

# **KOBANE THE SYRIAN KURDISH THERMOPILE**

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*“Do not shoot the arrow which will be returned against you.”*

*Kurdish Proverb*

As the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) jihadist forces are pressing from all sides to conquer capture the Syrian Kurdish controlled city of Kobanê, a large amount of the local Kurdish population that resides there have fled to the Turkish side of the border for protection. The present situation as a whole it could be better identified by a BBC map<sup>1</sup> where it illustrates the ISIS onslaught and its gains against the Kurdish fighters since September 14, 2014 when the original phases of Kobanê's siege begun. Kobanê happens to be not only a city of mostly Kurdish populace in Syria but also a strategic linch pin vis-à-vis the Kurdish desires of autonomy and even possible independence which includes the Kurdish

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<sup>1</sup> Battle for Iraq and Syria in maps, 8 October,2014, BBC, available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27838034>

inhabited areas of Iraq, Turkey and Iran. For many Kurds but also from the outside world, Kobanê is currently portrayed as the symbol of the "creation" of a homeland that has been awaited for a century to occur since the Treaty of Sèvres was envisaged in 1920.

Hence, a possible Kobanê capitulation to ISIS not only translates into a strategic blow for the Kurdish insurrection in Syria but also it brings forward far more severe consequences. It shuts the strategic aim of keeping the three autonomous Syrian Kurdish cantons (Efrîn, Kobanê and Cizîr united under the command of YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel) People's Protection Units but it also severs any possible union with Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - PKK) controlled areas in Turkish Kurdistan. Lastly, it hinders the latter's sphere of influence with any possible relationship with Irbil's (Hewlêr) KRG's administration and with all future benefits that might stem from it. This has prompted many military intelligence analysts to ask who actually benefits from an ISIS onslaught to the Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) enclave of Kobanê? When in reality ISIS forces are needed elsewhere and where their presence is actually required to fill strategic gaps in the all shifting war theaters or to recover ground or supply routes lost to the Syrian Security Forces. Instead ISIS units are currently getting grinded down by desperate and even suicidal Kurdish defenders but above all the constant USAF bombing which is crippling their future offensive capabilities by losing much needed military hardware that was captured in Iraq. More precisely on October 3rd, 2014 Bassar Al Assad's Forces achieved a strategic victory by capturing three villages (al-Mudafah, Handarat and Sifat) North of Aleppo thus straggling ISIS ability to resupply controlled areas in the City which are in dire need.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Syrian forces have also given a blow to the Jihadist

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<sup>2</sup> Syria army retakes strategic villages near Aleppo 3 October,2014, presstv, available at: <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2014/10/03/380933/syria-army-retakes-villages-near-aleppo/>

forces by regaining control of the Dekhaneyeh area in east Damascus thus strengthening the Syrian regime's grip in the nation's capital suburbs.<sup>3</sup> Adding into all these ISIS current reversals the noise that a possible capture of a Kobanê and the mayhem that will ensue especially to captured prisoners and Kurdish women is for certain to cause an international uproar. It could even force the US and its allies to intervene on the ground on to prevent a humanitarian disaster. Currently about 13.000 civilians are remaining near the city close to the Turkish corridor, a huge number that cannot be ignored.<sup>4</sup> A number much more larger than chemical weapons massacre of *Helebcei* a town in Iraqi Kurdistan that took place on March 16, 1988. A place where 5,000 Kurds died as a direct result of a chemical attack by Saddam Hussein armed forces, aiming to quell the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq by any means. In other words ISIS frantic Kobanê siege is nullifying its strategic aims of consolidating power all over Syria and Iraq by dispersing units and materials into a less important theater of operation compared to places like Aleppo or the suburbs of Damascus. Therefore the question who gains from this short term suicidal and pyrrhic war operation of ISIS? The answer seems to be not other than Turkey. After all Erdoğan's current grand Strategy encompass the will of removing Assad from power, depriving the Kurds of Syria, Turkey and Iraq the ability to unite and lastly project Turkey as the only safe oil route from Northern Iraq to the Coast of Ceyhan due to Kurdish and Arab squabbling.

It is already obvious that Ankara and ISIS seem to be cooperating on shaky grounds of a shadow alliance each for their own reasons. Despite Erdoğan's

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<sup>3</sup> "Syrian Arab army recaptures Dekhaneyeh area east Damascus, kills 54 terrorists outside Hama, Idlib, 06 October,2014, Syrian Times,available at: <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/don-t-miss/14721-syrian-arab-army-recaptures-dekhaneyeh-area-east-damascus-kills-54-terrorists-outside-hama-idlib>.See also, "Syrian Army recaptures town in Damascus countryside," 09October,2014 Arabamericanews, available at:[http://www.arabamericanews.com/news/news/id\\_9473/Syrian-Army-recaptures-town-in-Damascus-countryside.html](http://www.arabamericanews.com/news/news/id_9473/Syrian-Army-recaptures-town-in-Damascus-countryside.html)

<sup>4</sup> Robert Tait, Yumurtalik,"War for Kobane: 13,000 terrified Kurds trapped between Isil and Turkish border ,"10,10,2014,The Telegraph, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/11155020/War-for-Kobane-13000-terrified-Kurds-trapped-between-Isil-and-Turkish-border.html>

assurances to the west that he does not condone ISIS operations in IRAQ Syria evidence points otherwise. Even CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has openly claimed: “[I] believe the government is still helping ISIL. There is some information showing that some of the weapons and money ISIL has is of Turkish origin. ISIL spokesmen do not refrain from speaking about that [assistance] openly”.<sup>5</sup> In addition Kılıçdaroğlu further substantiates his claims by saying that Turkey is treating wounded ISIS members and then sends them back to fight without any hesitation of trying to arrest them thus stopping them from entering Syria. But above all he reiterates openly Erdoğan's real strategic design in the area by stating that: “[T]he [Turkish] government's priority is not ISIL, but the Syrian regime. The priorities of the U.S. and the Western alliance are not Syria, but ISIL. We made this point clear during the motion debate [in Parliament].”<sup>6</sup> It should be also noted that the CHP, jointly with the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), voted against a government motion authorizing military action in Iraq and Syria on Oct. 2. However, CHP's leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu despite his initial objection to any Turkish military incursion into Syria is currently preparing a new motion that would allow Turkey to send troops only to repel ISIL and then return back inside Turkey's Borders. A good will policy to attract future Kurdish voters (a Kurd and an Alevi himself), save face for Turkey's foreign image and lastly an action that will not be seen as aggressive by his fellow Syrian Alawite administration.

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<sup>5</sup> Murat Yetkin, "CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu: Turkish army should stay out of Syria",08 October,2014, hurriyetdailynews,available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-leader-kilicdaroglu-turkish-army-should-stay-out-of-syria.aspx?pageID=449&nID=72674&NewsCatID=409>

<sup>6</sup> Murat Yetkin "CHP leader Kılıçdaroğlu:Turkish army should stay out of Syria",08 October,2014,available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-leader-kilicdaroglu-turkish-army-should-stay-out-of-syria.aspx?pageID=449&nID=72674&NewsCatID=409>

Quite an antithesis with Erdoğan's aims that are mainly demanding President Bashar al-Assad to go as a condition for Ankara to step up its co-operation. In addition Erdoğan's demands requests a safe zone and no fly zone along the Syrian Turkish border from the US based coalition, a YPG alignment with the Free Syrian Army and lots of equipment and training for the FSA. During his recent visit to Ankara YPG leader Salih Muslim plea for military aid in heavy weapons and Turkish artillery action on the periphery of ISIS strongholds around Kobanê was fell on deaf ears. Turkey's negative response was based, on fears that these weapons might be used for Pro Independence activities in Syria and on the fact YPG up to date refuses to side with FSA. Lastly, Turkish worries of retaliation on Turkish targets inside and outside Anatolia by ISIS were also mentioned as grounds of refusal. However, given the facts that Turkey is a major transit for ISIS and Al Nusra recruiting cells it is unlikely that these terror organizations would have endangered their Turkish hospitably of turning a blind eye to foreign fighters over Kobanê's future.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-leader-kilicdaroglu-turkish-army-should-stay-out-of-syria.aspx?pageID=449&nID=72674&NewsCatID=409>. See also, Jonathan Schanzer, "Boosting Turkey As It Backs Terror", 25 September, 2014, [defenddemocracy.org](http://defenddemocracy.org), "available at: <http://defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/boosting-turkey-as-it-backs-terror/>. See also, "CHP lawmakers accuse Turkish government of 'protecting ISIL and al-Nusra militants' available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-lawmakers-accuse-turkish-government-of-protecting-isil-and-al-nusra-militants.aspx?pageID=238&nID=67750&NewsCatID=338>. Turkish soldiers could be seen either fraternizing with the ISIS fighters next to the Syrian, Turkish border or even trying to pass new recruits to the Syrian border. See, A Turkish soldier "visiting" an ISIS anti-aircraft unit at Kobani", They look way too friendly, 10 October 2014, Twitter .com, available at: <https://twitter.com/OliverNorthFNC>. See also, Βίντεο: Τούρκοι στρατιώτες μεταφέρουν ισλαμιστές στα σύνορα για να πολεμήσουν τους Κούρδους στη Συρία, (Turkish soldiers allowing Islamists recruits to cross the border with Syria), October, 10 2014, [Defensenet.gr](http://Defensenet.gr), available at: <http://www.defencenet.gr/defence/item/%CE%B2%CE%AF%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%8D%CF%81%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9>. What is more disturbing is that there are allegations and events that suggest that Turkey is also aiding logistically many Islamist movements in the world ranging from ISIL to Boko Haram. More precisely as Dr Rubin puts forward: "[t]urkey has become has become an engine for regional instability and the promotion of radicalism. Indeed, when extremists took over northern Mali and gave al Qaeda free rein, a Turkish ambassador tweeted his endorsement of al Qaeda and condemned the French for intervening... Quoted from, Michael Rubin, "Did Turkey arm Boko Haram?", 13, May, 2014, [aei-ideas.org](http://www.aei-ideas.org), available at: <http://www.aei-ideas.org/2014/05/did-turkey-arm-boko-haram/>. See, also, Turkish Tweets Turn Heads" 27, February, 2014, [freebeacon.com](http://freebeacon.com), available at: <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/turkish-tweets-turn-heads/>, see also, Turkish Intelligence (MIT) supportive position in transportation and logistical matters to Al Nusras aims in Syria became evident, when three Tunisian Al Nusra recruits caught by Kurdish PYD( Democratic

It is ironic, but Turkey and its Gulf allies have opened the Pandora box of sectarian warfare all in the name of their own geopolitical interests thinking that the Arab spring might be a platform of transforming North Africa into a Muslim Brotherhood neighborhood first and with the Levant countries following next. Entities that could be controlled and directed according with their needs. Instead sectarian warfare ranging from Syria to Iraq and now even into Yemen, with Lebanon witnessing its own skirmishes between Shia Hizbullah and Al Nusra cells.<sup>8</sup> This has become an abomination that is slowly spreading into Ankara's doorstep and if not checked Anatolia might be its next victim. Making matters even worse for Turkey, Abdullah Öcalan Turkey's Kurds imprisoned leader on Imrali island, declared that all hell might break loose in Anatolia if his Kurdish brothers in Kobanê are left to their dismal destiny to face alone the ISIS siege.<sup>9</sup> Thus making the national reconciliation talks between Ankara and the KCK, PKK political wing its first victim. HDP political representative of the Kurdish minority Selahattin Demirtaş, has even gone further by saying that the protests should be peaceful but should not subside until Kobanê is secure from the ISIS jihadist grip.<sup>10</sup> Moreover the Kurdish- ISIS vendetta is also spreading in Western Europe were recently Kurdish immigrants fought Salafi/ISIS sympathizers in Hamburg

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Union Party) forces in the city of Efrin Asayîşi admitted the latter's role into their war efforts. More precisely prisoners, Nadir Elwassani, Essabi Musa, and Yusuf Ekkari spoke about an operational team of Turkish officers codenamed IMAM that aids Al Nusra in logistical and transportation matters against PYD and Syria's armed forces. For more info on Turkey's supportive role to Al Qaida allies. See, Seyit evran, Türkiye'den El Kaide'ye tam destek, 12July,2013,*Firatnews.com*, available at: <http://firatnews.org/news/guncel/turkiye-den-el-kaide-ye-tam-destek.htm>. According with I tribune.gr there is an alleged video where it shows military hardware transported from Turkey into ISIS strongholds. See, «Τουρκικό τρένο μεταφέρει τανκς στο Ισλαμικό Κράτος» (Turkish train carrying war tanks and weapons, delivered to ISIS), 13,October,2014,Tribune.gr, available at <http://www.tribune.gr/world/news/article/80777/tourkiko-treno-metaferi-tanks-sto-islamiko-kratos.html>

<sup>8</sup> "Syria's Nusra Front 'kills Lebanese soldier", 19 september,2014, aljazeera.com, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/09/syria-nusra-front-kills-lebanese-soldier-2014919193711483251.html>. See also, "Nusra Front claims attack on Hezbollah checkpoint",20 October,2014,dailystar,available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Sep-20/271378-suicide-bombing-near-hezbollah-checkpoint-in-east-lebanonsecurity-source.ashx#axzz3DyopCj8>

<sup>9</sup> "As Kobane Makes Last Stand, Ocalan Gives Turkey Deadline for Peace Process" 07,October,2014,Rudaw.net,available at: <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/07102014>

<sup>10</sup> "Death toll at 25, politicians call for calm in name of peace process", 09 October,2014, Zaman, available at: [http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news\\_death-toll-at-25-politicians-call-for-calm-in-name-of-peace-process\\_361083.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/latest-news_death-toll-at-25-politicians-call-for-calm-in-name-of-peace-process_361083.html)

Germany.<sup>11</sup> Although it is too early to stipulate a European theater of Shia Sunni antagonism one thing is for sure, action brings reaction. Thus, if more scenes of mass executions of Iraqi or Syrian and Kurdish soldiers by ISIS or Al Nusra Jihadists persist or additional suicide bombings in Alawite neighborhoods and schools become an everyday TV news phenomenon no one in the west will be really prepared for the terrorist actions that might ensue as a result of this sectarian/nationalist dichotomy all over the world.<sup>12</sup> Thus, raising the big question: Is there a proxy war into the making?

### **In Conclusion**

If (PYD) Chairman Salih Muslim leader of the Syrian Kurds lost a son fighting for autonomy in Syria against the Al Nusra and its allies, Ankara might eventually lose its sleep of what might follow if Kobanê is erased from Kurdish cultural history. Erdoğan 's AKP's aggressive sunnification agenda in Turkey along with his failure to accommodate the Alevi's promised rights for official recognition as a religious dogma stipulate that more esoteric crises might materialize in Anatolia. A disaster ready to erupt, fueled with hate by the sectarian violence in Syria and Iraq, the burnings of Shia mosques in Istanbul combined with the possible reemergence of the Turkish Hizbullah as a means of combating Kurdish autonomy is not a good sign for Anatolia's cultural mosaic.<sup>13</sup> All these

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<sup>11</sup> "Kurdish protesters clash with Salafis in Hamburg, 14 injured",08,October,2014, hurriyetdailynews, available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/kurdish-protesters-clash-with-salafis-in-hamburg-14-injured.aspx?pageID=238&nID=72693&NewsCatID=35>. See also, "Kurds again rally in Germany after violent clashes," 09,October,2014, hurriyetdailynews, available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/kurds-again-rally-in-germany-after-violent-clashes.aspx?pageID=238&nID=72737&NewsCatID=351>

<sup>12</sup> "Syria Blasts at School Kill 32, Including 10 Kids" 01,October,2014,Abcnews,available at:<http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/islamic-militants-behead-captured-kurds-syria-25883598>

<sup>13</sup> According with Turkish daily news, Hizbullah, happens to be a radical Islamist group whose members are mostly Kurdish and who supposedly assisted the state in torturing and killing many Kurdish activists in the 1990s. The group's major affiliate, organization is the Free Cause Party (Hüda Par), which was also involved in the clashes that begun on October 7th 2014 in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır. In addition TDN makes evident that while Kurdish protesters clashed with Turkish nationalists in western cities, pro-jihadists were also reportedly on the streets in a number of southern provinces. An incident that

events slowly are creating a powerful wave of violence that is ready to annihilate everything in its path.

A pre-sequel of what is going to follow if Erdoğan and MIT undersecretary Dr. Hakan Fidan don't keep their promises given to the Kurds of Anatolia for a greater cultural and political autonomy, is the Kurdish insurrection of October 7th, 2014 that is still taking place inside Turkey's big cities from Diyarbakır to Istanbul. These violent demonstrations are related directly to Kobanê's ISIS siege and Turkey's refusal to help YPG has left dead more than 38 people and a tremendous amount of vandalism on public property and political Parties offices. Erdoğan's continuous refusal to aid militarily or logistically the besieged PYD (YPG armed wing) combatants against ISIS assault along with his verbal identification of PKK with ISIS terror policies was the spark of this mini Kurdish intifada to erupt.

*Therefore it might be wise for the Turkish leadership to read Xenofon's Cyrus anabasis to see that even the then powerful Greek mercenaries in Mesopotamia two thousand years ago did not stay to fight the (Karduchians) Kurdish guerilla forces head on. But above all they must keep also in their mind Decimus Magnus Ausonius (310 -395) AD famous quote: Multis terribilis caveto multos (If you are a terror to many, then beware of many).*

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could also be manipulated by AKP to attract votes from the MHP Turkish nationalist party during the forthcoming Parliamentary elections scheduled for June 13,2015. See , "How the ISIL fire in Syria burned 22 Turkish cities: In four questions", 08,October,2014, hurriyetdailynews, available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/how-the-isil-fire-in-syria-burned-22-turkish-cities-in-four-questions.aspx?pageID=238&nID=72687&NewsCatID=338>, For more information concerning the Hezbollah organization. See also, Wladimir van Wilgenburg, "Rival Islamist Groups Vie for the Support of Southeast Turkey's Conservative Kurdish Population" 30,April,2009, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 7, Issue: 11, available at: [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=34925&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=412&no\\_cache=1#.VDgWGNiKDIU](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34925&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=412&no_cache=1#.VDgWGNiKDIU)

