

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

by Kerem Schamberger - 04/06/2018 16:37



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 of 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 which have clearly become extremely important in shaping

the sphere of West Asian politics.

In addition, the umbrella organisation of which the PKK is a member of, the KCK, has a presence in Iran, Turkey, Syria and Iran. Needless to be said, statements released by the PKK are therefore important, withstanding the controversial nature of the organization.

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 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", to stand in solidarity with Gazan protesters is an act of humanism. Furthermore, it also contends that the structural manner in which Turkey and Israel deal with the Kurdish and Palestinian questions respectively are remarkably the same.

Make sure to read the counterpoint by Zach Daniel. The main thrust of his 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. "

In the latest border protests, Kurds should stand with Palestine

The Kurdish Freedom movement is right to support the Palestinian Struggle and should always do so, for the Serhildan and Intifada are on the same path of liberation. This is why the latest statement released by the PKK in solidarity with Palestinians struggling for their right to self-determination should be supported.

Since the Great March of Return protests began two months ago, 13,190 people are said to have been **injured** -- many of whom by live bullets -- and over a hundred have been **killed**. How many of those injured will eventually succumb to their wounds and die?

It is too early to tell.

Journalists have been [killed](#) in cold blood, nurses have been [murdered](#), a [baby](#) has died from tear gas, thousands are susceptible to being permanently disabled. “I truly believe that much of the world completely underestimates the extent of the disaster in human terms that occurred in the Gaza Strip”, UNRWA’s Commissioner-General Pierre Krahenbuhl [told the press](#) on behalf of the United Nations, “As many people or even slightly more were injured during a total of 7 days of protests than were injured during the full duration of the 2014 conflict.”

The question most ask is why the people of Gaza are protesting? Are they really doing so just to endanger Israel’s “national security” as Netanyahu would have it? Of course not.

For years, the people of Gaza have lived under a blockade which has led to food shortage, an [unemployment rate](#) of 43% and a [chronic energy crisis](#) which gives them only a few hours worth of electricity a day. Their infrastructure is [decimated](#) and by the account of most of its residents, Gaza is the worlds biggest open air prison. Gaza is a prison, Israel administers it, Egypt gets to be prison guard. What is happening in Gaza is a prison break, for people who have done nothing wrong.

It’s a mystery why people have been surprised about the PKK’s latest statement about Israel’s latest massacre on the Gaza border. As Marcel Cartier has [mentioned](#), Mustafa Karasu, himself a founding member of the PKK, recalled recently that in 1982, “13 of our cadres fell in the fight against the occupation of Lebanon by Israel. The Israeli state also participated in the international conspiracy against Abdullah Ocalan and murdered four of our comrades in Berlin. No doubt, we will never forget the support the Palestinians gave to the Kurdish people in the 1980s.”

Why would they be expected to forget? Without the help of Palestinian Marxist factions like the PFLP and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the first PKK cadres would have never gotten military training in the first place. And, at the end of the day, it’s not only about the historic relationship between the two struggles but simply for the sake of humanity. Israel killed more than one human wearing a clearly identifiable free press jacket, how many times has [Turkey](#) gotten away with doing the same?

Israel gets away with this through a rhetorical move, that has by now, become central to the administration of dictatorship all across the Middle East. These are the steps to get away with murder in the Middle East.

Step one: say that everybody you have killed is a member of what you deem a

“terrorist organisation”. For example, after Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag [said](#) that Turkey hadn’t committed any civilian casualties in Afrin, he claimed that “The operation concerns terrorists” only, “and terror organizations within the Afrin district.” Israel has said the same about the latest massacres. As Israel’s ambassador to the UN Aviva Raz Shechter [put it](#), “The loss of life could have been avoided had Hamas [not sent] ... terrorists to attack Israel under the cover of the riots”.

Step two: Say that those you kill are actually being used as “human shields”. As Turkey’s government organ, Anadolu [said](#) about the Afrin operation, “The PYD/PKK terrorist group plans to use civilians as human shields as the Turkish military and Free Syrian Army move closer to the Afrin city centre.” Now compare this with a [press release](#) by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was designed to refute the UN, and you can understand this familiar picture. “The Commissioner-General is deliberately ignoring Hamas’ responsibility for the instigated violence. He is ignoring “the fact that Hamas used Gaza residents as human shields”.

Step three: say that you are protecting your borders, “every country has the obligation to protect its borders” Netanyahu [said](#) in response to the latest massacre of innocent Palestinians in Gaza. Parallel this to Erdogan, and we get a familiar picture when close to the end of the occupation of Afrin when Erdogan [said](#) that “We are constantly harassed by terror groups on our borders”.

Step four: this is the final one, engage in deflection, or what has now more commonly be known as “Whataboutism”. Say anyone who criticizes you has a bias against you because they didn’t criticize “X country”. Lately, for Israel, this has been [Turkey](#), and for Turkey, this has been [Israel](#). So when Erdogan and Netanyahu, every once in a while, get onto Twitter and build the case for why there is a legitimate case for both of them to be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court, they are engaging in the same thing. In some ways, you could say they are the same person. Another example of this “whataboutism” is when the Turkish ambassador to Washington, Mr. Serdar Kilic, [mentioned](#) that “All the countries and humanitarian agencies calling on us for the prevention of civilian casualties in Afrin are unfortunately silent on Palestine. The necessary humanity is not exhibited on the Gaza victims.”

My personal favourite form of whataboutism, however, was when Erdogan’s advisor Ilnur Cevik, was quite frank about how Turkey approached Afrin. When asked why Afrin was invaded, he [mentioned](#) that Israel had created a 40-kilometre safe zone in Syria beyond the Golan Heights. “We are bringing humanitarian aid to the people, establishing a new system for them. Israel did the same”, he told CNN Turk to the astonishment of his AKP base of supporters.

Isn't it obvious by now? The AKP doesn't care about the Palestinian struggle for emancipation. The Likud and the AKP are mirror images of each other. To both, Palestine and Kurdistan are merely rhetorical tools. That some have sought to resist statements by the PKK in support of Gaza's struggle is perplexing. That some buy into the Israeli narrative that killing children is a way for it to secure Israel's "borders" – the very narrative that Erdogan used to invade Afrin – is even more mind-boggling. But this is a conversation that needs to be had.

For some reason, whether it's the influence of Kurdish reactionary organizations like the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) or any other parties that see Israel as an ally in their struggle against Arab nationalism, or if its because of the illusion that Erdogan cares about Palestine (and thereby, says the simplistic mind, the Palestinian cause is wrong), even as he sends millions of oil barrels a day to Israel – some supporters of the Kurdish struggle have voiced concern, mostly privately on social media, about the statements made by Kurdish leftists in support of the Palestinian struggle for emancipation.

Let it be clear, one can be very critical of the reactionary nature of Hamas, one can condemn its failure to seriously ground itself in anti-colonialism, one can stand against its solidarity with Turkey's occupation of Afrin as well – but how does this exempt Israel from its war crimes, for cold-blooded murder? Gaza's residents are not synonymous with Hamas. One cannot talk about the Great March of return without acknowledging that in 1948, over [700,000](#) Palestinians were expelled from their homes for Israeli's to settle in. One cannot talk about the Great March of Return, if Palestinians have, quite literally, been living on crumbs with the promise of a state – only to face an [Israeli-Trump coalition](#) which seeks to destroy any hopes of a negotiated two-state solution. One cannot talk about the Great March of return without talking about poverty, unemployment, lack of energy, electricity – all of which stem from a joint blockade by Egypt and Israel. And now that they seek to leave their prison, they are all slaughtered in cold blood in a massacre that refuses to distinguish between children, nurses, journalists and members of Hamas? Let's be honest, "Hamas" is a dog whistle. The old adage is innocent until proven guilty. To the Israeli state, if a bullet lands on you, you are Hamas until proven otherwise.

It's easy to mention that Hamas's leader congratulated Erdogan for his occupation of Afrin, and forget the voices of those like Leila Khaled of the Peoples Front for the Liberation of Palestine, who said at a congress of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), that she [greeted](#) them on behalf of all Palestinians who "raise our voice against the war in Afrin." It's easy to equate Hamas with the Palestinians, but forget that Palestinian liberation organisations were the first to train the PKK. Why did the

PKK release a statement saying that “The Kurdish people and the Palestinian people share a similar fate”, while “Turkey and Israel, thanks to external support, keep violating the basic rights of Kurdish and Palestinian peoples”?

Simply because Afrin’s [settlers](#) act awfully a lot like Israeli settlers, they settle on land that doesn’t belong to them, they defend their settlements with armed guards, backed by the monopoly over violence that a foreign State has taken by force. Turkey administers Afrin’s affairs from [Gaziantep](#), Israel administers the affairs of its occupied territories from Tel-Aviv. Just as Turkey has set up its own token administration called the “Gaziantep council”, Israel has its own, under its loyalists working within the Palestinian Administration. Most importantly though, Israel and Turkey [use](#) the same weapons, the same strategies of warfare, the [same](#) intelligence mechanisms that they’ve developed together in a decades-long relationship. As the PKK statement itself said, “Turkey has actually learned the most complex techniques in the dirty war against the Kurdish people’s struggle for freedom from Israel and the United States.”

Why else, in 1999, would Israel’s intelligence service MOSSAD play a key role in the International plot to capture PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is still in prison? Erdogan, despite the diplomatic rift that occurred between Israel and Turkey under his helm due to the freedom flotilla massacre in 2010, continues this legacy.

The question that some must ask is the following: Do I care about the suffering of all peoples’ or that just of my tribe? If the answer to the first question is yes, then you should not be offended by any statements made by the Kurdish freedom movement which stand in solidarity with the suffering of Palestinian people.