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The Kurds and the Turks: A history of conflict in which chapters were written in blood

The study of the history of the relationship between the Kurds and the Turkish sultans constitutes an important entry point for understanding the determinants and repercussions of this "existential conflict" that we see between the two parties in light of Ankara's adherence to the necessity of subjugating the Kurds by the use of force and severity. On the other hand, we find the strong insistence of the Kurds in their demand for their independence from Turkey and the realization of the dream of building a Kurdish state after they failed to try to persuade Turkish politicians to contain them within the state structure, taking into account the peculiarities of the Kurdish race, which was possible by granting the Kurds expanded autonomy under Turkish sovereignty.

In the face of this convulsive reality, we need to research the historical exceptionalities of this conflict in order to fully understand the situation and the Turkish principles in the Turkish sultans' dealings with yesterday's allies and today's enemies, and how a landless people was able to rob the land and bounties of another people and inherit its political entity.

In this context, the first effects of Kurdish-Turkish relations started with the beginning of the eleventh century when the Kurds suddenly found themselves sharing their country with a new people without land or history that was trying to search for a geographical area to complete the building of the state, even in its simple concept. When the Ottomans succeeded in what others failed to do, they entered into pragmatic alliances with the Kurds from the sixteenth century. The Kurds played an important role in the structure of the Ottoman state and were part of the political equation. After that, the Turks returned the favor to the Kurds by shedding the blood of their leaders and accusing them of the worst charges that made them permissible targets by the Turkish repressive forces.

It can be said that the Kurds may not have been aware of the behavioral structure of these new settlers. Otherwise, the Kurds would not have allowed this threat to grow, especially since the beginning of the eleventh century coincided with the rule of the Marwanid state over the Kurdish regions, especially in Diyarbakir and Meiafarakin (Currently in Turkish: Silvan). Here, we find Ibn Al-Azraq, the historian of the Marwanid state, records the first attempts by the Seljuks to invade the capital of the Marwanid state, Meiafarakin, in 1042 AD. He says: "This was the first appearance of the Turks in these lands. People had not seen them before." (The History of Meiafarakin - p. 161).

It seems that the Marwanid family's entry into power struggles precipitated the placement of their state under the guardianship of the Seljuks, starting from the year 1070 AD. After that, the invaders broke their promises to the Kurds and expelled them from their homes permanently and from the Diyarbakir region in 1084 AD. They tracked down the Marwanid elements and eliminated them, which was achieved by the expulsion of the last ruler of the Marwanid family in 1096 AD.

Through this historical rooting, it becomes clear to us that subjecting the Kurdish people to the rule of the Turkish sultans was through fraud and breaking the promises they made to the Kurds in order to place them under the guardianship of the Turks. This method will remain among the fixed facts in the Turkish politicians' dealing with the Kurdish issue.

This malicious method created a strong reaction among the Kurds, forcing them to defend their rights to exercise their cultural, ethnic and religious privacy by all available means, even under the sovereignty of the Turkish race. It seems that instead of trying to contain the Kurds, Turkish politicians resorted to the classic methods of dividing the Kurds through the colonial tactic of "Divide and Conquer". They took advantage of the Kurdish clans and tribes, as the Turks contributed to their division until they reached 379 tribes and clans at the beginning of the twentieth century. (The book of "Kurdish Tribes in the Ottoman Empire" pg. 6/5).

Despite the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk maintained the same Turkish doctrine in dealing with the Kurdish issue. He manipulated in various ways to waste the rights of the Kurds, who demanded only autonomy from Turkey through the petition submitted by the "Kurdish Ministerial Committee". This matter intersects with the terms of Sèvres Treaty of 1920 AD. The treaty stipulated in 3 terms the right of the Kurds to establish an independent state. These are the terms that Atatürk manipulated in order not to implement before he made pragmatic alliances with the West, the results of which appeared in the Lausanne Conference, which Atatürk considered a green light to suppress Kurdish gatherings and prevent the circulation of their language.

The repressive measures of Turkish politicians prompted the Kurdish people to adopt the option of resistance to defend their legitimate right to a decent life, which was embodied by a series of revolutions that worried and exhausted the Turkish rulers, perhaps the most important of which are:

The revolution of Sheikh Said Piran (Seidê Pîranî)

Following the end of the First World War, the Kurds, led by Khaled Jabri, succeeded in liberating their lands from the Armenian militia loyal to Russia. These relative successes prompted Khaled Jabri to plan a revolution against the Turkish forces in Diyarbakir. This attempt failed and ended with executing him and his deputy before the start of the revolution. Faced with the necessity of having a leader around whom the Kurds would gather to continue the revolution, Sheikh Said Piran was elected in 1925 AD as the general leader of the revolution to succeed Khaled Jabri.

Although the Kurdish revolution achieved some tactical successes that worried the Turks, the lack of coordination and haste in moving against the Turkish forces caused the failure of this revolution and the arrest and execution of its leader Said Piran on June, 30 1925. After that, a series of abuse of the Kurds and the destruction of their villages began in a terrifying scene that continued until 1928 AD.

Ağrı revolution led by General Ihsan Nuri Pasha

The terrorist practices of the Turks against the Kurdish people prompted many of their figures to think about the revolution again, following the path of Sheikh Said Piran. Among them was General Ihsan Nuri Pasha, who founded a nationalist party in 1927 for which he chose the name "Khoebon" (In Kurdish: Xoybûn), which means "independence" from the Turkish state and the establishment of a national homeland for the Kurds.

Ihsan Nuri Pasha will choose the Ararat mountains in the Ağrı region (Turkish: Ağrı Dağı) to spark the Kurdish revolution, which began with skirmishes and the Turkish forces, who did not expect a new uprising with such strength and this organization. It seems that the difficulty of reaching the revolutionaries and the military skill with which Ihsan Nuri Pasha led the Kurdish forces cost the Turks heavy losses in lives and equipment. Some sources mention the killing of thousands of Turkish soldiers due to the fierce resistance, combative doctrine and high morale of the Kurds.

Despite the state of exhaustion caused by the Kurds against the Turks, their isolation in the Ararat Mountains and the poor supply and encirclement carried out by the Turkish forces prompted General Ihsan Nuri Pasha to seek political asylum in Iran. At that time, the Turkish forces continued to punish all those connected with the Ağrı revolution.

Dersim revolution: Genocide of the original peoples

Despite the fall of the so-called Islamic caliphate in Turkey and followed by a secular regime that "explicitly" intersects with religious principles in legislation and governance, the doctrine of Turkish superiority remained rooted. With it, the attempts to exterminate the Kurdish race were repeated through the old-modern tactic adopted by the Turks by working to Turkify the areas that include an ethnic population block that is not in harmony with the racist doctrine of Turkish politicians.

Based on this, the Turks resorted to enacting new settlement laws aimed at forcibly displacing some ethnicities in order to achieve what they claimed was "cultural homogeneity". Among these laws was "Tunceli Law" named after a newly called Tunceli region, historically known as "Dersim", with a Kurdish majority with some Alawite communities. In the face of the Kurds' refusal to submit to these religiously and legally forbidden procedures, the two sides entered into unequal armed confrontations that ended with what the Turks did of betraying the pledge of safety they offered to the leader of the revolution, Sayed Reda. Sayed Reda accepted in good faith to enter negotiations with the Turks, then they arrested and executed him along with 27 of his unarmed companions.

While Turkey, led by Erdogan, admits that Turkish forces killed 14,000 Kurds, historical documents tell us that more than 70,000 Kurds were systematically brutally murdered. Despite the refusal of the Turkish courts to recognize this genocide against the Kurds, Erdogan exploited the massacre politically by accusing the opposition Republican People's Party (Turkish: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) of being responsible for the incident, as it was leading the government at that time.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (partiya karkerên Kurdistan): On the path of the comrades

The scenes of the daily confrontation between the Kurds and the Turkish central authority are nothing but a rewriting of the same history of the confrontations between the two sides. Here, we record that the systematic oppression against the Kurds prompted them, each time, to return to the method of armed resistance and resistance to Turkish arrogance.

In this context, the Kurdistan Workers' Party was established on November, 27 1978 AD with a nationalist communist reference to demand the establishment of an independent political entity. The party entered into military confrontations against Turkey, in which thousands of victims were killed from both sides, where the Kurds had the largest share of victims. The arrest of Abdullah Ocalan (Ebdullah Ocelan) in 1999 was a fatal blow to the Kurds, who were forced to lower the ceiling of their demands from independence to the new, old demand of autonomy.

Although the two sides entered into secret negotiations in 2009, followed by direct negotiations with Abdullah Ocalan in December 2012, Erdogan's promises were always illusory. The targeting of Kurdish activists and the suppression of the prominent politicians continued, which prompted the party to revitalize its work inside Turkish cities, where a strong confrontation was recorded inside Turkey, especially in 2016.

Because of the deterioration of the military situation in Syria and the Kurds playing a pivotal role in eliminating ISIS, the Turks feared that northern Syria would turn into a rear base for the Kurds from which military operations to liberate the Kurdish areas would be launched. This strategic coercion prompted the Turks to intervene in Syrian territory through a series of operations (Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Spring of Peace) (Turkish: Fırat Kalkanı Harekâtı - Zeytin Dalı Harekâtı - Barış Pınarı Harekâtı) under the pretext of eliminating ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces. Those interested in Turkish affairs see this Turkish behavior as an attempt by Ankara to prevent the establishment of any Kurdish political entity, and to continue expanding at the expense of the Kurdish lands, especially since the Turks see the Kurds as a nightmare that threatens their historical glory. This is in addition to the fact that the history of the Ottomans cannot be compared to the history of the Kurds, which dates back - according to the most accurate estimates - to the Assyrian era (20th century BC).

Although the solution to this crisis seems simple by agreeing to grant the Kurds expanded autonomy under Turkish sovereignty in line with the major trends of countries that include different ethnic formations, the Turkish arrogance and genocidal policies against the Kurds forced these people to raise the ceiling of demands in light of the existence of a political system that seeks to exterminate them instead of containing and integrating them.