

On Ocalan's Call for Peace and Social Democratic Imperialism

An Anarchist Communist Critique

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Revolutionary struggle is never a solitary endeavor; rather it is an unfolding process replete with contradiction and tension. But sifting through the complexity what fundamentally endures is solidarity and principles. When we – anarchist and communist revolutionaries – embark on the path of struggle we expect to exist, grow and die in a life of contradiction and tension, but we also intend for the path we are on to steadily maintain the positions that we’ve historically defined as unequivocal. In essence, some things are negotiable, some deviations are forgivable, and some can be treacherous. The recent positions and actions by the PKK, in several of its components, are not only inconsistent with revolutionary struggle, but have deviated so far from the established principles of proletarian and internationalist struggle that the project has now veered into an essentially revisionist, collaborationist posture. This is particularly alarming as the internationalist movement exceedingly needs heightened, resolute and honorable positions as the challenges facing us are grave and growing.

We are writing from an anarchist communist position that is far from monolithic in our locale, or in general, but we have also been at the forefront of solidarity efforts with the PKK since the formation of the International Freedom Battalion, the HBDH, and the establishment of the anarchist guerrilla faction, the IRPGF. We have been increasingly alarmed at ongoing developments and the most recent political realities need to be addressed. We are not writing this with any elation and are not laying out this statement from a dogmatic, idealist stance. In actuality, we maintained principled silence on a whole host of revisionist deviations, and would have continued out of respect for the complex and dynamic position the combatants find themselves in at the forefront in the conflict zones in West Asia. However, recent developments have pushed us to publicly critique the organization in spite of our admiration for their historical accomplishments.

In the earlier phases of the struggle in Rojava, the US and the YPG both stated their collaboration was “temporary, transactional and tactical”; in essence, not a strategic partnership but a brief association to combat ISIS. This stated position is now, approximately, 8 years old and has turned into unarguably a comprehensive strategic partnership.

The reality is even more stark in light of the larger situation in West Asia today. The Palestinian Revolution, ignited by the monumental October 7th operation, followed by remarkable acts of solidarity performed in northern occupied Palestine and the Red Sea, set a new stage in contemporary struggle against colonialism and imperialism, but is also an illustrative example of resistance for the entire internationalist movement. The war against the Zionist settler regime, and in effect the US-led imperialist world system, is at an elevated state, and due to the genocidal nature of the imperialist forces, the planned ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and the potential of success for the Resistance in Gaza, the liberation of Palestine must have a central role. To be clear, this is not to contrast the Kurdish movement with the Palestinian movement, but to highlight a fundamental contradiction that has reached its peak. The Zionist regime, being a settler appendage of US power projection, has embarked on a genocidal campaign, and the eradication of the Zionist state will put unprecedented pressure on American imperialism, particularly as the US is a wounded animal that has been in decline for some time due to its intensifying excesses. In this context, the PKK partnership with the American regime is particularly inconceivable – as a crucial war for liberation against colonialism rages on in the region.

The opportunism in this collusion is evident but there are also three other crucial points that we feel must be addressed to clarify the true scope of the morass.

1)

The historic statement by Abdullah Ocalan calling for the PKK to lay down its arms and to dissolve itself not only betrays the strategy of revolutionary people's war, self-defense, and proletarian struggle; the release of the statement had been timed at the height of the counter-revolutionary push across the region, which is the HTS/Turkish consolidation of power and the Zionist colonial expansion in Syria.

The statement was met with confusion initially by PKK executive committee members. Murat Karayilan, for instance, stated, "Let's assume that he [Ocalan] made the call. But this work cannot be done only through a call. We are a movement with tens of thousands of armed people. These fighters are not on a payroll to be sacked. These are ideological fighters. They have beliefs and are willing to sacrifice themselves."

The Turkish revolutionary organization, the MLKP who is allied with the PKK, resoundingly rejected the statement arguing:

We strongly emphasize that the view in the "Call for Peace and a Democratic Society," which states, "There is no path outside of democracy for system searches and implementations. There cannot be. Democratic consensus is the fundamental method," is incompatible with the reality of polarization between oppressors and the oppressed, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the oppressed peoples in Turkey, Kurdistan, and worldwide. In a world where the ruling class, through their state apparatuses, hold the monopoly on violence, have access to the means of violence, are armed to the teeth, fascistize state apparatuses, and divide the world with blood and fire, it is impossible for the working class, women, oppressed peoples, and workers to achieve their basic demands, gain freedom, and create a just, humane world without armed struggle and revolutionary mass violence.

The MLKP will continue the fight for freedom against the fascist regime, denialist colonialism, the patriarchal system, capitalist exploitation, and imperialism, for the Union of the People's Republics of Turkey and Kurdistan, for the Democratic and Socialist Federation in the Middle East, and for the war for socialism, using all means and forms of struggle.

We echo a similar sentiment here. The renunciation of revolutionary self defense and mass violence is the siren call of a movement replete with bourgeois revisionism. Other segments in Ocalan's call illuminate the same issues: the demands for "free self-expression, democratic self-organization of each segment of society based on their own socio-economic and political structures"; the idea that "permanent and fraternal continuity" can be achieved if it is "crowned with democracy." Or that "there is no alternative to democracy in the pursuit and realization of a political system. Democratic consensus is the fundamental way." This is the language of imperialist power; it is the language of liberalism. We don't mean this in a pejorative sense either, but literally. The discourse of democracy separated from class war, a movement without an armed component, or a strategic initiative against the colonialist enemies is merely speaking the language of defeat.

2)

Mazloun Abdi, the top SDF general, who was in the PKK high command, the HPG and a personal friend of Ocalan, publicly stated that the YPG is open to support from the Zionist colonial regime. Abdi stated if the occupation regime can “prevent attacks against us and stop the killing of our people, we welcome that and appreciate it... ‘Israel’ is a force with influence in the US, the West, and the region.” As we noted, Palestine is the compass for anti-colonial revolution, and publicly articulating (particularly now) a desire to open relations with the Zionist regime is unconscionable.

From Imrali Island to SDF headquarters, the whispers of social democratic imperialism have now become screams, however, in Qandil, and HBDH guerrilla zones we hear a different discourse. Cemil Bayik recently stated, for instance that, “A new Syria is being built, and it is based on protecting ‘Israel’ and the global capital. What does ‘Israel’ represent? It represents global capital; it represents the capitalist system. Protecting ‘Israel’ does not only mean protecting Israel; it also means protecting the system of capitalist modernity.”

After the martyrdom of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah the MLKP proclaimed his “memory will live on in the struggle for a free and united Middle East,” while also calling “on the peoples of Kurdistan and Turkey to take the streets, side by side with the peoples of Palestine and Lebanon, against genocidal colonialism.” TKP-ML’s Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Brigade, based in Rojava, proclaimed that “Nasrallah has become an example of resistance against ‘Israel’s’ brutality, attacks and occupations.” They called “on all peoples to take a stand against genocide and to actively solidarize with the Palestinian and Lebanese people,” since the “only remedy for the oppressed against this system is to unite in a common line of resistance and to strengthen solidarity networks with the oppressed peoples of the world.”

These positions hearken back to the foundational era of the PKK’s Kurdish Freedom struggle, when guerrillas were based in the Bekaa Valley as guests of the Palestinian Resistance, and even took casualties fighting Zionist colonialists in the 1982 battle for the Castle Arnun in Lebanon. Evoking this period highlights the nature of the political differences that have emerged, and the consolidation of bourgeois thought and practice within the upper echelon of the PKK – seemingly the dominant perspectives. The revolutionary parties and some of the executive branch in Qandil fully understands that the Kurdish Freedom Movement, allied with the Palestinian Resistance is unmistakably the path to liberate both societies – merged again through resistance.

Practically speaking, the Resistance in Palestine and Lebanon wanted a front opened against the Zionist regime from Syria. The Assad regime, being as opportunistic and cynical as expected, refused to open a new front for the Resistance, leaving Hezbollah to take the brunt of the fighting in the north singlehandedly. If PKK/YPG forces had opened a front, even symbolically, the contradictions that exist would have been severely disrupted, solidarity between the stateless peoples would have been strengthened and the repairing of Kurdish-Arab ties could have been addressed with a foundational basis of revolutionary solidarity and not political maneuvering.

3)

The SDF/YPG announcement of their political and military merger with the HTS regime in Damascus signals an impending collapse of the revolutionary project.

The HTS seizure of power in Syria is the culmination of a counter revolutionary process targeting Palestine and revolutionary Kurdistan in tandem. HTS, like its counterparts ISIS and Al-Qaeda, are accomplices with the fascist Turkish state. Its military offensive against Assad, timed on the very day of the ceasefire in Lebanon – November 27th – was designed to put extraordinary pressure on the Palestinian Resistance and its supporters during a period of vulnerability. In this regard, it was almost certainly agreed upon by the Zionists and their American sponsors. Before the offensive, the US and Zionist regime were beaten to a stalemate in Lebanon and the HTS actions became the one marker of strategic success for imperialism in the entire al-Aqsa Flood battle. Fascist Prime Minister Netanyahu claimed the collapse of the Syrian regime was “a direct result of the blows we have inflicted” on the anti-Zionist Resistance forces.

On the Kurdish side, the success of the HTS military operation brought to power the same people the PKK had fought against since the rise of ISIS and it also rejuvenated the Turkish backed SNA forces that were attacking the YPG in the north. However, this also put political pressure on revolutionary factions in the Kurdish movement since Rojava was surrounded by hostile forces who have now gained momentum.

The Communist factions have maintained the position that striving for a Kurdish nation, allied with internationalist anti-imperialist forces as a bulwark against Western expansion is the objective. The PKK, on the other hand, proposed the formation of the democratic nation, opposed to the nation-state system, where directly-democratic communes organize themselves, cutting through the miscellaneous Sykes-Picot arrangement, and through ethnic divisions. But the opportunistic forces in the PKK, based in Syria and Turkey, disregarded both revolutionary propositions and took Ocalan’s call for disarming/dissolution and the opportunity to appease western forces to its logical conclusion. As TKP-ML stated in their recent text about Ocalan’s call, “it appears that even this ‘paradigm’ – Democratic Confederalism – “has now been abandoned.” In both instances, in Syria and Turkey, the party is calling for subsumption by both states. In Turkey the PKK calls for the establishment of a democratic process, which as Cemil Bayak says the conditions for such an initiative do not even exist. He states, “The Turkish state attacks us every day with all kinds of weapons. How are we going to stop under these circumstances? Of course, our struggle continues.” In Syria, Salih Muslim, spokesperson for the PYD’s foreign relations, reinforces the capitulation, claiming that the agreement with HTS is consistent with Ocalan’s decree.

We should also note that the signing of the agreement with the HTS regime, just like the offensive against Assad, was timed in a particularly heinous manner. The signing ceremony was commenced immediately after one of the gravest massacres – resembling Sabra and Chatilla – was committed by regime forces. Recent estimates maintain that almost 1400 people were slaughtered by the state in western Syria, the vast majority civilians, with tacit approval by the west and their puppet Arab states.

In the imperial core, particularly in the US, we had struggled against the revisionist creep in Rojava solidarity efforts; promoting the combative forces and maintaining the line of armed struggle, anti-imperialism, while supporting efforts either towards the Kurdish nation, or the Democratic Confederalist line. Both positions have merit, and solidarity was established through struggle, with its clearest articulation in the International Freedom Battalion in Rojava, and the HBDH in Turkey in Bakur. Through this process we have also understood mourning, loss and sacrifice. The internationalist movement has given martyrs from all over the world; Orhan Bakırçıyan, Ivana Hoffmann, Dogan Kirefe, Lorenzo Orsetti, Michael Israel, Ulaş Bayraktaroglu, Alina Sanchez, Nurhak Cem, and the list continues.

In memory of the fallen it is our responsibility to clearly proclaim that the direction the party has taken is contrary to the stated objectives of the revolution: from either the class struggle position or the Democratic Nation. We hope non-revisionist forces within the struggle can exert the necessary pressure to prevent a further drift towards reaction and normalization with imperialism. In a similar manner that Fatah's capitulation in the Palestinian struggle damned the left to years of insignificance, or Khrushchev's peaceful coexistence betrayed anti-colonial forces, thoroughly discrediting the Soviet project, the PKK's shift towards integration and peaceful co-existence with US imperialism will certainly have a similar effect.

The integration of revolutionary political forces into the Western-backed state in Syria, and the dismantling of revolutionary military forces in Qandil and Bakur is totally irreconcilable and antagonistic to the furtherance of the internationalist movement. The Kurdish Revolution, with the PKK as its primary revolutionary force, cannot prevail after being absorbed into bourgeois, fascist political structures in West Asia; in fact, the most advanced sections of the movement – the women's movement and the armed struggle – will only survive if the democratic aspirations of the Kurdish people are fulfilled and maintained through embracing the principled positions that have been established and continuing to combine efforts with other forces fighting against imperialism today. People's War, the Democratic Confederalist model, and the "right to freely secede" (the right to establish a Kurdish nation which is now rejected by Ocalan), are all positions that reject absorption and must be upheld. As TKP-ML succinctly stated, "Renouncing or refusing to demand.. national-collective rights does not mean that the Kurdish national question has been resolved, nor does it indicate that the contradiction between the oppressor and oppressed nations has disappeared."

Due to wary statements from some members of the PKK leadership and the revolutionary organizations we believe there is still potential to pivot and rectify the situation internally. We are certain the guerrillas in the mountains, the commando units in the cities, and local organizers who worked diligently to build popular power are questioning these positions. Revolutionaries in Kurdistan and elsewhere understand what is at stake and that now is not the time for half measures. The collaborationist posture is particularly egregious as antagonisms and conflict are amplified in the region. The internationalist anarchist and communist positions must further the line against capitulation.

For a free Kurdistan and a free Palestine!
No to unilateral ceasefire and disarmament!

Revolutionary Anarcho-Communists in the Northeastern "US"

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