

There are no 'military solutions' – a weekly news review

In a week dominated by events in Israel/Palestine, this week's review looks at the Hamas attack and the Israeli response, the right to resistance, the nature of Hamas, and the international reaction, all before examining the approach of the Kurdish Freedom Movement and how Kurdistan is affected by what is happening in Gaza. A short round-up of Turkish attacks in Syria and Iraq is followed by developments in Europe's city of human rights.

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Sarah Glynn

Will future generations remember 7 October 2023 as a historical turning point? In the Hamas attack on Israel last Saturday, some 1,000 civilians were killed as well as 250 Israeli soldiers, and nearly 150 people – including children – were taken hostage. And it has triggered a response that is bringing our planet even closer to Armageddon. This is an event of universal importance, and it also has particular consequences for the peoples of the Middle East.

The Hamas attack was not the beginning, of course. It was the result of 75 years of settler colonialism, 56 years of occupation, an increasingly brutal oppression under a system that has become widely recognised as apartheid, and the repeated failure to make a peace settlement with previous, secular, Palestinian leaderships. All of which has been underwritten by the United States and supported by other western nations.

The right of resistance

The right of resistance to tyranny is a concept with a long history that predates the modern nation state, and – in response to the fights against fascism and colonialism – it has been internationally acknowledged, at least for warlike situations. The people of Palestine have a right to resist against their colonisers, but possibilities are very limited against Israel's American-funded army. In 2018-19, they tried a major unarmed approach. In an almost entirely peaceful action, begun by independent citizens but taken over by Hamas and other groups, Palestinians attempted to enter Israel through the border fence that has made Gaza into an open-air prison. Israel responded by shooting 214 of them dead, including 46 children, and leaving over 36,000 wounded. When non-violent routes are blocked, people will turn to violence.

Hamas

Like many other people, including many other Jews, I have long believed it is possible to support the Palestinian right of resistance at the same time as criticising Hamas – both for their intolerant philosophy and for employing methods that primarily kill random civilians and that prompt a many times more brutal backlash against civilians in Gaza.

It has been disappointing to witness how this year's mass demonstrations against Israel's far-right government failed to make the vital link to the oppression of Palestinians, but the actions of Hamas always [make such links harder to achieve](#). This is not an accident. Hamas and Israel's right-wing politicians need each other and thrive on the dehumanising polarising politics that both create.

And even if Hamas could succeed by such methods, what sort of society would that create?

However, Hamas's home grown 'shock and awe', far from making them uniquely violent, comes out of the much greater violence meted out on the Palestinian people. In Defence of Marxism has published, for comparison, Karl Marx's comments on the hypocrisy of British outrage at the violence of the Indian Revolt of 1857. Marx [wrote](#), "However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India".

Israel's response

The violence of Israel's response to this latest attack has been staggering, even for those familiar with the impacts of their sixteen-year blockade of Gaza and earlier retaliations for Hamas attacks: collective punishment for the 2.2 million people living in Gaza, half of them children. They have carried out indiscriminate heavy bombing of residential areas, with promises to leave the survivors relying on tents. They have cut off all access to water, food, electricity, and fuel, [claiming](#) "we are fighting against human animals, and we are acting accordingly". On Thursday night they issued the impossible demand that 1.1 million people evacuate the northern half of the Gaza strip in 24 hours before Israeli tanks move in, and then they bombed fleeing families. As I write late on Friday night, 1,900 Gazans have been killed and 400,000 have been displaced from their homes. Prime Minister Netanyahu says this is just the beginning.

Western backing

Even more staggering has been the response of western politicians, rushing to give Israel uncritical backing and to outlaw all public expressions of support for the Palestinian people, which they portray as support for Hamas. The Huffington Post even reports on internal State Department memos warning US diplomats not to talk about [de-escalation or ending violence](#). These politicians are giving tacit support to Israeli war crimes while encouraging the impression that all Palestinians are killers – or at least don't matter – and attempting to silence all dissenting voices.

Hamas' Charter

Hamas' founding charter of 1988 is a hugely antisemitic document that claims Jews are responsible for everything from the French Revolution to the Second World War – even Rotary clubs. It quotes a hadith that says “The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews”, and [claims that](#) “There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad.” In 2017, Hamas adopted a new, sanitised charter to appeal to international sensibilities. This is careful to assert that “Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine”, however [it has no problem in claiming that](#) the “Palestinian issue is the central cause for the Arab and Islamic Ummah”.

Division and conflict

The actions of Western elites are making an open goal for people who look to create racist divisions. Meanwhile, Islamist groups and Islamist leaders are calling for people to support Gaza on the basis of religion. We can expect to see rising Islamophobia on one hand and anti-western feelings on the other, and attacks on synagogues and other Jewish sites.

There are fears that the conflict will spread to other countries. There have already been exchanges of fire across the Lebanese border, where a Reuters photojournalist was killed by an Israeli shell. The Iranian Foreign Minister has

threatened that further Israeli war crimes would [lead to a response from the Axis of Resistance](#), which includes Iran, Palestinian militant groups, Syria, Hezbollah, and other factions.

The view from the Kurdish Freedom Movement

The Kurdish Freedom Movement has always supported the Palestinian struggle for freedom and has historic links from the time that the PKK spent in Lebanon, but they stand firmly opposed to Hamas and their patriarchal Islamist society. A [statement from the movement's umbrella body](#), the Kurdistan Societies Congress (KCK) spells out the agreed position: "As the Kurdish Freedom Movement, we would like to express our condolences to both the Palestinian Arab people and the Jewish people of Israel... Just as Hamas' methods are wrong, the attitude of the Israeli state is also unacceptable... The Palestinian problem cannot be solved through violence, but through democracy and the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people... All the problems in the Middle East, especially the Kurdish question and the Palestinian question, can only be solved by overcoming the nation-state mentality... [and] by the development of Leader Apo's [Öcalan's] system of 'democratic nation' based on the coexistence, equal and common life of peoples... Problems cannot be solved by establishing more states... As the Kurdish Freedom Movement, we always stand by the just cause of the Palestinian people. The solution of the Palestinian issue is as important as the Kurdish issue for the solution of problems and the development of democratization in the Middle East... Just as one cannot be right and democratic in Israel without seeing and recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, one cannot be right and democratic in Turkey without seeing the Kurdish reality, without recognizing the rights of the Kurdish people, and without supporting the struggle of the Kurdish people."

The pro-Kurdish Green Left Party/HDP has [put out a similar statement](#), which stresses the need for a democratic peaceful solution. The party, which will be holding its congress tomorrow, also found themselves in the unusual position of signing a joint statement, alongside their parliamentary enemies, that calls

for peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine in order to achieve a two-state solution.

Effect on the Kurds

For the Kurds, the immediate impact of the events in Gaza was that Kurdish issues, which always struggle for coverage, were completely eclipsed. Turkey's wholesale destruction of the vital infrastructure of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria was hardly mentioned outwith Kurdish media. Kurds have [called out](#) the hypocrisy when President Erdoğan, fresh from bombing North and East Syria, professed concern and indignation over Israel's targeting of similar infrastructure in Gaza.

There was also an outcry when a Turkish journalist with a large Twitter following shared, as an image of a Palestinian, a photograph of the Kurdish boy burnt by white phosphorus in a Turkish attack during their invasion in 2019. The victim [shared a video explaining](#) "I am not from Palestine, I am from Serekaniye, I was not attacked by Israel, but by Erdoğan, I live now in Serekaniye [IDP] camp".

As with the war in Ukraine, Turkey is trying to gain prestige by exploiting their contacts with both sides to act as a negotiator – in this case for the [release of the hostages taken by Hamas](#) – though so far without success. Hamas shares Erdoğan's Islamist politics. They praised Turkey's invasion of Afrîn, and Palestinian Islamist charities have helped Turkey's project for demographic change in this former Kurdish region by funding new settlements. Erdoğan has always juggled posing as a Muslim world leader at the same time as [Turkey enjoys trade and even military links with Israel](#). Recently they had been building new energy ties, but now, political considerations are pushing Erdoğan to emphasise his Palestinian rhetoric. Benjamin Netanyahu has been equally cynical in posing as a friend of the Kurds. In many ways, the two leaders are chips off the same block.

Turkish attacks on North and East Syria

Turkey's attacks on North and East Syria continued up till Monday, when Erdoğan declared that "The first phase of our operation, in which we targeted only members of the terrorist organization, facilities used by terrorists, sources of income and capabilities of terrorism, was completed successfully." <https://npasyria.com/en/105940/> In fact, a large part of the region's infrastructure is now in ruins. On the last night of this phase, a Turkish bomb on the Anti-Narcotic Unit of the Internal Security Forces in the Derik area killed 29 and wounded 28 more. The administration [declared](#) three days of mourning for the martyrs of the Turkish aggression, and the [Kurdistan Red Crescent has put out an appeal for help](#). Meanwhile, Erdoğan has [promised](#), "We will continue to carry out operations against the terrorist organization [by which he means all parts of the Kurdish Freedom Movement] and the places under its control with more determination, more violence and more effectively."

There have been [protests in Turkey against the attacks on North and East Syria](#), which – predictably – were met with heavy policing and detentions.

The American factor

America's unconditional support for Israel will only increase antagonism towards the American presence in other Middle Eastern states. This could put extra pressure on them to pull out of Syria, and it could negatively affect how people regard the Kurds who have been fighting alongside US forces.

Turkey in Iraq

Turkish drones have also [targeted the Makhmour refugee camp in Iraq](#), yesterday and last Saturday, injuring two women and two children. A Turkish man, believed to have been working for the Turkish National Intelligence Organisation (MİT), was fatally [wounded](#) when he tried to murder a Kurdish citizen in Sulaymaniyah. And another man in Sulaymaniyah – a Kurdish lawyer – made an audio recording of a woman who tried to recruit him to join MİT, and [threatened him with death when he refused](#). Sulaymaniyah is the main city of the part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq that is controlled by the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK hasn't been able to prevent MiT from carrying out their work there, but the PUK leader, Bafal Talabani, [stated](#) last week that he had refused to bow to Turkish pressure to close organisations friendly to the PKK.

In the city of Human rights

Here in Strasbourg much attention this week was on Osman Kavala, the Turkish philanthropist and human rights activist who was given a life sentence without parole after the European Court of Human Rights had demanded his immediate release. On Monday, he was awarded the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which was established to protect democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. And on Thursday, [a resolution was passed at the Parliamentary Assembly](#) that moves the council an important step closer to punishing Turkey for refusing to comply with the court's binding rulings in Kavala's case.

But the city of Strasbourg itself – or rather the local representative of the French state – demonstrated a worrying lack of respect for human rights when it came to the actions planned for the campaign for Freedom for Öcalan – a Political Solution to the Kurdish Question. This was launched at 74 different events around the world, one for each year of Öcalan's life, but the central event was in Strasbourg. MPs here for the Parliamentary Assembly were to have been joined outside the council building by foreign guest speakers and hundreds of Kurds who had planned four days of action. But at the eleventh hour, the organisers were informed that the permission had been withdrawn – and the main reason given, which was tweeted to the public, was that one of the [organisers had shared something on social media](#) that showed support for Hamas. While the suggestion that the Kurdish Movement supported Hamas was clearly absurd, all plans had to be called off. Kurds are [used to set-backs and last minute arrangements](#) enabled the MPs to give their statements inside the council building, while another, much bigger meeting, took place in the street outside the Kurdish community centre, but this is a worrying development – a nasty attempt to libel a whole community, and a stain on French liberté. That [stain grew darker](#) yesterday when 14

people were arrested for demonstrating in support of the people of Gaza, including the president of the local Union of Jews for Peace. We are living in dangerous times.

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