

Hopes and fears in Iran – last week in Kurdish news

Amidst fears of Armageddon, Kurds are dreaming of autonomy within Iran. This week's article examines both the huge risks being taken by Israel and America, and the political thinking of the Kurdish groups who hope to see an Iranian version of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. It finishes with a look at how events in Iran could impact the PKK "Peace Process" in Turkey.



Sarah Glynn

Is this what the beginning of a world war feels like? The sparrows are chirping from their nest under the eaves, and the city is preparing for France's annual fête de la musique;

but away from the reality of a dozy too-hot afternoon, social media is full of images of rockets and intercepting missiles, of damaged buildings and deranged politicians, and of armchair pundits dreaming of fairytale endings. Someone has posted a video of Tony Benn's [antiwar speech](#) to the House of Commons in 1998. The much-missed MP, who was born in 1925, observed "War is easy to talk about; there are not many people left of the generation which remembers it." Few of the decision makers in America and Europe have lived through war or expect to experience it themselves.

Israel's attack on Iran

Israel has been building its dominance over the Middle East, and the next piece of the puzzle is Iran, which has long been in their sights. They are able to do this not because they are the uniquely evil master controllers, as they are often simplistically portrayed, but – on the contrary – because they represent the current phase of Western colonialism, which has always been ready to employ the most brutal methods, including genocide, to achieve and maintain dominance. Past genocides weren't videoed, but they were just as depraved as Israel's destruction of Gaza. Israel is the West's fortress in the wild Middle East. The highest achievements of Western civilisation have always existed alongside gross inhumanity. This paradox is not limited to the West, but in an era of Western hegemony, it is the Western version that is most significant.

Israel, armed and backed by the United States and Europe, has become the hegemonic power in the region; and Iran's "Axis of Resistance" has been destroyed piece by piece. Israel has long set their sights on Iran itself. They are able to launch an attack now because they have already weakened or vanquished the regional allies that Iran relied on – Hamas, Hezbollah, and Assad. The attack has also distracted world attention from Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza, and supports Benjamin Netanyahu's personal ambition to remain in power and avoid imprisonment for corruption. Iran's nuclear capability is a useful excuse.

Israel has claimed that Iran is on the verge of having a nuclear bomb for well over a decade, and less than three months ago, Tulsi Gabbard, as Director of National Intelligence, [announced](#) the US Intelligence Committee's assessment that "Iran is not building a nuclear weapon and Supreme Leader Khamenei has not authorized the nuclear weapons program that he suspended in 2003." Iran – isolated and economically stretched – had every reason to treat the negotiations with the United States seriously, and [reports suggest](#) that a deal could have been on the horizon. Israel did not want that to happen. In that sense, their attack was indeed a pre-emptive strike – it pre-empted the possibility of peace. In the words of [Carl Bildt](#), Co-Chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations, and Former Prime Minister of Sweden, "Netanyahu attacked Iran not primarily to prevent a nuclear weapon but to prevent a nuclear agreement between the United States and Iran." It is clear that Israel won't be happy until the Iranian regime is removed and either replaced by a regime friendly to Israel or by debilitating chaos – as has followed other regime change operations.

America

There has been much debate about the role of Donald Trump, who had campaigned on stopping US involvement in forever wars. Probably, he would have preferred to have made a deal, but that would have required patience and an acceptance of strategic compromise that are alien to him. With Israel dependent on US weapons, it doesn't make sense to portray America as under Israel's thumb, but Trump's advisors are divided on war on Iran, and Trump, the bully, has shown himself to be easily swayed by other bullying leaders, as we have seen in his relationship with Turkey's President Erdoğan.

Israel's attack had been long-planned and prepared for, and we can be sure that they have mapped out how to drag the United States fully into their war. America is already actively involved, including in Israel's anti-missile defence. Trump has said that he will decide if America will directly enter the war [within two weeks](#) to give a chance for negotiations. He will find Iran understandably reluctant to trust him. However, Iran does not want to do anything that might provoke America to become more involved in the war than they are already. They do not want to face the weight of a direct American attack.

If America were to openly enter the war, perhaps in response to an Israeli false flag operation, the knock on affects across the globe would be immense. All American assets in the region would become targets – especially their military bases – and that would just be the beginning. The US has bases in Iraq, Syria, and also Turkey.

Such a war would also have a huge impact on the world economy. This is not just a source of worry for businesses and financiers. A recession is always most catastrophic for those at the bottom of the social scale. And economic turmoil can lead to political turmoil and more refugees driven from their homes.

Kurdish hopes

Talk of regime change inevitably raises hopes of something better. Few would mourn the loss of Iran's oppressive and brutal regime, 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. We only have to look at the results of America's previous Middle East wars: at the millions of deaths and the generation of destroyed lives.

But Kurds will point out that it is through such chaos that they have been able to carve out a measure of autonomy, both in Iraq and in Syria. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was made possible by the US/European no-fly zone following the Gulf War in 1991, and federal relations were formalised in the 2005 Iraq constitution, which followed the US invasion. Kurds were able to establish their autonomous region in Syria thanks to the power vacuum created by the Syrian civil war. The Rojava Revolution took place before America's large-scale regime change programme, Timber Sycamore, but the Autonomous Administration came of age through the Kurds' leading role in the fight against ISIS – which had emerged through the chaos following the Iraq war – and this

brought them into tactical alliance with the United States and its allies. Now there is no shortage of Kurdish bloggers predicting autonomy in Rojhelat, the Kurdish region of Iran, too.

While Kurds in exile have been quick to share AI images of peshmerga forces marching with Kurdish flags, those on the ground know that they must proceed with extreme caution to avoid inciting further repression or leading the Kurdish people into a noble and bloody defeat. Previous attempted uprisings have been brutally suppressed, including the Women Life Freedom movement that followed the state's killing of Jina Amini for not wearing her hijab in the approved manner. That uprising was led by the Kurds and by the Baluchi minority at the other end of the country, but it never received the level of support from the dominant central provinces that was needed to carry it over the line.

The Kurds were the [last group to resist](#) Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic takeover of the 1979 revolution, and Khomeini ordered a murderous jihad against them. Under the Islamic Republic, the Kurdish provinces have been starved of investment and heavily militarised. In recent days, surveillance in these provinces has [intensified](#). The war has been used as an excuse to [clamp down on dissident voices](#) throughout Iran. Even before Israel's attack, any sign of dissent was severely punished. The United Nations has just [reported](#) that the Iranian state executed at least 975 people last year.

Kurdish political groups

Kurdish groups must tread very carefully, but they want to be ready to exploit any breach in the government's control, and to ensure that others are ready to follow them. In response to the 2022 uprising, Iran attacked the Iraqi bases of dissident Kurdish groups from Iran, and – under threat from Iran – Iraq agreed to force the groups to move away from the border and to disarm, though this has not been fully realised. The only group not affected by Iran's agreement with Iraq is the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), which follows the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan. Their fighters are all in mountain bases out of the reach of any state.

PJAK put out a [statement](#) last Saturday, the day after Israel's attack. They emphasise that "This is a war of power and conflicting interests, not a war of liberation for peoples and nations." They expect the war to continue "until the regime is completely restructured and neutralised", and they call on people to come together in a new Jin Jiyan Azadi revolution. Specifically, they "call on all the people of Iran, especially those in Kurdistan, to organise within democratic, popular structures." They explain 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." And they invite "all patriots, freedom seekers, and our party members" to join them. The party's foreign relations officer [told Firat News Agency](#), "We are not a party to the war, nor do we want to make our peoples a part of these conflicts." Similar to the Kurds in Syria, he describes their approach as a "third way", that would establish local democratic autonomy outside existing power structures, as was done in Rojava.

The East Kurdistan Free Women's Society (KJAR) [underlined the call](#) with a reminder that "Without the presence of women, one cannot speak of a free future for Iran."

While there is a general will for all Iran's Kurdish parties to work together, their approaches differ. [Komala Kurdistan's Organization of the Communist Party of Iran](#) also calls for a "third way", beyond the "military confrontation between two religious fascist states", but interprets this expressly as the "revolutionary overthrowing of the Islamic Republic". The Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) [assigns all responsibility](#) for the war to the policies of the Iranian government, and concludes that "the first and most important prerequisite for saving Iran's citizens from this crisis, destruction and darkness is to completely remove and end this regime." [Abdullah Mohtadi](#), leader of the breakaway Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, which describes itself as social-democrat and has turned its back on armed struggle, has been in Washington trying to establish a relationship with the US Administration. And the small [Kurdistan Freedom Party](#) (PAK), the only one of the parties to demand a separate state, expressly supports Israel's attacks and calls on young Kurds to attack the regime.

Regime change

If the Kurds of Rojhelat are able to follow the Kurds of Rojava in establishing an autonomous region, that will still leave major questions over relations with the rest of Iran – questions that are still far from resolved in the Syrian case. If the United States succeeds in effecting regime change in Tehran, they are unlikely to choose a regime sympathetic to Öcalan's radical ideas espoused by PJAK. Iran also suffers from entrenched prejudice against the non-Persian minorities. The exiled son of the former Shah continues to try and position himself as a potential leader, but most of his support is outside Iran. Those who suffered under the brutal rule of his father have no reason to support him.

The "Peace Process"

Events in Iran also have implications for the PKK "Peace Process". It is widely believed that it was the growing power of Israel that pushed Turkey to talk with Abdullah Öcalan. They feared the possibility of Israel using support for the Kurds to counter Turkish influence in Syria. These latest developments ought to make Turkey more determined to ensure that the Kurds are not blocking them in their competition with Israel for regional hegemony, which should generate a will for building the much talked about Kurdish/Turkish brotherhood, and help carry the flagging "process" forward.

This was the thinking behind the recent comments by Selahattin Demirtaş and by [Cengiz Çandar](#). Çandar, the veteran Turkish journalist who is now a DEM Party MP, argues that "Abdullah Öcalan has consistently maintained an anti-Israel stance," and that "if Turkey truly commits to the [peace] process, then Öcalan's stance could align perfectly with that effort – if [Turkey] genuinely aims to strengthen the domestic front."

But the message doesn't seem to have got through to President Erdoğan. Erdoğan has, indeed [spoken about the need for unity](#), , but, at the same time, his military has been [attacking the PKK's](#) bases with even greater intensity, despite the PKK's decision

to dissolve and disarm; and his talk of unity clearly excludes the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). This would suggest not a genuine desire for unity, but a continuing attempt at divide and rule. Of course the DEM Party are well aware of this, and yesterday party leaders [visited the imprisoned CHP politicians](#). But both Erdoğan and Trump seem to mistake bullying for diplomacy.

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