

World Kobane Day 2018: vigilance & resistance

by Marcel Cartier - 01/11/2018 12:56



Today marks the fourth anniversary of the first ever World Kobane Day, which was initiated by the Kurdish Freedom Movement and its supporters at the time of the Islamic State's (IS) siege of the city in late 2014. The call was made to garner international solidarity for the fighters of the People's & Women's Protection Units (YPG/J) who were pushing back against the brutal invasion by the fascistic forces.

The significance of World Kobane Day this year cannot be understated.

IS is long gone from the streets of the city, whose people - 350,000 of which have returned after liberation - have slowly been going through a process of rebuilding, as well as gradually furthering the institutions that have not only replaced the chaos of those dark days of late 2014, but have brought forward a new model of participatory democracy that is light years ahead of what reality was like for them prior to the declaration of autonomy by Kurdish revolutionary forces in 2012.

However, Kobane – much like the rest of Rojava, or the Democratic Federation of

Northern Syria (DFNS) – is far from safe from the threats of fascist occupation. IS has been largely decimated as a functional organisation, but continues to cling to life in Deir ez-Zor, where both the YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the Syrian government are attempting to eradicate their last pocket of control. In recent days, an attack by IS left dozens of SDF fighters dead in the town of Sousa.

Meanwhile, in Heseke, the YPG foiled a bomb plot that they attributed to IS operatives, saying “thanks to the sense of responsibility and the attention of the civilian population, a potential danger has been eliminated and another ISIS attack has been thwarted.”

But the principal threat is no longer IS, but their partners in crime in Ankara.

Erdogan Promises Another Invasion of Rojava

Four years after IS attempted to turn Kobane into ‘Ayn al-Islam’, the Turkish state under the aegis of President Erdogan has stepped into their shoes once more, just as it did when Turkey facilitated the occupation of Afrin earlier this year alongside rebranded IS and al-Qaeda elements who flew the flag of the ‘Free Syrian Army’.

Turkey’s military has engaged in the shelling of both Kobane and nearby Gire Spi (Tell Abyad) in recent days, which had once been of the most important cities for IS, as it served as their human supply route on the Turkey-Syria border to their self-proclaimed caliphate’s former ‘capital’ of Raqqa.

The renewed aggression by Erdogan’s forces has resulted in the SDF announcing the halting of its operations in the Hajin region of Deir ez-Zor, just as it had been forced to do when the encirclement of Afrin was taking place in January.

In a statement released on October 31, the SDF drew the appropriate connections between the campaigns by both IS and Turkey, saying “We in SDF consider these attacks to be direct support provided by the Turkish state to reorganize IS and came in direct coordination with it and coincided with the reverse attacks carried out by IS on Hajin area recently. We also inform the world public that this direct coordination between the attacks of the Turkish army in the north and the attacks of IS in the south against our forces which have stopped the "battle to defeat terrorism" temporarily, which our forces were fighting in the last strongholds of the terrorist organization, and the continuation of these attacks will cause a long-term suspension of our military campaign against IS.”

Quartet Meeting: Prelude to a Bloodbath

The renewed push by Erdogan for a Turkish military occupation of the predominately Kurdish areas of northern Syria is far from surprising. In a statement made on

Tuesday, he promised to proceed with his plans, saying "We will destroy the terrorist structures east of the Euphrates. We have completed our preparations, plans and programs to this end."

The timing was hardly coincidental. It followed the meeting in Ankara over the weekend between Erdogan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Russian President Vladimir, where the four leaders gathered to supposedly push for a resolution of the Syrian war -- of course, without the participation of the Syrian government, or the Kurdish-led forces who control roughly one third of the country's territory (also noteworthy was the absence of the United States from that meeting).

In an article written by Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council Member Mustafa Karasu for *Yeni Ozgur Politika*, he made clear that the meeting had no serious agreement reached aside from the greenlighting of Turkey's aggression toward Rojava. Karasu wrote, "there was no outcome of this meeting but a rehashing of all parties defending their own theses and voicing general common points. The only outcome of such a meeting in Istanbul has been the legitimisation of the AKP fascism and its attacks against the Kurdish people and forces of democracy."

This is an outgrowth of the policies of these countries since the Afrin occupation, which both Germany and Russia had greenlighted, while France took a more critical position.

German tanks and other weaponry that have been delivered over decades played an indispensable role in the invasion, prompting outrage across German society and from left-wing politicians in Berlin. As a consequence, Merkel issued some half-hearted warnings to Erdogan, but stopped far short of ending weapons deals with the AKP government. Erdogan's recent trip to Berlin, where he was met with massive protests, was aimed at smoothing over any rough edges that had developed in the relationship between the AKP and Germany's government over the past few years. Russia's decision to open Afrin's airspace was seen by many as an outright betrayal of the YPG/J who they had previously enjoyed a working relationship with both on the ground, and through the first Rojava diplomatic mission which had opened in Moscow in 2016. But the rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow changed the equation. Last month, foreign minister Sergei Lavrov went as far as to say, "The main danger to Syria's territorial integrity originates from the eastern bank of the Euphrates, where autonomous structures are created under the direct control of the US". This, of course, flies in the face of the fact that these structures are not the result of the U.S. presence, but are cornerstone projects of Rojava's ideology of democratic confederalism, which also aims to maintain the territorial integrity of the current states

in the region.

France's position has been more ambiguous, with analysts pointing to Emmanuel Macron's body language while holding hands with Erdogan at the summit as symbolic of a tougher line toward Turkey. Macron was perhaps the most vocal of the western leaders in urging Ankara to show restraint in Afrin, and he suggested mediating between Turkey and the SDF, to which Erdogan remarked in March, "If the remark by the French Presidency that 'we can mediate between Turkey and the SDF' is true, it far exceeds the capacity of the person who said it." French troops have been reported to be operating in the northeast Syria since April, a move that coincided with Donald Trump saying that he would seek U.S. withdrawal from the country (a statement he later retracted). Washington's interests were perhaps best represented at the summit by Macron, who told reporters that he had personally briefed Trump on the quartet meeting before departing for Istanbul.

U.S.-Turkey Relations: A Turning Point in Manbij?

The timing of the renewed attacks from Turkey against YPG/J positions along the border also coincides with statements from both the U.S. and Erdogan's government about the start of joint patrols in Manbij, which were agreed to as part of a roadmap signed between U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in June.

In that meeting's aftermath, Pompeo said of Turkey, "they will ultimately be part of political resolution there and an important part. And we need to recognize that and do our best of work alongside them."

On Monday, October 30, a Pentagon spokesperson confirmed that joint patrols would soon begin, saying "Mission rehearsals and interoperability training for combined patrols outside Manbij city are complete. Both forces are resetting in order to begin combined patrols."

Erdogan has made no secret that "after Manbij" (where he claims that YPG/J are still operational despite the city being under the control of the Manbij Military Council), he would set his sights on the areas to the east of the Euphrates River.

The start of these patrols and the signs of an imminent Turkish invasion of cities that straddle the border leave one to wonder if the United States has decided to push forward with the full-fledged "abandonment" of the YPG/J in a gesture of good faith to Erdogan to show that it is prioritizing its relationship with the second largest military in NATO.

After all, the last thing that Washington wants is to watch Turkey drift closer to Russia, the most alarming evidence to the U.S. establishment being Moscow's \$2.5

billion sales of S-400 anti-aircraft weapons systems to Ankara.

Urgent Solidarity Required

The fact that Turkey's attacks on Rojava resumed in full force the day after the Erdogan-Merkel-Putin-Macron show of unity shows how emboldened Erdogan feels at the moment. He has been promising to clear the border of what he calls "terrorists" for years, but the regional geopolitical situation was never quite favourable enough for such an operation to commence.

Now, he has Kobane in his sights, just as IS did four years ago. The urgency of the current situation should not be understated.

In a statement issued on October 31, the European Democratic Kurdish Society Congress called for urgent actions in solidarity with Rojava, saying "Erdogan, hellbent to carry out a Kurdish genocide, and the fascist Turkish state are looking for revenge through attacking our gains. Our patriotic people in Europe, and all who are revolutionaries, democrats, intellectuals and opponents of fascism should be aware of the danger that awaits the Rojava Revolution and Kobanê, and rise up with the historical tradition of resistance in Kobanê."

The brutality of Turkish-Salafist occupation has already been made abundantly clear in Afrin, where Kurdish cultural rights are inhibited once more and the most grotesque of human rights abuses have been documented. The fact that world powers are willing to greenlight further occupation and possible genocidal actions on the part of Erdogan's government shows the fallacy of their "human rights" discourse where they peddle vague notions of "freedom" and "democracy".

For those of us who have found profound inspiration through the examples of the martyrs who gave their lives for the liberation of Kobane, we have a responsibility to raise our voices at this critical juncture. The fall of the Rojava Revolution would be disastrous for its people and for the wider region, and a major setback for progressive forces globally.