

**GREEN LEFT**

# **Kurds facing brutal crackdown in Iran following US-Israeli bombings**

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According to human rights groups, Kurdish cities have borne a disproportionate share of the crackdown, including mass detentions, political executions, state-sanctioned killings and military occupation. Image: Green Left

**Sarah Glynn** has written a weekly news roundup for the Kurdish online publication [Medya News](#) since December 2020. Sadly, *Medya News* is closing down, but she will continue to write articles for *Green Left*. In this article, abridged and updated from her last *Medya News* column, she looks at the brutal crackdown on Kurds and other minorities and activists since the Israeli-United States bombings of Iran.

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The 12-day war between Israel and Iran seems to be over, for now. The United States has carried out its bombing raid in support of Israel, and Iran has exposed the holes in Israel's Iron Dome. Both sides have pulled back from continuing the escalation, but there is no guarantee that the current peace is more than temporary. Indeed, Israel has [made clear](#) that, as in Lebanon, they have no intention of abiding by the ceasefire and will cut Iran down to size whenever they want.

Israeli defence minister Israel Katz has stated, "I have instructed the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] to prepare an enforcement plan against Iran, which includes maintaining Israel's air superiority, preventing the advancement of nuclear capabilities and missile production, and responding to Iran's support for terrorist activities against the State of Israel."

Far from being the decisive action portrayed by US President Donald Trump, this short war has left the world a more dangerous place. We cannot know to what extent the US bombing set back Iran's nuclear program, but it is clear that international law has taken another massive blow; US duplicity has been blatantly exposed, seriously impeding diplomacy; more countries have likely been persuaded that possession of an actual nuclear weapon is the only real deterrence; and minorities and activists in Iran are facing a renewed crackdown.

In addition, while all eyes were on Iran, Israel continued to starve, bomb and shoot the people of Gaza, and although there is now widespread revulsion at Israel's

genocide of the Palestinians, this hasn't been translated into meaningful action. Even the acknowledgement of "indications" that Israel is breaching its human rights obligations under the EU-Israel Association Agreement has only resulted in a decision to hold further discussions.

Meanwhile, Trump has reinforced his new order of "might makes right" by bullying NATO member countries to commit to massive increases in their military spending, which will doubtless be made at the expense of vital social budgets.

## **Crackdown in Iran**

Talk of regime change inevitably raised hopes of something better. Few would mourn the loss of Iran's oppressive and brutal government, but history has shown time and again that regime change through external aggression can be a recipe for catastrophic chaos, banditry, violent extremism and years of civil war. However, two weeks ago, Kurds were dreaming that the attacks on Iran just might open up a path to Kurdish autonomy in a similar way to how the Syrian civil war enabled the emergence of Rojava. Kurds in exile were quick to share AI images of peshmerga forces marching with Kurdish flags, but those on the ground knew that they had to proceed with extreme caution to avoid inciting further repression or leading the Kurdish people into a noble and bloody defeat.

The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), which follows the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan, put out a [statement](#) on June 14, the day after Israel's attack that read: "This is a war of power and conflicting interests, not a war of liberation for peoples and nations."

They called on "all the people of Iran, especially those in Kurdistan, to organise within democratic, popular structures". And they explained that "Vital steps toward building a self-managed, democratic society include forming support groups for victims of war, establishing local rescue committees and financial cooperation committees, and preventing state mercenaries from infiltrating the population."

“We are not a party to the war, nor do we want to make our peoples a part of these conflicts,” PJAK foreign relations officer Zegrus Enderyarî told [ANF News](#).

Last week, dreams of a silver lining were replaced by accounts of an intensified crackdown on regime critics, and even greater militarisation of the Kurdish areas.

The Iranian government has genuine cause to be concerned about Israeli agents, as detailed intelligence and local actions played an important part in Israel’s attack. However, there is no reason to believe that people arrested, or even executed, for working for Israel are the people who were actually involved. The Iranian “justice” system is known for dispensing with evidence and for extracting confessions under extreme torture, and “spying for Israel” has long been a useful accusation with which to eliminate government opponents. Iranian state media [announced](#) that 700 people have been detained for collaborating with Israel.

Reuters [reported](#) that, despite the lack of any significant protests against the government, officials have claimed that the authorities are focusing on possible unrest, especially in Kurdish areas. Representatives from Kurdish political groups told Reuters that Iranian Revolutionary Guards had taken over school buildings and carried out house-to-house searches, that checkpoints had been set up across the Kurdish areas and that at least one Kurdish man had been [shot dead](#) by Revolutionary Guards after stopping at a checkpoint in Sanandaj. Hengaw Organisation for Human Rights [reported](#) that six people, including three Kurds, had been executed for “spying for Israel”, and [described](#) the situation in Kurdish cities as effectively a form of martial law.

Summing up the situation on June 29, Hengaw [wrote](#): “Following the outbreak of war between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel, a widespread wave of repression and mass arrests has unfolded across the country, with particularly severe consequences in Kurdistan. Kurdish cities have borne a disproportionate share of these crackdowns, including mass detentions, political executions, state-sanctioned killings, and military occupation.

“In recent days, more than 300 Kurdish people have been arrested by Iranian security forces. Among them, one person has died under torture, a child and a young man have been killed...”

## **Evin prison bombing**

On June 23, an Israeli bomb damaged Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison, which holds numerous political prisoners. If this was intended to portray Israel’s attacks as some sort of liberation of the Iranian people, it was a callous, ill-thought-through plan.

Narges Mohammadi, who spent years in the prison, shared her serious concerns over the fate of the inmates. She [reported](#) on June 26 that prisoners had been moved out and no one knew where the prisoners from the high security wards had been taken. Those from other wards had been moved to prisons “notorious for their harsh and inhumane conditions”. Earlier, she [reported](#) that the prison infirmary had been destroyed in the blast and wounded prisoners were unable to get treatment.

Siamak Namazi, an Iranian American who spent eight years in Evin Prison, [wrote in Time magazine](#): “This was no surgical strike on senior regime officials or military commanders in their ill-gotten penthouses ... Israel’s bombing of Evin lays bare what happens when two reprehensible systems collide: one that cages the innocent, and another that claims to liberate them with bombs.

“We can only hope the recent fragile ceasefire between Iran, Israel and the United States holds — and that this madness finally ends. But even if it does, we all know what will follow.

“The Ayatollahs, having failed to stop the bombs from Israel or the US, will turn their vengeance inward. They will try to reassert control in the only way they know how: through brute force. Thousands will be rounded up, tortured and executed as the regime spreads fear to survive.”

The Iranian government [stated](#) on June 29 that 71 people had been killed in the attack “including administrative staff, young soldiers, prisoners, family members visiting prisoners, and people living in the same neighbourhood as the prison”.

[The Guardian](#) reported on July 1 that many families had still not received news from their incarcerated relatives, and that other prisoners described overcrowded and insanitary conditions in the places they had been moved to. The families are fearful of what will happen in this “new wave of intense repression”. The brother of Pakhshan Azizi, a Kurdish humanitarian worker and social activist who has been sentenced to death, told the *Guardian* that her family is concerned that “they will execute this sentence to create terror among the people”.

Before the attack on Evin, an [open letter](#) condemning Israel’s aggression against Iran was penned by four women prisoners, including Warisheh Moradi, a member of the Community of Free Women of Eastern Kurdistan and a former fighter against ISIS, who is also on death row. They wrote, “Support for Israel and reliance on its destructive power — by any individual, group or political movement, regardless of their dreams and ideals — must also be condemned, as it reveals only the depravity and disgrace of its backers. Our liberation, the liberation of the people of Iran from the ruling dictatorship, is only possible through mass struggle and by relying on social forces — not by placing our hope in foreign powers.”

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