

After 23 years of international conspiracy – a weekly news review

[10:57 am 09/10/2021](#)



Sarah Glynn

Twenty-three years ago today, Abdullah Öcalan was forced to leave Syria. He began a tour of Europe in search of a political solution to the Kurdish Question, but an international conspiracy, including the CIA, ensured that, four months later, on 15 February 1999, he was captured and abducted back to Turkey. He has been imprisoned ever since. They hoped to decapitate the Kurdish freedom movement, but they did not understand the strength of the roots that it had already put down and that have continued to grow in both Turkey and Syria.

As Kurds and their friends commemorate the start of Öcalan's fateful journey, they are only too aware that the international conspiracy against their leader and their freedom movement is far from over. To international elites, Öcalan and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that he leads are seen as the enemy. The PKK has long emphasised the need for a negotiated peaceful solution that would enable Kurds to lead a dignified life in Turkey; and they point out that resolution of the Kurdish Question is essential to any hopes of genuine democracy in Turkey as a whole. But ruling elites are more concerned about maintaining a strategic relationship with the Turkish government. These leaders also have no wish to allow space for a more socialist vision of the future, and they do not want to contemplate a resistance movement succeeding against a NATO state.

Today, a crucial cog in the international conspiracy against the Kurdish freedom movement is provided by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which dominates the government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Despite warnings from Kurds across the world, the KDP is helping Turkey attack and occupy the region's northern mountains. In their greed to dominate the region and its resources, the KDP have allowed themselves to become dependent on their powerful neighbour, and in their determination to extinguish the PKK's rival form of Kurdish leadership, they are prepared to facilitate Turkey's invasion of the areas where the PKK guerrillas have their bases. Ignoring widespread fears and warnings of inciting fratricidal war, which would play into Turkey's hands and ultimately destroy the region's hard-won autonomy, the KDP are not just not resisting Turkey's attacks, their peshmerga are actively helping Turkey.

For the most part, they have avoided open clashes with the PKK – they would rather attempt to force the PKK into a position where they take the first shot against other Kurds – however the PKK has reported disappearances of guerrilla fighters in areas where the KDP peshmerga operate. Last Sunday, they published a statement based on the account of a survivor of a KDP ambush: 'It has been confirmed that a guerrilla group consisting of seven people was attacked by KDP forces at approximately 2:30 a.m. on the night of August 28-29 while traveling from Qandil to Behdinan. The group was fired upon directly from four sides with heavy weapons as it crossed the Zap River

without prior address or warning shots. Five of our companions were definitely killed in this attack. One of our members is believed to have been captured injured. Our comrade Haki, who was part of the guerrilla group, observed what was happening and was able to leave the area unharmed after a while... The attack, which took place without warning, was clearly aimed at destroying the entire guerrilla group. It is clear that it was intended to provoke armed clashes among Kurds. The attack took place despite the fact that it is known that intra-Kurdish fighting is harming the entire Kurdish people right now.'

The Turkish forces that the KDP are assisting have no hesitation in resorting to chemical weapons to try and extract the guerrillas from their tunnels in the mountains – and a complete lack of international condemnation allows them to do this with impunity. A recent [PKK propaganda video](#) shows the guerrillas in their mountain hideaways.

The 'international community' has generally kept silent – they have no wish to draw attention to this war and to Turkish expansion into Iraq – while the US has reinforced their antagonism to the PKK.

When it comes to the Yazidi city of Şengal (Sinjar), foreign interference has played an open role in the attempted extinction of Yazidi autonomy. Today is also the first anniversary of the agreement on the future of the region that was made between the Federal Government of Iraq and the KDP-dominated Kurdistan Regional Government and was supported and facilitated by America and the United Nations. The agreement did not include the Yazidis themselves, who, after they were abandoned in 2014 by both the Iraqi army and KDP peshmerga and left to face ISIS genocide, have built up their own autonomous structures. The Yazidis were rescued from total extinction by the PKK and the Syrian-based YPG, and, like their rescuers, the structures they have built up follow Öcalan's philosophy, which makes them unacceptable to those who made the agreement. So far, the Yazidis in Şengal have refused to hand over control, while trying to negotiate a measure of continued autonomy in line with Iraq's federal constitution.

Tomorrow, Iraq goes to the polls, and last weekend, the Şengal Yazidis accused the KDP of attempting to bring military units into the area under the guise of campaigning. Local people set up roadblocks and forced their retreat. Many Yazidis have not felt safe to return to Şengal yet, and still live in IDP [Internally Displaced People] camps in the Kurdistan region. There have been claims in these camps that people have been threatened that help will be withdrawn if they don't vote for the KDP's candidates. More generally, the KDP has a history of manipulating the quota system, which was designed to give representation to minority groups, in order to ensure the election of their favoured candidates. The Iraqi election as a whole appears to offer little hope for progressive change, and turnout is expected to be low.

For a brief while, in 2014, as they huddled on top of the Şengal Mountains awaiting rescue from the surrounding ISIS forces, Yazidis entered the international consciousness, but they have quickly been forgotten. Last week, a story in the New York Times illustrated the extent of this abandonment – and also Turkish complicity in their ongoing plight. It notes that hundreds of survivors are 'believed to still be living with the families of deceased ISIS fighters, either in hiding or in detention camps. Others are thought to be held by different extremist groups in Syria or Turkey.' Extremists in Syria are generally in Turkish occupied areas, so Turkey is heavily implicated. As the article explains, there is no help to find the abducted Yazidis or bring them home. Even when families discover the whereabouts of their long-lost relations, they may be unable to afford the ransom demanded for their release, or even the smaller sums demanded for internet contact.

Meanwhile there is no lack of international interest in and support for the KDP and their Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), with states keen to strengthen military alliances and trade links. This week, Consul General David Hunt described the UK as a 'committed partner', while President Macron wrote that, 'France and the Kurdistan Region have old and unique relations which we need to preserve at the highest level'.

These democrats seem remarkably unbothered, not only by the never-mentioned war in the mountains, but also by the KRG's abuse of the human

rights of its own citizens. Around eighty imprisoned activists who were involved in demonstrations against the government are currently on hunger strike, protesting the conditions in which they have been held for over a year in pretrial detention. On Monday their families and supporters demonstrated outside the courthouses of various of the region's cities. This was timed to coincide with the trial of four of the activists, but this trial was again postponed, as was the trial of another five of the activists that was due to take place on Wednesday – postponements that could threaten the lives of hunger strikers whose health condition is already critical. Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraqi Kurdistan have been publishing details of what is happening on Twitter and on their website, where they conclude that, 'After speaking with families and witnessing 10 trials conducted by the Erbil Criminal and Appellate courts, CPT believes the courts are being used to limit Freedom of Expression and punish people who criticize the government.'

Journalist Sherwan Sherwani, who was convicted for six years in a trial that was condemned by human rights organisations, has shared a voice message on the power of prisoners' resistance against this state oppression. He begins, 'I have reached a conclusion that your enemy... can beat you, can hold your family as hostage, arrest you, change your confessions, and sentence you for years, but there is one thing that leaves them powerless; that is an inner power in us that cannot be seized by any means.' And he observes, 'I feel sorry for those who are holding top powers in the KRG and come on to the TVs to lecture about universal values.'

The KDP's abuse of the judicial system is not restricted to the region's citizens. Last week, I wrote about the abduction of the representative from North and East Syria. This Thursday saw the brief arrest, following an unspecified 'complaint', of official representatives of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the pro-Kurdish leftist party that is the third largest party in the Turkish Parliament.

With respect to Turkey itself, international relations seem remarkably unperturbed by internal oppression and external aggression. In a notice issued on Thursday, the US recognised that Turkey's offensive in North and East Syria

'undermines the campaign to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, endangers civilians, and further threatens to undermine the peace, security, and stability in the region, and continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.' However, just six days earlier, the US Defence Department reported on a phone call with the Turkish defence minister in which the two countries discussed 'opportunities to increase and strengthen our longstanding defense ties and to share perspectives on regional issues, including the shared threat from terrorism', and the US Secretary of Defense 'reaffirmed the great value the United States places on its defense relationship with Turkey'.

This week has provided further examples of the brutality that the international conspiracy has allowed to flourish within Turkey.

On Tuesday, Istanbul Bar Association and Istanbul Medical Chamber held a press conference to highlight the misuse of covid measures in Turkey's prisons, where prisoners are increasingly isolated and denied access to fresh air, in what is effectively a further layer of punishment. The previous day, Mezopotamya News Agency observed that a new violation of human rights is added every day, as they reported on families banned from visiting their children to punish them for also greeting other prisoners.

On Wednesday, Conservative Americans were introduced to the hard realities of Kurdish politics when Başak Demirtaş, wife of the HDP's imprisoned co-chair, Selahattin Demirtaş was interviewed on Fox TV. Viewers heard how Turkey has defied the European Court of Human Rights ruling for Demirtaş's release, and how Covid has been used to restrict family visits and deny prisoners any physical contact. Başak stressed the importance of dialogue, and told how she keeps in touch with wives of leaders of the mainstream opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). The Turkish authorities responded by launching an investigation into Fox TV.

There have been more mass detentions of activists and HDP politicians, and, in Urfa, HDP members told how people in their families have been threatened with sacking from public-sector jobs or with cuts to social aid, and how party

members who have been detained are informed that they can remain free if they protest outside HDP offices and even stone the HDP buildings. An eight-year sentence given to HDP politician Ahmet Öner, who died in 2017, showed that political trials don't even spare the dead.

North and East Syria is remembering another dreadful anniversary. It is two years today since Turkey launched its attacks on Serêkaniyê and Girê Spî after President Trump cleared the way by withdrawing US troops and air cover. In appeasing Turkey, the 'international community' allowed an area that had been a mosaic of different communities to become a fiefdom for violent jihadi mercenaries and a safe haven for ISIS cells. This doesn't even make sense from the limited perspective of the War against Terror. This week the Syrian Democratic Forces revealed that they had thwarted the detonation of a large ISIS car bomb in Raqqa.

The US may now acknowledge the dangers of Turkish aggression, but that aggression is still allowed to continue, albeit at a lesser intensity. Last Sunday there was a report of banned cluster bombs being used on Ain Issa.

The international conspiracy can also be seen at work in the official treatment of Kurds in the diaspora, especially in places with strong links with Turkey, such as Germany, where Kurdish organisations and actions have faced aggressive clampdowns. Last Saturday, Kurds were shown the French state's real views on Liberté, when the police attacked the 'Take Action for Öcalan' camp just hours after it was set up in a public square in Strasbourg. Activists were forced to flee clouds of teargas as the police destroyed over a hundred tents. The Union syndicale Solidaires observed, 'Once again, the French state has chosen repression when faced with peoples' just struggle for freedom'.

The international conspiracy of world leaders needs to be confronted by an international resistance. There have been some positive signs – individual politicians and others who have taken a public stand in solidarity with Öcalan, the social democratic parties who make up the Progressive Alliance promising solidarity with the HDP – but nothing substantial will be achieved without a big push from below. The Kurds have demonstrated the

power of resistance, and this resistance and the ideas it defends are finding a wider resonance. International resistance is growing, but can it grow fast enough?