

The vicious cycle of “no peace, no war” bites Turkey once more



Hope and growing expectation that the age-old Kurdish issue could finally be resolved in Turkey, underlined by the government's bold and historical undertaking referred to as the “Kurdish opening,” quickly evaporated.

The derailment of the brief positivity that was sewn in the much impoverished and conflict scarred east of Turkey is highlighted by the dramatic escalation of events in Turkey this past week. The PKK have evidently escalated attacks in recent weeks, but the death tolls marked by a string of deadly attacks over the past number of days has rocked Turkey and stirred nationalist anger. A bomb attack on a bus in Istanbul, claimed by an offshoot of the PKK, the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, brought the number of soldiers killed to 17 in less than a week.

This has placed immense pressure on Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, already under broad attack from the opposition and nationalist circles for his attempts to reach out to the Kurds and ultimately reach out to the PKK to lay down their arms.

This all begs the question, where did it all go wrong? Surely, all sides would seek to capitalize on positive motions to bring peace to Turkey and a democratic settlement to such an age-old problem that has left scars on both sides. The simple answer is no. This is Turkey after all, and cracks formed from decades of nationalist policies, disenfranchisement, bitter feelings from both circles, and a raging guerrilla war that has claimed thousand of lives will not be papered over all too easily.

Turkey has finally come to the realization that cutting the branches of your problem is not equivalent to cutting its root. As long as the PKK machine is fueled by government policies, peace will not be achievable and bloodshed will continue.

The greatest goal of the Turkish government should be to isolate the PKK, not militaristically or economically, but emotionally. Not all Kurds support the PKK, and certainly only a very small minority of Kurds prefer bloodshed to peace.

However, even as Kurdish political parties with firstly the DTP, which was dramatically ousted last year for alleged links with the PKK and was the first fatal blow to the peace process, and there successor, the BDP, have had a presence in the Turkish Parliament; they have failed to become the true representatives of the Kurds, and have succumbed under the great PKK shadow and persistent attempts in Turkey to clip their wings before the political birds could even fly.

However, the Turkish government hardly helped their cause, in spite of what initially seemed positive developments between the AKP and the now defunct DTP last year. Nationalists and Kemalists have gulped at the mere idea that the Kurdish problem should be drawn on a democratic or ethnic basis, and have persistently acknowledged the battle with the PKK as a fight against terrorism. In truth, the root of this battle is for greater cultural and democratic rights, freedoms, and social development in the Kurdish region.

As such, these democratic openings and initia-



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan speaks with Turkish soldiers in a trench during his visit to the Turkish city of Hakkari at the border with Iraq June 20, 2010.

tives can only be attained in the Turkish Parliament, not in the mountains or by the sheer military might of any army. Therefore, the more the Kurdish issue is rendered to a battle in the distant mountains, while the situation on the ground deteriorates, this only entices Turkey into a vicious “no peace, no war” cycle that, as history has shown, has blighted both sides.

In spite of widespread public pressure and the recent attacks, Erdogan maintained his pledge to the Kurdish opening and the broadening of Kurdish rights. However, as violence escalates, Erdogan will have a fight on his hand to instill any motion in Parliament against a backdrop of opposition and sheer animosity. Constitutional changes, the fundamental aim of the Kurds, will become almost impossible in such a tense and nationalistically polluted climate.

In reality, ongoing tension in many ways supports the nationalist and Kemalist circles, the Turkish military, as well as the PKK. As peace and democratic moves falter, the PKK continues to be the flagship of the Kurds.

It is important for Turkey not to rescind on its pledges, lest allow the PKK to take center stage again. It must support and encourage Kurdish political evolution, which has historically been starved, and facilitate true representation in the Turkish Parliament, rather than pressure, alienate, or—as has been common place—shut down Kurdish parties all together.

The peace initiative took a great blow when the government was largely embarrassed, as what should have been a milestone for the Kurdish opening with the surrender of a number of PKK rebels last year turned into a pro-PKK ceremony.

Currently, there has emerged a huge vacuum in the peace process that cannot be so easily bridged. The Turkish government will simply refuse to ever negotiate directly with the PKK, let alone be seen to succumb to the rebels. The war with the PKK has become far too bloody, too many scars have developed, and too much pride is at stake for that to ever happen. Yet as long as the PKK continues to be the representative voice of

the Kurds, then the process is stalled without true, recognizable, and widely respected Kurdish interlocutors on the ground.

The aim of Turkey should remain unhindered. Reach out to the Kurds and entice them into a genuine alternative between separatism and violence on the one hand, and historical repression by successive Turkish governments on the other. The tears of a mother, whether Kurdish or Turkish, are sacred. Violence serves no gain and only deepens scars. The more deaths that emerge, the more that both sides reach deeper into the position of no return.

When the Kurds see development of their region, democratic rights, employment, and a firm place as true partners of the Turks, Kurds will themselves turn on separatists or those who seek violence or bring instability. For now, the situation will get worse before it gets better. With imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan openly abandoning efforts to seek dialogue, this has culminated in a fresh wave of violence, with the PKK threatening more attacks until its demands for

greater rights are fulfilled. While Erdogan remains persistent on his bold and historical opening, he cannot at the same time watch as attacks escalate and pressure mounts. A dismayed Erdogan accused European countries of not doing enough in its combat against terrorism. This was an all-too frequent criticism of the U.S. in the past, even as the U.S. has openly denounced the PKK and publicly defended the Turkish government while often overlooking Turkish actions in Iraq.

As Turkey continues to flagrantly breach Iraqi sovereignty with military incursions and air raids, this places the Iraqi Kurds in a more precarious predicament. Iraqi Kurds, who have often been blamed for aiding the PKK, have repeatedly refused to fight fellow Kurds. However, with the much-welcome thawing of relations between Turkey and Kurdistan in recent times resulting in the landmark visit by Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, the Iraqi Kurds may well have a price to pay for the new, strong bond with Turkey.

Barzani pledged “all efforts” to assist Turkey on his visit, and the Turkish government may well give the Iraqi Kurds more support and official recognition, including annexation of disputed territories, for their hand in further alienating the PKK.

This places the Kurdistan government in a tough situation. It needs the strategic support and recognition of Turkey to prosper and develop, while at the same time it does not want the PKK problem to become a greater Kurdish issue. After all, no matter how you look at it, the Kurdish dilemma in Turkey is a cultural and democratic one, specific to Turkey alone, and can only be resolved in the Turkish Parliament and nowhere else.

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National P 3

Date of Kurdistan local elections in doubt

Faraj al-Haydari, head of the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission, announced that they have not received an official call to begin preparations prior to local elections in Kurdistan Region's three provinces of Erbil, Sulaimaniya, and Duhok.

Ruling coalition list confirms the date: "The provincial council election will be held this year on October 31."

National P 5

Makhmour Camp refugees get a day of their own

GLOBE PHOTO: Suzan Mandelawi



Business P 10

Private sector is only solution for unemployment

The Kurdistan Regional Government's attempt to limit the employment of foreign laborers is a step to control unemployment, one official said. Organizations or companies are not allowed to exceed 25 percent of the total labor they hire. Further restrictions are going to be applied to the import of foreign labor.



REUTERS/Saad Shalash

A man walks past wires connected to a local generator on a street in Baghdad June 22, 2010.

Iraqis demand more electricity

"The electricity problem will not be solved at least in the next two years," al-Maliki told reporters. He explained that it will take two years to complete, with the construction of power stations currently being undertaken. Electricity Minister resigned following a series of demonstrations first launched in the southern city of Basra on Saturday. Protestors questioned the government about increased periods of no electricity. The Basra demonstration drew clashes between people and security forces, leaving dead and wounded. A similar demonstration was repeated in Nasriya city where 17 people were injured in clashes with police.

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