

# The link between the Palestinian and Kurdish revolutionary struggles

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There's something deeply unsettling about watching tyrannical figures whose hands are dripping with the blood of those in their own regions attempt to position themselves as defenders of the idea of liberty in another. The sheer hypocrisy with which one murderer believes that he can accuse, attack and bemoan the heinous acts of another makes it difficult to grasp whether such a war of words is really about jealousy. It almost seems as if such words could be guided by a sense of envy of another's genocidal acts having achieved a greater level of destruction.

This is the confusing reality that persists in light of the bizarre tirades that have broken out in recent weeks between Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over the decision of Donald Trump to proclaim Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

To be certain, the decision on behalf of the Trump administration to break with decades of U.S. policy and essentially greenlight the continued annexation of the

remainder of historic Palestine by the Israeli state is one that should be readily condemned. All progressive forces should continue rally to the defence of the Palestinian cause against Israeli expansionist and racist policies.

### Hypocrisy on Display

However, the picture becomes a bit more complex once reactionaries with right-wing orientations - and their own racist and expansionist positions - begin to posture as opponents of ethnic cleansing and annexation.

Nobody should be deceived into believing that somehow the posture of Erdogan as one of the most militant and outspoken opponents of the Jerusalem decision means that the Turkish state is playing a sincere role in standing with the Palestinian people. It's not just that Erdogan has himself set foot in Jerusalem. Nor is it simply because Turkey-Israel trade deals have blossomed in recent years, despite a degree of diplomatic tension over the 2009 Israeli attack on a Turkish aid flotilla headed for Gaza.

Erdogan's comments in the direct aftermath of Trump's December announcement took aim at Israel as a 'terrorist state' that 'kills children'. You would be hard-pressed to find a sincere revolutionary who disagrees. Yet, how could a leader whose policies are increasingly pushing Turkey towards authoritarian and fascist rule, who is at the forefront of a 'war on terror' that condemns the Kurdish people to a life of exclusion, denial of their existence, and wholesale destruction of their villages and towns possibly dare to open his mouth on such an issue? Is he not aware of the paradox of hurling such accusations? Erdogan has said that Netanyahu's government has no other policies aside from 'occupation and plunder'. It seems almost certain that any number of Kurds in southeastern Turkey would attribute those same characteristics to the Turkish state.

Netanyahu, for his part, decided to respond to Erdogan's words by pointing out that very contradiction, saying that the Turkish leader didn't have the moral superiority to pass judgement on Jerusalem given that he 'bombs Kurdish villages'. Yet, just as one shouldn't be tricked into believing that Erdogan can assume regional leadership in the resistance to the government in Tel Aviv, Netanyahu is far from a friend to the resistance of the Kurdish people. It's true that Israel did support the September 25<sup>th</sup> independence referendum in the Kurdish region of Iraq, making Israel the only country to do so. However, as I have pointed out on numerous occasions in previous articles on the divergent Kurdish political formations, the KRG leadership is far from revolutionary. In stark contrast to Israeli support for the northern Iraq leadership, Netanyahu has always stood firmly opposed to the very group in Turkey that is at the

frontline of resistance to 'bombing Kurdish villages', the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

### The Position of Arab Nationalists & Reactionary Kurds

Many Arab nationalists, as well as other supporters of the Palestinian cause, were understandably motivated by Erdogan's comments on the Jerusalem move, despite the Turkish leader's previously cordial relations with the Israeli government.

Their hope was that perhaps this was another step on behalf of the Turkish state away from the diktat of the western powers, and would result in increased support from Ankara to the Palestinian resistance faction Hamas (a point that Netanyahu also didn't hesitate to make in response to Erdogan's comments).

Meanwhile, it's hardly surprising that some Kurdish activists and their supporters were energized that Netanyahu has made reference to their plight and struggle in his remarks. Could an increase in tensions between Tel Aviv and Ankara mean a re-assessment on behalf of the Likud government in terms of how to assess support for Kurdish resistance organizations?

The reality is that contrary to the assertions of a considerable degree of Arab nationalists that 'the Kurds' are Zionist puppets, and in staunch opposition to the concept held by some non-revolutionary Kurds that Israel should be seen as an ally, it is the Palestinian and Kurdish revolutionary struggles that are joined at the hip.

### Historical Links Between the Kurdish & Palestinian Struggles

It isn't simply that both movements are principally about opposing ethnic cleansing and colonial occupation. The Palestinian and Kurdish left have deep ties going back roughly half a century.

With the emergence of the Rojava Revolution in northern Syria in 2012, PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan declared his desire to turn the region into today's Bekaa Valley. What he meant was that what Lebanon's Bekaa region was for internationalists in the 1970s and 80s – a hub for revolutionary training, development and solidarity – was what Rojava should aspire to be in the modern age.

The Bekaa Valley was significant not only to internationalists who wanted to join the Palestinian struggle (as it was home to camps run by the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO]), but it was also where the PKK sent its fighters to train in large numbers beginning in the late 1970s. In particular, the Palestinian Marxist factions Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), helped to facilitate military training for PKK cadres that would prove essential before the declaration of the war against the Turkish state

in 1984.

*Mustafa Karasu, a founding member of the PKK, recalled this historic relationship in a statement last month, saying “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. Our attitude towards Zionism has always been ideological. Until today, we stand on the side of the Palestinians and all those who are fighting for a democratic solution in the region.”*

### Overcoming Narrow Nationalism, Building Solidarity

While it's true that both the Palestinian and Kurdish left have a history of cooperation and solidarity, it's also true that these links haven't been as prevalent in recent years as they were at the height of their ties.

It's perplexing that too often Kurdish solidarity activists don't raise their voices when it comes to defending and supporting the Palestinian liberation movement, just as it's deeply problematic that the same holds true for far too many Palestinian solidarity activists when it comes to resisting Turkey's genocidal campaign against the Kurdish population. To the extent that this is due to general ignorance of the common features of both resistance movements, it means a concerted effort will need to be made to overcome any narrow nationalism that has taken root in either movement, and assert an internationalist perspective that puts forward the notion that these are twin struggles. The blows that the Kurdish movement deals against the blood-thirsty AKP government should be seen as victories for Palestinians, just as attacks on Zionism should be seen as energizing for the Kurdish movement.

It is important that Karasu's comments on the Jerusalem decision be widely heard, as to aid in fostering a revival of this relationship. As he explicitly pointed out, “Since the emergence of the PKK, we have been against Zionism. We compared the genocide of the Kurds in Turkey with Israeli Zionism and the apartheid regime of South Africa.”

Anybody who is genuinely concerned with emancipatory politics should think twice before taking opportunistic positions on who the friends of the Kurdish and Palestinian revolutionaries ought to be. It certainly isn't colonial-minded politicians such as Erdogan or Netanyahu. The old adage holds that “the enemy of my enemy is my friend”. Unfortunately, the world isn't always neatly packaged in such an easy to read contradiction. At times, the adage can be true. At other times, however, the perceived enemy of my enemy could very well be a fascist. Internationalism is indeed essential.