

# Debate: In Gaza's protests, Kurds should stand with Israel

by Zach Daniel - 04/06/2018 16:27



## Editorial Introduction

*On the 16th of May, we published a statement released by the executive committee of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which demonstrated its commitment to standing in solidarity with those in Gaza who had lost their lives in a series of protests on the Gaza/Israeli border. At the time, Israeli gunfire had left 1,500 wounded, and led to the death of dozens over the course of one week. The statement itself was seen as controversial, by critics and sympathisers alike.*

*The PKK, provides the ideological tenants which inspire the YPJ (Women's protection units), the YPG (Peoples protection units) and their political wing, the PYD (Democratic Union Party). Over the course of the Syrian civil war, the PYD has been a leading partner of the International coalition against the so-called Islamic State (IS) and although the PYD is organisationally separate from the PKK, it adheres to the ideological perspectives of the PKK.*

*This only means that whether supporters or critics may disagree, the PKK is extremely important in shaping the direction of West Asian politics.*

*The latest statement released by the PKK, which emphasised "the solidarity of the Kurdish people with the Palestinian and Arab people", and which condemned the decision by many of Israel's allies to "announce Jerusalem as the capital of Israel", caused controversy, and drew a divisive line between left-wing and right-wing supporters of the Kurdish struggle for self-determination and IS. It also divided many in the Kurdish diaspora.*

*The following is an article written by Zach Daniel. The main thrust of the argument is that the "PKK should recognize the long-running sympathy and material support for the Kurdish cause that the Jewish People and their state have offered — and avoid a message of sympathy for the Palestinians that could be understood as an endorsement of Hamas' barbaric tactics against civilians on both sides. "*

*Please make sure to read the counterpoint, written by Kerem Schamberger, which is supportive of the latest PKK statement against the killings of Palestinians on the Gaza-Israeli border. It argues that because "Journalists have been killed in cold blood, nurses have been murdered, babies have died from tear gas, and thousands are susceptible to becoming permanently disabled", the PKK was right and just to stand in solidarity with Gazan protesters.*

In Gaza's latest protests, Kurds should stand with Israel

The Executive Committee of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) released a sharply-worded condemnation of Israel's response to the escalating situation on the Gaza border. Calling for non-violent resolution and negotiations, [the statement](#) also went so far as to call the 62 deaths on May 14th a "massacre," as part of Turkish and Israeli "genocidal colonialism."

Selahattin Demirtas, head of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) similarly [tweeted](#) harsh sentiments, and wished "mercy from Allah to the massacred sons and daughters" from Israel's "boundless barbarism."

There's a glaring problem. By any moral, tactical, or ideological measure, the Palestinian mode of resistance seems incongruent with the moral and ideological aims of the PKK — unbecoming of the level of solidarity expressed by the PKK's leadership. It's also incongruent with previous opinions of top level PKK cadres.

First of all, were the protests in Gaza peaceful, and who was "massacred"?

To remove dispute about numbers and intent, let's go only by what Hamas said in

recent days. A senior Hamas official [estimated](#) that, “50 of them are from Hamas and 12 from the people ... these are official numbers.” Palestinian Islamic Jihad [claims](#) an additional three. Those breaching the border published [videos](#) of themselves bearing knives, molotov cocktails, screaming “Allah akbar” as they broke through, headed towards Israeli communities just hundreds of meters away. “We will take down the border and we will tear out their hearts from their bodies,” was the rally cry from [Yahya Sinwar](#), Hamas’ military leader.

Hence it is no surprise that the co-founder of Hamas, Mahmoud al-Zahar, [told](#) al Jazeera in an interview about the protests that, “When we talk about ‘peaceful resistance,’ we are deceiving the public. This is a peaceful resistance bolstered by a military force and by security agencies,” and added that they are using a “...clear terminological deception.”

So in reality, it was a massacre of mostly jihadist terrorists — cousins of those which the PKK and its ideological affiliate, the YPG, have sacrificed to eradicate.

If they were referring to the tragic loss of several civilian lives in the crossfire, however heart-breaking each death is, reality does not bode well for the narrative of alleged Israeli indiscriminate fire on civilians — if in a crowd of tens of thousands, nearly 90 percent of those killed in the “massacre” are enemy combatants.

When coalition air support for liberation of ISIS strongholds was provided to the YPG, did it crow about undue amounts of civilian casualties? Were they counting? It begs the question of whether there’s a double standard in our shared fight against radical jihad.

Since the PKK statement firmly aligns it with the struggle of the Palestinians, here’s a quick comparison of their tactics of resistance: Kurdish leaders do not mobilize [women and children](#) to breach the Turkish border wall or conflict boundaries. The Kurds also do not fire from [civilian population centers, at civilian population centers, as Hamas does. It did not laden animals with explosives, nor did it transport terrorists in first responder vehicles.](#)

The PKK’s resistance does not stab [pregnant women](#), kidnap children and then murder them, and nor do they hold the [mentally ill](#) and the [body parts](#) of their enemies for barter. The Kurds wouldn’t squander international aid on [tunnels](#) used solely to kidnap and massacre civilians.

The PKK promotes respect for the environment — while Hamas sets [forests ablaze](#) and orders ‘[tire burning units](#)’ to torch [10,000 tires](#). Under Hamas, [political opponents](#) and [gays](#) may face execution.

The PKK can do better than this: their morality is head and shoulders above any organized resistance movement the Palestinians have ever mustered. The PKK has been focused on building a free entity, while the dominant Palestinian ‘liberation movements’ are focused on destroying one. Compare what happened when Assad withdrew from Rojava, with what happened when Israel withdrew from Gaza.

The stark difference between the PKK and Hamas is that Hamas actually deserves to be a designated terror organization.

Writing as someone who came to know Kurdish fighters during a combined dozen trips to their areas in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, the moral clarity between the Kurds and their enemies is unmatched. Nothing the PKK can say would diminish the respect deserved by the martyrs and their families, for their sacrifices on behalf of humanity.

Noting a “common struggle of the Kurdish and Arab peoples,” the PKK said that the Palestinians “...supported the struggle for freedom and democracy elsewhere in the world.”

Whichever struggle the Palestinians were supporting, it wasn’t the Kurdish one.

Yasser Arafat’s kinship with Saddam Hussein during his massacre of 182,000 Kurds is well-known; [memorials](#) and businesses honoring the brutal dictator dot the West Bank. Saeb Erekat, the former Palestinian Authority’s chief negotiator, in 2015 [declared](#) that “Kurdish independence would be a poisoned sword against the Arabs.” With vocal opposition to the Iraqi Kurdish 2017 independence referendum, the Palestinians were [lockstep](#) with the Arab League’s [efforts](#) against the right of the Kurds to secede from Iraq.

When Turkish-backed jihadists invaded Afrin to suppress the Kurdish democratic confederation in Syria, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal [congratulated](#) Turkey on their conquest.

Following Hamas’ congratulations to Turkey — and amid this week’s pro-Palestinian solidarity from the PKK — the United Nations [confirmed](#) that Palestinians from western Syria are being settled in Afrin, as part of the Turkish campaign to obliterate the enclave’s Kurdish-majority.

Compare Israeli behavior vis-a-vis the Kurds with that of the Palestinians. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who on a number of occasions [blasted](#) Turkish aggression in Afrin, endorsed the right of Kurdish self-determination — alongside almost all members his cabinet and countless members of the parliament. Israel is the sole major power to do so.

Former Israeli Defense Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Yair Golan [even opined](#) last

summer that, “the [PKK] is not a terrorist organization” — and despite rhetorical clarification from Netanyahu, Israel [has not](#) legally designated it as such. This is despite the PKK losing 13 fighters [against](#) Israel in 1982 during the Lebanon War.

Zagros Hiwa, a senior spokesman for the PKK, offered some important context to the PKK's statement, via email:

“We condemn the attack of the state against a peaceful protest. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people should not be understood as enmity with the Jewish people and the whole state of Israel — rather, only Israel’s ruling class. We are for a peaceful solution to the conflict.”

"For us, Hamas does not represent the real cause of the Palestinian people. It is a deviation from the real cause which has led astray the rightful struggle of the Palestinians. Hamas congratulated Turkey on the Afrin invasion. We should have congratulated Israel, in retaliation, if we had a mentality like Hamas. Hamas is against the Jews and Israel. We are not against the Jews and Israel.”

“The Jews are surrounded by a sea of Arabs who see Israel as an enemy. This is unfortunate. The Jews have the right to live freely all over the Middle East without any threat.”

Mr. Zagros cites the ideas of PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan, who advocates a unique approach to the conflict. Ocalan suggests a single “Israeli-Arab federation” for both sides that would replace nationalist and religious-driven entities. Zagros explains:

"The two state solution will only aggravate the matter. It lays the ground for future endless conflicts. We are against the state-nation mentality which has caused grievances and sufferings for the Jews and Palestinians."

"Both people can live side by side within one political entity which ensures the equal rights of the Arabs and Jews. So, once the notion of the nation-state is overcome and a new view on peaceful coexistence is adopted, the Jewish and the Palestinians will trigger a whole process of democratization all over the Middle East and contribute to the solution of other questions, especially the Kurdish question."

“Iranian, Turkish, and Arab tyrants don't want a solution to the Palestinian issue. They want to keep it in place, to exploit the matter for their own internal policies and anti-democratic practices, to overshadow all of their own repressions, massacres, and corruption.”

“It is of prime importance for Israel to take the initiative and solve the issue with its own internal dynamics and the support and solidarity of other peoples.”

This context for the PKK statement is helpful, and earlier rhetoric by senior leadership of the PKK — and her umbrella organization, the KCK — reveal a fairly kindred view of the Zionist entity.

Dr. Jonathan Spyer, a preeminent Israeli expert on regional affairs, spoke with KCK Parliament President Zubeyir Aydar in 2014. Mr. Zubeyir [said](#):

“There is an Islamic approach toward Israel in the Middle East,” he said. “Before that, there was a leftist point of view. But both of these were based on Arab nationalism. This view was saying that Israel has no place in the Middle East, and Jews have no rights in the Middle East.

“The other nations in the Middle East – Arabs, Turks, Iranians, Kurds – have to accept the existence of Israel in the Mideast. They have to recognize that these people are from the region, and are indigenous people of the region. And whatever rights Arabs have, Israel also has. This nation has the right to live on its own soil.”

Aydar went on to call for “breaking the walls between Kurds and Israelis, and getting to know each other. If we can continue our friendship, both sides will benefit from it. The region needs the Israeli experience.

In 2010, Murat Karayilan, co-founder of the PKK and head of the PKK military wing, [told](#) Israeli journalist Itai Anghel that

“Turkey, whom you assist, is a clear supporter of Hamas, and Erdogan’s government operates against Israel. Come to think of it, Turkey, Iran and Syria have aligned to destroy us... We know that Israel is isolated in the Middle East and we know that like us, you have experienced genocide. We’d expect Israel not to cooperate and not to aid those who seek to destroy Kurds and our freedom fighters.”

A reasonable expectation. Israel and the “progressive” West should begin to rectify their errors by isolating the increasingly belligerent Turkish regime. This week’s [bipartisan efforts](#) in the US Congress to halt the sale of the F-35 stealth fighter to Turkey offers some hope.

The PKK and her ideological affiliates should certainly continue to help affect a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They should focus on promoting their ideology as a starting point to address the real humanitarian challenges of the everyday Palestinian living under Hamas and the PLO.

At the same time, the PKK should recognize the long-running sympathy and material support for the Kurdish cause that the Jewish People and their state have offered —

and avoid a message of sympathy for the Palestinians that could be understood as an endorsement of Hamas' barbaric tactics against civilians on both sides.