

Political Psychology of Peace and War: Peace as a Psychological Need

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The common view is that Turkey is on the verge of civil war as well as war; in fact, the categorical distinction between a war and a civil war is fast fading in post-election Turkey where waging a full-fledged war in Syria has direct consequences and implications for the internal conflicts of domestic politics. While a minority of the commentators would claim that the war never ended, thus it never started (recently); the most common view is that the so-called 'solution process' or 'the peace process' which was marked by a series of publicized as well as mystified negotiations between a number of Kurdish actors and AKP politicians in power was a period of relative tranquility. In this period, politically-motivated killings were mostly on hold but with notably exceptions questioning whether it was truly a peace process (e.g. death of Kurdish teenagers as well as Gezi protestors) or not. In fact, it was more reasonable to denote it as a ceasefire whereby the guns were mostly kept silent, but the institutional transformations and reforms to secure safe passage from a ceasefire agreement to a genuine peace process were sadly missing. What were these transformations and reforms? These were about how to re-align educational system, security forces, legal structure, municipal services etc. according to the new social needs that emerged throughout the ceasefire process. From the very beginning, the two parties never trusted each other and waited for a surprising hostile move that put an end to 'the process'. It can be stated that both sides had rational motivations behind this mistrust. One party to the conflict thought that 'the process' was just for show to lure the outer rings of voters which are not conservative such as liberals; whereas the other party, the government was not willing to go too far to the extent to satisfy the Kurdish political demands. Furthermore, 'the process' lost its appeal by the developments in the Syrian war where both sides gravitated towards a proxy war initially, and an unnamed direct confrontation. In other words, while the so-called 'peace process' was under development in Turkey, both sides of this process was fighting with each other in Syria. Nevertheless, 'the process' survived many attacks from both sides, just because it was a win-win situation, where both sides had expanded or hoped to expand their voter base and use this interim period of tranquility to prepare for the soon-to-come war period with a cyclical understanding of war and peace.

One of the turning points was HDP's victory on 7 July 2015 elections which surprised and even shocked the AKP politicians. HDP voters expanding their support had thrown the presidential system that would be planned to be enforced by the imagined predominantly AKP-led post-election parliament (the dream was 400 AKP parliamentarians out of a total of 550 seats in the parliament) to the rubbish bin of history. 'Rubbish bin of history', a Marxist term is found to be only partially capable of characterizing this situation, because AKP's dream of the presidential system was a recycled (recurring) one, which means it can't be deleted forever. Realizing that a great portion of Kurdish AKP supporters opted for HDP in the recent election and that a coalition with MHP, the mostly likely partner depends on complete denial of 'the peace process', AKP pressed for a chaos plan, whereby a civil-war-like atmosphere coupled with aerial attacks over Southern neighbors would be expected to force Turkish voters to believe that there is no solution other than AKP. Just like the economic crisis preceding the rise of AKP in 2002, the party needs a social and political crisis to be invited as a savior one more time by the voters. They want voters to believe that "AKP era was better than this reign of terror; so it is better to vote for AKP again". We asked for an extension of a Marxist term above, but we have another Marxist expression which completely matches the reality: "*History repeats itself, first as tragedy, then as farce*" (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, 1852). AKP was an emerging party in 2002, associated with all the hopes tarnished by other parties; while now in 2015 it is an ailing party resorting to civil war and even war to secure its position. It was the '*deus ex machina*' in 2002 tragedy, but a '*persona non grata*' in 2015 farce.

But then the question is: "How are all these related with psychology?" Well, there are a number of ways to unlock the psychological mechanisms behind AKP's politics. For one thing, AKP's rise to power was

associated with the perceptions and especially pessimistic views of economic crisis which in turn acted as a motivation for search for stability which was ironically and paradoxically promised by AKP, a party that vowed to propagate revanchist policies. Secondly, AKP utilized a set of political psychological tools since its first day such as scapegoating, projection, moral panic, self-victimization, tension strategy, polarization etc. Political figures can be analyzed on the basis of personality theories as well. The AKP followers can be investigated from a social psychological perspective referring to conceptualizations such as group psychology, just world hypothesis, system justification theory, attribution models, the notions of authoritarianism and social dominance etc. However, the anti-government reactions to recent Suroç suicide-bombing (20 July 2015) which claimed 31 lives proved to be a sign of a far deeper and personalized link between politics and human psychology.

Since then, through these days of civil war and war, many of the anti-government citizens are more depressed and more anxious, while AKP-MHP supporters are busy with asking for more hostility to reset the country to the default settings, whereby AKP would be the one and the only one to reign, as in good old days. HDP will possibly be shut down as it is seen to be responsible for violence, and its parliamentarians will be banned of any political activity. Snap election, the government hopes, will bring AKP to power again. In such a heavily loaded atmosphere, HDP stands out as a militant defender of peace, as the party is in fact a project of the 'peace process'. Without peace, Kurdish politics would not find democratic and legal grounds to express its cause. Civil war and war in their current forms attacks the *raison d'être* of HDP. This notorious pair of war and civil war marginalizes and ultimately outlaws Kurdish politics, which doesn't mean anything other than escalation of violence each and every day.

CHP-HDP supporters and other vocal critics of AKP government realize that this is clearly the Syrianization process which would not benefit anybody other than AKP government. They joke less, they laugh less, they talk less. The number of people who want to leave Turkey dramatically increased within a couple of days. This is a direct consequence of Suroç bombing and upcoming news of violence associated with it. This is a clear case of a social trauma that primarily or secondarily traumatizes the survivors of the bombing as well as millions of sympathizers of the victims who were exposed to the scenes by media, social media or word of mouth. The society exhibits Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, but this trauma is not discrete, it is rather continuous. We don't know whether the trauma ended and whether we are in the post-trauma stage or whether it has just started. In that sense, it resembles the prognosis of an economic crisis.

7 June election results were greeted with joy and optimism which have been depleted in a short time, reminiscent of the disillusionment of Gezi Park protestors (2013) which expected that the government would resign sooner or later as a response to this greatest uprising ever in Turkish republican history. Anti-government victories bring power restorations, as the state apparatuses are self-learning machines responding to social unrest by new measures and regulations.

During the Gezi Park protest days, some of the anti-government psychologists advised their depressed anti-government counselees to join the protests which were considered to be a 'natural cure' for depression. The healing effects of the protests were confirmed by the demonstrators. Nowadays it is more difficult to demonstrate on the streets of Istanbul. Even a basic demand like peace is criminalized. Anxiety disorders can be expected to get more prevalent as well, since "what is next" feeling coupled with deep pessimism is corroding the soul.

Human psychology needs peace to restore its disturbed equilibrium. That is why peace is not only a political matter, but a psychological need (or we can even state that it is a hygiene factor, following Herzberg's theory), as somewhat conveyed by slain Chilean protest musician Victor Jara's song 'El derecho de vivir en paz' / 'The Right to Live in Peace' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0vPPuEJQLY>).

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