

My Solution for Turkey, Syria, and the Kurds

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Capitalist modernity is history's deadliest and most continuous crisis of civilization. In particular, the general destruction of the last two hundred years has disrupted thousands of evolutionary links in the natural environment. We are probably not yet fully aware of the devastation this has caused the plant and animal worlds. It is, however, clear that, like the atmosphere, both these worlds are steadily emitting SOS signals.

How long can humanity go on enduring this modernity, which has inflicted far-reaching environmental devastation and caused the disintegration of society? How will humanity soothe the pain and agony of war, unemployment, hunger, and poverty?

The claim that the nation-state protects society is a vast illusion. On the contrary, society has been increasingly militarized by the nation-state and fully submerged in a kind of war. I call this war a societicide, imposed in two ways.

First, power and the state apparatus control, oppress, and surveil society.

Second, the information technology (the media monopolies) of the past fifty years has replaced real society with a virtual one. Up against the canons of nationalism, religionism, sexism, scientism, the arts, and the entertainment industry (including sports, soap operas, etc.), with which society is being battered 24/7 by the media, how can society be defended?

It's become quite clear that nation-statism in the Middle East is, in fact, one of capitalist modernity's tools of domination. What the Treaty of Versailles was to Europe, the Sykes-Picot Agreement drawn up between the British and the French in 1916 is to the Middle East: "A Peace to End All Peace."

Today's nation-states have the same meaning in the region as the Roman Empire's governors once had, but they are even more collaborationist with capitalist modernity — and stand even further from the region's cultural traditions. They are at war with their own peoples internally, and with one another externally. The liquidation of traditional society means war against peoples — and maps drawn with a ruler are an invitation for wars between states. None of them are adequate to overcoming the deepening crisis; in fact, their existence further deepens this crisis.

In my view, a third world war is taking place globally, with the Middle East as its center of gravity. In terms of scope and duration, this war is both deeper and longer than the first two world wars. The result is decay and disintegration. And it can end only with the formation of a new regional or global equilibrium. I contend that the fate of capitalist modernity's third world war will be determined by the developments in Kurdistan. This is manifest in what is happening in Iraq and Syria.

The existence of nation-states is an anomaly in Middle Eastern history — and the insistence on them leads to disasters. The Turkish nation-state believes that with a final genocide of the Kurds, it will make itself eternal — a nation-state now integrated with its own country and nation. Clearly, unless Turkey abandons this paradigm, it will be a mere gravedigger for the region's peoples and social cultures — including the Turkish people itself. Iran's future situation, similarly, remains uncertain both for itself and for the region.

But the situation of the Kurds — chopped up into pieces by nation-statism in the Middle East, imposing different forms of annihilation and assimilation upon each of these parts — is a complete catastrophe. Kurds are, as it were, condemned to a long-term, deadly agony.

Kurdish Struggle

However, the conditions have now matured — and the Kurds, through their struggle, can make their way out of the pincer movement of genocide. This is only possible through the project of a democratic nation — one based on free and equal citizens, existing together in solidarity, encompassing all cultural and religious realities. This is, then, a project designed to be forged together with the other peoples in the region. The methodology for achieving that goal is now developing, step-by-step.

Rojava and all of Northern and Eastern Syria — run by an autonomous multiethnic, multi-religion self-administration, based on the freedom of women — is rising like a beacon of freedom. This presents a model solution for both the peoples of the Middle East and the nation-states. The model proposes not the denial of nation-states, but proposes that they be bound to a democratic, constitutional solution. This will ensure the existence and autonomy of both the “state nation” — the nation constructed by the state — and the democratic nation.

The rich heritage of ethnic, religious, and denominational entities and their cultures, in this region can only be held together through this democratic nation mindset — one that fosters peace, equality, freedom, and democracy. Each culture, on the one hand, builds itself as a democratic national group. Then, they can live in a higher level of democratic national union with other cultures that they already live together with.

The democratic nation solution proposed by the Kurds has enabled them to eliminate ISIS — the result of religious monism — on behalf of all humanity. This is no doubt the result of our paradigm based on women’s freedom, making it a role model all over the world.

Fighting for the Future

At present, the developments in Northern and Eastern Syria have reached an important point. The recognition of the Administration of North and East Syria and the local democracy it represents for the Arab, Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian, and other peoples will be a very important development both for Syria and the wider Middle East. Our call for people to return from Europe, Turkey, and elsewhere will be possible once a Democratic Constitution of Syria is declared.

Our view on the Kurdish-Turkish conflict that has gone on for nearly a century is clear. We’ve been developing a democratic solution of the Kurdish question since 1993. Our stance — as seen in the 2013 talks with the Turkish nation-state, held in İmralı — expressed in the Newroz Declaration, as we entered the dialogue process, is today more important than ever. We reinforced this stance in the seven-point declaration we put forth in 2019. We insist on the need for social reconciliation and a democratic negotiation, to replace the culture of polarization and conflict.

Nowadays, problems can be solved not with physical tools of violence but with soft power. Under favorable conditions, I could set up the moves to eliminate the conflict within a week. As for the Turkish state, it is at a crossroads. It can either continue on its path toward unravelling like other nation-states in the region, or enter into a dignified peace and a meaningful democratic solution.

Ultimately, everything will be determined by the struggle between the parties. The success of the struggle waged by the Kurds through the politics of peace and democratic politics shall determine the end result. And freedom shall prevail.

On the Author

Abdullah Öcalan is founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), regarded as one of the Kurds' most important political representatives and a leading strategist. Ever since his abduction from Kenya in 1999 and subsequent trial and death sentence — commuted to life imprisonment without possibility of parole — he has been held in total isolation on İmralı island. For almost eleven years, he was the sole prisoner there.

Öcalan has written extensively on history, philosophy, and politics, and is regarded as a key figure for a political solution of the Kurdish issue. Since the author has been held totally incommunicado and not been able to consult his lawyers or receive regular visits for many years, this op-ed has been edited from his prison writings and recent statements. His recent works include *The Sociology of Freedom* (2020) and *The Political Thought of Abdullah Öcalan* (2017)

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