



A child holds a banner of Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan at a gathering in Turkey. Will Ocalan be released in the near future?

Is Peace Process in Turkey back on track?

For many years, there has been talk of a peace process in Turkey, aimed at resolving the Kurdish question. This has not been followed up by concrete action, leaving many people sceptical about real prospects. However, new initiatives indicate that the peace process may be back on track.

Early last year imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan announced the cease-fire between the PKK guerrillas and the Turkish military. The PKK fighters withdrew from Turkish territory to their base at the Qandil Mountains. Both parties respected the cease-fire.

Before the guerrillas could completely withdraw, the GEZI protest took place in Istanbul. This resulted in the stall of the withdrawal process. However, there have been on-going talks between Ocalan and the government with the representatives of pro-Kurdish parties the BDP and now the HDP acting as the intercessors. There has been slow but sure progress with the peace talks.

Turkey has just emerged from a local government election. The elections took place under relative peace and calm and without any serious incidents of violence. The elections did not produce any major upsets. Those in power in the local areas were returned to power with minor changes.

The majority of the Turkish and Kurdish peoples have given the political parties which have actively supported the peace process such as the AKP and the BDP (now the HDP) the mandate to

proceed with the resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey.

The local government election is to be followed in August 2014 with the Presidential elections in which the Turkish electorate will for the first time elect their President directly. In the past the President was elected by Parliament from the ruling party. The national Parliamentary elections will take place in June 2015.

Certain constitutional changes have taken place in which certain demands of the Kurds have been met. They are identity of the Kurdish people, the teaching of mother-tongue in private schools and the use of Kurdish language officially in areas inhabited by the Kurds. The government has also released some political prisoners.

Last month the Turkish Parliament adopted the "Framework Law" titled as "Draft Law to End Terror and Strengthen Social Integration" It entails a bill of six articles on reforms to help find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue. The Law includes issues of amnesty and guidelines for the process of negotiations between the government and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

It appears that the peace process is on track. It is widely speculated that the release of Ocalan, who has initiated and is instrumental in the peace process, may not be that far off.

A number of Kurdish leaders have had meetings with Ocalan on the island of Imrali, where he has been imprisoned for the last fifteen years. Ocalan has called for these exchanges to be strengthened and expanded.

Editorial

CAN CONFLICT BE ENDED?

THERE are justifiable doubts from many Kurds about the peace process in Turkey, given the foot-dragging and repressive actions from the authorities.

The government's rhetoric about finding a lasting solution to the Kurdish question has occasionally given cause for hope, but they have not followed through with concerted action. Granted, there have been some concessions with regard to the use of the Kurdish language and the teaching of mother tongue in private schools. But levels of political repression remain high with thousands of political prisoners still behind bars in Turkey and many more living in exile.

Also, the conflict in other parts of the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria has thrown the region into turmoil. This is seriously impacting parts of Kurdistan, especially Rojava in Syria where armed gangs of fighters are threatening Kurdish towns. Kurds, Alevites and Christians in this area have formed self-defence units to ward off the threat.

If this conflict spreads, it could further dent the aspirations of Kurds for self-determination and basic human rights.

The above notwithstanding, a law has been enacted in the Turkish parliament that aims to provide the peace process with a legal basis. This is similar to laws that were enacted in South Africa during the negotiation period that began in 1990.

The legislation will allow Kurds in exile including guerrillas to return home provided they give up their arms and reintegrate into society; it will pave the way for the release of political prisoners and other steps necessary to push the peace process forward.

The long history of conflict may make the prospect of peace hard to imagine. But there is no viable alternative. The people of Turkey – both Kurds and Turks – must work together to make a just peace possible.

Kurdish News Briefs

Hundreds of Kurds enter Syria to fight ISIL as Turkey increases security on Rojava border

HUNDREDS of Kurdish fighters entered the predominantly Syrian Kurdish region known as Rojava in July to battle jihadists besieging the Kurdish city of Kobane, Syrian Observatory for Human Rights director Rami Abdul Rahman said July 14, as the Turkish army beefed up its security on the border.

Read more: <http://tinyurl.com/nej8ap7>

Peace in Kurdistan (PIK) Campaign: Rojava must not fall - Support Kurdish democratic autonomy against ISIS

THE Kurds in Syria have been under fierce assault from ISIS since 2 July but very little of what has been unfolding has been reported in the mainstream media and few if any comments have been made by British, European or American political leaders. As the casualties start to mount, it is time that the world took note before a new tragedy in the Middle East emerges, says the Peace in Kurdistan Campaign, based in London.

Read more: <http://peaceinkurdistancampaign.com/resources/pik-campaign-statements/rojava-must-not-fall-support-kurdish-democratic-autonomy-against-isis/>

David Morgan – urgent need to find a solution to the Kurdish question

THE protracted conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish population has claimed many thousands of lives over the past four decades and continues to inflict misery on millions adding to the toll of terrible suffering. Families still suffer grief as their children are embroiled in conflict; loved ones are detained, injured in clashes with the police or fleeing to an uncertain fate the mountains to join the Kurdish guerrillas. The criminalisation of Kurdish communities by Turkish anti-terrorism legislation imposes severe restrictions on behaviour and there is a similar criminalisation of Kurdish refugee communities across Europe living under the threat of punitive European anti-terrorism laws, in particular there is the impact of the proscription of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in circumscribing normal behaviour such as travelling, reading, speaking out, meeting up with people and

even thinking in a certain way. This enormous human suffering of countless daily injustices underlines the urgent need to reach a solution whereby Turkey and the Kurds can create a shared space where they can re-establish a degree of normal living.

http://liveencounters.net/?page_id=7798

Pro-Kurdish party announces presidential candidate

THE co-chairman of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP) will run in the country's first direct presidential election in August.

The HDP's Selahattin Demirtas announced his candidacy on Turkish news channel Haberturk TV last month, before tweeting: "I would like to (be) perceived as the candidate of all the oppressed and the neglected groups in Turkey".

Read more: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/06/26/us-turkey-election-idUSKBN0F12KY20140626>



Selahattin Demirtas, the presidential candidate for the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP).

Iraq crisis: Kurds winning battle for self-rule as country disintegrates

JOHN Kerry, the US Secretary of State, has urged Kurdish leaders to stand with Baghdad in the face of a Sunni Arab revolt but the Kurds appear to have concluded that Iraq is finished as a unitary state.

On the battlefield, the attacks of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) have slowed but government forces do not look as if they can regain lost territory. "We are facing a new reality and a new Iraq,"

said Kurdish President Masoud Barzani at the start of his meeting with Mr Kerry in Iraqi Kurdistan. Earlier, he had blamed "the wrong policies" of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's for the violence and called for him to go, saying it was "very difficult" to imagine Iraq staying together.

Read more: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-crisis-kurds-winning-the-battle-for-selfrule-as-country-disintegrates-9560704.html>

Turkey: Kurdish politician Hatip Dicle tried in KCK case released

KURDISH politician and former DEP MP Hatip Dicle, Gultan Kisanak, who has been in custody for 5 years in the main Kurdistan Communities Union KCK trial, was released from prison in Diyarbakir last month.

Dicle was met at the prison gates by HDP MP Faysal Sariyıldız, Amed (Diyabakir) Metropolitan Municipal co-mayors Gültan Kî anak and Fîrat Anlı in addition to family members and representatives of civil society organisations. Dicle thanked those who had come to meet him, saying: "It's strange that I was also released 10 years ago on a June day. On that day 10 years ago I had hoped no more Kurdish politicians would go to prison on account of their opinions." Hatip Dicle previously served 10 years in prison after being arrested in 1994 along with MPs Leyla Zana, the late Orhan Dogan and Selim Sadak.

Read more: <http://www.ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2014/6/turkey5057.htm>

Turkey and the Kurds: Dreams of Kurdistan

IN YALAZA, a remote mountain village near the town of Lice, the seeds of a "free Kurdistan" are being sown. A "popular council" vetted by rebels of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) will soon launch Turkey's first school offering education in the Kurdish language. Last summer Yalaza's fields were carpeted with cannabis. They are now filled with tobacco and other legal crops after the PKK outlawed the booming drug trade.

"Yalaza will be a model commune for all of Kurdistan, the state cannot set foot here," says Serdar Celik, a PKK man who seems to be in charge.

Read more: <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21606297-buoyed-recent-success-their-iraqi-brethren-kurds-turkey-look-hopefully>

▶ The article below gives some context to the conflict taking place in some of the Kurdish areas of Syria. It was written by Michael Stephens & Sofia Barbarani Director, RUSI Qatar & Freelance journalist, Irbil - and published a few weeks ago.

SYRIA'S KURDS BEAR BRUNT OF EXPANDING CALIPHATE

WHILE international attention has been fixated on the disintegration of Iraq and the expansion of the so-called caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the Sunni insurgents have moved their offensive back into Syria with a newly acquired haul of US-made weapons and cash.

Cushioned by the impunity offered them by a largely unresponsive international community, and the inability of the Syrian and Iraqi armies to defeat them in battle, Isis' latest advances in Syria have further destabilised the already frail dynamics in the region.

As Bashar al-Assad attended his de-facto self-coronation affording him another seven years in power, Isis was making a mockery of the president's pledge to "not stop fighting terrorism and striking it wherever it is until we restore security to every spot of Syria".

In addition to Isis, Syria's Kurds have also been busy establishing their own cantons of self-governance, backed by their militia force, the People's Protection Units (YPG). But as their control over Kurdish areas of Syria has strengthened, it has brought them into fierce conflict with Isis.

Upgrade in firepower

While in neighbouring Iraq the Kurdistan Region remains largely insulated from Isis' violent land-grabbing operations, Syria's approximately two million Kurds have borne the brunt of the expanding "caliphate" declared at the end of June.

On 2 July, Isis fighters targeted villages west of Kobane in Aleppo province.

A Kurdish-majority region, Kobane was captured by the YPG in July 2012 and subsequently declared an autonomous canton by the Democratic Unity Party (PYD).

While this is not the first time Isis has attempted to assimilate Kobane into the territory under its control, having threatened to do so in March, the ongoing attacks are notable for the stark upgrade in firepower used by Isis against the Kurdish forces.

In a symbolic show of the new regional realities since the capture of the northern Iraqi city of Mosul last month, Isis has made use of the weapons it seized from the Iraqi army in its successful takeover of large swathes of the country, including an estimated 1,500 Humvees, some armed with TOW missiles, howitzers, and precision-guided weaponry.

"The attacks from Isis have reached an acute level following their recent acquisition of heavy artillery," warned the presidency of



People sit in the back of a truck as they celebrate what they said was the Kurdish liberation of villages from Islamist rebels near the city of Ras al-Ain, Syria in November last year.

the three Syrian Kurdish cantons.

'Chemical weapon'

While the YPG claims that Isis used chemical agents in its recent attacks on Kobane - allegedly seized at the Muthanna chemical weapons facility near Baghdad - legitimacy of the photographic and medical evidence provided by Kurdish forces has yet to be confirmed by international players.

The US also downplayed Isis' takeover of the Muthanna facility on 8 July, claiming the weapons were no longer intact and would be impossible to use.

"Chemical weapons have been used, we have taken samples for testing in Diyarbakir. It is some kind of... chemical weapon but we are not sure exactly," said the leader of the PYD, Salih Muslim.

YPG spokesperson Redur Xalil called on the international community to "intervene immediately and carry out their duty toward Kobane", in a bid to alert the world of the unspoken battle that is being waged against Syria's Kurds.

The sharp upswing in fighting in Syria is a cause for alarm, particularly in neighbouring Turkey, which has cause to worry about the increasing militarization of Kurdish areas, as the YPG struggles to fight an emboldened Isis.

"We know that some 300-400 Turkish Kurds are fighting with us in Syria against Isis," said Mr Muslim. "It is very difficult.

We are short on weapons and our rocket-propelled grenades are not effective against [Isis'] tanks."

Turkey is faced with a conundrum whereby the PYD - which is closely linked to Turkey's decades-old enemy, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) - is also preventing the militant Islamist force from destabilising its own border regions.

According to Turkey expert and associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Aaron Stein: "It is unclear as to what Turkey's policy is. The rise of Isis has been a game changer for them."

"But I haven't yet seen evidence that Turkey supports Isis against the YPG. All evidence I have uncovered says they're not directly supporting them."

What Turkey decides will have a huge impact on the direction of the conflict in Syria.

None of the three major players - the Syrian regime, Isis, or the PYD - are particularly palatable to Ankara, but choices must be made.

It may be that Ankara must recognise the de facto break-up of Syria into three distinct governing structures, and preventing radicalisation of Kurds fighting Isis is its main security priority.

As the conflict in Syria heats up, fuelled by Iraq, Turkey may well find it plays a double game of supporting the Kurds but only just enough to ensure that they do not lose. Either way, more war will surely come.

KHRAG IN ACTION

KHRAG members join mass march for Palestine

MEMBERS of the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group (Khrag) participated in the mass march in support of Palestine that took place in Cape Town two weeks ago.

KHRAG is appalled by the murderous Israeli campaign in Gaza which has left hundreds of Palestinians dead and thousands more injured. Many of the dead are women, children and the elderly.

The ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, the continuing displacement of Palestinians, the flagrant disregard of international and humanitarian law and the collective punishment meted on them, must be ended immediately.

The Israeli war crimes are made possible by the support and complicity of Western governments, especially the United States of America. These governments have the blood of innocent Palestinians on their hands.

We are called to action, mindful of the words of Madiba, who said that South Africa cannot truly be free until the Palestinians are free.

We add our voices to the international outrage over the massacres in Gaza. We join in powerful calls by icons such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ahmed Kathrada as well as millions throughout the world that the killings must stop and the illegal occupation must end.

We call for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador to South Africa and support for all efforts to isolate the Israeli regime.

We need to redouble our collective efforts to ensure that Palestine is free and that Palestinians achieve their rights to self-determination.



30 000 people marched for Palestine in Cape Town on 16 July.

Kurdish students return home after working with KHRAG in Cape Town

TWO Kurdish Dutch students have returned home following several months of campaigning with the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group.

Alina Jabbari and Roshhat Sharanshi are both from Holland, but met in Cape Town at the beginning of the year after each became involved in the work of KHRAG.

Alina studied at the University of the Western Cape and campaigned energetically around the Kurdish issue. Rosshat had arranged to work as an intern during his stay and worked in the KHRAG office for several hours each day.

The two mobilised young people to support the Kurdish cause and organised a Kurdish Festival in May. They participated

in the general programmes of KHRAG. Two months ago they facilitated the screening of a documentary on the Marikana Massacre, which was shown at the Slave Church in Long Street.

Both have expressed their gratitude to the members of KHRAG for their respective experiences.

Rosshat's family are from the Iraqi part of Kurdistan and they suffered under the Saddam Hussein regime. "To see a Kurdish organisation working in South Africa was quite emotional for me," he said.

"I would like to thank all the people from KHRAG, especially Judge Moosa, the Reverend Esau and Baran Kalay. I will continue doing work for KHRAG in Holland and I will always be ready to serve the interest of my people."

'Her bijji KHRAG u gele Kurd!' (Long live KHRAG and the Kurds!)

AGM scheduled for 27 August

THE Annual General Meeting of the Kurdish Human Rights Action Group will take place in the City on 27 August.

UCT Professor, Dr Andrew Nash, will be the guest speaker. He will reflect on how the Middle East has become a flashpoint for the contradictions of global capitalism.

Anyone wishing to attend, can reach us at the contact details below.



KHRAG members participated in the mass march.



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