

Rojava – “There is an increase of negative propaganda against the SDF”

Interview with Kino Gabriel, spokesman of the Syrian Democratic Forces

Did the SDF factions entered in the occupied territories of Serê Kaniyê?

I do not think so. We do not have any troops in that area, according to the agreements made between on the one hand Turkey and the USA and on the other Turkey and Russia. It is more something that we hear constantly by Turkey, it is not something new or linked with one statement or report. For the last two or three months there was a big focus on the propaganda made by several Turkish official's accounts, mainly on twitter. They try to make a propaganda against the SDF, saying that they are making attacks or are present in the areas where the agreements are in application. We already made statements saying that this is false. It is just a pretext to launch an attack or to cover some attacks they are making against several areas and against some infrastructures -mainly electric infrastructures and water stations. We do not know why they continue to do this, but I think it is normal for Turkey. They always do this propaganda ahead of their attacks.

What are the consequences of the reinforcement of the Turkish troops in the de-escalation zone for the autonomous administration?

Turkey has its troops in north-east Syria and in north-west, in Idlib, Afrîn and areas around there. There is some movement, but we did not see signs from which we have to increase our troops in north-east Syria. I think it is just a normal military movement: it would be normal to increase the number in the north-west areas because they had previously clashes with the Syrian regime forces.

Does the autonomous administration have to expect future attacks?

It is something expected. We always make our preparation for the worst, not for the good. I think it is a fact that we must talk about. The people are afraid to such attacks. As I said, there is an increase of negative propaganda against the SDF and normally it is a pretext for small attacks or a big one. We cannot say what we are precisely expecting, but again, again, it is almost always expected from Turkey to do everything. We do not know how the situation is going to be with the proxies of turkey, the Russian and the Americans, but in the case of launches, it will be coordinated with those forces – the International Coalition and the Russian.

From the other side, there is always this possibility – if I can talk about this analyse, it's not a fact- that Turkey tends to launch attacks outside of its borders whenever the government feels that it is pressured in these days. And with the last situations in Turkey with the economic problems, the coronavirus and the Turkish opposition that is stronger than before, the government might think about it as a weak situation within the Turkish state. They attend to make a diversion by launching attacks in Syria, Iraq, or any other places, to shift the focus of the Turkish people away of the internal problems that they are facing. Again, there is no direct information relatively to this analysis.

Could we expect possibilities for Rojava to have a non-fly zone agreement?

There is not such a thing. We always demand it, to apply such a move to be able to secure the area there. It is more complicated than before, as there are two international powers involved in the Syrian situation and they have presence in north-east Syria. And which one has its plans and different strategies. I do not think there is any chance to have such agreement soon. Even if it would secure the areas from a Turkish invasion, would benefit for the stability of the north-east Syria in general and would protect the life of millions of people that are there.

Why USA patrols are still going until Qamishli, and how the populations perceive such presence?

They have still some tasks linked with the mission of the international coalition in Syria. First, we are continuing to do several operations to eliminate the threat of sleeper cells in the area. We are also still going on our joint project, away from operations, like military and medical support, trainings programs -increasing the readiness of our forces to face ISIS. All of that is a common work. There are patrols not only in Qamishli but in different areas: they go from the Turkish border until Deir el Zor, and as you said from Qamishli to Derik and Hassake. These patrols are part of the International Coalition to secure the locations that they have and also to maintain the movement they have work on.

Does the coronavirus change the management of the troops on the ground?

It has not changed something. There are some precautions that we and the International Coalition have taken. We are trying to prevent such spread within the military forces and so far, it has been successful. We did not have cases of coronavirus among our military forces. Some meetings were delayed, and we made some of our tasks and operations a little bit later, but we continued everything except for the training programs. We have a clear policy: we cannot do big gatherings with people from different areas or we do not allow forces to move between different areas. So maybe we were a bit affected but everything else was still scheduled.

I think the autonomous administration tried to make the best it can with the resources that it has. We are short in medical stuffs, hospitals, or any facilities -to isolate the confirmed or suspected cases for example. I think that an outbreak of coronavirus in north-east Syria would have been devastating. Even if we would have work against it and we would have succeeded, we would have had a lot of cases. Other countries that have more resources than us could not do anything. Thankfully, we have not seen other cases than the three cases in Hassake. We hope that it passed. The people respected the lockdown, specially the beginning but recently they cannot anymore for economic reasons. They need to go back to their work.

Concerning the regime troops, we have tried to not do big movements or change the troops, to keep the situation as it is and prevent any cases of coronavirus -to spread or to come up. I think we have worked together in a good way so far, but we will see how it is going on the next weeks.