

ROJAVA

& the Kurdish Fight for Freedom

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Introduction

With the eruption of the murderous Islamic State in Iraq and Syria in 2014, the Kurdish people were inescapably thrust onto the front lines of the struggle against it.

It was the forces of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq and the Kurdish militia in Rojava in northern Syria — the Peoples Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) — that furnished the most staunch, unyielding and effective opposition to the jihadist gangs.

It was the epic and heroic Kurdish defence of Kobanê (October 2014-January 2015) that first brought Rojava and its amazing revolution to the attention of the world.

Rojava is a remarkable people's revolution. It has been marked by an absolutely unprecedented effort to empower women, a genuine ethnic and religious pluralism, grassroots democracy based on assemblies and communes, and a growing ecological concern.

Obviously, Rojava represents a mortal threat to Western imperialism and all the reactionary regimes in the region. It shows how things could be very different.

The Turkish regime has long supported and used the IS gangs against Rojava. When this was insufficient to stop the revolution, Turkey intervened directly. In 2016 it occupied Jarablus, across the Euphrates from Kobanê, and in early 2018 it invaded Afrin. Previously the most peaceful part of Syria, Afrin is now a brutal, lawless place. In 2019 Turkey attacked the remaining Rojava cantons but has been unable to completely crush the AANES (Autonomous Administration of North & East Syria).

The collection of articles in this pamphlet attempts to provide an introduction to the Rojava Revolution and its struggle to survive in an extremely challenging situation.

But while Rojava is the focus, we also take up the wider Kurdish question. The Kurds are one people who have been split by imperialism between four countries and are denied justice and freedom in all of them.

They desperately need the support and solidarity of progressive people everywhere.

Dave Holmes

February, 2021

The Kurdish Freedom Struggle: Oppression & Resistance

By Dave Holmes

The Kurds are the largest ethnic group without a state of their own. They are divided between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. There is also a sizeable diaspora.

How many Kurds are there? In Turkey this is an especially politically-charged issue and estimates vary considerably. A September 20, 2012 article by Mashallah Dakak reported on data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, a government agency. Using this data, the author suggested that 20 million was a reasonable estimate of the number of Kurds living in Turkey — 27% of the then total population of 74.7 million.¹

The Wikipedia entry under “Kurds” gives the following 2017 estimates: Turkey 14.3-20 million, Iran 8.2-12 million, Iraq 5.6-8.5 million and Syria 2-3.6 million — making a total of around 30-44 million in the region. Then there is a large diaspora, especially in Europe — in Germany alone Wikipedia gives a range of 1.2-1.5 million Kurds. So the global total is 32-46 million Kurds.

Kurds big losers in postwar settlement

In the Middle East, World War I saw British and French imperialism each manoeuvring to grab as much territory from the collapsing Ottoman empire as possible. Britain seized what became Palestine, Jordan and Iraq and the French got Lebanon and Syria. The Kurds were promised their own homeland but this didn't happen.

After the war many Turkish cities and towns were occupied by the British and French

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and their allies. In May 1919 a Greek army invaded Turkey. The war of independence lasted from 1919 to 1923. In October of that year a republic was proclaimed. Mustafa Kemal, the victor of Gallipoli, was its first president and dominating figure.

Despite his vaunted secularism, Kemal and the nationalist officers around him wanted a Turkey made up of Sunni Muslims and saw other communities as a threat to the integrity of the state. The 1915 genocide had dealt with the Christian Armenians. The Kurds were too numerous and would have to be forcibly assimilated.

During the war of independence against the imperialists and their proxies, when Kurdish support was vital, Kemal stressed that in the new state “Turks and Kurds would live as brothers and equals”. But once victory had been assured, Kemal was quick to declare that “the state which we have just created is a Turkish state”.²

In March 1924, a government decree banned all Kurdish schools, associations and publications. For decades even speaking Kurdish was a crime. The Kurdish regions were subject to brutal repression. Several revolts were ruthlessly crushed.

Even today, despite a number of concessions, Kurds in Turkey are still denied public education in their mother tongue.

Syria: Kurds faced Arabisation campaigns

The largest non-Arab minority, the Kurdish population in Syria suffered heavy discrimination under successive Arab-chauvinist regimes before the creation of Rojava.

In 1962 some 120,000 Kurds in Hasaka province were stripped of Syrian citizenship and all the rights to work, property, education, etc. that go with it. Often they were forced off their land and Arab or Assyrian settlers moved in.

In 1973 in Hasaka the Syrian authorities dispossessed tens of thousands of Kurds of their land which was given to Arab settlers moved in from other areas.

These and other Arabisation campaigns substantially changed the demography of northern Syria. In Rojava today, the regions between the original three cantons have large Arab majorities. Dealing with the legacy of this ethnic cleansing and bringing some measure of justice to the victims demands the greatest political sensitivity, tolerance and democracy.

Iraq: Oppression & betrayal

The history of the Kurds in Iraq is one of continuous struggle for their rights against various Arab-chauvinist regimes in Baghdad.

One of the most ghastly episodes occurred towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war. On March 16, 1988 the Kurdish city of Halabja was subjected to a gas attack by the forces of the Saddam Hussein regime. Up to 5000 people were killed, with thousands

more badly injured.

Halabja was part of the regime's genocidal 1986-89 Al-Anfal campaign which targeted the Kurdish and other non-Arab minorities. As many as 180,000 Kurds were killed.

In August 1990 Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, leading to the first Gulf War. In early 1991 the United States urged the Iraqi people to rise up and topple the regime. Uprisings took place in both the south and in the Kurdish areas in the north. Most of Kurdistan was liberated. But Washington took no concrete action to help the insurgents and the regime was able to crush the southern rebels.

Then it moved against the Kurds. Unable to match the firepower of the regime forces, the Kurdish rebellion collapsed and hundreds of thousands of refugees fled into the mountains.

The US established a no-fly protected zone in the north and in 1992 a Kurdish-controlled region was established — the Kurdistan Regional Government. However, this area was not subject to a unified Kurdish administration but was divided into a northern zone controlled by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Massoud Barzani, and a southern one dominated by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Jalal Talabani. The KDP and PUK fought a civil war between 1994 and 1996 in which several thousand people died.

Iraq: Kurdistan Regional Government

The PKK and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the dominant party in Rojava, represent the revolutionary wing of the Kurdish movement. Massoud Barzani and the KDP leadership, on the other hand, are a conservative, corrupt wing of the movement. Indeed, the Barzani leadership is tribal with family members occupying key positions of power. The PUK leadership is much the same although more friendly to the PKK.³

The revolutionary and conservative wings are engaged in a struggle for political influence. However, at key moments of the war against the Islamic State, the intervention of PKK and YPG/YPJ forces in Iraq has been vital and the KRG leadership has been forced to acknowledge them.

The KRG peshmerga is not a true national army but is largely divided into units controlled by either the KDP or the PUK.

The KDP is hostile to the PYD. The KDP has tried to establish an armed presence in Rojava but has been blocked by the YPG/YPJ.

Turkey has close relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government. A large number of Turkish firms are active in the area (1500 according to a 2013 estimate)⁴; each year Turkey exports billions of dollars of goods to Kurdistan and takes most of its oil.

A great deal of investment money has poured into Kurdistan, much of it going into building fancy shopping malls. Corruption is widespread and the gap between rich and poor is growing.

In April 2014 the KRG dug a 26km-long trench, two metres deep and three metres wide along its border with Rojava. The PYD and the PKK denounced it as project to isolate the Kurdish areas of Syria.

The Barzani leadership of the KRG leadership is collaborating closely with Turkey in its current assault (2020 and continuing) on the base areas of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in northern Iraq

Iran: Islamic Republic oppresses Kurds

Iran is a multi-ethnic country with Persians a majority but with non-Persians making up around 40% of the population. Iranian Kurds welcomed the 1979 revolution which overthrew Shah Reza Pahlavi. They rose up and took control of their areas. But the new Islamic leadership of Iran saw this a threat and moved to crush the revolt by force. Over 10,000 Kurds were killed.

Kurds in Iran continue to experience oppression. Prisoners face torture and execution. In March 2015 six Kurds were executed despite a worldwide outcry.

In 2004 the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) was founded, inspired by the struggle of the PKK.

(Many of the asylum-seekers caught up in Australia's inhuman refugee detention system are Kurds fleeing oppression in Iran. This group includes Behrouz Boochani, incarcerated for six years and now free in New Zealand; Reza Barati, murdered on Manus Island in 2014; and Fazel Chengeni, who died on Christmas Island in 2015.)

Turkey: PKK insurgency

The foundation congress of the PKK took place in November 1978 near the Turkish city of Lice. The leading figure in the group was Abdullah Öcalan.

When the military coup took place in September 1980, Öcalan and most of the group's forces withdrew to Syria

In 1984 the PKK launched an armed insurgency. With ceasefires in 1993 and again in 1999-2004, the uprising continued until March 2013 when the PKK declared its last ceasefire.

The human cost of the war was enormous. A commonly cited figure is that over 40,000 people died but according to estimates cited in Wikipedia, the real figure is likely to be considerably higher than that. In addition, 4000 villages were destroyed and several million people displaced.⁵

The economic cost was similarly gigantic. Hundreds of billions of dollars were

consumed and the economy severely damaged. One recent government report put the cost from 1986 to 2012 at \$1.2 trillion.⁶ If these huge resources had been used in rational development projects, Turkey would be a different place today.

The PKK has established bases and a zone of control in the mountainous region of northern Iraq, bordering both Turkey and Iran.

Öcalan: Imprisonment & rethinking

One turning point in the long civil war came in 1998 when PKK leader Öcalan was forced to leave Syria. No European country wanted to give him refuge. Nelson Mandela offered him sanctuary but *en route* to South Africa he stopped in Kenya where US agents kidnapped him and turned him over to Turkish authorities.⁷

In Turkey he was put on trial and sentenced to death. But in August 2002, with the abolition of the death penalty, Öcalan's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He is confined to a strongly guarded, high security jail on Imrali Island, 65km off Istanbul in the Sea of Marmara. Access to him is tightly controlled.

From prison Öcalan made a harsh criticism of the past practices of the PKK. He said the movement had been strongly disrupted by banditry, warlordism and gangsterism and that a great many fighters had died unnecessarily.⁸

Öcalan called for a completely new strategy. A peace process was to be initiated with the Turkish government and the PKK would transform into an open legal movement. The fight for an independent state was to be abandoned; this was politically undesirable. Armed self-defence was legitimate but must be kept within strict and defined limits.

But the overriding objective had to be genuine autonomy and democratisation of the country. (See his historic March 2013 Newroz message which was read out to a huge rally in Diyarbakir.⁹)

Aliza Marcus, in her 2007 book *Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence*, regards Öcalan's change of views as irrelevant or special pleading to curry favour with his captors. But this dismissal completely ignores the political rationality and cohesiveness of the project Öcalan is advocating.

One can be critical or not of the practice of the PKK in the past (and Öcalan is extremely critical). But there is no denying the immense progressive impact of Öcalan's current ideas embodied in the Kurdish struggle today in Turkey and in the Rojava Revolution.

The emphasis on grassroots democracy, ecology, creating a society where all ethnic and religious communities can find their place, and the tremendous and unprecedented weight given to the empowerment of women — even defining the revolution as a women's revolution and the PKK as a women's party — all this is genuinely distinctive and points the way forward for the whole Middle East. ■

Rojava: ‘most progressive & democratic system in Middle East’

By Dave Holmes

In an interview with SBS, celebrated Iranian Kurdish refugee Behrouz Boochani, detained in Australian offshore detention camps for six years, said that: “[Rojava] is the most progressive and democratic system in the history of the Middle East [so] this attack is not only an attack on Kurds, it is an attack on democracy and democratic values.”¹

Rojava’s remarkable democracy is based on assemblies and communes. Its feminism, in a region saturated with patriarchal practices, is also striking. Its formation of a 25,000 strong women’s army is without precedent — anywhere, anytime. Its strong ethnic and religious pluralism, in a region where elites play on these differences to maintain their power, is also without precedent.

Slovenian Marxist philosopher Slavoj Žižek recently very accurately described Rojava as “an actually-existing and well-functioning utopia”.²

Turkey’s hatred of Kurds

Recently Turkish writer Asli Erdogan, jailed in 2016 for four months for criticising her presidential namesake and now in exile in Germany, gave an interview to the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*.³

She said that “We Turks have been made to hate the Kurds since we go to primary school” and went on to explain that this sort of brainwashing is what leads most Turks to deny the reality of Kurdish oppression.

She said that all political forces in the Turkish parliament, including the CHP (the Kemalist bourgeois opposition party), are “terrorists”, except the HDP. “My country lives in an extreme nationalism.”

The Kurds in Turkey — 25% of the population — suffer a deep oppression and

have done so since the republic was formed in 1923. Kurdish children can't be taught in their own language in public schools. The Kurdish southeast is an internal colony, an occupied country. Elected Kurdish mayors are routinely sacked and replaced with Turkish administrators.

Furthermore, the Kurds are the spearhead of the fight for real democracy and women's rights. Their struggle threatens the whole repressive, exploitative system of Turkish capitalism.

Why Turkey invaded

When you run a repressive prisonhouse for Kurds, it is intolerable to have a Kurdish-majority country of freedom and democracy just over the border. The "threat" was simply the example.

All the talk of Turkey's legitimate "security concerns" is complete rubbish. Rojava has *never* attacked Turkey across the border. And in any case, how could a small country of several million people threaten a country of 80 millions with the biggest NATO army after the United States?

The alliance with the US

Rojava's alliance with the US has confused some people on the left. It was only ever a tactical military alliance of convenience.

The US needed ground forces to fight the Islamic State. By itself, bombing from the air was never going to do it. So US imperialism allied with a people's revolution. But Washington never signed up to support commune-style democracy, feminism, and ethnic and religious pluralism.

Rojava obviously needed US airpower and supplies or it would have succumbed to IS long ago. Of course the US has been extremely careful not to give the defence forces advanced heavy weaponry (anti-tank missiles, artillery and anti-aircraft missiles) which could have created serious problems for Turkey.

The price the Rojava defence forces paid over seven years was horrendous — 11,000 dead and 21,000 seriously wounded.

And finally Trump pulled the plug in the worst possible way. But when you strip away the Trump style, what it boils down to is that the US has turned back to their long-term imperialist alliance with Turkey.

Difficult choices on all sides

Rojava now faces extremely difficult choices on all sides.

Syrian Democratic Forces commander Mazlum Abdi has said "If we have to choose

between compromises and the genocide of our people, we will surely choose life for our people.”

He went on to say: “We believe in democracy as a core concept, but in light of the invasion by Turkey and the existential threat its attack poses for our people, we may have to reconsider our alliances. The Russians and the Syrian regime have made proposals that could save the lives of millions of people who live under our protection. We do not trust their promises. To be honest, it is hard to know whom to trust.”⁴

This is an extremely clear-headed and realistic analysis.

The Turkey-Russia deal

Before the recent Russia-Turkey deal (October 2019), a deal with the Assad regime led to Syrian Army units moving in to SDF-held territory, including the border around Kobanê.

The recent meeting of the Turkish and Russian autocrats (Erdogan and Putin) was not very edifying. Their filthy deal settled Rojava's fate over the heads of the people concerned.

However, let's look at what it appears to mean concretely:

- Syrian Army units and Russian personnel deploy along the whole border except that between Tel Abyad and Serêkaniyê (Arabic name: Ras al-Ayn). So Turkish control is limited to that strip (and the previously-seized Afrin).
- The SDF pulls back 30km. (This doesn't include the local military councils in the towns.)
- The town administrations remain in place for now.
- Talks with the Syrian regime, brokered by Russia, will be held to work out a full political settlement, i.e., what happens to Rojava and its system of governance (including the SDF).
- The refugee question is mentioned in the Turkey-Russia agreement. The issue here is whether or not Erdogan will succeed in settling several million Arab refugees in Rojava and thereby achieving a massive demographic change — ethnic cleansing, to use the correct term.

It is worth noting that the so-called ceasefire that was meant to accompany the SDF pullback is largely fictitious. Turkey's Islamist gangs are continually trying to press forward and conquer more territory. They have even clashed openly with Syrian Army units.

It now seems clearer than ever that the whole invasion was agreed to by Turkey, Russia and the US to fundamentally weaken Rojava and force it to cut a harsh deal with the Assad regime, liquidating the self-administration and self-defence forces and once more bottling up the revolutionary Kurdish genie.

Constitutional conference — without input from Rojava

The current constitutional conference (October-November 2019), convened by the UN in Geneva, bears this out. Underwritten by Russia, Turkey and Iran, the conference is made up of 150 members — 50 delegates loyal to Bashar al-Assad, 50 members of the Syrian opposition largely supported by Turkey and Saudi Arabia, and 50 civilian representatives. This latter group has no representatives of Rojava. That is, the entity which controls one third of the country and which carried the burden of crushing the Islamic State at tremendous cost, is not represented.

What will the Kurds & their allies be left with?

The Assad dictatorship doesn't want to share power with anyone. It is based on rigid control, Arab chauvinism and a predatory neoliberalism. (Until recently, Assad's cousin Rami Makhlof was estimated to control 60% of the economy but it seems he has now fallen from grace.)

But the regime has been badly weakened and will have to make some accommodation — at least for now, despite the fact that it fundamentally rejects democracy, decentralisation and federalism. But the weaker the Kurds and their allies, the less the regime will have to concede.

Solidarity is vital

The situation for Rojava is undeniably extremely challenging but the future is still open. International solidarity remains vital. The Western governments talk but will do nothing concrete unless they are forced to. The people have to compel them to do what is right, not what is expedient for their imperialist economic and military interests.

Meanwhile, on the Western left . . .

The Rojava Revolution has long divided the left in the West. It has been enthusiastically supported by some socialist and anarchist groups. But others have been critical to one degree or another. For some it is the alliance with the US that is the stumbling block, for others it is the supposed authoritarianism of the PYD (the Kurdish Democratic Union Party that is the backbone of the political leadership of the revolution).

Here in Australia the main socialist group aggressively publicising and supporting the Kurdish freedom struggle and the revolution in northern Syria has been the Socialist Alliance — in fact, we have been the *only* socialist group. We have consistently carried material in *Green Left* and *Links* and have done all we can to collaborate with the Kurdish community to build the practical solidarity movement.

Socialist Alternative, the largest group on the Australian left, has always been

hostile to the Rojava Revolution. In my opinion, this stance results primarily from their general sectarian outlook and they have justified their hostility by a mistaken analysis of the movement against the Assad dictatorship.

Turkey invaded Rojava on October 9. It was not until an October 28 article by Mick Armstrong that *Red Flag* was able to say one word about this major development in world politics.⁵ Three protest rallies have taken place and Socialist Alternative ignored them.

Let's look at Armstrong's analysis in his article *The Kurdish Tragedy*:

... pushing forward the revolution from below of the popular masses of Syria, both Arab and Kurd, was the only possible solution to sectarianism, racism and national chauvinism. The Kurdish forces could have played a vanguard role in that struggle ...

... The Kurdish masses need to ally themselves with the ongoing revolts sweeping the Middle East. Kurdish self-determination can be achieved only as part of a united revolutionary struggle involving the working class and popular masses of the whole region — Kurdish, Turkish, Arab and Iranian.

I think the record shows extremely clearly — to anyone who looks at it without prejudice — that Rojava has indeed pushed “forward the revolution from below of the popular masses, both Arab and Kurd” and sought to overcome “sectarianism, racism and national chauvinism” and “have played a vanguard role in that struggle”.

The revolution has continually attempted to broaden out and incorporate various non-Kurdish communities — Arabs, Assyrians (Syriac Christians), Armenians, Turkmen, Chechens, Circassians and so on. But these communities are different to the Kurds — they have different cultures, different histories and different political leaderships — and winning them over to the new way of living has required sustained and patient work. But there have been real successes as life shows these communities that the new system is genuine and works for them too.

The Syrian Democratic Forces — Rojava's self-defence forces — have incorporated more and more Arab units, including Arab women. A small Arab unit helped defend Kobane in late 2014 and more and more non-chauvinist Arab forces have rallied to the Rojava Revolution since that time.

In fact, the Rojava Revolution represents the high-point of the Syrian Revolution and points the way forward for a new Syria — grassroots democracy, decentralisation and federalism; feminism; and ethnic and religious pluralism. Behrouz Boochani's analysis is absolutely correct: “[Rojava] is the most progressive and democratic system in the history of the Middle East.”

That is why socialists should do all we can to actively support Rojava in its hour of existential need. ■

The Rojava Revolution

By Tony Illtis

Rojava, the Kurdish-majority liberated zone in northern Syria, is the location of a unique experiment in grassroots, participatory democracy that emphasises social and economic equality, ecology, religious tolerance, ethnic inclusion, collectivity combined with individual freedom and, most obviously, feminism.

This is behind both Rojava's surprising success against the Islamic State and the distinctive character of its military forces — the most important of which are the Peoples Protection Units (YPG), which has male and female fighters, and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ).

The Rojava Revolution — for that is what it is — is distinctively Kurdish and 21st century.

Abandoning the nation-state

The ideological changes that the PKK underwent following the kidnapping, rendition and imprisonment of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 was in part a recognition that the previous strategy had reached an impasse. But it was also an adaptation to the realities of Kurdistan.

The name Rojava is itself a reflection of the borders that divide Kurdistan. It simply means “West” (as in West Kurdistan). Öcalan recognised that the struggles in each of the four parts of Kurdistan, while interlinked, had distinct paths. Furthermore, in no part of Kurdistan are there not large numbers of people belonging to non-Kurdish minorities.

The development after 1991 under US protection of the capitalist Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq (what became the Kurdistan Regional Government) provided further negative lessons.

Öcalan and the Kurdish left concluded that the nation-state itself was an oppressive

institution. Borrowing the municipal libertarianism of US post-anarchist Murray Bookchin, a new approach to revolution was adopted based on local democratic autonomy and democratic confederalism between autonomous communities. The aim was no longer to create a Kurdish nation-state but to radically democratise both Kurdistan and the nation-states it was part of.

One aspect of this change was that the PKK was divided into four separate parties in the four parts of Kurdistan, ideologically linked but organisationally separate. In Rojava the Democratic Union Party (PYD) was formed in 2003.

The Rojava Revolution & the Syrian civil war

One of the many slanders directed against the PYD, YPG and YPJ by partisans of the Sunni Arab Syrian opposition is that they did not join the fight against the Assad regime that began after the 2011 uprising against the dictatorship. In reality, the YPG and YPJ have been fighting the regime since their establishment after the 2004 Qamishlo uprising.

However, their military philosophy of armed self-defence, linked to the political philosophy of “democratic confederalism”, means not fighting offensive actions but defending areas under democratic autonomous self-rule.

In 2011, the PYD supported the mass, democratic (but ideologically incoherent) uprising against Assad. However, they were concerned about the opposition overly militarising the conflict, which was initially the result of Assad’s military response to unarmed protests but fuelled by the intelligence agencies of the West and its regional allies.

This, and the increasing ethnic and religious chauvinism of an opposition becoming defined as Sunni and Arab (also fuelled by the intelligence agencies of the West and its regional allies), caused the Kurdish movement to stay aloof from the fractious armed opposition.

By July 2012, the Assad regime’s military presence in Rojava was depleted by their need to defend Aleppo and Damascus from the Sunni Arab opposition but there was a growing danger that Rojava would become a battleground between opposing forces that were both hostile to Kurds and the other ethnic minorities in the region, such as the Christian Assyrians. This was the context of the uprisings that established three autonomous cantons in Rojava and allowed the ideas of “democratic confederalism” to be most visibly realised in practice.

Democratic autonomy

The PYD has played an ideological role in the transformation that has taken place in

the autonomous cantons, but not an institutional one. It was instrumental in setting up the Movement for a Democratic Society (TEV-DEM), which organises and mobilises the population but like the PYD, has no institutional role. TEV-DEM is organisationally independent of the PYD.

Institutional power is based on a system called “Democratic Autonomy”. TEV-DEM representative Çinar Salih explained how it works to a visiting academic delegation in Qamislo in December 2014.¹

Our system rests on the communes, made up of neighbourhoods of 300 people. The communes have co-presidents, and there are co-presidents at all levels, from commune to canton administration. In each commune there are five or six different committees. Communes work in two ways. First, they resolve problems quickly and early — for example, a technical problem or a social one. Some jobs can be done in five minutes, but if you send it to the state, it gets caught in a bureaucracy. So we can solve issues quickly. The second way is political. If we speak about true democracy, decisions can’t be made from the top and go to the bottom, they have to be made at the bottom and then go up in degrees.

The co-presidents are one male and one female.

Qamislo has 6 different districts. Each district has 18 communes, and each commune is made up of 300 people ... The 2 elected co-presidents from each commune come together to make up the people’s council of that district. Then each of these 6 district people’s councils elects 2 co-presidents. So from Qamislo’s 6 districts, 12 people make up the citywide people’s council of Qamislo. But 12 people alone can’t make up the council — it’s supposed to have 200. So in addition to these 12 people, the others are directly elected. Even if you’re not on a committee or weren’t elected in the commune, you can put their name out and potentially be elected.

Cizîre canton consists of 12 cities. Delegates to the canton-level people’s council are allocated according to population. Qamislo is the biggest city, so it gets more delegates than others — it gets 20. They determine it by population numbers. The co-presidents are already part of this big council; then Qamislo gets 18 more. Each city people’s council elects who’s going to go to the cantonwide people’s council. At the end you have a canton-wide people’s council. It’s like a parliament, but the ties between the commune and the councils are not severed.

Female representation is guaranteed on all the peoples councils. No gender is allowed more than 60% representation. In addition there are parallel women-only structures.

Women’s councils exist in parallel at all levels, the commune, the district, the city, and the canton. The women’s councils don’t decide on general issues — that’s what the people’s councils are for. They discuss issues that are specifically about women ... A

committee tries to resolve issues between people. The women's council also has a committee like this. So if they see in this committee an issue that concerns women, like a domestic violence dispute, and they disagree with the people's council, and they say no, the no of the women's council will be accepted. They have veto power on issues concerning women.

Feminism

The emphasis on women's liberation and politicisation that runs throughout the movement is reflected in the high visibility of female fighters. Part of the ideological rethinking that the PKK and its derivatives went through was the realisation of the centrality of male supremacy not only to capitalism but to all class society since it first evolved more than three millennia ago, and that not adequately addressing this was one of the shortcomings of the 20th century left.

The PKK always supported women's liberation and female fighters were always in the ranks of its armed affiliates, but the ideological shift to "democratic confederalism" moved women's liberation to the centre of the Kurdish struggle. "Democratic confederalism ... is flexible, multicultural, against monopolies and oriented towards consensus. Ecology and feminism are its central pillars," Öcalan wrote.²

Çinar Salih said: "Our Rojava revolution is a revolution of women. In Rojava there is no area of life in which women don't take an active part ... We believe that a revolution that does not open the way for women's liberation is not a revolution. There have been revolutions in Libya and Egypt and Tunisia ... but the same status for women has persisted."¹

Economy

Because of blockade and war, exacerbated by an influx of refugees from other parts of Syria, the economy of the cantons is still largely geared toward survival. However, the emphasis on providing universal housing, nutrition, healthcare, childcare and education, none of which were provided by the Assad regime during peacetime, reflects the socialist orientation of the revolution.

The longer term goals were explained by Dara Kurdaxi, from the committee for economic revival and development in Afrîn, in a November 2013 interview.³

Naturally we're only at the beginning. But nonetheless, even if only in small ways, we're seeing some positive developments. We must be clear that we don't need an economic revival and development which has no clear goal for the community ... It shouldn't be a capitalist system, one without respect for the environment; nor should it be a system which continues class contradictions and in the end only serves capital.

Rojava: A Syrian revolution

The revolution in Rojava is a Syrian revolution as well as a Kurdish revolution. In its preamble, the constitution of the Rojava autonomous cantons, the “Charter of the Autonomous Regions of Afrin, Jazira, and Kobanê”,⁴ describes the cantons as “a confederation of Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens”. The preamble says:

In building a society free from authoritarianism, militarism, centralism and the intervention of religious authority in public affairs, the Charter recognises Syria’s territorial integrity and aspires to maintain domestic and international peace.

In establishing this Charter, we declare a political system and civil administration founded upon a social contract that reconciles the rich mosaic of Syria through a transitional phase from dictatorship, civil war and destruction, to a new democratic society where civic life and social justice are preserved.

The emphasis on the structures of the democratic autonomous administration being multi-ethnic, as opposed to Kurdish, is not mere rhetoric. Everything from street signs, to media, to education is in all of the languages of any particular community.

As with gender, on the communal and other councils, ethnic participation is enabled both by quotas ensuring that all communities are represented in the general structures and by parallel structures for ethnic minorities.

The revolution quickly won support from non-Kurdish minorities, reflected both in non-Kurdish participation in the revolution’s structures and organisations and alliances made with non-Kurdish political and armed groups.

The greatest difficulties for the revolution have been with the Arab community. The Arab-majority areas of Rojava were created by the ethnic cleansing and transmigration policies of the Assad dynasty and its predecessors over the past 50 years, and the revolution’s enemies have exploited fears that the Rojava Kurds will reverse this demographic change by expelling Arabs. This has not been helped by the example of the KRG in northern Iraq, which did just that.

The revolutionary forces of Rojava, however, have demonstrated that not only do they have no intention of doing this but that the principals of democratic autonomy apply as much to Arab communities as to any other communities.

IS, Turkey & the US

Contrary the conventional wisdom of the Western media, the Turkish state is not threatened by the possibility of sharing a border with an independent Kurdish state. Its close relationship with the KRG proves this. The possibility of a sharing a border Kurdish-led, multi-ethnic, religiously tolerant, socialist, feminist revolution — one

with close ties with the Kurdish freedom movement and broader left inside its borders — is another question.

Initially Turkey encouraged the al Qaeda-affiliated Nusra Front, and other Jihadi opposition groups to attack Rojava. However, the YPJ and YPG saw off these attacks with little more difficulty than they had those of the regime.

Turkey transferred its support to IS. This became highly visible during the siege of Kobanê, which lies on the border. Also apparent but less visible was the fact that despite having just initiated its “War on IS” — an air war in search of a ground force as partner in Syria — the US was less than eager to align with the YPG and YPJ.

During the siege, and since, the YPG and YPJ has consistently had two requests of the West. One was to cease Turkish support for IS, the other was heavy artillery weapons and night vision equipment, so they could match IS in firepower. During the siege they also asked for access across the border so the YPG and YPJ forces could reinforce Kobanê. Neither request was met.

However, the US did begin coordinating its air strikes with the YPG and YPJ. Rather than allow reinforcements from the YPG and YPJ access to Kobanê, the West sent a detachment of KRG fighters and a detachment from the Free Syrian Army (FSA). While the role of the KRG troops was minimal, they did have heavy artillery, which was useful to the defenders. Also useful was the coordination of air strikes.

The FSA is not a cohesive force but an umbrella name used by large number of



North-east Syria February 2020 (gold — controlled by SDF; blue — Turkish occupied area; red — Syrian regime).

independent units, often at loggerheads with each other. The FSA troops sent at the West's behest played no role in the fighting. However, other FSA units, who had gone to Kobanê at their own behest after being squeezed between IS and Assad regime forces, became the core of the Burkan al-Firat ("Euphrates Volcano") alliance, which encompasses the most significant Arab allies of the YPJ and YPG.

To Erdogan's alarm, the YPG, YPJ and their allies not only lifted the siege of Kobanê, but made significant advances. The turning point was the June 2015 liberation of Tel Abyad by YPJ, YPG and Burkan al-Firat forces, linking up two of three Rojava cantons and cutting one of the key IS supply lines across the border. Coming a week after the HDP's electoral successes in Turkey, Erdogan decided to take drastic action.

While the US-led coalition has to date continued to coordinate air strikes with the YPJ, YPG and Burkan al-Firat forces, it reacted to Erdogan's launching of a war against PKK forces in Turkey and Iraq, and YPG and YPJ forces in Syria, by welcoming Turkey into the "War on IS".

The West remains hampered by its own anti-Islamist propaganda but despite some ongoing issues in US-Turkish negotiations, the two NATO powers are looking dangerously close to finalising an arrangement that will allow the establishment of a "safe zone" occupied by Turkish troops or proxies and backed by US air power.

Rojava needs the world's solidarity — and deserves it because the world needs Rojava. ■



Female SDF fighters hold victory rally in Raqqa's main square, October 2017.

Women in Raqqa Celebrate Three Years of Freedom

[Raqqa, the capital of the Islamic State in Syria, was liberated by the SDF in October 2017. This report shows the deep-going effect of the revolution in northern Syria, especially as regards women.]

With the liberation of their cities from ISIS [in October 2017], women who have regained their leading role in society are working hard to overcome all kinds of obstacles and eliminate the damage created by the gangs.

In the third year of their liberation from persecution, women continue their struggle for a revolution of construction and transformation.

In July 2013, Raqqa was occupied by ISIS gangs and all living spaces of the city were turned into places where people of the city were subjected to all kinds of violence under ISIS.

Violence and brutality were therefore imposed on women. They were not allowed to leave their homes, and all provisions were applied based on oppression and violence against women. Many women living in the city were either forcibly recruited by ISIS or imprisoned.

The universities, schools and stadiums in the city were turned into dungeons where women were kept. Large venues such as the Itihad University and the Rabe El Edewiye School in the Kesra region in the south of the city became torture places where women were held.

Women and urban people were liberated by SDF fighters on October 17, 2017. Women who fought for the liberation of their cities also got their names written in the history books.

First step: Women's assemblies

With the liberation of Raqqa, women started organising activities and formed local

women's councils in the city. With these assemblies, women participated actively in the field of politics and fulfilled their roles of leading, organising and developing society.

With the co-presidency system in Northern and Eastern Syria, women gained the right to equal representation in politics.

Women, who continued their organisational activities throughout Raqqa, also formed their assemblies in towns and villages. Nineteen women's councils are actively working in the city. At least 10 women are active in each of the assemblies, which have reconciliation, archive, health, economy and education committees.

The participation of women in all spheres of life has increased so much that the number of women working in institutions and organisations in the city has exceeded 5000.

4000 women included in education programs

More than 4000 women in the city have been involved in these training programs so far. 300 women completed the training program in Tisrîn Women's Academy, which is the largest women's academy in Raqqa.

A woman from the region, Meryem El Ebo, said that "Raqqa women have undergone a great change and transformation. This change is evident in participation in politics. Participation that started with the political sphere spread to all other areas of life."

Stating that the important achievements of women in three years gave women great power, Meryem added that, "The revolutionary developments created by women in Raqqa and in general in Northern and Eastern Syria have made them an example to the Middle East and the world."

Three years of emancipation: Thanks to Leader Öcalan

Celebrating the third year of freedom, a Raqian woman, Fatma El Hasan said, "October 17 is a women's revolution; it is a revolution of change and transformation. Because women who were subjected to the brutality of the gangs have revolutionised step by step. We thank Leader Abdullah Öcalan, who struggled for the freedom of women and peoples and gave great duties to women."

Veza El Ahmet living in the Mensur District of Raqqa said that October 17 is the beginning of women playing their roles taken from their hands, carrying the struggle for liberation to victory. Women resisted and dedicated October 17 to all women who resisted."

Another woman, Necah El Ahmet commemorated all the martyrs of freedom in the person of the martyrs who gave their lives for the liberation of Raqqa and wished that the next October 17 would be the day when the Turkish state occupation would end in all of Northern and Eastern Syria. ■

2020 in North-East Syria: Ideological Attacks & Resistance

By Ersin Çaksu

2020 has been a year of various ideological attacks on the North-East Syrian revolution. The resistance against the attacks targeting the essence of the revolution continued to grow.

In North-East Syria, where Girê Spî and Serêkaniyê were invaded in the beginning of 2020, multiple and conventional attacks against the revolution continued throughout the year.

The revolution of the peoples of North-East Syria was subjected to military, political and diplomatic attacks in 2020 aiming at stifling the revolution.

While the ideological attacks targeting the “democratic nation” and “third way” strategy, which forms the essence of the revolution, continued in multiple directions, the revolutionaries managed to frustrate many attacks.

National unity: Partnership or division?

The pro-unity talks between the Kurdish parties in Rojava and the Turkish state-affiliated ENKS (Kurdish National Council in Syria), which started under the initiative of the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) and mediated by the USA and France, continued throughout the year.

On May 19, 25 political parties in the Autonomous Administration came together and formed the Parties for Kurdish National Unity (PYNK).

Making a joint statement in Qamishli on June 17, PYNK and ENKS announced that they reached a consensus within the framework of the 2014 Duhok agreement (Management, Partnership, Security and Defence).

After frequent ENKS visits to Hewler and Ankara, the negotiations came to a

deadend from time to time due to ENKS opposition to the Kurdish education [system] and the co-chair system and ENKS plan to divide Rojava into two parts.

Talks concerning Syria: Meetings with no results

The series of talks in the international arena, which claimed a political solution to the Syrian crisis but only deepened the crisis, continued in 2020.

Sixteen talks between Russia and the Turkish state, 19 talks between Turkish state and the US and two talks between Russia between the US took place.

Two summits were held with the participation of the UK, Germany, France and the Turkish state (the first in January and the second via videoconferencing in March). In addition, 11 sessions on Syria were held at the Security Council of UN during the year.

Two meetings (in Astana format) on Syria initiated by Russia, Iran and the Turkish state were held (April 22 and July 7).

Constitutional negotiations exclude Kurds

Kurds and the North-East Syrian Administration, which represents five million people, were excluded from the Constitutional Committee, which was established as a result of the Astana negotiations between Russia, Iran and the Turkish state.

The Constitutional Committee, which was formed in Sochi and moved to Geneva, held a meeting in December 2019 and three meetings in 2020 (March, August and November-December).

During the fourth and last meetings held between October 4 and November 30, the gangs that the Turkish state supported did not utter the “provisional government” condition specified in UNSC’s resolution 2254.

Gang transfer: Export from Turkey

The Turkish state turned the gangs who committed all kinds of war crimes against the Syrian peoples, especially the Kurds, into weapons that threaten the whole world.

The Turkish state sent thousands of Syrian gang members to Libya and Karabakh during the year.

Although not confirmed yet, the Syrian gangs of the Turkish state are reported to have been deployed to Kashmir, Qatar and Sudan.

Assassinations of tribal leaders: Kurdish-Arab alliance targeted

The attacks aimed at disrupting the Kurdish-Arab alliance which is the pillar of the revolution, peaked in 2020.

In July, many Arab chieftains were targeted in the attacks and assassinations, especially in Deir ez-Zor.

However, the Arab tribes, who raised their voice in the streets, eliminated the dissension introduced by the Turkish state, the Syrian regime and gang groups.

Demographic change: Turkification practices continued

The Turkish state continued demographic change in Afrin, Jarablus, al-Bab, Azaz, and in Serêkaniyê and Girê Spî which it occupied in 2020.

Many gang members and their families brought in from different regions were settled in Afrin, Girê Spî and Serêkaniyê.

Many gang members disguised as Turkmen were stationed on the border lines and an attempt was made to create a “Turkmen belt” in the region.

Afrin: War crimes continued without interruption

Dirty actions of the invading Turkish state in Afrin, such as demographic change, massacre, injury, kidnapping, torture, rape, destroying historical sites and cemeteries, cutting down olive trees and plundering olives, peaked in 2020.

Throughout the year, dozens of people, including women, children and the elderly, were murdered, while dozens of people were injured.

While 805 women were abducted during the year, 54 women were killed. In May, 11 women were put in the prisons of the gangs.

While hundreds of people were kidnapped by gangs for ransom, the abducted people were subjected to severe torture and at least four identifiable people died under torture.

While many historical sites such as Girê Istêr, Girê Cîrnas, Sêx Mihemed cemetery, Girê Dêrsiwan, Til Eqreb and Syros were destroyed, cemeteries were also the target of the invaders.

While the forced deportation of the Kurds who remained in the city continued throughout the year, the Yazidi House in the centre of the city was turned into a Qur'an course.

While at least 36 thousand olive trees were cut down, the olive and olive oils of Afrin were also plundered by the Turkish state.

Afrin Liberation Forces continue their actions

The Afrin Liberation Forces (HRE) continued their actions against the invaders throughout the year, primarily in Afrin, as well as in Azaz, Mare, al-Rai and al-Bab.

According to the HRE, 302 mercenaries and Turkish soldiers were killed and more

than 300 gang members and soldiers were injured in 144 armed conflicts throughout the year.

Anti-ISIS operations continue

The SDF continued its operations against the sleeper cells of ISIS gangs throughout the year.

With the support of the international coalition against ISIS, two comprehensive operations were carried out under the title “Ending Terrorism”.

Between June 4-10, 110 ISIS suspects were detained in the first operation involving 150 villages.

In the second comprehensive operation between July 17-21, 11 ISIS suspects were detained.

In addition, 68 ISIS members were detained in 25 different operations in the rural areas of Heseekê, Deir ez-Zor and Raqqa.

ISIS families: Ignored by the international community

Tens of thousands of ISIS members and their families detained in North-East Syria continue to be a problem for the region.

While the international community did not take steps to prosecute ISIS members, the North-East Syria Autonomous Administration released 631 ISIS suspects in October under the supervision of the tribes.

Since 2014 People’s Defence Courts have tried 7000 ISIS suspects who were Syrian citizens.

In 2020, 200 foreign children and 29 women were delivered to the representatives of origin countries.

However, there are still 49,000 children in camps in North-East Syria, including more than 8000 foreign nationals, more than 20,000 Iraqis and over 21,000 Syrians.

KDP-Turkey partnership against Rojava

Simultaneously with the Turkish state’s policy of hostility towards North-East Syria, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) focused on black propaganda attacks against Rojava in 2020.

On the one hand, the KDP is trying to destroy the gains of the revolution through ENKS, on the other hand it attacks Rojava in coordination with the Turkish state.

KRG Prime Minister Masrour Barzani claimed during a meeting with US Special Envoy for Syria Joel Rayburn in December that the support given to the SDF went to the PKK.

One day after this statement, Serbest Lezgin from the KDP claimed in a statement on behalf of the Ministry of Peshmerga that the YPG attacked the Peshmerga. The YPG denied this claim.

Thereupon, Masrour Barzani asked the US troops to be deployed on the border with Rojava and Bashur (South Kurdistan) in his meeting with US officials.

Turkey uses water as a weapon

The Turkish state used water as a weapon against the region, in addition to its military, political, diplomatic, black propaganda and spying activities against North-East Syria throughout the year.

The Turkish state, which cut the Euphrates water during the summer, also cut the drinking water that came to Hesekê from the Alouk Water Station, which it had seized after the invasion of Serêkaniyê.

While the international calls to the Turkish state, which left 1.2 million people without water, did not find much place, the water flow to Hesekê was cut again for more than a month.

COVID-19: A successful struggle despite obstacles

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected North-East Syria as well as the whole world.

The first coronavirus case in Syria was detected in Damascus on March 22. The North-East Syria Autonomous Administration declared the first curfew within the scope of coronavirus measures.

By the end of the year in North-East Syria, the total number of cases reached 8000, while the number of deaths exceeded 270. ■

Turkey Turns to All-Out War on the Kurds

By Dave Holmes

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an Islamic-based neoliberal party. It first won office in 2002 and ruled Turkey alone for 13 years. In August 2014, Erdogan became the first popularly elected president; Ahmet Davutoglu, formerly foreign minister, took over as prime minister.

Some concessions to the Kurds

In the first period of AKP rule, the government enacted some important reforms affecting the Kurdish community. Limited TV broadcasting in Kurdish was permitted as were Kurdish language courses in private schools. The state of emergency in the southeast was lifted. Later a 24-hour state-owned Kurdish-language TV channel was established.

However, although such measures were generally positive they didn't address key Kurdish demands such as public school education of students in their mother tongue, disbanding of the pro-government village guard militia, constitutional recognition and some form of self-government.

Negotiations with Öcalan

At the end of 2012 Erdogan revealed that the government was holding discussions with Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Nationalist and far-right circles were not happy. On January 9, 2013 PKK leader Sakine Çansız and two colleagues were murdered in Paris. The killer had links to the MIT, the Turkish security service. Just what elements in the MIT organised the killings is not clear but the government condemned the assassinations and the talks continued.

Öcalan's historic March 2013 Newroz message called for an end to the armed struggle. "This is not abandoning the struggle — we are initiating a different struggle," he said.¹

On this basis the PKK agreed to support the peace process. In May 2013 it began withdrawing its forces from Turkey to camps in northern Iraq.

Erdogan sinks peace process

On February 28, 2015 a joint press conference of the government and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) at Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace announced a 10-point peace plan. However, the next month Erdogan denied there was any agreement.

In a very revealing July 28, 2015 interview,² HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas explained that the peace negotiations had been extensive, involving the government, Öcalan, the HDP and the PKK in Qandil. But the government reneged on promises to pass legislation to enable PKK fighters to withdraw from Turkey in safety. And as the fighters vacated their defence zones, the government began building military forts and roads there — clearly a preparation, not for a peaceful future, but for a violent one.

Demirtas explained that Erdogan killed the process because polls showed the AKP was losing electoral support and the HDP was gaining it. Erdogan evidently concluded he needed to veer hard right, towards conflict and the ultra-nationalist voters.

Kobanê

From September 2014 to January 2015 the Rojava canton of Kobanê was besieged by a large IS force. The city came very close to falling. But the epic resistance and the tremendous worldwide publicity generated by the heavy frontline participation of women in the heroic defence forced the US to step up its air support. Turkey was forced to let limited KRG peshmerga forces with heavy weapons cross the country and enter the city. So Kobanê survived — a tremendous popular victory.

Turkish support was vital to IS operations in Syria in its heyday. Turkey was the main transit country for foreign IS recruits, wounded IS fighters received medical care in Turkey, IS freely purchased utilities and trucks in Turkey, IS received covert supplies of arms and ammunition from Turkey, and oil produced in IS-held areas was easily smuggled into Turkey. Furthermore, Turkey enforced a more and more complete blockade of Rojava, preventing people and supplies from entering.

On October 4, 2014 PYD co-chairperson Saleh Muslim held talks with Turkish military intelligence officials in Ankara to plead for aid for Kobanê. He was told this would only be given if the Kurdish forces joined the Free Syrian Army, focused on toppling the Assad dictatorship, distanced themselves from the PKK, abandoned their claim to self-government, and agreed to a Turkish buffer zone inside Syria!

On the same day, Erdogan said that the PKK and the PYD were the same as IS.

With Kobanê's fate in the balance, Erdogan gloated. On October 7 he announced

that the city was on the verge of falling.

In mid-October Kurdish protesters supporting Kobanê poured onto the streets in the Southeast and in Ankara and Istanbul. They were met with teargas, clubs, bullets and military-enforced curfews. Police and Islamists attacked them. Over 30 people were killed.

The drama of Kobanê was a watershed in the decline of Kurdish support for Erdogan and the AKP.

Rise of HDP

Over the years there have been many attempts in Turkey to establish a legal Kurdish-based party. Most of these were shut down by the authorities.

In October 2012, the HDP was founded and has since achieved electoral success unprecedented for a Kurdish organisation.

In June 2014 the HDP elected two new co-chairpersons, Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yüksekdağ. A Kurd, Demirtas is a former human rights lawyer. Yüksekdağ is Turkish; she cofounded the Socialist Party of the Oppressed which later merged with the HDP.

The charismatic Demirtas stood as the HDP's candidate in the August 2014 presidential elections, achieving 9.8% — almost four million votes — a big increase on the HDP's result in the earlier municipal elections. Demirtas attracted attention with his strong advocacy for women's and LGBT rights.

Historic HDP victory

The June 7, 2015 parliamentary elections were dominated by two things.

Firstly, Erdogan wanted a two-thirds majority in the 550-seat assembly so that the AKP could unilaterally amend the constitution to provide for a very strong executive presidency (and dispense with the office of prime minister).

Secondly, the HDP took the bold decision to run as a party, betting that it could cross the very undemocratic 10% threshold and deny Erdogan his presidential majority. While the HDP's core support lies in the Kurdish community, it reached out to all those suffering oppression, discrimination and exploitation across the country. Almost half of its 550 candidates were women.

As the elections approached there was a steady drumbeat of attacks on the HDP. Scores of their offices suffered arson and bomb attacks. On June 5 an HDP rally in Diyarbakir was bombed killing four people.

In the event, the HDP smashed the 10% barrier, achieving 13.1% (6.1 million votes) — an increase of 7.5% over its 2011 result — and 80 deputies in the 550-seat Grand National Assembly. The AKP dropped almost 9% (4 million votes) and lost its majority. The big reason was the collapse of its vote in the Kurdish regions due to Kobanê and

its failure to pursue the peace process.

Now Erdogan had a major problem. He would have to form a coalition government or a minority government dependent on external support.

Anything less than total AKP control of parliament would risk a corruption investigation being restarted, endangering himself, his family and key associates. If that happened Erdogan would face prison — being marooned in the presidency without the powers he wanted would be the least of his problems.

War on the Kurds

Erdogan's solution was to create a security crisis by screaming about the terrorist threat from the PKK and the gains of the Kurds across the border in Rojava.

The July 20, 2015 Suruç bombing — which killed over 30 young socialists at a meeting as they prepared to cross over to nearby Kobanê to help rebuild the city — was almost certainly a provocation organised by regime elements.

Erdogan declared war on “terrorism” and unleashed the security forces against the Kurdish southeast. In many towns and cities young people — acting independently of the PKK — established self-defence groups and dug ditches and erected barricades to protect their neighbourhoods against the assault of the regime forces. The army responded with full force — helicopters, tanks and heavy artillery. It was civil war. Many urban areas ended up looking like those in war-ravaged Syria.

Coup provides excuse for purge

In July 2016 a failed coup d'état by a section of the military provided the excuse Erdogan needed to carry out a wide-ranging purge of Turkish institutions across the board. The regime blamed the coup attempt on the Gulen movement, that is, followers of exiled Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen who had been close allies of Erdogan but broke with him in 2013. There is no evidence that Gulen group had any direct involvement in the coup.

Scores of thousands of personnel in the military, judiciary, schools and academia, police and civil service were arrested and dismissed from their jobs.

The post-coup purge was also used to target the Kurds. Over 11,000 Kurdish teachers were dismissed; dozens of elected mayors were . Demirtas and Yüksekdağ were arrested on the usual spurious charges of “terrorism” (i.e., links to the banned PKK). They remain in jail to this day.

Centralising power in an executive presidency

With support from the ultranationalist MHP, parliament authorised the executive presidency plan. In April 2017 a referendum on the plan was also carried.

In June 2018 parliamentary and presidential elections were held on the same day. Erdogan was returned as president; the HDP's Demirtas received 8.4%. In the parliamentary elections the AKP-MHP alliance got 53.7%, a drop of 7%. And despite all the repression the HDP again surpassed the undemocratic 10% threshold, receiving 11.7%.

Ongoing repression against HDP

However, the HDP remains under remorseless attack. Some figures in a November 5 *ANF News* article show the scale of the ongoing attacks on the HDP. From June 2015 to September 2020, 22,321 HDP members were detained and some 10,000 remain in jail (including 11 MPs). The HDP won 65 municipalities but after dismissals of mayors currently controls only 6. Of the 37 co-mayors detained, 18 are still under arrest.³

Intervention into Syria

Turkey had long supported the Islamic State gangs. While Turkey may not have created IS, it would not have lasted long without Turkish support. But when it was clear that IS had failed to stop the Kurdish advance, Turkey intervened directly.

- In August 2016 Turkey moved into Syria to occupy Jarablus, across the Euphrates from Kobanê. It wanted to stop the advancing SDF from linking up with Manbij and eventually reaching the isolated and vulnerable western canton of Afrin.
- In January 2018 Turkey and its jihadist allies invaded and occupied Afrin, for a long time the most peaceful part of Syria, a haven for refugees from all communities. Several hundred thousand Kurds were driven out and jihadist families moved in. Afrin today is a violent lawless place, ruled by Turkey's predatory jihadist gangs.
- In October 2019 Turkey invaded Rojava and occupied the area between Tel Abyad and Serêkaniyê. It is continually trying to enlarge the area under its control. Everywhere Turkey and its Islamist gangs act to demolish the gains of the revolution and create an arbitrary lawless society.

And in June 2020 Turkey launched an invasion of northern Iraq in an effort to wipe out the PKK (see article in this pamphlet).

It is absolutely clear that the Turkish regime and its supporters regard the Kurdish people and their highly progressive project as an alien and dangerous force, whose existence anywhere is a threat to the established order and who must therefore be crushed at all costs. For the same reason, progressive forces everywhere should do their utmost to support the Kurdish people in their struggle. ■

Turkish Attacks on PKK Meet Fierce Resistance

By Dave Holmes

In mid-June Turkey launched yet another large-scale air and ground operation in northern Iraq aimed at crippling the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Turkish planes bombed the Makhmur refugee camp, home to 12,000 Kurds from Turkey. The camp near Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government, is a stronghold of support for the PKK. Also bombed was Shengal (Sinjar), home of the much-persecuted Yazedi Kurds. Following the devastating Islamic State attack on Shengal in August 2014, the PKK played a key role in helping to establish the Yazedi self-defence forces.

Turkish planes also hit targets across the rugged PKK-controlled border region between Iraq, Turkey and Iran (the Medya Defence Zones). Following these attacks Turkey has ramped up its efforts, which began last year, to establish bases in the Heftanin region.

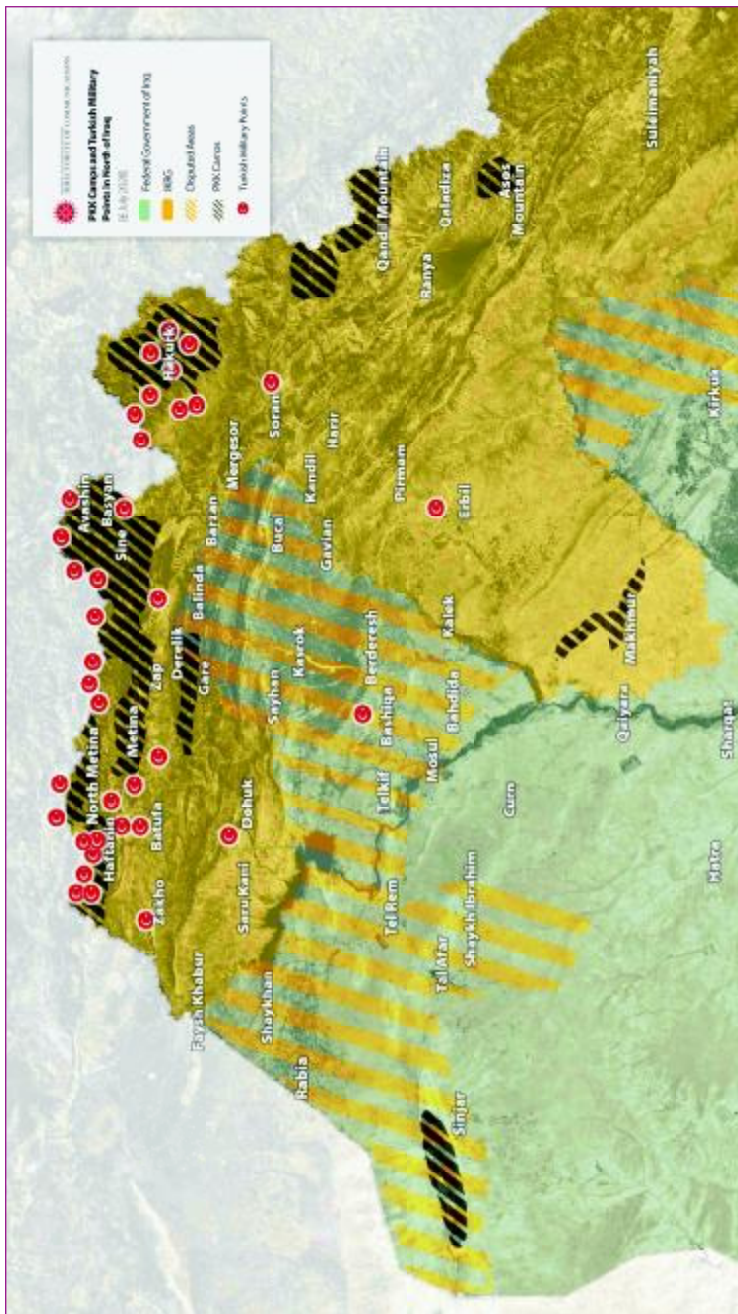
Fierce resistance

In a radio interview nine days after the invasion had begun, Rizgar Ersi, a PKK military leader, explained Turkey's objective:

... It is trying to occupy a strip of land that is about 30 to 40 kilometres wide. If it succeeds in this, the attack will continue on a line from Qandil to Shengal and an occupation corridor will be built. If the Turkish state occupies 30 or 40 kilometres of the mountainous area, only the small plain between Zakho and Sulaymaniyah will remain for the population of Southern Kurdistan. The attacks on Shengal, Maxmur and the Medya Defence Zones show that this process has started.¹

Ersi went on to describe the battles around Heftanin:

... First, the Turkish military bombarded the region for days with heavy weapons, tanks and howitzers. Then the Turkish jets dropped 1000-kilo bombs on the area for hours. Then



Turkish bases in northern Iraq.

Cobra helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft advanced; attempts were made to launch a ground operation. The guerrillas' tactic was not to allow Turkey to get a foot on the ground in the region. From the first moment, the attacks on the army began.

... The soldiers were severely hit by the guerrillas and had to retreat. That is the reality of Heftanin. Afterwards, they launched a second wave of attacks with even more massive use of the most modern war equipment but they only managed to get deployed on a hill. In the past nine days, five or six hills have been occupied. Before that, they had been completely deformed by the bombing.

... The guerrillas carried out 20 actions in eight days. Cobra helicopters were attacked 15 times, many of them were damaged and had to withdraw from the war zone. There were dozens of sabotage actions. More than 70 Turkish soldiers were killed and dozens were injured. In these eight days, five of our friends have died in the sacrificial struggle. This is the situation.

He added that the guerrillas are very well trained, highly motivated and determined, and fighting in their own land.

Villages emptied

The Turkish onslaught has had a severe impact on civilian life in the area. According to a June 27 *Rudaw* report, villages in the border town of Zakho “have been emptied and placed under lockdown due to recent Turkish airstrikes ... according to local officials, 361 villages in Duhok province have been completely emptied due to airstrikes over the past 20 years.”²

KDP collaborates with Turkey

The northern border regions are nominally under the control of the KRG, whose dominant element is the Kurdish Democratic Party led by Masoud Barzani. The KRG is a neocolonial regime, politically and economically subservient to Turkey and the United States.

Over the past two years, as Turkey has expanded its network of bases and outposts in the border region, the KRG has done nothing.

In early June, shortly before the invasion, Hakan Fidan, chief of Turkey's MIT intelligence agency, made a secret visit to Baghdad. It is hard to believe he didn't brief Iraqi and KRG officials about the imminent invasion and secure their agreement.

Long history of operations in Iraq

Turkey's first anti-PKK incursion into Iraq took place in 1992. The current “Operation Claw” is the latest of many such efforts since then. Despite Turkey's huge superiority in weapons and numbers and the death and destruction caused, all the previous

attacks failed in their objective of smashing the PKK.

Drones, surveillance & informers

This time around Turkey is pinning much of its hopes on the heavy use of drones, high-tech surveillance and informers.

In the last few years Turkey has carried out a number of assassinations of PKK leaders using these means. In August 2018 PKK leader Ismail Özden (Mam Zeki Sengali) was killed near Shengal by a missile strike and in October last year two PKK leaders were killed by a drone strike near Sulaymaniyah.

Turkey's home-grown drone capability is much lauded in the country's pro-government media and right-wing nationalist circles. And there is no doubt that the widespread use of drones, with their advanced surveillance and attack capabilities, has created serious problems for the Kurdish guerrillas but the PKK has adapted its tactics to counter this.

Turkey implacably opposed to Kurdish rights

Looking at the history of the Turkish republic since its founding in 1923, implacable opposition to basic Kurdish rights is the central feature, the fixed element. Although it once courted the Kurdish vote and began peace talks with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, the current authoritarian regime of Recep Tayyip Erdogan is engaged in a war on any manifestation of Kurdish autonomy and democracy — whether it be in Turkey, Syria or northern Iraq.

Turkey attacks Kurds everywhere

In early 2018 Turkey invaded northern Syria and occupied Afrin, the geographically isolated western canton of Rojava. Using an army largely made up of jihadist gangs it has carried out massive ethnic cleansing, forcing out hundreds of thousands of Kurds and terrorising and brutalising those that remain. Afrin today is a dangerous, lawless place. In the years before the Turkish invasion it was the most peaceful part of Syria.

Last year Turkey invaded Rojava again and occupied a strip of land between Tel Abyad and Serêkaniyê and is constantly trying to expand it. The results have followed the dismal pattern of Afrin.

And in Turkey itself the Erdogan regime has kept up its war on the Kurds. The left-wing Kurdish-based Peoples Democratic Party (HDP), while not yet illegal, is under constant attack. Scores of elected HDP mayors have been sacked and replaced by government administrators, thousands of party members are in jail, and on June 4 two HDP MPs were illegally removed from office and jailed. In June, two HDP six-day

marches protesting this state of affairs were repeatedly attacked by security forces.

Western silence

The big Western powers are complicit in the Turkish regime's war on the Kurds at home and abroad. It is important to understand that the West is fundamentally opposed to the Kurdish freedom struggle with its radical leadership and its highly progressive agenda of democracy, feminism, ecology, and religious and ethnic pluralism. The West has no problem with the rotten Barzani leadership of the KDP but the PKK is something else.

That's why the Western powers (including Australia) have accommodated the Turkish regime by listing the PKK as a terrorist organisation when it is so clearly a legitimate national liberation movement fighting for self-government and democracy.

The European Union annually gives large financial grants to Turkey so that the huge army of Syrian refugees (some 3.5 million of them) is kept away from Fortress Europe.

For decades Turkey has been armed by the West. For example, the Turkish army is equipped with hundreds of German Leopard tanks and these were used in the two invasions of Rojava.

One possible looming source of conflict with the West is Turkey's big (and so far successful) military intervention in Libya in support of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord. The GNA and Turkey have signed an agreement giving Turkey oil exploration rights over a big slice of the Mediterranean between the two countries. This agreement has been fiercely opposed by Greece, Cyprus and the EU.

Erdogan under pressure

Under Erdogan's rule Turkey has a very aggressive foreign policy with the army conducting operations in Iraq, Syria and Libya. At home it crushes all dissent and keeps its Kurdish population in a tight Turkish chauvinist grip.

But there are growing signs that trouble is looming for the regime. The economy is in a bad way and social distress is growing. Nationalist hype won't put food on the tables of the millions struggling to survive.

Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has recently suffered some small splits, although they are all on the right and share the AKP's Kurdophobic outlook.

Despite the repression the Kurdish movement is not broken. And there are clear signs that Operation Claw could well turn out badly for Erdogan. The heroic Kurdish resistance in Heftanin is making a big contribution to the ultimate demise of the regime. ■

Call for Kurdish Unity as Turkey Attempts a 'Final Solution'

By Peter Boyle

For some time now the Turkish military has been increasing its presence in South Kurdistan (officially an autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq).

It now has nearly 50 military bases in the region and regularly sends its warplanes and killer drones on missions within the region.

But now, it is stepping up its attack on Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerilla bases and self-governing Yazidi communities in Shengal (Sinjar) in concert with peshmerga units aligned to the dominant Barzani faction in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The excuse for the latest aggression by the Masoud Barzani forces was the killing of a security official affiliated with the Barzani regime's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) at the Sarzer border crossing, in Duhok province, on October 8.

The KDP blamed the PKK but this was strenuously denied by the PKK. Subsequently, the KDP claimed it had detained several people who confessed to an alleged PKK plot to carry out terrorist attacks against government officials and foreign visitors in South Kurdistan. This was also denied by the PKK.

PKK guerilla leader Murat Karayilan said: "We were surprised by these statements, so we started our own investigation. In the meantime, we can definitely rule out any involvement of our members. If the KDP was able to back up its claims with evidence, it would have done so long ago."

"Nobody within our movement wants this," he added. "We are not afraid of war, after all, we fight the enemy every day. But to start an inner-Kurdish war is not what we want."

Green Left, November 13, 2020. *Peter Boyle* is convenor of Rojava Solidarity (Sydney). He is a member of the Socialist Alliance National Executive.

Another political faction in the KRG, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) also rejected the KDP's provocative accusations. The PUK's Rewaz Fayeq, who is speaker of the KRG parliament, called for prudence and for a de-escalation of the conflict.

A report issued by the Kurdish Initiative Against a Turkish Invasion in South Kurdistan blamed the escalation on the Barzani regime's desperation to hold on to power in the KRG.

Since the liberation of South Kurdistan from Saddam's rule in 1991, the KDP has done everything at its disposal to curb the liberties of the Kurdish people and to abuse the Kurdish cause for its own family and tribal interests.

In 1992, it instigated a six-year-long civil war with PUK, PKK and other factions.

After 2003, it has monopolised power in its hands and used it to take control over all spheres of economic, political and social life. This has led to widespread corruption, favouritism, poverty, brain drain and emigration.

Journalists and opposition figures who dared to discuss these issues in public were intimidated, kidnapped, imprisoned and murdered, including Serdesht Osman (2010), Wedat Huseyin (2016) and Soran Mame Heme (2008), to name just a few.

Even the KRG parliament, which wanted to make some reforms in the political system, was suspended, with its speaker being banned from even entering Erbil [the capital of KRG]. This has further aggravated the situation for the people.

People cannot get salaries, while KDP exports more than half a million barrels of oil a day to Turkey and has monopolised the economic gains to the border gates. The money gained from oil sales are illegally transferred to foreign banks and used to buy properties for Barzani family members abroad.

People who cannot make ends meet and cannot speak have, from time to time, taken to the streets to claim their rights (in Duhok, Zakho and Sheladize), each time to be heavily suppressed by pro-KDP forces and taken into prison in large numbers.

On November 1, 2020, families of the imprisoned people called on human rights organisations and NGOs to support their case and help end KDP pressures. According to the call, from August 13 until now, 280 people have been arrested by KDP forces. Most have been tortured and have been forced to sign promises that they would observe silence against all KDP practices.

The report also said that the KDP has escorted the Turkish army 40 kilometres deep into KRG territory and has helped them build nearly 50 military bases and tens of MIT [Turkey's notorious secret police] intelligence and reconnaissance bases in its desperate attempt to preserve its kleptocracy.

For 13 years, Turkish military and intelligence have been looming around the mountains, villages and cities of Kurdistan and we have witnessed daily air attacks on Kurdish

lands. These attacks, conducted under the pretext of fighting the PKK.

In an interview on October 2, Besê Hozat, co-chair of the Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council warned: “Turkey is waging a war of extermination.”

“The current position of the KDP must be assessed in this context,” she added. “Turkey wants to destroy all Kurdish achievements. Through the Kurdish genocide it wants to establish a new regime as a Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Its goal for 2023 is to establish a regime of religious fanaticism, nationalism and racism.”

Hozat noted that regular peshmerga forces were not deployed because of their unwillingness to take part in an intra-Kurdish war. Instead, the special Zerevan units, which are tightly loyal to the Barzani family, are being deployed to the zones controlled by the PKK and the Yazidi self-defence forces, the Shengal Resistance Units (YBS).

“They [the Zerevan units] are deployed between the guerrilla areas in order to interrupt the connection of different areas,” she explained.

Hozat said that the latest Turkish-KDP military plan was “extremely dangerous” and risked all the gains of the Kurdish people. ■



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Lift the ban on the PKK

Despite its frontline role in the struggle against the Islamic State gangs, the US, the European Union and the Australian government continue to proscribe the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) as a “terrorist” organisation.

The PKK was first placed on the Australian list of terrorist organisations at the end of 2005 and has remained there ever since under both Coalition and Labour governments. The PKK was last re-listed in 2018. Listing an organisation means that it is illegal for Australian citizens to belong to it, raise funds for it or in any way to directly support it.

A very strange document

The Australian government’s case¹ for putting the PKK on the list of terrorist organisations is a very strange document.

Firstly, any armed action is classified as terrorism. Does our government recognise legitimate self-defence? And if so, under what circumstances? What about Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 facing death in Nazi gas chambers? Or Blacks suffering under the apartheid yoke in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s?

Secondly, and related to the above, the government dossier makes absolutely no mention of the long, heavy oppression and discrimination endured by the Kurds in Turkey ever since 1923. It makes absolutely no mention of the Erdogan regime’s scrapping of the peace process and its turn to a brutal, bloody war against the Kurdish people.

Thirdly, the government’s indictment of the PKK is simply a list of alleged attacks on military and police personnel. Whether the list is true or false, that is what often happens in a country when the level of repression becomes unbearable.

Just look at Turkey today. Civil servants purged in their thousands; journalists jailed; opposition media banned or simply taken over; the judiciary totally partisan; the HDP virtually suppressed; elected mayors dismissed; and the security forces waging

¹ Adapted from Australians for Kurdistan, australiansforkurdistan.org/pkk-ban-facts-arguments.

a dirty war in the Kurdish southeast. And from 2016 Turkey has occupied large parts of northern Syria and is continually attacking the remaining parts of Rojava.

But the Kurds must never pick up a weapon to defend themselves lest they be called ‘terrorists’!

The ‘abducted’ children

Included on the national security website is the claim that the PKK “is reported to have kidnapped more than 300 children between December 2013 and May 2014”.

This is a complete fabrication. There was no kidnapping. In conditions of ongoing oppression, in which many Kurds feel that they have no place in a racist Turkey, a number of young people made contact with the PKK of their own accord.

The then HDP co-leader, Ertugrul Kürkçü, made the point² that the best way to make it possible for the teenagers to return to their families would be to establish a genuine peace process.

Drop the ban

The PKK simply should not be on our list of terrorist organisations. It is a completely legitimate national liberation movement, supported by millions at home and abroad. It is willing to negotiate with the authorities but the same cannot be said of the government. And that is the *real* problem. ■



The time has come!

Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan!

Crisis

The Kurdish question relates to Iraq, Iran, Syria and in particular Turkey and is one of the major unsolved problems of the Middle East. For many years Turkey, and now ISIS, has been threatening the Kurds with genocide. In this conflict countless lives have been lost. Cities and villages have been destroyed, genocidal attacks have taken place. Millions of people have become refugees dispersed over different territories. Thousands of women have been sold into slavery by ISIS.

The Middle East is in deep crisis. But not all is black, there is hope!

Hope

Abdullah Öcalan, founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has led the struggle for Kurdish rights for many years. In 1999, he was abducted from Kenya and brought to Turkey. In prison, he wrote numerous books which advocated a democratisation of Turkey and the whole region. Recently, he has inspired the democratic and feminist revolution in northern Syria (Rojava).

Öcalan has been isolated in prison for almost 20 years now on Imrali Island, Turkey's equivalent to [South Africa's notorious] Robben Island. For more than 10 years he was the only prisoner on the island. Despite the horrendous conditions, Öcalan has never given up hope for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East, especially the Kurdish question. For several years the Turkish government held talks with him about a resolution of the conflict. In Northern Syria his writings inspired a multiethnic, multireligious, democratic revolution based on women's freedom and ecology.

Öcalan has become a symbol of hope for peace and democracy in a troubled region.

An edited version of a leaflet circulating in Europe.

Inspiration

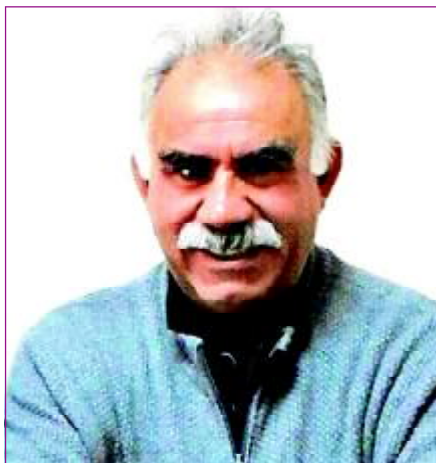
Not only was he able to transform the Kurdish society from a statist approach to a confederalist approach, he was also courageous enough to enter into talks with the Turkish state. He has laid down the theoretical and practical grounds for the Rojava revolution, liberation of the Yazidi Kurds in Shengal, as well as the HDP project in Turkey. Thus, prison bars and limited means could not prevent him from inspiring the people.

Trust

The vast majority of Kurds rally behind Öcalan. In 2005-06, 3.5 million Kurds signed a petition stating that they regarded him as their political representative. He is their most trusted leader and the most important symbol for the struggle for freedom, peace and democracy. Like Nelson Mandela, Abdullah Öcalan represents his people's political will, and his freedom is critical to a lasting peace in Turkey, Syria and Kurdistan.

Peace

Öcalan has devoted his life to the struggle for democracy, peace and the solution of the Kurdish issue. He initiated numerous unilateral ceasefires and presented constructive proposals. From 1993 onwards successive Turkish governments have from time to time approached Öcalan and thus recognised his key role in the search for a solution. Between 2012 and 2015, the AKP government maintained negotiations with him for two and a half years, during which time Öcalan proposed a step-by-step plan for achieving peace, from confidence building measures, to the silencing of arms under



Left: Abdullah Öcalan in prison. Top: Early 1990s: Öcalan with Sakine Çansız (on left).

international surveillance, to a permanent political solution to the Kurdish question. The talks collapsed in April 2015, but Öcalan's proposals, laid out in his "Road Map", remain of the utmost importance.

Freedom

The approach to Öcalan has always paralleled the approach to the Kurdish people. There can be no freedom without the freedom of the political prisoners. Öcalan's freedom is vital to break the military logic of the conflict and to shift the focus irrevocably towards peaceful negotiations.

The time has come!

As the crisis in the Middle East deepens and Turkey slides into dictatorship, Öcalan's voice of peace and democracy is more necessary than ever. He is the architect behind the proposal for a dignified coexistence, thus only his freedom shall mean that a reconciliation can be reached. The potential is there, and the conditions are ripe to achieve this.

Now is the time to listen to the people: Freedom, not slavery! Peace, not endless war! Democracy, not dictatorship! This is what Öcalan stands for.

February 15, 2021 will mark the 22nd anniversary of his abduction and imprisonment. April 4, 2021 will be Abdullah Öcalan's 72nd birthday. We want him out and to celebrate with him.

The time has come!

The Free Öcalan world campaign

As the one leader who possesses the confidence of the Kurdish people, and as the progenitor of a peaceful solution, Öcalan is indispensable to resolving the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. But he can not fulfil this his role from prison, due to the onerous conditions and the extremely restricted communication — he is at present entirely cut off from the outside world. To end this isolation is the first, urgent step. And it needs your support.

Millions have been rallying for his freedom for many years now. More than 10 million people worldwide have already signed the demand for his freedom. We need your voice too! ■

freedomforocalan.org.au

Notes

The Kurdish Freedom Struggle

- 1 See <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/9/turkey4166.htm>
- 2 Kendal, "Kurdistan in Turkey" in Chaliand ed., *A People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (Zed Books: London, 1993), p. 48.
- 3 <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2010/6/state4002.htm>
- 4 <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/790/turkish-business-in-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq>
- 5 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish-Turkish_conflict_\(1978-present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdish-Turkish_conflict_(1978-present))
- 6 <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/turkey-kurds-pkk-peace-process-bill-for-ending.html#>
- 7 <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/nelson-mandela-and-abdullah-ocalan-bound-revolutionary-solidarity>
- 8 See Abdullah Öcalan, *Prison Writings: The PKK and the Kurdish Question in the 21st Century* (Transmedia Publishing: London, 2011), especially pp. 50-69.
- 9 <http://www.freeocalan.org/news/english/ocalans-historical-newroz-statement-2013>

Rojava 'most progressive & democratic system'

- 1 <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/kurdish-refugee-behrouz-boochani-warns-of-genocide-in-northern-syria>
- 2 <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/kurds-syria-trump-turkey-rojava-macedonia-greece-zizek-a9166206.html>
- 3 <https://anfenglish.com/news/writer-asli-erdogan-turks-learn-to-hate-kurds-in-primary-school-38705>
- 4 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/13/kurds-assad-syria-russia-putin-turkey-genocide>
- 5 <https://redflag.org.au/index.php/node/6935>

The Rojava Revolution

- 1 Reported by Janet Biehl, on her website *Ecology or Catastrophe*, <http://www.biehlonbookchin.com/rojavas-communes-and-councils/>.

- 2 A. Öcalan, *Demokratischer Konföderalismus*, 2012, p. 21. Quote translated from German original by Richard Braude, <http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com>.
- 3 *Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê*, November 28, 2013 <http://anftrkce.net/guncel/ekonomist-kurdaxi-suriye-karanliga-rojava-aydinliga-gidiyor>.
- 4 <http://civiroglu.net/the-constitution-of-the-rojava-cantons/>

Turkey Turns to All-Out War on the Kurds

- 1 <http://www.freeocalan.org/news/english/ocalans-historical-newroz-statement-2013>
- 2 <http://links.org.au/node/4532>
- 3 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/over-22-thousand-hdp-members-arrested-since-2015-47756>

Turkish Attacks on PKK Meet Fierce Resistance

- 1 <https://anfenglishmobile.com/kurdistan/guerrilla-commander-ersi-they-cannot-succeed-in-heftanin-44909>
- 2 <https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/27062020>

Lift the Ban on the PKK

- 1 <https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/Listedterroristorganisations/Pages/KurdistanWorkersPartyPKK.aspx>
- 2 <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/political-debate-over-children-abducted-by-pkk-deepens-67368> ■

Kurdish solidarity groups

- **Australians for Kurdistan (Melbourne)**
W australiansforkurdistan.org **F** [KurdistanAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/KurdistanAustralia)
E australiansforkurdistan@gmail.com
- **Kurdish Lobby Australia (NSW)**
W KurdishLobbyAustralia.com
- **Rojava Solidarity (Sydney)**
F [RojavaSolSydney](https://www.facebook.com/RojavaSolSydney)
- **Solidarity with Rojava (WA)**
F [Solidarity-with-Rojava-AANES-network-Western-Australia-102337707857623](https://www.facebook.com/Solidarity-with-Rojava-AANES-network-Western-Australia-102337707857623)

The epic and heroic Kurdish defence of the north Syrian town of Kobanê against the Islamic State (October 2014-January 2015) first brought Rojava to the attention of the world.

Rojava is a remarkable people's revolution. It has been marked by an absolutely unprecedented effort to empower women; a genuine ethnic and religious pluralism; grassroots democracy based on assemblies and communes; and a growing ecological concern.

This pamphlet attempts to provide an introduction to the Rojava Revolution and its struggle to survive in an extremely challenging situation, threatened by the IS, Turkey and the Assad regime.

But while Rojava is the focus, we also take up the wider Kurdish question. The Kurds are one people who have been split by imperialism between four countries and are denied justice and freedom in all of them.

They desperately need the support and solidarity of progressive people everywhere.

Resistance books

