



Manbij - a city under repeated occupation

Between the Euphrates and the border with Turkey

The city of Manbij (Kurdish: Minbiç) is located in northern Syria, about 30 kilometres west of the river Euphrates and 80 kilometres north of the city of Aleppo. It is an old, historic and diverse city whose population is made up of Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs. Geographically, it connects the north and south of Syria and lies on the border with Turkey, about 90 kilometres from Dîlok (tr. Gaziantep).

The interest of the Turkish state

Manbij is an important trading city in the region, which the Turkish city has claimed for itself for a long time. The tomb of Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire, is a recurring theme. It was located near the village of Qereqozax near Manbij before the Islamic State came to power. Turkey considers the area around the tombs to be its own territory. The Tishreen Dam is also located in the Manbij region. A large part of the region on the Euphrates is supplied with electricity from there. Whoever controls the dam can massively affect the living conditions of the population within the self-administration. Since the beginning of the revolution in Syria, Turkey has been working to bring Manbij under its political control. On the grounds of protecting internal security, the Kurdish population living there and the Kurdish forces organising themselves there have repeatedly been described as a threat.

Occupation by the Islamic State

In 2014, the city was occupied by Islamic State (ISIS), even then with the support of Turkey. Manbij became a training and operations centre for ISIS activities in the northern region of Syria. ISIS used the city as a logistics centre. It was the arrival and departure point for their fighters and, with its connection to the border, Manbij served as a corridor for logistics, oil, weapons and other goods to Turkey.

During the occupation, the people, especially the women, were exposed to great danger. They experienced violent attacks and severe repression. Women were denied the most basic rights. They were shrouded in black veils and forced to live in darkness and slavery. The entire population was brutally intimidated. Beheadings and the hanging of people in public places, locking women in their homes and forced marriages to ISIS-fighters were just some of the cruel acts committed by IS. The clothing of women and the population in general, everyday life, coming and going were regulated by the strict laws of radical Islam. Money was taken from people by force, theft and robbery were omnipresent.

The liberation of Manbij - a message of freedom for women

For over two years, the population, especially women, suffered under the occupation of IS, its crimes, massacres and slavery. In response to the call of the people who no longer wanted to endure these atrocities, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) liberated the city in 2016. This was also a message of freedom for all women. Many women took part in the liberation with all their strength. When the women in Manbij recognised the strength of these women, their belief that they could defend their rights themselves also grew. Although the fascist Turkish state, with its military technology and the support of ISIS, used every means at its disposal to prevent this, the region was liberated. Many of the more than 600 martyrs who fell in the battle for Manbij were women.

The establishment of democratic self-administration

After liberation, institutions and facilities for self-administration were created with representatives of the various population groups living there. A civilian city council was



elected and security force structures and a military defence council belonging to the SDF were established. This has brought about major changes and relief for the population, both in the economic sector and in the area of security. Women also organised themselves and set up their own structures and institutions. These included, for example, the women's organisation Zenûbiya, 4 Mala Jin houses, women's communes and councils.

The new attack on Manbij in December 2024

At the same time as the attacks on Aleppo on 27 November 2024 by Islamist groups, Turkey began bombarding the villages around Manbij, including Cat, El Kawiklî, Til Hemam, Toxar and Xalidiyê û Hoşeriye, with artillery shells. And it sent the Syrian National Army (SNA), which it controls, to attack the areas of the Democratic Autonomous Administration, including Tel Rifat, Shehba and Manbij. They saw their opportunity in the current chaos in Syria and acted accordingly.

The first attacks on Manbij were repelled by SDF forces. Nevertheless, the SNA - in which Islamist groups and former ISIS-fighters organise themselves under a new name and new clothing, fuelled by the ideas of Turkish fascism - continued to attack the villages in the region from the north, south and west.

From 8 December, Turkey concentrated all its forces on attacking the city of Manbij. In addition to the invasion from outside, armed sleeper cells inside the city were activated in preparation for the long term. In the first hours of the invasion, Turkey had already spread propaganda via its state-owned media - without any actual successes - that Manbij had been taken and that the military council belonging to the SDF had surrendered the city. In fact, the SDF fighters put up strong resistance. As a result, the SNA were unable to gain control of Manbij either through the sleeper cells or from outside. This is why Turkey began to support the invasion with airstrikes. In order to cut off the routes between the Euphrates region and Manbij, the bridge in Qereqozax and the area around Sirrin were bombed dozens of times by the Turkish state's drones (SİHA). On 9 December, the SNA, allied with Turkey, launched ground attacks on the Qareqozax bridge and its surroundings, which have so far been successfully repelled by SDF fighters.

The Syrian National Army in Manbij - ISIS in new clothes

During the invasion, the SNA - the newly clothed ISIS - attacked the population as it had done in 2014. Gangs moved from house to house, looting and taking people captive, triggering a wave of migration to Kobanê and other regions in northern and eastern Syria. Their approach to women is also repeated. They use the same language and the same methods under different name. In particular, women from the structures of the women's movement and women's organisations were attacked. Three activists from the women's movement Zenûbiya were also murdered.

Zenûbiya wrote in her statement: Qamar Al Sud, Aisha Abdul Qadir and Iman resisted the forces of darkness and aggression and made enormous sacrifices in the struggle for women's freedom and the defense of the achievements of the women's revolution. They stayed in Manbij to resist despite the attacks of the Turkish-backed jihadists. They were a living example of sacrifice, determination and courage in the fight for the dignity and freedom of women and society as a whole.

The residents of Manbij speak of great fear, especially those who were involved in the establishment and work of the democratic self-administration and the Syrian Democratic Council, as they are being targeted, tortured and humiliated. Many crimes are undocumented and the whereabouts of abducted women and men are unclear. It is known that ten civilians were killed by Turkish airstrikes.



The current situation in Manbij

On 11 December 2024, a ceasefire negotiated with Turkey was announced to protect the civilians and ensure their safety. It was agreed that all armed forces would withdraw from the city with the exception of internal security structures. As part of this agreement, the SDF has largely withdrawn from Manbij. Because the Turkish state and the SNA, which it controls, did not honour the ceasefire, some forces as well as members of the Autonomous Administration and many residents were unable to leave the city as intended. For fear of further massacres, the people are calling for the SDF to return.

Turkey is also trying to capture the Tishreen Dam and the bridge in Qereqozax, which connects Manbij with Kobanê. The dam has been out of operation since 10 December due to the SNA attacks and the region is without power supply. Again and again, most recently on 17 December, SNA groups tried to attack and capture the dam. Turkey mobilises troops and prepares another attack on Kobanê. The agreed ceasefire with Turkey has actually been extended by a further week.

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