

# The Öcalan Case between Political Exploitation and the Kurdish Issue

(Translated)

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On January 10, 2025, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited his ally Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), at his residence. The meeting lasted forty minutes. This visit comes amidst ongoing political discussions in Türkiye regarding the potential release of Abdullah Öcalan, the founder of the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

On October 22, 2024, Bahçeli called for Öcalan to come to parliament to declare the dissolution of the PKK in exchange for his release. Erdoğan expressed his support for this proposal, describing it as a historic opportunity. It appears Erdoğan wanted this proposal to come from Bahçeli, his coalition partner, who had previously advocated for Öcalan's execution. This shift is noteworthy considering Bahçeli's earlier stance as part of the government led by Bülent Ecevit, following the 1998 Adana Agreement. That agreement led to Syria expelling Öcalan and his party members, closing training camps, and halting their infiltration into Türkiye.

Öcalan, who had ties to the U.S. while in Syria, was captured in Kenya in 1999 and handed over to Turkish intelligence.

A delegation from the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (HDP), regarded as a Kurdish political party in Türkiye, visited Abdullah Öcalan on December 29, 2024. Öcalan has been serving a life sentence in solitary confinement for 25 years on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara, south of Istanbul. The delegation's visit, however, was reportedly orchestrated by Erdoğan's government.

After their visit to Öcalan, the delegation met with Parliament Speaker Numan Kurtulmuş, a member of Erdoğan's ruling party, as well as with Bahçeli to brief them on the outcomes of their meeting. Erdoğan's subsequent meeting with Bahçeli seems to be aimed at finalizing a decision on Öcalan's release. Reports suggest that Öcalan may be cooperating with the proposal, especially as media outlets have indicated that the delegation is expected to visit him again soon, possibly paving the way for his release.

The developments indicate a significant shift in the Turkish government's approach to the Kurdish issue and Öcalan's role within it. If successful, this initiative could mark a critical turning point in resolving longstanding tensions, but it also raises questions about the political motivations and implications for Erdoğan's administration and his coalition with Bahçeli.

The Kurdish issue appears far more complex than what the U.S.-aligned Turkish rulers perceive. Previous negotiations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have failed to yield results, largely because the party's current leaders are aligned with Britain. These leaders are based in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq under the protection of the Barzani family, who are British allies. Britain has manipulated the Kurdish issue for over a century to fragment Muslim communities and maintain its influence in the region. The United States has followed the same exploitative path for similar purposes, with their competition playing out covertly through proxies and loyalists in the region.

If Abdullah Öcalan is released and calls for abandoning armed struggle, there is little guarantee that his party will comply. While his appeal might influence Kurdish voters within Türkiye, it is unlikely to shift the PKK's stance significantly. Erdoğan, however, sees an opportunity to leverage Öcalan's influence as he seeks to garner Kurdish votes for his political aspirations. Erdoğan is maneuvering to secure re-election, despite constitutional limitations preventing him from running for a third term. He argues that his first presidency

(2014–2018) does not count as a full term since it preceded the 2017 constitutional amendment that transitioned Türkiye from a parliamentary to a presidential system, consolidating executive power under the president.

On November 28, 2024, Erdoğan's chief legal advisor, Mehmet Uçum, stated that Erdoğan could seek another presidential term in the May 7, 2028, elections through a special parliamentary decision. Uçum emphasized Erdoğan's "national value" and called for utilizing this "exceptional leader's" capabilities. These remarks align with those of Devlet Bahçeli, reflecting the coordinated efforts within the People's Alliance coalition comprising Erdoğan's AKP and Bahçeli's MHP. This legal maneuvering underscores Erdoğan's intent to remain in power, despite his earlier claims during the last elections that he would not run again.

Skepticism surrounds Erdoğan's promises, as critics had predicted he would find a way to extend his rule before his term ends in 2028. Erdoğan has consistently shown his reluctance to relinquish power, backed strongly by the United States for advancing its regional interests. His role in implementing U.S. strategies is evident in various countries, most recently in Syria, where he supported the establishment of an administration under Abu Mohammad al-Jolani to execute American policies. Moreover, Erdoğan's silence over massacres of the Jewish entity in Gaza and his actions to provide resources to the Jewish entity reveal his duplicity. Despite fiery rhetoric, Erdoğan has ensured the delivery of materials directly to the Jewish entity for over seven months since its assault on Gaza. In cases where direct shipments were politically sensitive, materials were routed through intermediaries, including foreign companies and the Palestinian Authority, with Erdoğan's full knowledge.

These developments highlight Erdoğan's willingness to prioritize personal and foreign interests over national and regional concerns. While the Öcalan issue may offer him temporary political gains, the broader implications for Türkiye's stability and regional dynamics remain precarious. The Kurdish issue, manipulated by external powers for decades, is unlikely to be resolved through short-term political maneuvers, and Erdoğan's actions may only exacerbate tensions in the long run.

The Kurdish issue is fundamentally a political matter exploited by colonial powers in their regional conflicts. Solutions proposed by figures like Erdoğan, his party, and his ally Bahçeli primarily aim to secure short-term political gains. Bahçeli, whose political survival is tied to Erdoğan, faces the same fate as him. Both their parties suffered significant losses in the local elections held on March 31, 2024, reflecting the declining support for their policies.

The Kurdish issue will continue to plague the region as long as it remains framed within the current nationalist divisions. The colonial powers that orchestrated these divisions—establishing Türkiye as a nationalist state, alongside Arab nationalist states like Iraq and Syria, and a Persian nationalist state in Iran—use the Kurdish nationalist aspirations to maintain instability and prevent unity in the region. By fueling ethnic divides, they deepen fragmentation and sow perpetual discord. True resolution lies in Islam, the unifying religion of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Persians. For over thirteen centuries, Islam unified these peoples under one state, transcending ethnic divisions, rejecting nationalist ideologies, and fostering a sense of brotherhood.

Thus, the root solution requires abandoning nationalist frameworks and the establishment of a single unified state that views its diverse peoples through the lens of Islam. Any other approach will remain partial, temporary, and politically motivated, ultimately failing to address the core of the issue. Without such a unifying vision, the region will remain trapped in cycles of conflict and vulnerable to colonial exploitation. Only by dismantling nationalist states and establishing a single, inclusive state based on Islamic principles can lasting peace and stability be achieved.