

Öcalan calls on Kurdish PKK to lay down arms and dissolve itself

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A delegation from the Kurdish nationalist People's Equality and Democracy Party (DEM) visited imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan for the third time on Thursday. As expected, he delivered a letter to the delegation, calling on the PKK to lay down its arms and dissolve itself. Tens of thousands of mostly Kurdish people have been killed and millions displaced in the ongoing conflict between Ankara and the PKK since 1984.

Öcalan's "Call for Peace and Democratic Society", read in Kurdish and then in Turkish at a press conference in an Istanbul hotel, was broadcast live on many national channels and watched by millions of people in Turkey and around the world.

"The inevitable outcome of the extreme nationalist deviations—such as a separate nation-state, federation, administrative autonomy, or culturalist solutions—fails to answer the historical sociology of the society," he declared in his call, claiming that the Kurdish question could be solved by "democratizing" the existing state.

"In presenting this perspective, there is no doubt that the laying down of arms and the PKK's self-dissolution in practice require the recognition of democratic politics and its legal dimension," Öcalan said in an additional note read separately. At the time of writing, there was no reaction from the PKK leadership or President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to the call.

Erdoğan's adviser Mehmet Uçum welcomed Öcalan's words, stating: "The call basically said that there is no more [Kurdish] identity problem, that the denial [of Kurds] is over, that there are no two nations, no two official languages, no two citizenships, no demand for autonomy, no demand for federation. The unitary state has been defended."

Uçum added, "Öcalan emphasized that the internal Kurdish problem in Turkey, which is based on denial and rejection, has been solved. Now the issue is democracy, integration with the state and society and the development of democracy."

The Erdoğan government's recent negotiations with Öcalan began last October with a call from Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of Erdoğan's fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Bahçeli said that Öcalan could be released if he declared that the PKK had been dissolved and that he would be allowed to speak "at the meeting of the DEM Party group in the Turkish Parliament." Subsequently, with Erdoğan's approval,

the DEM Party started talks with Öcalan, who has been held in a high-security prison on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara since 1999.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained, Öcalan, as the leader of a nationalist political movement with mass support, had been handed over to Ankara with the help of the CIA while the European powers had denied him political asylum.

Öcalan's call on Thursday was in line with his and the PKK's political evolution after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991.

He said, "The PKK was born in the 20th century, in the most violent epoch of the history of humanity, amid the two World wars, under the shadow of the experience of real socialism and the cold war around the world. The outright denial of Kurdish reality, restrictions on basic rights and freedoms—especially freedom of expression—played a significant role in its emergence and development," before adding: "In terms of theory, program, strategy, and tactics, it was heavily influenced by the reality of the real-socialist system of the century."

He then states: "The collapse of real socialism in the 1990s due to internal reasons, the erosion of identity denial in the country, and advancements in freedom of expression led to a lack of meaning and excessive repetition within the PKK. Consequently, like its counterparts, it reached the end of its lifespan, making its dissolution necessary."

In reality, despite some official steps to recognize the existence of the Kurdish people and the Kurdish language, which have been denied for decades, the existence and democratic rights of the Kurdish people are still not constitutionally recognized and Kurdish is still considered as an "unknown language" in the Turkish Parliament. Basic democratic rights, especially freedom of expression, are still being systematically violated by the government.

Öcalan's call comes amid an intense wave of repression and arrests targeting large sections of the political and social opposition, with thousands of Kurdish political prisoners in jail, elected mayors of the DEM party dismissed, and the right of millions of Kurdish voters to vote and be elected violated.

The PKK's "lack of meaning" is not due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union or the supposed solution of the Kurdish question, but to the bankruptcy of national programs in the era

of global integration of capitalist production. Ultimately, this is what underlay the end of the USSR, which was the culmination of the Stalinist betrayal of the October Revolution of 1917.

Like many bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist organizations that falsely call themselves “socialist” or “revolutionary,” the PKK responded to these major developments with a rapid shift to the right. Founded in 1978 as a Stalinist guerrilla organization that rejected the unified struggle of Turkish and Kurdish workers against the ruling class, the PKK, which gained strength in an environment of violent state repression against the Kurdish people, quickly declared the “failure of socialism” in the post-Soviet period, abandoned its program of national independence and sought reconciliation with Ankara and the imperialist powers. In fact, it was Stalinism, falsely identified with socialism, and its reactionary program of “socialism in one country”, that failed.

The critical issue completely omitted in Öcalan’s “call for peace” is that this call is made under the conditions of an emerging global imperialist war for the redivision of the world that could overshadow the two world wars of the twentieth century.

In the past three years, the US-NATO war against Russia over Ukraine has brought the world to the brink of a nuclear conflict, while the new Trump administration has now declared a program of global conquest and hegemony, targeting not only China but also Washington’s nominal allies. The US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza is deepening with ongoing aggression in the West Bank and plans for the deportation of more than two million Palestinians. The Islamist-led regime change in Syria could turn into a new conflict pitting the occupying allies, Turkey and Israel, against each other and various other forces in the country. The US-Israeli aggression against Iran and the preparations for a war that would engulf the entire region are in full swing.

This explains why the Erdoğan government has re-opened negotiations with Öcalan. Erdoğan himself expressed it as follows: “While the maps are being redrawn in blood, while the war that Israel has waged from Gaza to Lebanon is approaching our borders, we are trying to strengthen our internal front.”

A comment in *The Middle East Eye* on Öcalan’s call stated, “Many insiders in Ankara believe the government’s motivation for engaging in talks with Öcalan is linked to escalating regional tensions between Israel and Iran.”

Ankara and the Kurdish nationalist movement, both allies of the US-NATO and both oriented towards the imperialist powers, are not opponents but parts of the deepening war in the Middle East. The US and European powers believe that a settlement between the Turkish and Kurdish elites will contribute to their plans for imperialist domination in the region, especially targeting Iran and its allies.

That is why the United States and Germany welcomed the call. Berlin has announced that it will do everything in its power to support the “process.”

“It’s a significant development and we hope that it will help assuage our Turkish allies about U.S. counter-ISIS partners in northeast Syria,” said Brian Hughes, spokesman for the White House National Security Council. He was referring to the PKK’s sister organization, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), and its armed wing, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), which together with US forces control northeastern Syria.

Mazlum Abdi, the leader of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG is the backbone, declared that Öcalan’s call was directed against the PKK, not them. Referring to Ankara’s military operations against them in Syria, Abdi said, “The relationship and peace between the PKK and Turkey will have an impact on our region. If this process is successful, it will have a positive impact on us and Turkey will have no excuse to attack our region.”

Salih Muslim, a leading member of the PYD, welcomed Öcalan’s call, he told the *Al-Arabiya*, “There would be no need for weapons if we were allowed to work politically. If the reasons for carrying weapons disappear, we will lay them down.”

The last negotiations between Ankara and the PKK, which began in 2009 and continued with interruptions until 2015, collapsed as the US-NATO war for regime change in Syria intensified. Fearing that a Kurdish enclave in Syria led by the YPG could encourage a move toward independence in Turkey’s Kurdish provinces, where some declarations of “democratic autonomy” have been made, Ankara has launched a fierce offensive both at home and in Syria.

Thousands of people were killed and hundreds of thousands of Kurdish civilians were displaced. This bitterly demonstrated the organic inability of the bourgeoisie to solve basic democratic questions in a country with late capitalist development in the epoch of imperialism, as Leon Trotsky explained in his *Theory of Permanent Revolution*.

The tasks of independence from imperialism and building a democratic regime fall to the working class. This means the struggle for a socialist federation in the Middle East in opposition to the imperialist powers and all their proxies. In this fight, workers must oppose war, the sowing of enmity between peoples, chauvinist nationalism and state repression, and defend basic democratic rights. This requires fighting for demands such as the release of all political prisoners, including Öcalan, and the recognition of the democratic rights of the Kurdish people, including to vote and be elected.



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