

Behind the Kobane Tragedy: The Kurdish Political Movement and Turkey

October 14, 2014



The whole world is just watching the forthcoming massacre in Kobane. US-led air strikes seem to be made only for show. When ISIS approached the oil-rich Erbil, the Kurdish Regional Government's capital, the U.S.-led coalition forces immediately took action against ISIS. However they didn't do the same for Kobane.

John Kerry said that "The situation in Kobani is a 'tragedy' but saving it from ISIS is not part of our 'strategy'". Everybody knows that long-term strategy of the US is to establish U.S backed governments on the Erbil - Lazkiye line and dominate the distribution of oil in the Kurdish region controlled by Barzani to the world economy. So, the US uses ISIS to decrease the Shiah effect on this line. For example, Prime Minister of Iraq - Nuri el Maliki who was thought to strengthen Shiah influence in the country and help Esad protect his position in Syria, resigned this summer after the U.S. threated him by not intervening against ISIS should they attack Baghdad. In the middle of this unrest in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) seized the control of Kerkük, which accounts for 40 percent of Iraq's oil production.

Kobane, is one of the three cantons that declared democratic autonomy in Syrian Kurdistan and that has been under siege by the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (known as ISIS, ISIL, or Daesh) since September 16. The other two cantons are Efrin and Cezire. Kobane is between Efrin and Cezire and is located at the heart of Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan). These cantons are self-governed by the local assemblies, which are composed of the representatives of ethnic and religious group on the basis of secular pluralism, gender equality, and democratic autonomy. In Kobane, the political theses of Abdulla Öcalan, the jailed leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), regarding governance and living together in solidarity with other peoples have been put into practice. Besides, Party of Democratic Union (PYD) holding the political and military control in Rojava, is the Syrian branch of PKK which has been fighting for the basic right of Turkey's Kurds for 30 years. Just because of this brand new life project, Kurds, without any heavy weaponry, are trying to defend Kobane against IS, which captured tanks and advanced weaponry from Mosul.

It is no longer a secret that Turkey has been providing military equipment and training to ISIS for quite some time. In addition, Turkish soldiers and police using plastic bullets and tear gas attacked Kurds flooding to the border in order to get some news from the other side and provide help to the Syrian Kurds. Even some of those only slightly wounded bled out after after Turkey chose to keep them waiting at the border. On the other hand, while ISIS was crossing the border during a live broadcast by a pro-Kurdish TV channel IMC, Turkish tanks and soldiers were just watching them. The Justice and Development Party (AKP), with the help of Kobane siege, has attempted to demolish

the Rojava model and aims to shape the peace process and solution to the Kurdish issue with a reactionary and sectarian form.

With the support of AKP and the ultra-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the Turkish parliament voted to authorize its government to send military forces to Iraq and Syria to combat the terrorist organizations. However the name of ISIS is not explicitly mentioned in the bill, which makes one think that the bill has some other intentions related with Syria and Assad's regime. A no-fly buffer zone in northern Syria, which was laid down by Turkish President Erdoğan as a condition for joining the international coalition, also aims to prevent Assad's air forces from intervening and bombing ISIS positions. The main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), comprehending the symbolic importance of Kobane as a secular project very well, joined People's Democratic Party (HDP) in voting "no" to the war measure, despite the pressure of the nationalist wing in the party which perceives PKK and PYD as an explicit threat to Turkey's integrity.

On October 4, PYD leader Salih Müslim visited Turkey and met with both the MIT (National Intelligence Organization of Turkey) and Foreign Ministry officials. He demanded two things: First, permission for the People's Protection Units (YPG, the armed wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and an affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers Party) fighters in Afrin and Cezire to cross the Turkish border in order to join the resistance in Kobane. Second, allowing the transportation of heavy weaponry coming from North Iraq through Habur Border Gate into Kobane through Mürşitpınar Border Gate. Since ISIS surrounded Kobane from east, west and south, Mürşitpınar Border Gate is the only connection YPG has with the outside world. Casualties and civilians enter Turkey from this gate. Turkey, in exchange for meeting these requirements, demanded unacceptable compromises from Müslim: back down from the cantons and democratic autonomy, stop the collaboration with Assad regime and accept the security zone. AKP, for a long time, has been trying to tame the Rojava Kurds who refuse to come together with the reactionary forces against the regime under the name of a so-called "opposition forces". However, Rojava once again chose to resist instead of giving up without a fight and Müslim left Ankara.[i]

After this meeting HDP called on its supporters to mount mass protests all over Turkey and demonstrations showing support for Kobane resistance began. During the demonstrations in the Kurdish cities and the ghettos of Western cities, the clashing parties were not only the Kurds and security forces as in the '90s, which were the peak years of the civil war; but also the supporters of MHP, AKP and Huda-Par, the party of Kurdish Hizbollah. This latter group, which had laid down its arms a few years ago and whose leaders were released from the prison by AKP, were in the streets. Islamo-fascists backing up ISIS started to attack the Kurdish and socialist students in the main universities of western Turkey. The government declared curfew in six cities, including Diyarbakır, and the tanks and infantry forces roamed the streets of Diyarbakır, thought to be the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurdistan. After a few days, there were 38 dead, 351 wounded and 58 detainees.

The Turkish government, in order to put an end to all these protests, assigned MIT officials to talk with Öcalan, who is imprisoned in Imralı and has been conducting peace negotiations with the state for several years. Öcalan's views were conveyed to HDP. After the statement (below) made by HDP on October 10, the protests all over the country decreased significantly and the tension eased: "We want to eliminate these internal and external threats to our peoples together with the government... Despite all the tension and pain, we expect the government to continue its positive steps (such as facilitating the passage of wounded people and humanitarian aid across the border), taking into consideration the contribution of Mr. Öcalan, preventing the attacks by provocateurs on civilians, and acting in a responsible way by issuing messages that will defuse tension."

The co-presidents of HDP added that they hoped the leaders of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), an organization founded by PKK to put into practice Öcalan's ideology of Democratic

Confederalism, would also repeat their call to demonstrators to refrain from violence, investigate armed actions, and take measures to reduce tension.

Nearly 40% of Kobane has been taken by ISIS at the moment. The fall of Kobane to ISIS would surely result in a massacre of the town's civilians. At the same time, a possible future of solidarity of peoples on the basis of secular pluralism and democratic autonomy in the Middle East will be shattered.

All these goings on related to Kobane, have a special significance for Turkey. Ocalan and Turkish state officials have been carrying out peace talks for several years after a 30-year civil war that took some 40,000 lives. If Kobane falls, it is likely that PKK will put an end to the truce and resume the armed struggle, which will mean thousands of more casualties in a new civil war. If Kobane falls, the violence will escalate in the Kurdish cities of Turkey and the extensions of ISIS in Turkey and the fascists will collaborate on lynching Kurds, Alewites, and socialists in Turkey. That police and Islamo-fascists together have been attacking socialist students in the universities for the last few days is a sign of this.

The Kurdish political movement is not monolithic. There are moderate Islamists, leftist and nationalists in it and this reality has a significant effect on their policies. The Kobane resistance has brought both the Kurdish national freedom movement and Turkey as a whole at a new and strategic political crossroads. ISIS, maybe for the very first time in Kurdish history, might have been the means of understanding what a big threat political Islam is for most of the Kurdish people. As a consequence, progressive views may gain strength within the Kurdish political movement. "Religious brotherhood" and the "Islamic umbrella," concepts frequently pronounced by Öcalan during the peace process, may be able to be questioned more loudly. The resistance of the Kurdish people against ISIS and political Islam, may reinforce the possibility of changing the republican masses' view of Kurdish reality and establishing a dialogue between the Kurds and the secular republicans on the basis of secular or even leftist values. The CHP's "No" vote to the bill in the parliament is a contribution to this potential outcome.. A significant part of the secular, democratic, and leftist sectors of Turkey know by heart that the only way to get rid of their own Islamo-fascist trouble is a united front comprising socialists and the secular, democratic and leftist wing of CHP and HDP.

[i]
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/kurds-are-no-more-mercenaries-pyd-leader-.aspx?pageID=238&nid=72880&NewsCatID=352>