***Old Dominion University***

***College of Arts and Letters***

***The Graduate Program in International Studies***

## **Doctoral Dissertation Defense**

**Akin Guneri**

**The Transformation of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party): Exploring Domestic, Regional, and Global Dynamics**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the underlying factors behind the political and ideological transformation of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) since its foundation. Through the detailed analysis of the role of Turkey’s internal versus external factors on the evolution of the PKK over time, this work finds that changing political developments in the Middle East were more influential than Turkey’s shifting domestic political environment. Hypothesis testing revealed that the 1991 Gulf War, 2003 Iraq War, changing political dynamics of the Middle East following Syria’s Arab Spring, and policy changes worldwide implemented after the 9/11 terrorist attacks played determining role in the PKK’s shifting profile over time. Turkey’s political sphere regarding the Kurdish issue, however, fell short in providing overarching explanation over the terrorist organization’s changing ultimate goal. Findings showed that the terrorist organization’s ultimate goal and its concomitant strategies led the Turkish government to adjust its counterterrorism policies rather than vice versa, which indicates the importance of the external factors and the PKK’s capability to keep up with the changing regional and international realities.

Data were collected through the study of Ocalan’s prison writings, his defense texts, organization’s official documents, reports and final declaration of PKK congresses and conferences, statements of PKK cadres, and the pro-PKK media outlets. The findings indicate that the interwined projects of democratic republic, democratic confederalism, and democratic autonomy in the last decade as well as the goal of a separate Kurdish state before 1999 resulted from the detailed analysis of changing regional and international conjuncture by the leadership of terrorist organization, especially jailed Ocalan.

**Dissertation Chair:** Dr. Steve A. Yetiv

**Dissertation Committee:** Dr. Austin Jersild and Dr. Robyn L. Diehl

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**Monday, April 15, 2013**

**10:00 a.m.**