

Afrin and the Policies of the Democratic Union Party

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Afrin is one of the districts in northern Syria forming the region commonly known as Rojava. Until 17/03/2018, Afrin was one of Rojava's cantons that the seven year Syrian civil war did not reach. It was the safest place in the whole of Syria until January 20th when the Turkish State invaded. Around 200,000 people from different places in Syria, especially from Aleppo, moved there where they found peace, safety, equality, dignity and humanity.

There were many reasons for the invasion of Afrin by the Turkish State. The most important are the near-complete military defeat of Isis who fought against Syrian troops and Kurdish forces on behalf of the Turkish state, the proximity of Afrin and ethnic mix of its citizens which Erdogan wants to change by settling Arab refugees who are currently in Turkey and also its proximity to Idlib and Aleppo allowing control over the roads and supply of weapons and other support from Turkey to terrorist groups. In addition, there are unconfirmed reports that there was a deal between Erdogan and Assad whereby Erdogan would not support the rebels in East Ghouta whilst having a free hand to attack the Kurds in Afrin.

However, whatever the reasons were for Erdogan to invade Afrin, I believe the Turkish State cannot stay there for very long as there will be bargaining between Assad and Erdogan.

At dawn on 19th of March, Turkish troops, with the mercenaries of the Syrian Free Army (SFA), managed to enter Afrin after paying a heavy price. During the course of the invasion 1500 fighters of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were killed and many injured as well. Around 400 civilians were killed, over 2000 people were injured and also over 150,000 people left and headed toward Aleppo.

For the last 3 years the Turkish President, Rajab Erdogan, managed to play a very successful game, using almost everyone involved in the war. This included Isis, whilst keeping good diplomatic relationships with many regional governments including Iraq and Iran. He kept a successful balance between Russia and the United States and also satisfied Europe by blocking the entry of refugees through Turkey. One of his cleverest policies was imposing conflict on the PKK, forcing them to enter this war. Erdogan knows very well that any peace process helps the PKK and the Kurdish more than helping his political party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and his government. Throughout this war, Erdogan weakened the Peoples' Democratic

Party (HDP) and destroyed many cities, towns and villages in the Turkish Kurdistan region of Bakur.

There is no doubt that the US does not like some of Erdogan's policies. It does not want a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) to ally itself with Russia, enjoy a very good relationship with Iran and threaten Iraq whose Shia government is a US ally in fighting Isis. None of these are acceptable, but there is little the US can do about it. There is no alternative to the AKP in Turkey at all, and there has been no alternative political movement for the US to support and promote in order to replace the AKP. In this case the only other option is a military coup d'état. However, this option is also unavailable, at least in the present situation.

The vast majority of people, from writers, academics, and politicians to even ordinary supporters of the Kurdish people, are blaming the US, UN, UK and other European countries for being silent in the face of the brutal attack on Afrin and its citizens by the Turkish State. They believe that the above have betrayed the Kurdish in Rojava who defeated Isis, reducing the threat of terrorist attacks on the streets and public places. They think that, instead of being silent, these powerful states should have rewarded the Kurdish people by stopping Turkish troops slaughtering civilians, destroying their homes and land and displacing them.

I was neither shocked nor surprised about the position of the above states. We should all know better especially for those of us who know too well the history of the UK and US. They have no history of protecting human rights or of liberating nations from their allies. They have never supported any leftist, communist or socialist movements, let alone an anarchist one. Their history shows they have only been concerned with their own interests. They have always lined up with the most brutal dictators and states in the world. It is they who are planning war in advance and causing terrible, miserable lives for the majority of people in many, many countries.

We should also know there has been a major power struggle in the Middle East and the entry of the US into the war in support of the Kurdish in Kobane was the last effort and hope for the US to save its skin in the region rather than being kicked out of the region completely.

Personally, I always believed it was not that Rojava wanted the support of the US and Russia but, in that circumstance it was they who actually wanted Kurdish support especially when the Kurdish proved themselves in battle. When the US entered the war in Kobane it was mainly symbolic, morally boosting the spirit of the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ) at the time. US forces never seriously fought Isis in Kobane and never truly threatened them because it never wanted to destroy them. By entering the war, the US destroyed whatever was left intact in Kobane after the attack by Isis. Before US involvement, only 30% of Kobane was destroyed but by the end of the war this increased to 70%. I never had a doubt that this was a deliberate effort to weaken Kobane and Rojava politically and economically so that the Kurds would ask big US and European corporations to help in the rebuilding.

A few months after defeating Isis in Kobane, it became obvious that Syria and Rojava became the battlefields or war zone for Russia and the US as they played out a political, economic and strategic power struggle. At this stage, both were looking for a proxy war and trying to find groups to fight on their behalf. The Democratic Union Party (PYD) was among them but it tried to keep a balance between. Alas, in the end the PYD could not maintain this balance and had to align itself with the US, putting the future of Rojava in its hands.

This has disturbed Russia, Syria, Iran, Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shia group, and also Turkey as a member of NATO.

In such circumstances, the only winner was Erdogan who, up to the present time has played this game very well with the loser clearly being the Kurdish people of Rojava.

Has the PYD committed to the right policies to protect what has been achieved in Rojava?

Before coming to this point I would like to say I have written quite a lot about Rojava and Bakur in which I criticised the policies of the PKK and PYD. If anybody is interested in reading them, please see the links at the end of this article.

In my opinion PYD had three options to choose from, whilst each of the US and Russia had only one. The PYD could ally itself with Russia or US or simply stay out of the war and be neutral. In adopting the third option, it could work with the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tev-Dem) and the Democratic Self-administration (DSA) in bringing more international support and solidarity in rebuilding Rojava. At the same time, it could develop the YPG and YPJ to make them more powerful defence forces and stay independent of the PYD itself. In other words, it should serve the interests of the whole of Rojava and not just its own. The PYD should have stuck with Ocalan's principle, "if we have the world's forces, we will not attack anywhere. If all the world attacks us we will defend ourselves and not surrender".

In my opinion, there were no excuses or justifications for the PYD to try to expand its territory and fight Isis in non-Kurdish lands. The more land they liberated from Isis, the more fighters were killed, whilst bringing more threats and insecurity from Turkey, Iran and Russia to Rojava, more relying on US financially and militarily in other words less independent and also less focused on rebuilding Rojava economically and socially.

So what was going wrong with the PYD?

Unfortunately, the PYD was the main architect in designing policies and making plans for Rojava without consulting the people in Rojava. In fact, all the decisions, as with any other political party, have been made by a small circle of people, its leaders, in a dark room. Since Kobane's battle, the PYD made and committed to so many wrong policies. In my opinion, these have damaged the mass movement in Rojava instead of taking it forward. Here are some of them:

Aligning with the US: I already mentioned above the reasons for the US entering the war in Rojava and also mentioned that the PYD had three cards in its hand. The PYD did not need to deeply analyse or do much research in order to understand the position of the US in supporting any movement or government in the world. It has been clear for at least a century that many of us have known the US as a dark force. In fact any movement attracted to the US usually becomes very unpopular and suspect and has no future outside the US or to its big corporate interests. This should have been very clear and considered by the very progressive and unique movement in Rojava.

The Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG, following attack by the Iraqi Government on 16/10/2017 with a green light from the US, proved wrong to rely on or ally with the US. Surely, the US never drops Turkey, Iraq, Iran or the future Syrian government for Kurdish interests. These two examples proved again that those who thought the PYD had no choice but to ally itself with the US were wrong.

YPG and YPJ: These two forces initially were small volunteer forces but were very effective in defending Rojava. The PYD gradually made them much larger. Their strategy changed from defence to attack forces and have absolute loyalty to the PYD rather than to the people from whom they emerged. The YPG and YPJ were jointly commanded by the PYD and US attacking Isis who coordinated and cooperated in the air and ground fighting against Isis.

Constant war with Isis: The PYD insisted on defeating Isis in cooperation with US forces when, after Kobane, Isis was not a direct threat to Rojava at least while they were engaged in fighting with other forces. Continuation of the war with Isis meant digging graves for themselves. Consequently, the YPG and YPJ were weakened losing so many fighters, needed more help in every way from the US and deepened enmity with Erdogan. Putting fighting with Isis as the main strategy before rebuilding Rojava, resulted in less impetus to form more cooperatives to improve the life of people in Rojava economically and not focussing on the continuation of the revolution in culture and education. These, along with many more, were the consequence of continuing the war with Isis.

Syrian Kurdish National Council for Kurdish Opposition Parties (ENKS): The Syrian opposition political parties in Rojava have never had deep roots among people in Rojava. They have never been popular having no clean and clear records or background. That said, that does not mean they cannot have an influence over people or that they cannot stand against Rojava's people and their movement. ENKS could not launch a movement let alone make a revolution, but certainly they could and can damage and hurt the movement, especially when they have been supported in every way by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Barzani's Party. They also have a strong connection with Turkey and probably other regional governments.

In my opinion there was always room for the PYD to compromise with ENKS. They could accept some of their political conditions apart from letting them have their own independent military force out of control of the SDF. If the PYD had a good relation with them then it could affect the attitude of the KDP towards the PYD as well and probably ENKS could have an influence on Turkey too or, at least, could stay neutral.

Final US plan and project: When the US recently recommended that the PYD should form a 30,000 strong force among the SDF to protect the borders, the PYD should have turned this request down. They should have known better. The US never wanted the SDF to be too big, although any forces made larger by an outsider can easily vanish or, at least, be smaller. The PYD should have known that this plan would annoy and irritate the State of Turkey and bring forward its plan to invade Afrin.

When the invasion started on 20/01/18, the PYD instead of begging for help from the US, UK, the rest of Europe and the UN should have given an immediate warning to the US; either stop their ally, Turkey, from attacking Afrin, or they would withdraw from fighting Isis and join the SDF in fighting Turkey in Afrin. However, this was not done until almost the last weeks of the operation and that was far too late.

The question is why the PYD made mistake after mistake or rather all the time made wrong decisions?

The answer is very simple as they never consulted the people in Rojava. They ignored Ocalan's principle about the people making all the decisions. The PYD has a history of doing this. In 2015 when they negotiated with ENKS, they reached an agreement to offer 40 seats on the Democratic Self Administration, DSA, without consulting the people in Rojava. However, later ENKS pulled out of the agreement so they did not share power in Rojava.

I am sure that if the PYD had consulted with people when making these decisions, then many lives could have been saved as well as saving Rojava from any invasion or, at least, they would not be as responsible for what happened in Afrin or what may happen in future.

What can we learn from all this?

Well, the only lesson we can learn is that we should not trust any political parties and their leaders as they usually represent a tiny minority in society. They make decisions among a very small circle in a dark room. The strength of political parties is always at the expense of the mass movement, and eventually the mass movement is getting weaker and weaker.

We also should know that building Confederation or Democratic Confederation is the work of millions of people in all sections of society rather than the job of political parties. The last lesson we should learn is that we should recognise the use of weapons as a conditional and solid duty in defending ourselves but not attacking others.

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