

Interview with Tekoşîna Anarşîst on the situation in Syria

Regeneración Libertaria

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In light of the continuous succession of events in Syria after the fall of the Bashar Al-Assad regime, we at Regeneración Libertaria have spoken with the Tekoşîna Anarşîst (Anarchist Struggle) militia. The libertarian organization analyzes the situation in the rest of Syria and how it can affect the Rojava revolution of which they are part.

First of all, how are you in Rojava and what is the atmosphere there?

The situation is changing constantly, with moments of euphoria for sporadic victories and moments of terror for the atrocities happening around us. Our organization is in a state of high alert, with a big part of our forces deployed to defend the front lines, as fighters and as combat medic units. We also set up a provisional information office to keep track of the military and political situation, to keep a good coordination of our forces and asses our next steps. We also try to keep communication with other comrades and organizations the best we can in these conditions, sharing updates of the ongoing situation and coordinating to give collective answers to the current attacks.

The atmosphere is tense, with a weird combination of joy for the fall of the regime and fear of what will come next. There is hope for the future of a new Syria without the Al-Assad dynasty, but also many people who are very worried for what will come next. Kurds had been suffering attacks of salafists groups since the beginning of the war, and is not a secret that the Turkish state is enrolling as many ISIS fighters as they can in their proxy groups. The threats today are very serious, Erdogan seems determined to attack Kobane at any cost and is even threatening Raqqa. We are at risk of losing all the developments and sacrifices that have been put into this revolution for many years.

2.- In this moment, doing the interview, what is the political and military situation on Syrian territory?

We are trying to keep regular updates of the situation, recently we started sharing those updates (<https://tekosinaanarsist.noblogs.org/war-updates-december-2024/>) in our rudimentary website. Everyday new critical events are happening, and probably the situation will already be different when this gets published. In a general, we can see how the collapse of the Assad regime created a fragile situation for Syria. Different local and regional powers want to take advantage of it.

Hayir Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) is the re-branding of the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. Now they have the upper hand in the main cities after their successful military offensive against the regime army, that started from Idlib (their stronghold) on November 27. They established an interim government and are taking control of the power transition in the Syrian State, while displaying an image of moderate Islam to western media. They have been receiving support from Turkey for long time, and they are rapidly rallying support of many foreign states. On their side, Turkey is using their proxy forces, known as Syrian National Army (SNA), to attack the areas under control of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the military coalition of Democratic Autonomous Administration of North East Syria (DAANES), also known as Rojava. These proxy forces include documented ex-fighters of ISIS in their ranks, and are already committing horrendous brutalities in the areas they occupy. They occupied and took control of Shehba and Manbij, threatening now to invade Kobane. At the same time, Israel has been bombing Syria in what they claim to be the biggest air operation they ever made, claiming more than 500 targets and 90% of Syria military capabilities destroyed. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) are also expanding their occupied area in the south of Syria under the pretext of a 'security zone', moving troops and tanks along the border with Lebanon. Russia is withdrawing their forces from Syria, keeping only their strategic military bases of Latakia and Tartus. Iran also withdrew their forces. Political discussions about the future of Syria are being held in many places, some in front of cameras, some behind close doors. Syrian people who fled the war are starting to return, especially from neighboring countries Turkey and Lebanon, with hopes of rebuilding a new country after the fall of the Assad dynasty. Many more things are happening, but let's keep this short.

3.- In the west we have been following the fall of the regime of Bashar al Assad with astonishment. It is hard to believe that a dynasty dictatorship of 54 years collapsed in 10–11 days. For those on the ground, what made the regime fall? Why so fast?

After more than a decade of war, the army of the regime was exhausted. They had been relying heavily on Russian and Iranian support, but due to the invasion of Ukraine for Russia and the Israeli occupations of Gaza and southern Lebanon for Iran, their support has been weakened lately. HTS had been also preparing their forces in Idlib for long time, and their offensive became a domino effect as soon as they took hold of the Aleppo, the second biggest city of Syria. The soldiers of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) were mostly conscripts. They barely got enough food during their mandatory military service and were often also not ideologically interested to defend Assad. Therefor their motivation to fight was close to zero. In many places they simply ran away as soon as 'rebel' forces started attacking their positions.

Many people in Syria were fed up with the regime, especially ethnic minorities like the Kurds in the north or the Druze in the south, as well as the majority of Sunni Arab population. In many places local militias started uprisings against the regime, attacking checkpoints and military barracks all around Syria. The DAANES also played a pivotal role in the collapse of the regime, holding a third of the country with a revolutionary self-administration that challenged the power of the Assad dynasty. The foreign political situation was also ready for a change. Many Arab countries wish for a Sunni government in Syria, plus western powers (including especially Israel) were planning to get rid of Assad and their Russian and Iranian support for long time. It was the perfect storm.

4. With the end of Bashar Al-Assad this is the end of the last baazist/nassesirst forces in an arab world where they claimed to come to substitute the tribal, monarquic and theocratic regimes, and to unite them through pan-arabist socialism. How can we un-

derstand this reactionary wave in the arab world? Can Syria ended up as a failed state like Lybia?

Right now we are mostly busy on the front lines, we don't have much capacity to give organizational perspectives beyond our already published statements. As we said, many forces have had interests in a regime change. We have to remark the role of Turkey and Israel in what is happening once more. Whatever follows Syria will be a seriously crippled country, with a military force lacking any kind of advanced weapons and without any solid political partners or international support. Only Turkey may stand in strong support of HTS, pursuing their hopes to expand their influence in Syria and destroy the Kurdish Liberation Movement.

But the Neo-ottoman ambitions of Erdogan are already sparking contradictions with the nationalism that HTS is now displaying. In their moderate and western-friendly public face, HTS is claiming a Syria for Syrians, opening dialog with the diplomatic delegations that Kurdish political parties are already sending to Damascus. But the Islamist flavor of HTS inspire mistrust to many revolutionaries. They are already calling to establish a religious morality police and Islamic courts, making it easy to compare their steps with those of the Taliban in Afghanistan. But many Syrians that fled abroad during the years of war, mostly to Turkey and Lebanon but also in Europe, are returning with hopes for a democratic a Syria that may not fit with what HTS is planning to do. How all this will play out is difficult to predict.

5.- After the withdraw of the SAA of many territories, the areas that SDF control widely extended. How do you value those new territories and cities? Is this a reinforcement for the revolution?

This question is already outdated, the reality on the ground changes fast. It is true that with the collapse of the SAA the SDF took care of the military defense of some territories south of Raqqa as well as Deir Ezzor city. Since then, Deir Ezzor city and surrounding territories have been handed over to the military operations room of HTS on request of the local population. The areas south of Raqqa are still under control of SDF to prevent a resurgence of ISIS. At the same time the important city of Manbij, liberated from ISIS by the SDF on 2016, is now under Turkish influence after the occupation of SNA Islamist groups. In the territories that SDF took for just a couple of days, there has been no time to develop local councils and other democratic structures, so no, it is not a reinforce for the revolution. It was merely a move to prevent ISIS from capturing regime military supplies that could had helped them in the resurgence they are already attempting.

At the same time, the political bodies of DAANES had been working together with local political groups in the other regions, especially in Sweida. With the collapse of the regime, a new ground for political work and alliances open, and that can be an important reinforcement for the revolution. There are also risks, some Sunni Arab groups that were integrated in SDF are also defecting to HTS, but it is still early to analyze how this will play out. Most Arab forces in SDF are already making statements reaffirming their support for SDF and for a federal Syria. Another important element for us to reach out to now is all the libertarian circles of the Syrian revolution and honor the legacy of Omar Aziz, a Syrian revolutionary anarchist that died on February 16th after being imprisoned by the regime. Bring those libertarian forces closer to libertarian socialist project of Rojava can be a critical alliance to challenge the authoritarian Islamist project of HTS.

6.- Do DAANES have contact with people of southern Siria and the idea of the confederation can be expanded to those regions? Do the local councils returned in any place in Siria or all the country is under dominion of islamists of different currents?

As we just mentioned before, yes, there are political relations that date back for several years already, especially in Sweida. The co-president of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC, the Syrian “national” political body of the DAANES) is called Evin Sweida. In several regions, specially in the south, local councils never really disappeared, even if their work was very limited and often clandestine. It is now a question how the provisional government of HTS will relate to those councils.

HTS have its stronghold in Idlib. The provisional prime minister is from Idlib himself, but in other regions HTS will need to negotiate with local forces if they want to build any stable system of governance. The self-administration of NES has been an example of integration of different regions in a confederal model, and the proposal for a federal Syria is on the table. HTS wants to reorganize the centralized model of the Baath regime with them in the central government, and their behavior in Idlib over last years give clear clues of how their ideal model would look like. Their politics of divide and conquer, arresting leaders of other Islamist groups and even collaborating with US to eliminate the leadership of the more extremist groups, allowed them to build their hegemony as the dominant force there. This was promoted also by Turkish support, that provided supply routes over the Turkish border and placed military bases to protect them from the regime attacks.

Many ethnic and religious minorities continued organizing their local councils, and they probably won't have much interest on a centralized HTS rule. Those local councils can easily get more interest in a confederal model inspired by what NES is doing. Right now HTS have the upper hand, aiming to build an Islamist authoritarian state, but many people in Syria won't accept that. The DAANES can become a spearhead for revolutionary transformations and a confederal Syria but HTS, Turkey and other Islamist forces will oppose that. Right now is not clear how much will be discussed on a political table and how much will be resolved on the battlefield.

7.- We were surprised to see the volatility of beduin tribes, changing sides very fast. Do you think they can turn against the DAANES and join HTS?

Yes, as we said before this is already happening. Some groups in Deir Ezzor and Raqqa are making statements to join HTS, but most groups and tribes are reaffirming their support for SDF. For now, the group in Raqqa calling to join HTS is not openly in confrontation with the DAANES. They just want to negotiate their conditions for the political transition directly with HTS, hoping to get a better deal if they defect from SDF and negotiate directly with the provisional government. Deir Ezzor is a bit of another story. Some tribes there were previously affiliated with ISIS, and they had been clashing with the Deir Ezzor Military Council before. This comes down to local tribal conflicts, since those tribes had been engaged in power in-fights even before the war started. During the war they had been changing affiliation between the regime, the FSA, ISIS and SDF, with different tribes taking different sides and continuing their in-fights. HTS will probably try to benefit from this situation, and SDF is very aware of it. SDF forces withdrawing from the city, handing it over to HTS, was probably a negotiated diplomatic move to show willingness to cooperate with the transitional government.

HTS are trying to depict themselves as the saviors of Syria, trying to capitalize the dreams of early protests on 2011. They also have a well designed foreign media strategy, harvesting the sympathies that western media displayed with Bashar al-Assad opposition. HTS presenting themselves as “moderate rebels” is a clever move to build legitimacy as state holders, aiming to get rid of the terrorist label and the sanctions that western powers imposed on them. Their leader is now making inclusive statements for a plural and democratic Syria, with descriptions of a model

surprisingly similar to what the DAANES is putting in practice. They are keeping diplomatic relations with everyone, talking with UN and other foreign diplomats, making promises of a peaceful and stable Syria. But as we said in our first statement of this war, their aim is not different from what the Taliban are doing in Afghanistan and they probably won't keep the friendly mask for long.

8.- Now that SNA is attacking Manbij and Turkey is supporting those attacks with planes and artillery, for how long could be possible to resist? And how this may affect Bakur (northern Kurdistan)?

Things go fast these days, Manbij is now under occupation of SNA groups. The resistance have been strong, with the heaviest clashes Syria saw in the last years, much heavier than anything that HTS fought to topple the government. SDF also published for the first time videos using FPV drones, that seems to be the new standard of any post-Ukraine invasion battlefield. But even if SDF is catching up with drone warfare, Turkish air force is something that SDF can't fight against, since it's lacking any air defense systems. Also, we can't prove it with numbers, but any year budget of the whole SDF is probably smaller than what Turkish army spends in just a few days. It is already impressive to think how much a lightly armed but well prepared and disciplined defense force have been able to inflict such heavy loses against a much more numerous and better equipped attacker, even when the attacker have total air supremacy. This is nothing new if we look not just at Bakur, but also to the mountains of Bashur, where the Kurdish guerrilla has been challenging the Turkish army for decades, having not much more than their hands and a bunch of AK-47's, PKMs and some sort of self-produced long range weapons like the Zagros rifle.

But moving away from the military aspect and looking into the social and political situation, the implications for Bakur are still to be seen. Erdogan will present whatever is the result of these new operations as a victory, emphasizing the "achievement" of returning back to Syria some of the 3 million refugees living in Turkey. Erdogan also supported HTS in their ascend to the government of Syria, getting rid of an unfriendly Al-Assad as a ruler of the neighboring country. For sure he will ask the new government to return his investments with political favors, with the newly opened Turkish embassy in Damascus after 12 years without it. The repression against the civil organizing of the Kurdish liberation movement is also raising again in Bakur. Elected mayors of Kurdish municipalities, as well as political leaders and and civil organizers, being arrested and imprisoned under alleged secret charges not communicated to the lawyers. These kind of arrests started few days before starting the military operations and continue until today, with often dozens of new arrested every week. A protest camp has been set in both sides of the border between Turkey and Syria in the sister cities of Nusaybin-Qamishlo, also a march for peace started from the city of Amed (Diyarbakir) to Ankara. Young revolutionaries connected to the liberation movement also did some direct actions, setting on fire different buildings of Turkish State.

9.- Israel advanced position in Quneitra taking advantage of the Syrian chaos. Now the supply lines of Hezbollah had been interrupted. Until what point the collapse of Assad becomes a possible liquidation of Palestine and Hezbollah?

With the collapse of the Assad regime Iran withdraw it's militias, interrupting the supply lines of Hezbollah in Lebanon. But they are already engaged with diplomatic talks with HTS provisional government and they seem positive about prospects for re-establishing those supply lines. As mentioned before, HTS is now performing a very diplomatic approach to everyone, and

is still to be seen how much the promises they are probably making to Iranian diplomats will be fulfilled. Clearly, Israel will try to influence the future of Syria as much as they can. They are already taking advantage of this situation of instability to expand they are occupied areas next to the Golan heights, with IDF tanks and troops standing at less than 30 km from Damascus with their new extended “security zone”. Israel destruction of almost all Syrian military capabilities is also a warning of their intentions and capacity. HTS is also showing a friendly face with Israel, claiming to have no intentions to engage in conflict with them. This also affects how the new Syrian provisional government is relating to Palestinian militant groups. Recently, Syrian media was reporting about HTS declaring that Palestinian groups will not be allowed to have weapons, forbidding them to carry military trainings in Syrian soil anymore.

It is not clear to us how much these things are diplomatic moves to calm down Israel or how much they really reflect the intentions of HTS. In any case, for now Syrian routs and supply lines are cut to Iran, and probably any militant Palestinian activity in Syria will be restricted and closely watched by Israel. The Lebanese Hezbollah was targeted with extremely high profile attacks, including the assassination of their leader Hassan Nasrallah and the infiltration (and detonation) of their communication systems. After that, Hezbollah still resisted the Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon and considering the heavy blows they suffered the resistance offered is remarkable. The ceasefire on Lebanon signed on February 27th (the same day the HTS offensive started) established that Hezbollah fighters will withdraw 30km away from Israel borders. Cutting their supply lines with Iran in these conditions will for sure add sever difficulties to their reorganization.

10.- Last, following the question of the fall of the Assad regime, the most benefited here seems the sionist state. Many voices in Israel call for an alliance with DAANES or even to send weapons to restrain both the “Axis of resistance” and islamic fundamentalism that is now already governing Syria. The politics of alliances of the DAANES had been very pragmatic, making deals with US, Rusia, the regime or with some local militias when it had been convenient. How do you see those relations and a possible alliance with Israel?

As anarchist and as revolutionaries, we are in total opposition to the genocidal policies of the Israel State. Any alliance with them will necessarily undermine the revolutionary project of NES, as any alliance with US already did. But as you said, the pragmatism of the DAANES has been making moves not so much oriented to protect a revolutionary line, but more to ensure the survival of the achieved autonomy. This is something we will need to evaluate and reflect in the long term, considering how much is possible to compromise the revolutionary values to ensure the continuation of the developments achieved. Historically, anarchists give priority to the ideological and revolutionary line over survival, what often led to the annihilation of any anarchist revolution. We are not saying that we always approve the steps the self-administration is doing, but for sure it is forcing us to reflect about what we can and can not do as part of an ongoing revolutionary process. And, well, it is always a very difficult decision to chose between your revolutionary principles or the potential extermination of your people and your political movement.

We came to Rojava to support and defend this revolution, to learn from it and to translate the experiences we learn here to other anarchist movements. The Kurdish Liberation Movement is not an anarchist project, even if we can easily argue that their political project aims to build libertarian socialism. We have our voice, as they have theirs, and we can criticize them as well

as they can criticize us. For now they don't show serious interest in any cooperation with Israel State, and they don't forget their roots when the Kurdish Liberation Movement found shelter in the training camps of the Palestinian revolutionary forces in the Bekka Valley. It is true that today the Palestinian revolutionary movement is a shadow from what it was, and we all know how much the Israel state contributed to that. Palestinian resistance is now lead by Islamist forces, that politically are far away from our revolutionary aims. Still, it is our duty to stand with the Palestinian people, hoping that a solid revolutionary force will emerge ready to fight the oppression they suffer. It is also our duty to stand with the people in Syria, especially with the Kurds that had been denied their identity for so long, but also with the Arabs who had been brutally repressed by the Assad regime, as well as many other minority groups like Armenians, Assirians, Syriacs, Druze, Yazidies, etc.

The imposition of the nation-state model by western powers caused irreparable damage to the peoples in middle east. The scars of occupation and colonialism, always combined with plundering of resources and oil extraction, still bleeding in those arid lands. The model of democratic confederalism that the Kurdish movement is putting in practice brings a radical proposal to tackle that, moving away from centralized governments and nation-state borders, the new world standards that European colonialism imposed. Furthermore, they are also putting women's revolution and anti-patriarchal struggle at the front, pointing out the deeply entrenched relation of male dominance with state mentality. Social ecology is also remarked a necessity, building alternatives that escape the destructive model of capitalism. All these are values that we, as anarchists and as revolutionaries, have been always defending. That's why we stand shoulder to shoulder with our Kurdish and Arab comrades defending this revolution. Of course we have our red lines, and if things go in a direction we can't accept we will need to reconsider our role here. For now, after more than 7 years fighting here, we are confident to say that this revolution is the biggest opportunity we have to seriously challenge capitalism, patriarchy and the model of nation-state. It is the best opportunity we have to build free life.

11.- Add whatever you consider convinient.

Nothing much to add. Thanks for this opportunity to share our thought and perspectives. Iberian anarchism has been a reference for libertarian movements, and the Spanish revolution is an example we deeply study. We are happy to build this dialog and we hope we can continue developing our relations. Now we are going over difficult times here, and our focus have to be on the land we are defending. As we said in our last statement, the regime has fallen, the war continue. We need to strengthen our relations among anarchist organizations and collaborate closer with Syrian anarchists that, as Omar Aziz, worked to build a libertarian path in the Syrian revolution. The Rojava revolution in North East Syria can be a blue print for a new dawn, not just for Syria but for all middle east, even for the whole world. We are ready to fight for that, ready to be a drop in the storm that is coming. Make sure you are too!

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