

Letter to The Australian Jewish News

28 October 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

James R. Russell's article '[The Second Great Betrayal](#)', published in the AJN on Oct. 18 is very informative and encourages serious reflection. Karl Marx is quoted as saying 'History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce', but there is nothing farcical about Turkey's invasion of Rojava/West Kurdistan/northern Syria. So far, around 600 people have been killed, four to five times this number have been wounded and some 300,000 people have been forced to flee, more than 12,000 having gone to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Kurds around the world are sleepless from following what is unfolding in north east Syria and therefore it comes as a shock the severe condemnation of the Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK found in a letter by Danny Kidron (Oct 25). It's evident that Mr Kidron bases his condemnation on the now discredited 1990s allegations of the Turkish government.

When PKK was formed in 1978, socialism and Marxism-Leninism were popular throughout the Middle East as an alternative to monarchies, dictatorships and social inequalities. PKK and its aims have evolved over the years and is now advocating a federal system based on free and fair elections.

Successive Turkish governments have attributed many atrocities to PKK, usually immediately after the incident before any investigation. Tellingly, no Turkish government has agreed to an impartial, independent international inquiry into any of the atrocities allegedly committed by the PKK. This is most likely due to some no-state investigations inside Turkey pointing to Turkish authorities as the responsible party. Otherwise, PKK has not threatened or committed a violent act outside Turkey.

Last year the highest court in Belgium upheld two lower courts' findings that PKK is not a terrorist organisation, but rather a non-state party to an armed conflict. The courts noted that the PKK is fully committed to the Geneva Convention. The listing of PKK as a terrorist organisation in the USA (1997) and Australia (2002) was a political decision that was not subject to judicial review and is very hard to overturn. For instance, the two main Iraqi Kurd political parties, the KDP and PUK, whose Peshmerga fought Saddam Hussein, were listed as terrorist organisations by the US until 2014, even though they had proved reliable allies in 1990-91 and 2003, and their leaders had visited Washington!

Rojava is not controlled by PKK. Rojava is administered by the multi-ethnic, multi-party Syrian Democratic Council which represents the autonomous administrations of north and east Syria. Rojava is secured by a multi-ethnic force which was formed by the US in 2015. This force is called the Syrian Democratic Forces. Two components of this force are the People's Protection Units (YPG) and Women's Protection Units (YPJ).

Critically, there is no evidence that any of these organisations take orders from PKK; they clearly state their aim is to establish an autonomous region within a united federal Syria; and they have repeatedly expressed a wish for good neighbourly relations. Yet, because these organisations promote women's representation, ethnic rights and democratic federalism, as advocated by PKK, President Erdogan and other political leaders in Turkey constantly repeat a mantra that there is no difference between these groups and PKK. It is like saying there is no difference between Australia and the USA because they are both federal democracies.

Mr Kidron extolls US President Donald Trump for keeping his campaign promise of bringing American troops home, even though they have yet to return home and, in fact, more US troops are going to Syria to protect the oil fields. Mr Trump apparently values oil more than people, or at least in this new plan, is reducing the likelihood of a confrontation with another member of NATO.

All Kurds, and many non-Kurds, including US military commanders, see President Trump's order to withdraw US troops so that Turkey could conduct a long planned ground offensive against those who helped the US-led coalition fight ISIS, as a betrayal. Trump's unilateral decision, not subject to any advice, has cost America much credibility, status, prestige and influence in the region. Trump has sent a strong signal to dictators and other enemies of freedom that the US is not a reliable ally and does not stand up to aggression. One can't help asking, 'Is Australia's security treaty with the US worth the paper it is written on?' or, 'At a crucial moment, could the US betray Israel?'

What is becoming clear to Kurds and other ethnicities in the four regions of Kurdistan is that they will never be safe, or have a seat at a negotiation table, or have any sense of respect or control over their destiny until they have a country of their own. We know the Jewish people understand this more than anyone, and thank you for your support.

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