

THE

Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW



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AN ANARCHIST VIEW FROM ROJAVA ON RECENT EVENTS IN SYRIA:

A CONVERSATION WITH A COMBATANT OF TEKOŞINA ANARSİST



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This week, we're sharing a conversation with Errico, a combatant member of Tekoşîna Anarşîst, an internationalist anarchist formation in critical solidarity with the Rojava Revolution. For this episode, Errico answers some questions we had about what's been happening in Syria and concerns from within the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. You can find ideas and updates from the TA formation on their blog, <https://tekosinaanarsist.noblogs.org>.

We simultaneously recorded an interview with Cedric and Khuzama, two libertarian communists and editors of and contributors to the blog [Interstices-Fajawat.org](https://interstices-fajawat.org) about their insights into Syria. This is also up on our website and offers some interesting and conflicting perspectives to Errico from this interview.

Search for this interview title at <https://thefinalstrawradio.noblogs.org/> to find links to further resources on this topic, featured music, the audio version, and files for printing copies of this episode.

TFSR: Would you please introduce yourself to the audience with any name, pronouns, location, and affiliation that you want to share?

TA: Yeah, so this is Errico here. I'm talking from the provisional press office of Tekoşîna Anarşist, based at the moment a few kilometers away from the front lines. So for this, the best pronouns I can use is they then, if needed, but yeah, maybe that's it.

TFSR: Would you remind listeners about Tekoşîna Anarchist and its relationship with the PYD and the Rojava revolution?

TA: Tekoşîna Anarşist is an anarchist organization that has been working for more than seven years now in the northeast Syria. We are here in critical solidarity with the revolution in Rojava. We see how the values that this revolution is like promoting are extraordinarily close to what we see as anarchism, as libertarian socialism and therefore many anarchists from all around the world has been coming here, had been fighting and defending this revolution. Some of us, we saw the need of building a more stable project that can learn from this revolution in a more collective way to be able to not only learn these lessons, but also being able to translate it and share it with other anarchist organizations and comrades all around the world.

When we talk about our works here, we are a military structure that cooperates with the Syrian Democratic Forces. We are integrated inside the Syrian Democratic Forces and we are with them in the front lines fighting against the enemies that tried to destroy this revolution. Mostly we have been in the front lines against the Islamic State but since 2018 and the invasion of the Turkish army in Afrin, we have been also in the front lines against the Turkish army and its proxies. As a military structure, also, we want to promote a reflection of what does it mean for anarchists to be engaged in a military context because we know that anarchism often has been also connected with anti-militarist movements.

This is also part of our tradition, but we see the necessity of being part of the defense of this revolution in a military sense. We often say that we are not a military organization, but a militarized one, because the conditions on the ground had forced us to take up weapons to defend this revolution and even our life, especially in the front lines against the Islamic State. This was something that got a lot of international attention and this is a bit like the part that has been more mediatic. But for us, most of our work is also to function as a political organization here. As I say, critical solidarity with Rojava and trying to bring practical aspects to the meaning of international solidarity because when we talk about international solidarity, we can see that the capacity to bring solidarity on the ground with other struggles is often limited and we wanted to reflect on how we can directly bring this solidarity.

TFSR: Okay on that note thank you very much for having the conversation, I really appreciate it.

TA: My pleasure thank you.

TFSR: Say hello to the hevals for me.

are quite a lot of reflections from on the ground and many comrades have already been coming here. So I would invite whoever is interested in coming to make sure that they understand what the reality on the ground is and to try to have an overview from comrades who have been here so as to have better ideas of what area they would like to work on, or what can be the best structure for that kind of work.

TFSR: And for folks who are looking to learn more and either keep up on the ongoing and quickly changing situation, are there any news sources that you would suggest or groups that people can research online?

TA: Many structures are giving lots of updates about the situation. We can always refer to the Rojava Information Center as a quite reliable source for the situation on the ground. There's also a signal group that is broadcasting the situation happening here on the ground and the updates are also being posted on the website of the Tekoşına Anarşist. We just recently made a new tab where these updates of the situation on the ground are being shared on the website and there are several channels on telegram that are also reporting of the situation. But if you have interest maybe we can have you this link for joining this broadcast in signal in the show notes in case friends want to and receive daily updates with an anarchist perspective

TFSR: Well, Errico, thank you so much for having this conversation. Is there anything that i failed to ask about that occurs to you right now that you want to mention?

TA: Maybe one of the things that we have been reflecting lately is the importance of building relations, especially with all the Syrian revolutionaries that in 2011 and 2012 were part of the protest against the regime and were proposing libertarian paths to build a revolutionary movement in the whole of Syria. The main example that we can bring now is Omar Aziz, an anarchist that was writing really interesting documents calling for confederations of local councils as a path towards the Syrian revolution. I also think that at this time if these libertarian groups of 2011 or 2012 were having these experience of local councils, could see what's happening in northern Syria and how these communes of the Rojava revolution, which now many Arab people, Assyrian people, Armenian people are putting into practice... This can be seen as a very direct connection with the proposal of Omar Aziz and it's something that can be brought together. Especially now that the regime has fallen, it's time to push for a libertarian proposal, that it's not falling into trying to rebuild a centralized state in Syria with a central government, but to push for a decentralized project where these local councils could become the main political arena for a new Syria.

There was this sentence that we often like from a really interesting revolutionary group from Denmark that was saying that "solidarity is something you can hold in your hands." And we try to put this in practice and not stay in the symbolic solidarity, but be here shoulder to shoulder working with our Kurdish and with our Arab Syrian comrades and doing the work that is necessary on the ground to keep developing and defending this revolution. This means a lot of things that maybe we can talk and discuss further in this interview but this also means relations with other political groups, with our political structures. You were mentioning the PYD, that it's true that PYD is maybe the political body of part of the revolutionary bodies that are here. PYD is a political party that was created in 2003 to represent the voices of like Kurdish people here in northern Syria. But on the ground, and I think it's important to understand PYD is mostly all people that is trying to bring solutions and like develop whatever is needed for the society to function. So what does it mean on the ground? They have an office and when people have problems, when there are conflicts in the different things that happen in the daily life, people often go to this office and discuss with the friends to try to find solution. This includes a big range of things like from how new buildings that are being built are coordinated, to garbage collection, but especially it comes to political talks with different elements. So there is like a close relation between PYD and the autonomous municipalities of each area that they try to help each other to solve the social problems.

There's a nice story, you know... In the town that I'm right now, we were so often buying groceries in the shop that we kind of became friends with the shop owner. And some months ago, this shop owner asked "how are you?" and he was telling us that now he was asked to be responsible for the PYD office and this was him inviting to their office. So we came over for tea and were talking a bit about the situation of the city and the problems that they were facing. So we have a friendly relation, but the PYD is mostly like a local social center, mostly they have their office that functions as a social center to talk with the neighbors and discuss the situations on the ground. So this is part of our work, this diplomacy of like being in contact with the situation that the people is living here facing the same challenges and difficulties and problems and try to find solutions together with them.

TFSR: With the social structure and the social part of the revolution that you're engaging with it makes a lot of sense for you to be able to be fluid and participating and engaging in the ways that you find interesting and necessary in this critical solidarity. But as an anarchist organization under a military structure, it would seem a bit more difficult to maybe navigate the autonomy and consensus of the members of the group with the decision-making of a what is generally considered to be a top-down, hierarchical

organization like in the SDF, for instance, or with the YPG or YPJ. How is negotiating that? Can you talk about some of those tensions and some of the ways that you're able to negotiate that?

TA: Yes. Sometimes when we look for very technical answers, an audience can get disappointed because the reality here is much more organic. And of course we function as a military structure, not so much for like being military, but for being ready to defend revolution when it's needed. For example, right now under the attacks that the Turkish proxy forces are doing, we have been mobilized most of the time, we as an organization have the responsibility that all our militants, all our members are able to be deployed in a military capacity if necessary. So we are responsible also to make sure that all our militants that want to engage in this kind of work are able to do it and this is something that can be coordinated with the local military structures. Also, there are members that maybe they don't have interest in this part of the work so that they can focus in civilian work. During the times that there is not a big mobilization, most of us have capacity to be engaged in this kind of civilian works.

And we have to remark how the revolution here and how the movement is organized, gives a lot of space for that. There are not only like the local communes that are like working, it's like these neighborhood councils to run the different things, but there are a lot of different institutions from like art and culture, education, health that are functioning. And we also, of course, try to work with special intention with the women's structures, like the structures connected with the women's movement that are also diverse from the Kongreya Star that is the main umbrella structure, but also the different Mala Jin, or women's houses, and the Jineology institutes. So also like a big variety, especially comrades that are read as women here are trying to engage and like give priority to like connect with this because we see it as also one of the main aspects of the Rojava Revolution.

So we have been evaluating, like where are the different structures where our militants can feed beds, can make better connections. And over these years, our militants have been working in coordination with like many different groups from this like art and culture, health, education, with the youth. So, yeah, it's a quite diverse environment that, of course, it's always teaches us a lot of things because it's not only like living with the people here and learning from their culture, but also engaging on a human level. So, you know, people here are eager, like to get to know us and also to invite us to their homes. And we also ask them, like, "how's the situation? How was the situation before the revolution? How is now?" And we also talk about politics. We recently started to find more and more texts of anarchism translated to Arabic.

And we are sharing some of the books of Bakunin that have been translat-

paigns and the awareness of putting on the table the bad things that the Turkish state and their fascist structures had been using to fight against the Kurds. We can also remember what the origins of this state are, the first big moves made it possible for Turkey to become a state was the Armenian genocide in 1915, just at the end of the first world war. Two million Armenians were massacred and their wealth was stolen and this was one of the bases that allowed the Turkish state to build itself up. So these genocidal policies are rooted in the dynamics of the Turkish state and this is something that needs to be called out, that needs to be exposed. We can see how the one is a direct continuation of these policies now especially against the Kurdish people. So these actions of visibility are having impacts in the social and political conscience.

Actions like boycotts can also have direct impact. We saw different groups calling for boycotting Turkish airlines. Maybe the best example has been the campaign of BDS on Israel and this seriously has had impacts. But for sure the best solidarities are to come to Rojava and share the same fate as these people here. How many internationalists have been coming to this area to learn from the revolution, to understand what it means on the ground, what does it mean to build a stateless society, what does it mean to build a woman's revolution, what does it mean to build social ecology? And these lessons are something that aren't just practical solidarity of having more people here, building and developing this project. But it's also learning and opening doors for internationalist revolutionaries from all around the world to experience what is happening here and to learn. With these lessons we can also rethink and re-evaluate our experiences in order to better adjust our programs as revolutionaries back home to make sure that our models and our ideas are in connection with the reality that we are living in. This is a very important part also of international solidarity, to learn from experiences of other revolutionary movements and develop lessons together that are not just limited to the areas where the revolutionary process happened. That can also inspire revolutionary processes all around the world.

TFSR: For those that might be interested in going there are there any organizations that they should consider reaching out to, depending on what their abilities or interests are, that you would suggest

TA: At the moment traveling here is not easy. We see that when there are Turkish military operations, travel would often have to be done in coordination with the KRG and like what we were saying, the Barzani government is making sure that border access is limited. But here there are many internationalist groups that have been working and also learning how best to integrate and support internationals arriving here to learn. I would not encourage one group over another, I think there

bility of those people and putting them in prisons for some time and trying to cut off these levels of corruption. We also see that this is this mid-level corruption is not something we see reproduced in like high levels of the administration, like people that is in like serious responsibility positions coordination of like cantons, of whole areas. These people that have been with the revolution since the beginning, these people are not easily corruptible. We can see how there's a strong will to stop these dynamics of corruption and that it's not like most national states where you can see this is common in any kind of centralized government, those who are in the center of states like that often use the structures to steal and make themselves rich. Especially i think that the example that we have very close is Bashur, in Iraqi Kurdistan where the Barzani clan is running such a model of business, you know, where they run the main oil companies and a lot of money goes directly for them and for their family members. This is nothing that is not like this happening here. We can see how the directive levels of the autonomous administration are mostly run by people that is really believing that it's possible to build a different way of living and they are making sure that there is no like clan or small power group that is taking hold. And they're ensuring that there is a revolutionary spirit and a revolutionary project directing the efforts of the self-administration.

TFSR: Demonstrations have been occurring across Germany during called-for days of action from groups like Rise Up for Rojava. After over a year of ongoing slaughter by Israel backed by Imperial core countries like the US, Germany, Britain and France despite frequent protests and lockdowns the prospect of these sorts of tactics bringing about the intended changes feels unlikely to me, but the questions of what effectiveness looks like amidst looming or real genocide across the world requires a whole conversation. Can you talk about what you know of the awareness raising for a democratic Syria, activism in other countries, pressure on Turkish business and government institutions and what sorts of international solidarity can be useful to defend and support the Rojava Revolution?

TA: Mmmhm. That's a critical questions and for us it has also been one of the main points of reflection. Like "how to transform this international solidarity into real actions into practice that people can work with and people can develop from this?" And it's still a big question how much this, maybe, more street protests are affecting the situation. One of the things that we can see now is that all these these campaigns and these small-level actions and protests they create social conscience. It's no coincidence that the image of Turkey in so many places is so damaged, especially for politically conscious people. It's now known how much Turkey has been supported supporting the Islamic State. Also because of these mobilization cam-

ed and discussing with like some of the comrades, like how they see it. And even if it's true that anarchism is not known here, even the word sometimes leaves people confused. But when we explain it and we talk about it as libertarian socialism, it's easier for comrades here also to understand. And for local people, sometimes it's it can be funny to like have these conversations. But at the same time, we are also connected with other many revolutionary organizations so that even when they are more familiar with more like Marxist tendencies, a lot of them are also like aware. And even some of them have deep knowledge of like anarchist authors and ideas. And we have been engaging with like really extraordinarily deep political discussions on anarchism and it's really like an enriching part of hearing how people here see and perceive these ideas.

TFSR: So the news of the last couple of weeks in Syria has been pretty crazy. But then again, so have the last decade and a half since the Civil War began. With an understanding that this complex situation is still developing, can you give us a very simplified description of some of the actors on the ground and the international backers?

TA: Yeah. So there are a lot of actors. But to make it simple, we will focus maybe on four of the main actors right now that are present in the conflict. On one side, we have the SDF or Syrian Democratic Forces that we already mentioned. That is the military coalition of the different military structures around the autonomous administration of northern Syria. This means also that different regions have developed their own military councils, like local military councils that are confederated in this umbrella that is the Syrian Democratic Forces. This includes also different forces. We can see how different ethnic minorities, for example, have their own military structures and that they exist in different cities. So it's a quite diverse and complex system so to summarize, we will talk just about the SDF as comprised of different military structures working together, coordinating efforts to defend this revolution and this territory.

A second actor that we will refer is Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham or HTS, and this is the group that has been viewed as leading the offensive that overthrew the Assad regime. Shortly, we can dive a bit on the history. HTS is the new reorganization of the Salafist group that can be traced to the Al-Nusra Front that was the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. It's true that in the last years, there has been an effort of switching a bit the narrative and the ideological lines and going towards the line of more moderation and there has been purges getting rid of those elements more close to the ideas of Al-Qaeda. And we saw this process of moderation, but still, it's important to remember that their roots lay there. They've for several years been the effective government in the region of Idlib and ruling with a really like authoritarian

ian methods. Also, again, dividing and absorbing other Islamist groups in a quite violent ways. And there are quite some interesting articles that can be also shared about the background, maybe to refer to at least one there is the report from, I think, February 23, something like this from the Rojava Information Center that it's called "*When the Jihadists Learn to Smile*", that makes a big dive on how HTS developed.

The third actor that we have to talk, even if it's not existing right now, is the Syrian Arab Army that was the regular army of the Syrian Arab Republic, therefore, it was the army of the Al-Assad regime. At the moment, the Syrian Arab Army is dissolved, most of the most of the fighters left their uniforms behind and ran away, leaving their positions. Some of them defected, joining different factions.

The other umbrella organization that it's the Free Syrian Army that maybe needs to be mentioned. Some people will probably be familiar with the name Free Syrian Army as it was the umbrella name used for a lot of the opposition groups, especially during 2012 and 2013. But it's important to remember that it was never a coherently organized force, it was more like an amalgam of different groups. We can see that since this last offensive of HTS against the Syrian Arab Army, the idea of the Free Syrian Army has come back to life. And a lot of groups joined the offensive of HTS against the Syrian Arab Army, raising the opposition flag and somehow pledging alliance to this Free Syrian Army that, even if it doesn't really exist, still holds the idea of the forces in opposition to the Bashar al-Assad regime.

And the last element that we will mention is the Syrian National Army. The name can be confusing because even if it's true that most of their fighters are Syrians, the commanders are not.

It's a Turkish proxy force supplied, trained and command by Turkish state and it has been proved to be recruiting ex-fighters of Daesh. There's a published document that contains the identity of like more than 400 identified ISIS fighters and that are now in the ranks of this SNA and it has been the name that the Turkish state used to reorganize their Islamist forces against the Kurdish movement. Right now it's the group that is leading the offensive against the self-administration of North East Syria.

So to summarize how it is on the ground, these four elements that we mentioned, SDF, HDS, SAA and SNA are fighting almost two parallel wars with HTS mainly fighting against the regime, against the Syrian Arab Army. While at the same time, the SNA or these Turkish proxies had been fighting against the SDF or the Kurdish-led administration in North East Syria. And it's relevant to see that even if the Turkish proxies have a lot of coordination with HTS, they are separate structures that had been fighting different wars. These Turkish proxies never had serious interest in engaging in combat with the Syrian Arab Army and their focus has been solely the attacks against the regions, especially of Shehba, Til Rifat, Ari-

most of the area. And we can see how in these times of Turkish invasion where the system of the autonomous administrations has been reacting with more force against the threats. Now we can see that people are taking turns doing safety patrols, making sure that safety is maintained, making sure that there are no threats. Turkey is also using a lot of disinformation on the ground, spreading fake news on social media saying that "SDF is running away from this position," or "SNA already entered this village." All these things that are not true to scare population. It's impressive to see how much people are taking the defense of the land into their own hands, how neighborhood committees are organizing checkpoints in the main streets to make sure that Asayish can be redirected to points where they are more needed. So in these times of invasion the people's mobilization is stronger and a few hours or a few days without electricity isn't the big worry at the moment.

TFSR: Can you talk about assertions in the recent past of known instances of corruption developing in the DAANES and the administration itself? I'm thinking claims of bribery or skimming off the top by officials in positions of power? Is this a situation you know about, is it simply rumors or is it something that is being dealt with?

TA: That's a really interesting question because here is also when we can bring the part of critical solidarity, no? In the sense that we are here in support of the revolution and we are here supporting what the self administration is doing but we are also reflecting on how things are going on the ground. And we've seen in the last years, especially, an increase of the corruption cases. There're problems in the sense of people trying to steal from communal resources, bribaries and these things that are happening. At the same time, I can say that this is mostly happening in mid-levels structures, people that maybe were not ideologically aligned with the revolution, but at some point decided to join the works of the self administration and managed to get to some like mid-level position of administration. And then they use these positions to steal, to divert money. For now what we are seeing is that the self-administration is also aware of that and is tackling that and is also like starting to have groups of investigation that are like following what's happening with this money. We have been also working in support of like medical structures and we saw how in hospitals, also medicines and resources that should be destined for the people that end up in the pockets of someone.

The self-administration is starting to spend many more people and resources for investigation committees. And they are dealing quite harshly with that in the sense of when they find these corruption cases it's mostly often just men that with some of their family members trying to make these schemes to get some money and the autonomous administration are quickly taking away the responsi-

eas, killing everyone and stealing everything they can. There have been recently also attacks on checkpoints of the autonomous administration. So we see that there's already an ongoing revival of the Islamic state that is extremely dangerous.

This is also supported by the words of the MIT, the intelligent services of Turkey that they had been using these sleeping cells to, to use attacks and this came also in combination with other elements that Turkey has been using on the ground. Not always Daesh, but also just traitors as Turkey is offering money in exchange for information about commanders, like SDF commanders, our different locations. And this has been one of the ways that Turkey had access to information that is used to constantly attack with drones, different commanders of SDF. and for several years we have seen that almost every month, sometimes even every week, Turkey is attacking with drones, different positions and assassinating SDF commanders all over the place. So these are some of the threats that Turkey has been posing and the risk of a combination of both things is always very big. We saw in past Turkish campaigns mostly bomb power stations, oil refineries, oil stations, but they have been also often bombing the surroundings of the Al-Hol camp, even security checkpoints of Al-Hol camps to promote uprisings in the Daesh prisons. And sometimes some of the prisoners managed to escape thanks to those drone strikes by Turkey on the security facilities of these prisons and camps.

TFSR: When I had asked the question about conditions in north east Syria at this point, I didn't really ask about the day-to-day situation that people are experiencing is like with these frequent air raids and drone strikes. Obviously there are the targeted assassinations that you described happening, but also I know that Turkey has weaponized water in the past and access to water to cities that are within the DAANES. There was recently the SNA attacks on the Tishreen Dam, and as you mentioned, attacks on power stations and other infrastructure that's important for civilian life there. Can you talk a little bit about what life outside of the administration officials or the SDF, has been like since Assad was overthrown, with these different invasions and jockeying forces?

TA: So these bombing campaigns have been going on for years. Turkey has been bombing the power stations and cutting the water for a long time. People have been suffering these power cuts and lack of water for several years. Right now it's true that since the invasion in some areas this has intensified, especially as you were mentioning the Tishreen Dam, which is one of the main power supplies for a big part of Northern Syria. That has caused power cuts for a lot of people, but still it's very recent and it's a war. So right now, electricity is a bit secondary in most of the areas because the primary risk is that the Turkish proxies are threatening to invade

fat, Manbij and now Kobane, targeting only the self-administration of North East Syria. These groups are backed somehow in different geopolitical powers, but we can see how SDF is a really local force that in the fight against the Islamic State was actively supported by the international coalition led by the US forces. And partly the US has been keeping some support to the SDF, especially in the war against the Islamic State, not so much or not at all in the war against the Turkish invasion. When Turkey invaded before in Sere Kanye and in Afrin, the US did nothing. And not just did nothing, but even like withdraw to allow Turkey to crush some of the territories that they invaded. So in a lot of media, we can often see often a listing of the Syrian Democratic Forces as the backed force, but US is only backing it in the war against the Islamic State, not much more.

When we look at HTS, we can see it in a similar fashion, but there has been direct support from Turkey in the defense of the region of Idlib. Turkey has been holding different military positions around Idlib to defend the government and the forces of HTS from the attacks of the regime. So even if it's true that HTS is also a local force, their reliance on Turkey, not just for their defense but also for the supply lines was and still is really strong. The Syrian Arab army that was functioning as the state army for more than 60 years was at the moment of collapse, supported especially by Russia and Iran. Russia had an interest in maintaining the military bases of Latakia and Tartus that are the only naval bases that Russia had in the Mediterranean Sea. And Iran also had a lot of interest in supporting the regime to keep their supply routes to groups like Hezbollah and Hamas open across Syria. So we saw that, yeah, Russia and Iran were the main supporters. And when it comes to this last factor, the SNA, this Turkish proxy force, this is not just that it's supported, it is that it's built directly by Turkey. So this is a bit the distribution of these four elements and their main international supports.

TFSR: It gets so complicated with especially the international backing under certain circumstances and then not under others. I'm going to ask more questions momentarily about Israel, but the fact that Iran and Israel both had an interest in backing the Assad regime for their various reasons, like whether it be because of regional stability or the ostensible fight against ISIS by Israel, understanding that the Assad regime was doing that. Or Iran having a historical relationship with both of the Assad's and allowing that transit of weapons and money and stuff to go to Lebanon. Yeah, it's really complicated and confusing.

Israel has taken the power vacuum as an opportunity to seize territory in the Golan Heights and is stating that it will integrate it with the settlements while bombing weapons depots and infrastructure to cripple whatever comes next in Syria. Can you speak about the relationship be-

tween Assad and Israel and how it fits into the wars on neighboring territories that Israel has brought? And also, HTS has made a statement that Palestinian groups would need to disarm and no longer be able to train in Syria, which feels not disconnected from this.

TA: Yeah, this is a complicated question and it brings in scope Israel. Now, that was an actor that we didn't mention when we mentioned this for forces right now fighting in Syria. But for sure, Israel is also extremely present. Maybe if we look back a bit for long and to look at like the how Hafez al-Assad and the ideas of Pan-Arabism and Nasserism took hold in Syria, we have to see the establishment of Israel as a state in the Middle East as one of the sources of conflict for many of the situations that we are living through now. Hafez al-Assad and the idea of Pan-Arabism worked a lot on those lines, on the idea of building an Arab union and to question or challenge the establishment of Israel in those regions. To bring the Palestinian people to their lands, especially after the Nekba, was something that gave a lot of force to this idea of Pan-Arabism. So Hafez al-Assad, historically has, been confronting Israel and trying to build this alliance between Syria and Egypt to bring to an end the Zionist ideas in the Middle East. So, there's a long-term historical confrontation between Syria and Israel. We could go into all the wars that they fought, but maybe it's not necessary right now.

But we can also look at the short story. Right now, Israel is bombing more than 400 locations in what Israel themselves declared to be the biggest air operation they have ever conducted. That has been extraordinarily destructive and they are talking about having destroyed more than 90% of the military capabilities of Syria. There are rumors, I don't know how true they are, that Bashar al-Assad gave the locations of all these weapons to Israel in exchange for not being shot while leaving Syria. I will not dive in on that, I just want to note that clearly Israel had locations of all the weapons storage locations.

Now, for more than a week Israel has been bombing nonstop, day and night, all these locations and really destroyed any kind of air defense capability, advanced weapons capability, they really made sure that Syria cannot be a military threat for Israel probably forever.

So, this comes to what is the approach of HTS to Israel. HTS is now reaching a stage where they are in control of the transitional government, the interim government that is being assembled in Damascus and they are there trying to keep a very conciliatory presence and making speeches of about not looking for war, calling for the war to have ended and about trying to not escalate any conflict with Israel. They are not even condemning the brutal bombings that Israel is doing, even if several people have been already killed in those bombings. They are trying to avoid any conflict because Israel did not only just bomb all these more than 400 loca-

refuse to repatriate them. This is sort of a powder keg that one occasionally sees sparks near when there's a breakout or attempted breakout or violence occurring within the camps. Can you speak about what's important for the international and US audiences to understand about the position that the administration is in and the ways that these camps and the Daesh prisoners are weaponized by Turkey and others?

TA: Yeah. So this is a big topic and it has so many implications that to summarize, it's going to be challenging. But a lot of people have heard from the news from the Al-Hol camp which is this vast refugee camp divided in different areas in what is known as the annex is holding most of the families that were evacuated after the war in Hajin, the last pocket of Daesh. So we are talking about the most militant and committed people to the Islamic state that was fighting until the last second. That was finally evacuated and the SDF has been ensuring the security for the area, but also their capacity to ensure security inside is extraordinarily limited. There are a lot of crazy things happening in Al-Hol. And from time to time, the anti-terror units of the SDF have to organize raids to identify some of the Daesh members that are inside because in theory it's a camp that is only for women and, and children, but there is a constant building of networks of tunnels, of smuggling, people going in and out for in roads that are difficult to locate. And it's really dangerous area where people that're moving away from the ideas of the Islamic State are even being murdered by other people in this camp. So we are talking about 40,000 people in that camp. Not all of these 40,000 are in the annex and that is the most dangerous part, but still there are a lot of people in this area so that if they break free, they will have a lot of force to revive the ideas of the caliphate.

Al-Hol is the biggest example, but the fighters of the Islamic state are not in that camp. Fighters of Islamic state are in different prisons, mostly in Hesake, but also in many other areas. These prisons are under like heavy security as the SDF is trying to ensure that food, medical assistance in case of health problems, is provided. There have been a massive amount of resources that had been put into like sustaining the security and supplies to those prisons with constant request to different national states all around the world to take their prisoners back because we are not talking just about Syran people. Most of those, especially fighters, are also from different territories, but national states are not interested in taking these people back to their countries. As we mentioned, Al-Hol camp is the biggest one, but there are many other camps in like different areas but Daesh is also on the ground, there are sleeping cells that are waging small scale attacks, insurgencies all around the area. In fact, with the collapse of the regime, we saw a big revival of the activity of these Islamic state cells. We are talking about more than 80 dead since the, since Bashar al-Assad left the country. They are making raids, attacking small isolated ar-

is on the table and this is one of the main points that the political delegations of the self-administration are bringing to Damascus. This proposal is not coming just for North East Syria and the Kurdish self-administration, but for all the different minorities that are present in North East Syria. We are talking about Armenians, Syriacs, Assyrians, but also not only for North East, as in the South with other minorities like the Druze, different groups that have been for quite some years already in contact with the diplomatic bodies of the self-administration and building together this political project of the Syrian Democratic Council. And this is the idea that it's being brought on the table "Let's create a federal Syria with the principles of democracy that the self-administration of North East has been already putting in practice. Let's build this almost a model of libertarian municipalism where like different cities can confederate and allowing also that the different cities have their own councils, different ethnic groups, religious groups, develop their own civil and political institutions and building this democratic confederation, this democratic confederalism and proposing this for Syria."

Of course, this is very different of what HTS is envisioning. HTS, if we guide our analysis on what they had been doing in Idlib, they had been struggling to have a really centralized and authoritarian governance system that probably they expect to supplant just the centralized government of the Ba'ath regime with themselves and impose themselves as a central authority. It's true that they don't have capacity to do that. HTS was strong in Idlib, but they don't have any ground in these big cities that the Syrian Arab army just withdrew from. Like Halab (Aleppo) is the second city of Syria. Damascus is also a really big city and they don't have feet on the ground there, like people, militants, they don't have their political bodies to administrate this centralized government that they could envision. So still a question how much they will be able to develop some credible proposal for a transitional government, because for sure they will need to negotiate with local authorities, with the local political bodies. The self-administration has already been doing this work of building political alliances with other forces to bring a different proposal for Syria on the table. But maybe we can see that western governments are already taking the words and the proclamations of HTS and the provisional government as official. And this is a bit of a problem because to see how much western powers are recognizing this model of authoritarian regime. Yeah. And it really reminds of what happened in Afghanistan with Taliban, even if they want to distance themselves from that.

TFSR: So, Turkey has a history of aiding Daesh or ISIS, which you've brought up, in order to weaponize the destruction they cause in SDF-held regions. And the DAANES has been uncomfortably sitting on prison camps for ISIS affiliates and their families, whose home countries in a lot of cases

tions, Israel is also expanding their so-called security zone, the occupied territories in the Golan Heights and right now mostly they are advancing around the border between Syria and Lebanon. And now the IDF have troops and tanks less than 30 kilometers of Damascus. So, in the case that Israel feels threatened at any point by HTS, there's not many things that HTS can do to dissuade Israel to take action. At the moment the governing body of HTS is very aware that they have no capacity to challenge the military force of Israel. They're looking for peace and probably this statement to call for Palestinians to disarm and no longer trade in Syria, is part of this, of like a dissuasion methods to kind of pacify Israel and get a bit of a green light of Israel for getting the government. Because at the end of the day, this person that is taking the leadership of HTS, Al-Jolani, his family is from the Golan Heights.

How much there will be a continuation of the hostilities that Syria historically always had with Israel, it's still a question at the moment. But Israel wants to make sure that in case of any will to return to hostilities, that Syria doesn't have any trade capacity to do it in the next decades.

TFSR: And beyond that territorial gain in the Golan Heights, would you speak a bit about the Israeli and SDF relationship? What are Israelis' interests in this besides destabilizing a potential threat to the south? Are there any oil interests? And how do people think that there's a possibility of Israeli support? Is it worth mentioning a relationship historically between Turkey and Palestine in this dynamic?

TA: So, first, the main interest of Israel is probably just cutting the Iranian supply lines to Hezbollah and making sure, as we were saying, that Syria cannot become a threat for the next years on Israel. And also to limit the capacity of Iran to threaten Israel over their support of proxy forces like Hezbollah, like Hamas. So, with Syrian supply lines being cut to Iran, this makes it much easier for Israel to control the Iranian proxy forces within their borders. And, of course, Israel's support here is often seen with contradictory views.

On one side, Kurdish people also suffered a lot for the oppression of the Ba'ath regime that was imposing an identity that was based on the Syrian Arab Republic. So, Kurdish identity was denied. Kurdish language was forbidden. There was no school in Kurdish. Kurdish people was not allowed to study in their own language. They were forced to learn and go to school in Arabic. Not like other minorities, especially like Christian minorities had access who had some freedom to sustain their own languages like Armenians, Assyrians, but that was not the case with the Kurds. So, there is some historical hate that has been building in that sense. There has been this imposed identity of Arabs that Kurds are not happy about.

So, in that sense, when Israel is talking about Kurds being oppressed,

Kurds can identify in those eyes. And Israel is trying to inflame these ethnic differentiations to undermine any possibility for pan-Arabism or Arab unity. So, it's true that in the Kurdish population, there are sometimes even some approval for Israel. But in the revolutionary project of Rojava and what the political organizations here on the ground are evaluating, we know what Israel is as a state, we know what Zionism is. The Kurdish liberation movement has been training and found refuge in the Palestinian revolutionary movement. And they even have militants in the ranks that were killed in the war against Israel. So, the solidaristic links between revolutionary Palestinian movements and revolutionary Kurdish movements are strong, with long-term cooperation. So, in that sense, the revolutionary movements have a big, big mistrust of Israel. And this sometimes gets into contradiction, you know, when local people see Israel as like an option, like to break the hegemony of the Arabs that they felt oppressed by. This can be sometimes in contradiction with the political movement here, knowing that the solidarity with the Palestinian movement is critical for Palestine as it is for Kurdistan. Because it is only in support with the oppressed identities and the revolutionary groups that a new Middle East can develop.

This is also difficult nowadays because the Palestinian movement has been going over transformations over the last decades. The Israeli state especially targets any kind of revolutionary project inside the Palestinian movement, promoting a more conservative line. And this resulted in nowadays having the Palestinian resistance being led often by Islamist groups like Hamas. And for revolutionary movements, of course, of course, this is a bit of a defeat. The Israeli state, we can say partly succeeded in crushing the important revolutionary Palestinian movement, that it's a defeat for all revolutionaries of the world. And it's a defeat for us. But of course, it's especially like a defeat for the Palestinian revolutionary movement. Right now when we saw, the main conflict with Hamas is what is being seen as one of the main spearheads of the Palestinian resistance.

And we need to remark that Hamas is also connected with the Muslim Brotherhood, as President Erdogan is. Therefore, we see that in the last years, the narrative of the Turkish state and its ruling party, the AKP, and Erdogan has been often vocal in support with Palestinians. But this support is not for the revolutionary movement, this support is aligned with the Islamist claims of Hamas. And this connection between the AKP, the party of Erdogan, and Hamas also created some aversion from the Kurdish revolutionary movement, which is taking distance from this Islamist-led Palestinian movement while at the same time, of course, trying to keep and support this now smaller revolutionary Palestinian movements.

TFSR: So there was news in the last couple of weeks was that Turkey, after an extended period of air raids on northeast Syria, has been amassing troops

self administration and HTS have to negotiate conditions for a new Syria, because for the autonomous administration of north Syria, woman's revolution, woman's liberation is a fundamental, if not like the main points of this revolutionary project. This is something that for sure is not negotiable at all. So any kind of restrictions that HTS would like to impose on woman's rights, these would be for sure a total red line for the self administration. And this can be a challenge for some negotiations if these negotiations end up happening.

But for now, it's not even clear how much HTS is really engaging in these negotiations or if it's just a face that they are putting on, hoping that Turkey will put a finish the project of the self administration. Because we saw how HTS received diplomats in Damascus of the self administration and open negotiations and they are calling for Kurds to be part of this new Syria. But it's not clear, at least to me, how much this is something that they really believe in, or this is something that they are saying to gain time until the Turkish proxy forces can eradicate the project of Northern Syria.

TFSR: I think it's worth noting too, that Al-Jolani has specifically said that they're not trying to create a Taliban and not look to Afghanistan for what their goal is. But, you know, when the Taliban reclaimed portions of Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal, they were saying the same, like, "we're very moderate now, we're very reasonable." And then they went back to the same playbook. So, I mean, that's just politics, it's not even Islamism, I guess. The SDC has proposed a 10 point plan for moving forward towards peace, including increased inclusion of women in government posts. Along with this, do you see the DAANES and the democratic confederalist model as being allowed to actually play a role in the next transitional phase of Syria? And how do you see this as happening?

TA: Yeah, as you see, it's a really interesting thing. The Syrian Democratic Council, because it's the political body that was somehow aiming to build some national alliance in the level of Syria to prepare for a future organization. And one of the main figures of the political body that now develop as the Syrian Democratic Council was Hevrin Khalaf. Hevrin Khalaf was a Kurdish politician and she was murdered in the invasion of 2019. And it was not just another murder, like there was a group of Turkish-backed Islamists that penetrated several kilometers behind the front lines going explicitly after her car and killing like hers and the driver. So we can see how Turkey was scared of like this idea of a political body that can bring a national proposal for Syria, connected to the self-administration of North East Syria. And the Syrian Democratic Council continued, even if the president was killed, assassinated by these Turkish proxy groups. Eight now the proposal for a federal Syria

It has been a terrifying experience for those who went through that and that stands in contradiction with what HTS is trying to do. HTS was promising safe passage to the people of Shehba to areas of the self administration. And SNA didn't respect that and it's SNA is behaving exactly in the same way in Manbij, like looting, stealing, killing. There is a lot of videos that even they themselves are recording of torturing people, there was this video of like going into the hospital asking injured people if they were Kurds or not, and for who they were fighting and just shooting them on the spot in the hospital. It was quite brutal. So these are groups that don't have any political aim beyond massacring and killing and directed by the Turkish state to just destroy the project of the self administration of North Syria. So I would not even talk about any political project because there is none beyond obeying the orders of Turkey in the most brutal way possible.

HTS is a bit of a different thing. Even if we can see that they are coordinating in some areas, HTS is a political organization. They come from a political tradition of Islamism, and they have been shifting into a more moderate positions in the last months, or years even, to try to become a Syrian force that is a credible proposal for government for Syria. Well, we already made the comparison that it's maybe not so different from what the Taliban are doing in Afghanistan. And the idea is probably in the same lines, they are already talking about installing morality police, the Islamic courts. But at the same time, maybe talking about the Taliban in Afghanistan sounds too aggressive. But we can also remember that it's exactly the same thing that Iran is doing in the sense of the Islamic Republic of Iran. So is this idea of like bringing religious fundamentalism into politics, that it's something we mentioned that is Muslim people doing it sounds dangerous, but that so many Christian fundamentalists are doing exactly the same thing. So I think it's not so different. It's like bringing religious fundamentalist ideas into politics. And that seems to be the main idea of HTS and it's what they probably will try to implement with their interim government.

And of course, we already saw some of these declarations where some of the members of the government, (I don't remember who it was) making this statement that you say, like claiming that women are not capable of like having some positions in the of administration. Well, we can also reflect on how much religious fundamentalism and patriarchy go hand in hand and we can see how in the demonstrations of HTS, most of the time, we just see men, especially in the area on Deir ez-Zor where there was some protest calling for the SDF to withdraw and HTS to come. We can see how this protest is mostly men, how these ideas of religious fundamentalism also are in line with the power that men hold in the mosque and perpetuating these patriarchal forms of the family. So, of course, the project of the self administration is completely opposed to the vision of patriarchy. And probably this is going to be one of the main contradictions if we reach a point where the

at its Syrian border for what appears to be an offensive. At a joint press conference recently between the US and Turkey, both members of NATO and the US acting to attempt to facilitate communication on a ceasefire between Turkey and SDF. Turkey reiterated that it would deal with the US-backed SDF, whose Kurdish leadership Turkey argues is linked to the Kurdish Workers' Party, the PKK, within its own borders, as it saw fit, and would not be directed by the US. In the meantime, my understanding is that the US announced that it was going to take an administrative headquarters in Kobane and raise the US flag as a deterrent for Turkish invasion.

So I wonder what the last few weeks have been like in the area of the democratic autonomous administration of northeast Syria, and what do you see is coming next in terms of this sort of stalemate or at least threat of defense by the US being a larger power than the SDF can muster?

TA: Yeah. So, yeah, the last weeks and especially the last days have been crazy, and this has been a very relevant topic. Maybe to put it in context, we have to remember what happened in 2016, before the creation of the SDF, the main forces were the YPJ and YPG, with quite openly Kurdish-identified fighters. Then the YPJ and YPG, were the spearhead of the forces of the international coalition against the Islamic State. And during that time, the US was especially supporting these militias, like the fighters of the YPG and YPJ, in their war against Islamic State with their air force and the liberation of Manbij was a critical time.

There was some agreement between US and Turkey claiming that the YPG and YPJ cannot cross and to the west of the Euphrates River and that was the spark that ignited the process of conversations that ended up in the creation of the SDF or the Syrian Democratic Forces, an attempt to build these more regional realities of the military councils and the creation of the Manbij military council. This past agreement is something that Turkey has been contesting, claiming that the US promised that the Syrian Democrats, at that time the YPG and YPJ, could not go over the Euphrates River, and therefore was arguing that SDF had no right to be on the west of the river. On the west of the river is Manbij, the city that has been recently occupied by the SNA. There was not so muchn ground that US could hold diplomatically because of that agreement, so, the US did not intervene in front of the occupation of Manbij, but one of the red lines of the US in front of Turkey had often been like the Euphrates River and therefore Kobane. Turkey is trying to dismiss any kind of these claims and to go for a full military operation that occupies all the area. And therefore Kobane is a symbol of resistance, is a symbol of victory against the Islamic State, where the Kurdish forces managed to break the lines of the Jihadist groups. And it's a really important symbol of resistance for the revolution here and it was like what gave international name to what is happening here. It

was also the city where the US started to bomb the lines of the Islamic State. Therefore, US repeatedly say to Erdogan that Kobane was not on the agenda for Turkish occupation. And now with this invasion, clearly the proxy forces of Turkey were willing to dismiss these claims and attack Kobane directly. And as a deterrence, yeah, we saw an American convoy entering the city and raising the American flag.

What does it mean is still not clear. But for the moment, it's true that there seems to be negotiations where US is trying to balance the requests of Turkey with the need of the SDF. The commander of the SDF, Mazloum Abdi, was putting a proposal for considering Kobane as a demilitarized zone where SDF could withdraw, letting just the local Asayish security operate as basic security, like civilian structures, with supervision of US. That was a proposal put on the table with the idea to respect the claims of security of Turkey. And of course, for the US, this is a bit of a mess because they have a NATO partner that is clearly recruiting ISIS fighters and putting them on their groups to attack the Kurdish forces that have been the main partner on the ground to fight the Islamic State. So even if everyone knows that Turkey is still a nationstate that is part of NATO and the US doesn't want Turkey to get too close to Russia as it has been already playing both sides a bit, they want Turkey to remain in NATO because it's true that right now Erdogan is on the head of Turkey. Probably in the next elections, he will not hold that position and the US wants to make sure that this really big, powerful army that is the second force of NATO remains part of the of their military alliance. So they don't want to let Turkey move away from from NATO. But at the same time, they don't want to let Turkey smash the forces that really brought an end to the Caliphate.

And not only that, but we also have to remember that SDF is currently in control of the security of the prisons that hold tens of thousands of ISIS members. We're talking about thousands of fighters that are in the prisons, and tens of thousands of woman and children that were living in the caliphate of the Islamic State and that are right now a really big threat for the whole region. These people really believe in the ideas of the caliphate, their minds aren't going to be changed, and they are waiting for the opportunity to build it again. And US is aware of that and doesn't want to let these prisoners break out because we saw the cooperation of the Turkish state with Islamic state. Many of the international fighters of ISIS were crossing into Syria through Turkey. And this is something that is not a secret, it is known, but still they want to prioritize keeping Turkey as a NATO partner over any kind of human rights, any kind of risk prevention of the Islamic state to return.

Yeah. Anyway, we could talk long hours about this, but the situation is that US forces returned to Kobane that were not there since they withdrew before the last Turkish invasion under the orders of Trump. So right now they are there apparently preventing Turkey for immediately attacking with ideas of having a ceasefire until the end of the week, trying to reach an agreement. It's not clear if any

agreement is reachable. And maybe Turkey will try to attack anyway, on their own. And as far as we know, there are US senators already threatening Erdogan with sanctions like the ones that were placed in 2019, even if the ones of 2019 were never implemented. But they are using these sanctions as a measure for pressure to make sure that Erdogan don't make this step. What Erdogan will do is still something that we will see. At the end of the week, probably things will have to fall in one side or the other. If Erdogan wants to attack whatever the price, probably we will see the most brutal war that we saw since the days of the Islamic State here. SDF are ready to fight until the end. Kobane is not negotiable. Kobane is the most important symbol of the resistance that ends the Islamic State and a really important symbol of the revolution. So it's something that will be defended, for sure, with the strongest capacity that the SDF can put on the lines unless some agreement is reached where Kobane doesn't end up in Turkish hands.

TFSR: Okay, so this is going to cover some of the similar topics, but how have things on the ground in in the DAANES, been since the HTS and SNA offensives, and how have SDF allied forces engaged?

What do you think about the statements of Abu Muhammad al-Jolani of the HTS that point to a more tolerant vision of Islamism in Syria after the ouster of the Assad regime? You already mentioned this Rojava Information Center article from a few years ago, *When the Jihadists Learned to Smile*, I think. And I'll put a link to that in the show notes. But what do his words offer in relation to advances in the rights of women and LGBTQIA folks that have or could be won through models like that of Jineology? And can you talk a little bit about the vision that the Rojava revolution promotes?

TA: Maybe we can divide this in two parts, because even if the offensive of HTS and the offensive of SNA are somehow combined, they are really different forces with different political aims, and they are also acting different on the ground. So, the SNA until now occupied first and foremost the region of Shehba, where all the refugees from the Turkish invasion in 2018 of Afrin were living in refugee camps and the SNA forced them to flee again, finding shelter in eastern regions of Syria in territory of the self administration. And they occupied not only Shehba, that has been the first territory occupied, but also recently the occupation of Manbij. And we can see how SNA is advancing and behaving as like poorly organized criminal gangs, just looting, robbing, kidnapping. There are some interviews in the in the site of the information center with like those refugees from Shehba that are arriving to Raqqa, to Tabqa, and they are describing how the was evacuation and it's terrifying. Like these groups were just executing people on the road, were kidnapping.