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Denmark/Iraq

Why Danish leftists supported military aid to Iraq

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Danish socialists voting for a parliamentary decision to send a military plane to Iraq under US command is not usual. Even more unusual is the fact that I – considering myself a revolutionary Marxist – voted to support that decision. Nevertheless, that is what happened a few weeks ago.

The parliamentary group of the Red-Green Alliance (RGA - Enhedslisten) voted together with all out parties for sending a Hercules airplane to Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government. The plane will transport weapons and ammunition to the Kurdish militias fighting Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS).

According to the statutes of the RGA such a vote in parliament has to be approved by the National Leadership (NL) of the party. A thorough discussion took place a few days before the vote in parliament, which was also before the exact wording of the proposal was known. The National Leadership voted instead on a resolution, allowing the parliamentary group to vote Yes under certain conditions. Almost all NL-members had some kind of doubts before voting, but finally the text was adopted by a majority of 14 for – myself included – to 6 against, and 5 not voting or not present.

Many valid arguments were put forward against the decision. Most basic was the problem of supporting a military action under the command of the US. The US government and military defend the interests of US big business and imperialism, both in the narrow sense of gaining access to resources, markets and profits, and in the more general sense of geopolitical dominance.

US imperialism is the basic reasons for the sectarian fighting in the region – due to the previous Iraqi wars, and specifically US imperialism has a big part of the responsibility for the existence of IS. Some of their close allies have been funding ISIS, and Turkey – without any objection from Washington – has allowed ISIS to operate across Turkish borders.

Finally, Denmark has had three very bad experiences of participating in US-led warfare in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Everyone in the RGA leadership and the parliamentary group was aware of all this. But the decision was based on a concrete analysis of the situation in area. US imperialism created ISIS and allowed it to grow to a certain point. But it grew too much and became militarily too strong and dangerous for US interests – exactly as happened with the Taliban. So at the moment US imperialism wants to stop IS.

I don't think that much argument is needed to back the fact that revolutionary socialists also want to fight and stop IS, a murderous, sectarian and deeply reactionary force. A victory for IS will set back any social, democratic, pro-women or anti-imperialist development that may have taken place in parts of Syria and Iraq.

In that way there is a temporary coincidence of interests between imperialism and socialists on the simple issue of fighting IS. We want to supply the Kurds with weapons, and US imperialism want to supply the Kurds with weapons – for the time being. Not supporting it, only because of the US command, would be as if Lenin had refused to travel in the sealed train supplied by German imperialism through imperialist Germany to Russia in the middle of the Russian revolution, as another NL-member said.

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But don't we risk being a part of a broader US military campaign that has quite other intentions than we have, and which will do much harm to the people of the region? That was another argument against the decision. No one will deny that this can happen, also with the acceptance of the Danish government. But - in accordance with the resolution of the National Leadership – our MPs made sure:

- that the Danish Hercules plane cannot be used for any other purpose than delivering arms to the forces fighting IS;
- that this decision does not allow any other Danish military activity in the region;
- that whatever happens, a new parliament decision is necessary if the government wants to prolong the activity of the airplane after 1 January 2015

Counting as an argument against the decision was also doubts about who exactly will receive the arms. No one in the RGA was keen to supply this government with weapons, to say the least. But in the formal language of the parliamentary decision it was called an action for the Iraqi government and other forces fighting IS.

The National Leadership was assured and convinced that this was necessary for the decision to be in accordance with International Law – only governments can receive military help from other governments. Secondly the Iraqi army is not lacking weapons, and Eastern European weapons would be of no use for them. Thirdly the Iraqi army is practically not fighting IS at all.

That still leaves the question if the most progressive Kurdish forces, Turkish PKK and its Iraqi counterpart, YPG, actually will receive the weapons, or if the regional Kurdish government in Iraq will monopolise them. This government traditionally is in conflict with the PKK/YPG, and it is pursuing a strict neo-liberal policy in the areas that it controls.

There is really no telling exactly who will get how big a share of the weapons. But all the Kurdish forces have established a common military front to fight ISIS. There is evidence that they are actually sharing weapons, and the PKK/YPG is doing most of the effective fighting.

Confronted with relevant arguments against and without any 100 % guaranties of the outcome, I and the majority of the committee voted for the resolution allowing the MPs to vote Yes in Parliament. What tipped the balance between Yes and No for many of us, was the fact that all the progressive Kurdish forces, including socialists, in the region plus all the Kurdish organisations in Denmark, including several RGA-members, not only advised us to vote for, but begged us not to oppose the decision. They were sure that such a decision will most likely result in weapons for the PKK/YPG, a necessary strengthening not only of the fight against IS, but also a strengthening of the progressive forces in the region.

As a follow up to the decision the RGA have taken other initiatives to stop military and financial supply for IS, to popularise the fight for the Kurdish peoples' right to self-determination and to have the PKK removed from the US and the EU list of so-called terror organisations. A special Danish aspect is the fact that the TV-station of Kurds for all Europe was based in Denmark until it was recently banned, and 10 people from the Kurdish community face trial for collecting money for organisations that – according to the police - transfer the money to PKK.

When the first shipment of weapons to the PKK/YPG by a Danish airplane under US command has taken place, it will be hard for the authorities to explain that they are supporting a terror organisation.