

# Kurdistan, the fascists' graveyard! – a weekly news review

[10:27 am 29/10/2022](#)



## Sarah Glynn

“Kurdistan, Kurdistan, the fascists’ graveyard!” This slogan was repeated by the thousands who attended the ceremony at Jina Amini’s grave on Wednesday, which marked the end of the forty-day period of mourning, and they are determined to make it a reality. Calls had gone out to mark this day with strengthened united protest. Defying government attempts to threaten Amini’s family and close down access to the town, thousands converged on Aichi Cemetery outside Saqqez. Videos show long columns of people making their way on foot, as well as tightly-packed rows of cars.

Many went on from the cemetery to the building occupied by the governor of Saqqez, where government forces met the protestors with teargas and live fire. By the end of the day, protests were taking place in many Kurdish cities – and Jina Amini’s parents and brother were under house arrest. Despite government attacks – including with AK-47s – that left many injured, Hengaw human rights association, whose tweets form the basis of this account, observed that the cities of Iranian Kurdistan were witnessing their strongest uprisings yet. They also reported the fatal shootings of two young protestors by the security forces, one in Sanandaj and one in Mahabad.

The family of Ismail Mauludi, who was killed in Mahabad, asked people to join them at his funeral the next morning, and this became another mass protest. Mourners headed for the city centre chanting “We should not mourn for our youth, we should avenge them”, and succeeded in taking temporary control of a number of government buildings. That such resistance was happening in the capital of the short-lived Kurdish Republic of 1946, only increased its impact.

Hengaw reported several people killed by the security forces in Mahabad, and further deaths in other cities. By the end of Thursday, they had counted “At least 10 people... killed by direct fire from government forces during the protests over the past two days in Kurdistan.” On Friday, two more Mahabad funerals of those killed the day before became the focus of further protest.

It has also been reported that some members of the judiciary have refused to follow official orders and been sacked or resigned.

There have been continued protests in other parts of Iran, too, including at the end of the forty-day mourning for Nika Shakarami, the sixteen-year-old protestor whose singing and laughing video has been seen around the world. However, it is in the Kurdish provinces – which Kurds call Rojhilat, or East Kurdistan – that the protests seem to be truly all-embracing, with repeated strikes shutting down the city centres. And it is also in Rojhilat that opposition to the Iranian government is most organised and unified. All of which raises the question about the relationship between the uprising here and in the rest of the country.

## **Rojhilat and the rest of Iran**

Kurds in Iran have suffered from Persian ethnic nationalism under the shah, and from Persian/Shia ethno-religious nationalism under the ayatollahs – both enforced through extreme brutality. They were very active in the revolution that brought down the shah, and they were the last to resist the counter-revolutionary forces of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Islamic Republic enforced its control over Rojhilat through mass assassinations, followed by economic deprivation and comprehensive securitisation, which clamps down hard even on such peaceful activities as Kurdish language teaching and environmental protection. Kurds make up almost half of Iran's political prisoners, despite being only 12-15% of the population.

The people of Rojhilat are persecuted as Kurds and are resisting as Kurds – Kurds that are a central part of the wider Iranian resistance. They are well aware that the Iranian state would like to drive a wedge between them and other Iranian peoples and that united resistance is vital. At the same time, the alternative system they are fighting for includes autonomy for Iran's different regions and peoples as a central tenet. There has been particularly strong Kurdish support for the Baluchis, at the other end of the country, who have also suffered heavily from the regime's ethno-religious persecution. Of course, like any group, Kurds do not all think alike, but the breadth and depth of the resistance is evident, as is its proud Kurdishness, which is increasingly expressed in slogans and songs, while, as elsewhere in Iran, protestors consistently call for the end of the regime. They want Kurdistan to destroy fascism for everyone. And from what one can see from outside the country, the importance of united resistance appears to be well understood across Iran. Hengaw has also shared a [video](#) of students at Tehran's Soore University on Wednesday chanting in solidarity with the people of the Kurdistan regions. The universal adoption of the Kurdish Freedom Movement slogan, Woman Life Freedom, is symptomatic of a wider revolutionary synergy.

Iran's Kurdish political parties, which have to operate from exile in Iraq, argue for regional autonomy within a democratic Iran. Although they have armed wings, they do not want to give the Iranian government an excuse to use even greater military force against Iranian citizens. Thus far, they have focused on

calling for coordinated strikes and protests, and also on building trust with each other. A few years ago, the Cooperation Centre of Iranian Kurdistan Political Parties brought together the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and Komala (which used to be part of the Iranian Communist Party); and a split within the PDKI reunified in July. This week it was announced that the Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK), which was established in 2004 and follows the philosophy of Abdullah Öcalan, had made an agreement with Komala on a range of organisational issues, and that, together, they were calling for a joint Kurdish military force.

PJAK has set out their vision of revolution “for the Kurdish people and all Iranian nations”. Öcalan’s ideas on cultural freedom are central, so that, even within Kurdistan, “The resistance for freedom must be for all identities, cultures, traditions, languages and religions”. Their programme calls for regions to focus on self-government, with different social components coexisting without domination by any language or religion.

## **America**

Although Iran’s Kurdish parties all have armed wings, the United States does not list them as terrorists as it does the PKK. The crucial criteria is not taking up arms, but whether those arms are used against a friend or a foe of America. For Iran, it is the government’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps that is on the American terrorist list.

While the US would love to see the end of the Islamic Republic, and it would be naive to think the CIA is not actively engaged in trying to embed their agents in their favoured sections of the Iranian opposition, those who would dismiss events in Iran as a “US inspired colour revolution” demonstrate too little trust in the possibility of genuine revolution and too much trust in the power and efficacy of the United States.

When recent events erupted, America was in the middle of delicate negotiations with Iran, and they appear to be hedging their bets as to the outcome of the ongoing uprisings. As a result, the public statement of US Special Envoy to Iran, Robert Malley, was so weak as to draw the anger of

Iranian protestors. Last Sunday, Malley tweeted “Marchers in Washington and cities around the world are showing their support for the Iranian people, who continue to peacefully demonstrate for their government to respect their dignity and human rights” Iranians were quick to point out how this downplayed and misrepresented their revolutionary call for regime change. Malley was accused of favouring the regime and “lobbying for terrorists”, and there were repeated demands for his resignation.

While the US government could and should speak up more strongly and end all interaction with the Iranian regime that could be seen to give it any legitimacy, those calling on America to be more interventionist might want to be careful what they wish for. American intervention comes on its own terms, which rarely coincide with the interests of local people.

On the other hand, international support from the Iranian diaspora and concerned friends helps to keep the Iranian revolution and the regime’s brutal response in public sight. Such support may range from the lone violinist with his placard, who was playing below my window here in Strasbourg, to the march of 80,000 last Saturday in Berlin.

Meanwhile, the Turkish government has shown no qualms in making a new agreement to increase exports of Iranian gas to Turkey. The two countries are bitter rivals for regional power, but committed pragmatists in their own interests.

## **Inside Turkey**

Turkey’s President Erdoğan has been continuing his election preparations. This week, 12 Kurdish journalists were detained with a deliberate show of violence, and the head of the Turkish Medical Association was arrested and remanded in custody. Erdoğan also visited the Kurdish ‘capital’ – Diyarbakır – where he attempted to court Kurdish voters with the bizarre claim that Selahattin Demirtaş, the Peoples’ Democratic Party’s imprisoned former co-chair, is not Kurdish, and where he celebrated plans to turn the city’s notorious prison into a cultural centre, even while abuse in Turkish prisons continues its

cruel rise. Worryingly, the lack of a coordinated plan by the main opposition grouping means that an Erdoğan election win cannot be ruled out.

Early on Tuesday morning, journalists working for Mezopotamya News Agency and the all-female Jin News were woken by police raids. As reported in a series of articles by Mezopotamya News Agency, journalists were handcuffed with their hands behind their backs, threatened and insulted at gun point, made to lie on the floor where police sat on them, and then forced to bow their heads as police videoed them being shoved into the waiting van. They were forbidden access to their lawyers for 24 hours due to “the nature and classification of the crime”, and the lawyers were not told the grounds for their detention. One of the journalists, who is now under house arrest, has a six-week-old baby that she was not able to feed for six hours. In the police station, one Jin News reporter was battered for talking with a fellow prisoner, and another was attacked by five guards when she resisted a strip search. In an attempt to humiliate them and to intimidate others, the journalists were made to walk to the courthouse on Friday morning in single file with their hands cuffed behind their backs while the police again videoed them.

This is far from the first time that Kurdish journalists have been detained – and, with the upcoming election and new “censorship law” it will be far from the last. Sixteen journalists arrested in Diyarbakır in June are still in prison waiting indictments, and in the 1990s, Kurdish journalists faced an even more brutal crackdown. The police seem anxious to stress the link with previous attacks on journalists. The news agencies’ offices were also raided, and among the many items confiscated from Mezopotamya News Agency were photographs of journalists murdered in the 1990s, and of the 16 imprisoned journalists from Diyarbakır, as well as the archives of the newspaper, *Özgür Gündem*, which was shut down in 2016.

Last week, I described how the head of the Turkish Medical Association, Şebnem Korur Fincancı, after viewing a video of dying PKK guerrillas, called for an independent investigation into accusations of use of chemical weapons by the Turkish army. Early on Wednesday morning, she, too was detained in a police raid, and, by Thursday afternoon, she had been remanded in Sincan Women’s Prison in Ankara, charged with terrorist propaganda. With no

pretence at judicial independence, Erdoğan had called for the “necessary steps to be taken”; while his political ally, Devlet Bahçeli, head of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), had called for Fincancı to be stripped of her Turkish citizenship. Ankara’s Chief Public Prosecutor has now demanded the dismissal of the Turkish Medical Association’s executives and the election of new board members. The Turkish Government is also speeding up planned legal restrictions on professional associations that have been critical of its actions – the Medical Association, which represents around 100,000 doctors, and the chambers of engineers and architects.

The arrest of Fincancı has been widely condemned. Even the deputy chair of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) stated “in a democracy, you cannot detain someone just because she said something you do not agree with”, while making sure to prelude this by making clear that he, too, did not agree with what Fincancı had said. If the Turkish army is involved, the CHP does not dare act as a critical opposition. When CHP deputy, Sezgin Tanrikulu, who had also watched the PKK video, announced that he would submit a parliamentary question calling for an investigation into the video’s authenticity, he was promptly put in his place by fellow CHP deputy, Gursel Erol, who stated on live television, “Under no circumstance and in no condition may the actions of the armed forces in its anti-terror operations abroad or at home be questioned and criticized. Never!”

Outwith Turkey, however, such questioning is growing, and Fincancı’s arrest will only encourage this. Danish MEP, Nikolaj Villumsen, has submitted a question to the Council of the European Union, asking, “When will it discuss calling for an official mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to explore the allegations?” On Thursday, the World Medical Association both condemned Fincancı’s arrest, and called for “an independent investigation into reports that chemical gases were used by the Turkish authorities against the PKK group”.

At least 25 more people were detained at demonstrations in support of the detained journalists, and there were more detentions outside the court where

Fincancı appeared on Thursday, when police violently attacked those who had come to show support.

The ubiquitous charge of “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organisation” – which may mean nothing more than sharing a critical tweet – has been used to detain 22 people in Mersin in raids carried out on Tuesday and Friday. A mother has been given a three-months’ ban on visiting her son in prison to punish her for wishing him long life in Kurdish. And Abdullah Öcalan’s lawyers have been informed that he has been given another “disciplinary punishment” that, contrary to all national and international law, will prevent them from seeing their client for a further six months. Öcalan’s prison isolation has been almost complete since 2011.

The long-awaited release from prison of former MP, Aysel Tuğluk, finally took place on Thursday, but while this will be a relief for the very many people who have campaigned for her, it is also an indication of how very serious her dementia has become.

This week also saw the publication of another exposure of Turkish mistreatment of refugees, including the forced deportation of refugees to northern Syria, in contravention of international law.

## **Sweden and Finland**

Despite all the evidence that Turkey does not have an independent judiciary and that critics of the government cannot expect a fair trial, Sweden and Finland continue to discuss how they can do Turkey’s bidding and ensure Turkey does not carry out their threat to veto the Nordic countries’ applications for NATO membership. Central to Turkey’s demands is the extradition of political exiles. Even before the formation of Sweden’s new right-wing government, Sweden’s security and counter-terrorism police, Sapo, had ramped up actions against the PKK and held discussions with Turkey’s intelligence agency, MIT. On Monday, the new Foreign Minister, Tobias Billström, told Associated Press, “There will be no nonsense from the Swedish government when it comes to the PKK. We are fully behind a policy which



means that terrorist organizations don't have a right to function on Swedish territory." However, even this anti-immigrant government acknowledges that extraditions have to be approved by the Swedish courts. A Finnish delegation will be in Ankara for talks on Tuesday.

As European governments move further to the right, the spaces available for political action are getting ever further squeezed, which makes it even more important that we use the freedoms still available to us, and keep pushing back.

Sarah Glynn is a writer and activist – check her [website](#) and follow her on [Twitter](#).