollari kullannamazdiniz,” Selahattin Celik diyordu (s.49); Azman said he joined in 1988 because he saw no other way.(s.183): “Insanlar silahlı mucadeleyi son care olarak seciyordu, ilk tercih bu degil...Turkiye'de hicbir demokratik acilim yoktu.” The Turkish left's refusal to support Kurdish nationalism also helped. I don't ignore that at all. That's a key message throughout my book.
4. Cengiz Solmaz accuses me of not reading the PKK's - Kürdistan Devriminin Yolu. He says it would have made my analysis much better. Well, I have good news. I did read it. I regret that this title was accidentally left off the book's bibliography. Does this mean Cengiz Solmaz will now appreciate my analysis? I hope so. Because it wasn't the only PKK book I relied on. I probably own the biggest collection of original PKK publications. I used them all for my book. I own Kurdistan Devrimin Yolu (my edition was republished in December 1984), I have a Mayis 1979 copy of Serxwebun pamphlet, which is dedicated to Haki Karer and Halil Cavgun, lays out the PKK's theoretical framework and goes into detail into the Hilvan olayi. I also have a copy of “Ideoloji ve Politika Nedir Nasil Ortaya Cikmistir” (birinci baskisi 1978, my edition 1986) and the hard to find “Direnmek Yasamaktir” (first edition, 1981, my edition is December 1984).

5. Cengiz Solmaz doesn't like the people I interviewed. Because they quit the PKK, he writes, they certainly must be suffering from travmayı ve dengesizli i. They can't be trusted, is what he is saying. This is the heart of his criticism of my book. Because if the people I interviewed can't be trusted, then how can my analysis be trusted? I will just say the following, which I have said in many places. My books isn't just based on what people told me in interviews. I read every report that the PKK issued, including Ocalan's speeches, and every issues of Yeni Ulke, Gundem and Turkey's Hurriyet and Milliyet covering the period starting around 1984. I also was a reporter writing about the PKK and the rebel for almost a decade, including a few years based in Turkey. I went to villages as they were still burning after Turkish soldiers had come to force people out. I went to the Cudi Mountains and stayed in a PKK camp – probably the first foreign journalist to do that (if not the first journalist). My book is built on all those experiences and interviews.

6. Cengiz Solmaz keeps saying I'm not objective. What does objective really mean? I give the information about the PKK in my book without any judgment. I don't say it was right or wrong to attack other groups, to kill dissidents or to target teachers. I explain why, in the context of the PKK's goals and ideology, these things made sense. If this isn't objective, then we obviously define the word differently. Cengiz Solmaz, like some other critics, wants me to ignore certain troubling events from the PKK's history. But that's not history. That's propaganda. I leave that to others to do.

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