

After the war the crackdown: in this week's Kurdish news

The short war between Israel and Iran has left the world a more dangerous place, and minorities and activists in Iran are facing a renewed crackdown. This week's article is a round-up of current events in the four parts of Kurdistan, centering on the situation of the Iranian Kurds and the political prisoners in Evin Prison.



The twelve-day war between Israel and Iran seems to be over – for now. Since my last article – only a week ago – the United States has carried out their 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. Defence Minister Israel Katz has stated, “I have instructed the IDF [Israeli 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 the decisive action portrayed by President Trump, this short war has left the world a more dangerous place. We cannot know to what extent America’s bombs have set back Iran’s nuclear programme, but it is clear that international law has taken another massive blow; American 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 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

Last week I looked at how 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. This week, dreams of a silver lining have been 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.

Reuters [reports](#) that, despite the lack of any significant protests against the government, officials have claimed that the authorities are focussing 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, and that checkpoints have been set up across the Kurdish areas. On Thursday evening a Kurdish man was [shot dead](#) by Revolutionary Guards after stopping at a checkpoint in Sanandaj. Hengaw Organisation for Human Rights [describes](#) the situation in Kurdish cities as effectively a form of martial law.

By Wednesday, Hengaw had [confirmed](#) that at least 734 people had been detained across Iran, including a high proportion of Kurds. Six people, including three Kurds, have been executed for “spying for Israel”.

Evin Prison

On Monday, an Israeli bomb damaged Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison, in which are held 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 herself spent years in the prison, has shared her serious concerns over the fate of the inmates. On Thursday she [reported](#) that prisoners have been moved out and no one knows where the prisoners from the high security wards have been taken. Those from other wards have been moved to prisons “notorious for their harsh and inhumane conditions”. Earlier, she had [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 8 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 U.S., 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.” This appears not to trouble those Israelis and Americans who toyed with the idea of regime change.

Last week, 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 (KJAR) and former fighter against ISIS, who is 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.”

North and East Syria

Kurds in Iran had hoped for the chance to develop autonomous control, as in Syria, but the autonomy of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria itself is still threatened. Western interference in Syria has ensured that the successor to Assad’s tyrannical regime is a protégé of al-Qaeda – who is dependent on Turkey and on Turkey’s brutal mercenary militias, and is ready to neoliberalise Syria’s economy –

rather than backing the autonomous administration with its emphasis on democratic coexistence and women's rights.

For the Autonomous Administration, negotiating with Syria's new interim government – with Turkey leaning over that government's shoulder – is proving to be a long and difficult task. Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa needs the support of North and East Syria's disciplined 100,000-strong Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), but insists on centralised control. At the same time, the need for local autonomy and local defence has been repeatedly underlined by acts of racist or sectarian violence that al-Sharaa's interim government seems unable to control or even properly acknowledge.

Just over a week ago in Afrin (Efrîn), a young man was [killed](#) by fighters from one of Turkey's mercenary militias as he tried to prevent them from stealing his family's solar panels. The Syrian Interim Government is nominally in control of the region and of these militias, but did nothing to apprehend the murderer, and when people protested, demanding justice, the government [responded](#) by suppressing the protests and detaining protestors.

Last Sunday, a suicide bomber brought death and destruction to Mar Elias Greek Orthodox Church in Damascus. Twenty-five people were killed and over sixty were injured. The Ministry of the Interior in Damascus blamed ISIS, and claimed that the church bomber and another would-be bomber were foreign men who had come from al-Hawl Camp, which is run by the Autonomous Administration. Farhad Shami from the SDF Media Centre gave a [lengthy denial](#) in which he stated that they had thoroughly investigated the claim – as well as pointing out that most of the camp members are women and children. He finished by urging the Damascus Government “to conduct a transparent and credible investigation”. Building on the ministry's claim, accusations against the SDF, [fabricated evidence](#) evidence, have been flying round social media. At the funeral for those killed in the attack, Patriarch John X of Antioch and All The East [gave a message](#) to al-Sharaa: “do not declare this day a day of mourning for us... declare this day a day of mourning for the government.”

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Of course, Kurdish control in itself is no panacea – as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq demonstrates. The region remains divided between the two big dynastic parties, and eight months after the last election, which was itself two years overdue, these parties have still failed to agree to form a government. At the same time, the seemingly endless budget dispute with the federal government has meant that the region's million government employees have again not received their salaries; and the only way the authorities know to respond to protesting unpaid workers is through oppression. Last week, dozens of protestors, including politicians and press, as well as state employees who had not been paid for nearly two months, were [detained](#) in Sulaymaniyah.

Despite the decision of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to lay down arms and dissolve, Turkish [military attacks](#) have not stopped in the northern mountains, where

the group used to have their bases. Besides targeting the now-defunct PKK, who pose no threat, these attacks drive away the local people and empty out the villages.

In Turkey

Across the border in Turkey, the PKK's call for disarmament and its dissolution have also failed to stop Turkey's military operations, that see large areas [designated](#) as "special security zones" temporarily closed to everyone, including local villagers.

Also in Turkey, the pro-Kurdish Equality and Democracy (DEM) Party has a [busy agenda of meetings](#) with both politicians and the populace as they work to build support for the new Kurdish peace process. We are still to see a concrete step from the government that could demonstrate that they are engaging in the discussions with sincerity, but the DEM Party wants to widen involvement to include other parties, and to speed the creation of a parliamentary commission. In 2015, Erdoğan was able to overturn the peace talks when they no longer suited him politically. Wider political involvement would make such sabotage harder, as well as normalising the idea of Kurds taking their full part in a state that recognises their culture and language.

Meetings have been taking place outwith Turkey too, and this week a [DEM Party delegation](#), including co-chair Tuncer Bakırhan, has been drumming up support for the process from politicians in Germany and the United Kingdom.

Thirteen months after the verdict in Turkey's Kobanê Trial, which handed down prison sentences to many leading DEM Party members, the court has [publicised their reasoning](#), enabling those convicted to appeal. This opens up an opportunity for the state to respond positively and lift these political sentences. It will be a test of their commitment to the peace process.

Au revoir

With this brief tour of the four parts of Kurdistan, I bring to an end my weekly news column. Medya News is closing, and I must move on. It is sad to see the end of a venture that has helped to spread knowledge and understanding of Kurdish issues. I thank the editorial team for giving me the freedom to share my thoughts every week, and my readers who – though not numerous – have often been very loyal. I have learnt a lot, and I have enjoyed sharing that knowledge with you. I'm looking forward to reclaiming Friday evenings, and not being exhausted every weekend, but I intend to go on providing analysis of key developments, so please look out for future articles in [Green Left](#), and also via my [website](#), [Twitter](#), and [Bluesky](#).