

Here and here. Eyes and head.

Interview on the changed strategy
with a YPJ-commanding officer, Heval Sozdar



Interview with a YPJ-commanding officer, Heval Sozdar, on the 6th of August, 2021

The battle is a process

The interview was held in Kurdish/German with the help of an interpreting Heval. For a better legibility the text was edited afterwards.

Heval Barbara: After the military withdraw from Efrîn the movement initiated a process of analyses, critic and self- critic. The outcome is the guerrilla of the 21st century. What has happened there, how can we imagine what was going on?

Heval Sozdar: First of all, I have to say that we've already experienced a lot of fights. Though, we also must know the history of resistant fights in the past to be a strong answer as a movement.

We didn't want a war, but the society and the people are finding themselves in a situation where they're getting killed and displaced from their homes. Therefore, the armed battle can hardly be avoided. In order to keep living and defend our people, we have to fight. We aren't a state, and we don't want to be one. That's why to defend ourselves by fighting is the only choice we have.

Especially in the beginning of the revolution we gathered our knowledge from the Hevals in the mountains.

(Hevals are guerrilla fighters of the PKK, who are organised in the HPG and the autonomous womens' guerrilla YJA-Star. In the course of the attacks by ISIS, these units made a significant contribution to build up the people's defence and Women's protection units YPG/YPJ. The term Heval could be translated as comrade but is based on an ideological concept, which is why we didn't translate it.) They are also finding themselves in a battle against death over there. In the mountains one fights in little groups: You move, you beat, you move back and then you hide. This is the method.

Back then the technological military means were not developed as far. In 2000, a process began in which the technology was developed intensely. The fight was converted to a technological one. Methods for battles

on the ground against other persons or tanks were known but now new knowledge for this new fight had to be acquired. A change was needed to develop methods and techniques in the fight against military technology. It is important to recognize the differences in the fight against a militia, a state or for instance technological military means.

Now we have the following question on our minds: In the past, we knew how to fight. But now we have to relearn it. How should we fight now? How should we continue the struggle against these technological military means?

Still, I'd also like to say: Not everything is about technology in this fight. An analysis of Serokatî (translated it means chairman, by which Abdullah Öcalan is meant) says, 'The biggest technique is the human being himself/herself'. It is about the human being knowing best how he/she is, how he/she got to know things, what he/she has to do.

Everyone asks himself/herself, 'how is it possible that three/four people fight against this technology? How do they do this?'. The answer to this question is: It depends on the power of the person's aim. If the aim of the person is strong, he can also be successful against these technological means. You have to believe in your aim and have to have trust in it. If you know how strong your aim is, it'll have influence on your personality and it'll give you a strong will, a soul of resistance. That makes you strong. It might be that you are near death every day. But this will, the power of your strong soul of resistance, let you stand on your feet and it makes you love life even more. It makes you do everything for the love and for the life.

We also get asked: 'What is the point in our paradigm that makes us that strong, that gives us such power?'. It is the love for life and doing everything for this love. There are three aspects in our paradigm that are very important and that make us even stronger: A democratic society, ecology and the women's liberty. These are three very strong goals, which one has to understand. But just understanding isn't enough, you have to do something for it, integrate it in your own personality. You have to educate yourself every day and anchor this knowledge in your own mentality. In the last years, the system has developed further, so that we are having a fight on another level now. As for instance in the last two years against the COVID-19 pandemic, which is coming out of the sys-

tem and is being continued by it. Even that we have to fight. The enemy wants the truth, the human being, just everything getting destructed. The virus mainly separated people. The truth of our paradigm is the exact opposite. People shouldn't be separated but brought together and live a communal life. The communal life is the root of social cohesion. If people move away and leave each other, nothing will be left. There won't be friendship, there won't be humanity. You won't have any feelings left and you won't be able to continue living with other people.

These feelings, this social cohesion, this personality can only be found along women. One important aspect in the fight is that we have to educate ourselves every day, develop further and never forget our ideology and paradigm. We also know that not everything in life is easy and beautiful. But that is also one of the reasons for us to educate ourselves and think about it. For us the people are important.

Instead, for the system, for the enemy, other factors are important. If we look at our people, our Hevals, we can observe a big development, a strong will and a very strong belief. If one looks at the enemy instead, the Turkish soldiers, the ISIS and the others, one notices that there's no will left and that there basically is no fight left.

Although, we've fought against ISIS, we have seen that there was a belief among ISIS. It was an Islamic belief to which they stuck, but they had a belief they fought for. But we obviously also have our belief, our confidence, our aim in which we believe and fight for.

Look, ISIS didn't have to deal with the people at all. They only had to hiss their flags and people ran away. Whereas, when they saw our flag, people immediately came together. This shows what the Hevals have been building up and what kind of feelings we're giving them.

The fight against ISIS gave us a lot of experiences: How to fight in villages and in cities, what is needed to do that, which changes we have to undertake. Our Hevals were not very experienced. Basically, the first forces in the fight were the adolescents because they knew how to fight in cities. Them and our Hevals from the mountains came together, fought and we've learned from them. In this learning process we had to give many Şehids. Both, the Hevals from the mountains as well as us weren't used to fight with that many people. That was very hard for us. It was also very difficult for the commanding officers, who lead the fight,

as they also learned how to fight during the battle they fought. Until 2018 the fight was continued like this. Then the coalition (the 'International alliance against the Islamic State, lead by the US) built up their own operations.

In Rojava we didn't fight a war of aggression. It was important for us to defend the people and to drive out ISIS. ISIS' tactic was to attack with big groups, using all fighting methods at once and to attack the Hevals directly. Also, we had to analyse and assess again the way in which the states were fighting. We had to learn what a fight with technological means actually is. Which purpose do they have? How can we defend ourselves against them? These technological means do not only include jets and drones. They also involve intelligent services as the Turkish MIT. This is a big weapon for the enemy. Another enemy's tactic is sending a lot of people into our own structures.

Apart from this, nowadays about 60% of the battle is fought via media channels and news. In this way they continue fighting their special war (şerê taybet) against the people. For instance: In the media, a message is shared, which isn't true at all. But as it gets shared in many other channels, it finally gets accepted as the truth. We have a Kurdish saying. We say: 'If one tells you 40 times that you are crazy, you'll become crazy'. With the help of these fake news, they are trying to undermine our unity and all our efforts. They are trying to tell us, 'We are going to do everything to make these news come true.' On the other side, they want to break our resistant souls. That is why in the beginning I said: The human-being himself/herself is important. The aim is important. The human-being is the most important factor against all this.

In this process changes are needed. We made these changes in our movements and in our system. Now, we are used to fight in big groups. In one location, the Hevals fought in Rojava partly with one-, two-, or three thousand Hevals against ISIS. One Tabûr (combat unit) consisted of 50 persons. Our first change was to minimize the number of people in the units. That doesn't mean that we reduced the size of every group.

Rather it means that we were minimizing the movement.

For instance, hundreds of thousand Hevals can move altogether, but in many groups, which again are acting with little movements. The most important aspect of this change is that every team (combat unit with

four fighters) knows how to live together, that they know how to educate themselves. They have to know how to keep their souls together and act together. That is very important.

We also have to learn that a team shouldn't be visible to anyone but rather be like a ghost. Sometimes we make the mistake that everyone sees us, and this is dangerous. The enemy has a new tactic now, with which he gets information about us. He is sending a lot of people to us, so it gets dangerous when the teams are known to everyone. Information reaches the enemy. Therefore, we are protecting this point, we are secret, we pay attention to the goal that no one should see us.

Furthermore, we decided to barely use technical devices as cell phones. That doesn't mean that we don't know how to handle them.

But we also know that by using them, the enemy is getting even more information. The renunciation of these technological devices brought us good results. Even some people of the MIT said that since we've stopped using cell phones, they have difficulties getting information about us.

A change we made is that we specialised our military education, our academies. We see it like this: If a militant doesn't know how to use a weapon, it is as if she would hold a simple stick in her hand.

Understanding only a little of it isn't enough. Everyone can touch a weapon, everyone can take it into her hands. But it is about handling and using the weapon. It is about being professional. Therefore, in this change we put up even more active and professional sectors.

We took this tactic from the guerilla and it turns out to be better for us. It is not essential how many people are involved in a fight. Maybe there are few people, but in their sectors, they can be very professional.

Before there were Hevals who took their mothers, their parents to the fights. Back then, the number of people was bigger, but how could that be useful? When you have many people who cannot handle weapons, it won't bring you any benefit. This work, this fight implies being very professional in the respective field. This also meant a big change for us, in order to fight a successful battle. The third step of our change concerns the underground work, for instance in tunnels.

The underground systems are protecting you and can be a support during the fight, no matter how tough it will be. Also, you can protect yourself against technological military means.

A good example for us are the Arabic people that live in Gaza. They live below ground and protect themselves like that.

The Serekanî process was a very important and resistant process for us. The Hevals, who fought there, who have fallen there in Şehid, are holy to us. But why did we even loose over there? Because we fought against technological means from above, instead of below ground. There would have been also other alternatives for the way of fighting in Serekanî, but they weren't taken advantage of. Fighting above ground already was a mistake. And there were even more mistakes. When the Hevals would have used their umbrellas in the evening, there wouldn't have been so many Şehids. As the Hevals weren't sure if the umbrella would work, they didn't use it. That's why many Heval Şehids have fallen. Obviously, we don't want this to happen again or train our Hevals like this, instead we want to train them how to protect themselves, what we could have done differently and what has been the mistake back then.

What are the drones for? They want to spot us and then bomb us. That is why we have to hide. But how should we hide? We shouldn't hide just in any way. Instead, we should pay attention to which means we are using and how we make ourselves invisible. It is a battle in which we have to think very detailed. For example, if you don't need water or munition at the moment, you shouldn't get above ground. If you need them, you're coming above ground. And obviously, we can store all this below ground, so that the Hevals don't have to get out. We run this battle with the belief in us and our Hevals, with the knowledge that we have gained experiences and that we will lead the fight with these experiences.

For that, patience and knowledge is needed. We have to pay attention to choose the right way to fight. Here lies our focus.

You also have to analyse and recognize what you could do alternatively, when something hasn't worked out. You need this speciality in your personality and that is what we're working towards. As the topic is quite big, there is a lot to explain and to tell. Of course, we can also continue the battle above ground. We also have trainings in which we're learning and training our Hevals how to do that. As a women's movement and as women, we find ourselves in a process in which our trainings and our concentration on our considerations have a strong agenda.

We believe in ourselves and in the point that we can continue our work

also as an example for other women. It is true that, for incident younger women, have less experiences. But the truth is: In the battle women are the ones, who fight the most according to the rules and who pay attention to their discipline. In a place where women are present, the colour of live changes. Women, if they want to, are able to push anyone in the wrong or in the right direction because of the strong connection between women and life. This is a general summary of the process, of our fight.

Heval Barbara: This general description gives us the option to take up impulses for our own fight.

There are so many phases between Efrîn, Serekanî and the situation now. In Efrîn the quantity of people plays a role as a lot of people have gone there. In Serekani we can identify first steps into the today's direction.

Heval Sozdar: What I have told until now isn't valid for every place, yet. But it can be continued everywhere, no matter if in Rojava or in Europe. These are important points. As an example, I'd like to name the battle between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict). Actually, both forces, the Armenian and the Azerbaijan ones, were equally strong. But what has changed the conflict is that Turkey helped Azerbaijan and brought them new technological devices. We concluded from this fight is that the Armenians didn't develop according to the changes. They put tanks and soldiers into an empty desert but there were jets which were bombarding them from above.

The Armenians were using the tactics of an old battle, an antagonistic battle. That has worked out before, but not anymore. Nowadays it is important to know how to make military technology ineffective, what you have to do against technology that is flying above you and bombarding you. What is your tactic?

No one should claim that states are invincible. We gained experience in asserting ourselves over military technology. A glance at the history shows us that people have even flown into the space and came back just because they believed in the possibility. What I want to say here is that we have to develop further. One cannot continue living in the past. Obviously, for developing knowledge is needed. That is why in the be-

ginning I said that for fighting the today's battle, we have to get to know the history and the previous battles.

We don't claim that we're perfect or that we don't make mistakes. No. But we also believe in the experiences that we've made in the past years and that we can finish this fight successfully. We've gotten to know the war's technology. Now we know how to fight against it and what our mistakes were in the past.

We know that once our enemy starts to work, we have to work ten times harder. We also know that we have gaps in our social work, which we have to fill and where we have to get even more active. In this process we have also seen that when our Hevals in the YPG, HSD (Syrian Democratic Forces, also SDF/QSD/DKS) and YPJ organize and educate their families for the revolution, it can have a great impact. It's not like in the past anymore: Now you can just take a photo and send it anywhere. So much has been achieved by this, already. The capitalist system isn't able to hide a lot anymore.

Heval Barbara: Your description reminds me strongly of one question – How are the battles in the cities to be fought? For instance, in the heart of Turkish fascism or imperialism. For me, the military technology and the changes that were described, relate a lot with questions of urban combats. So, what is the difference to the popular struggle?

Heval Sozdar: The urban combat is one tactic of the popular struggle. The experiences from the urban combat can be used for the popular struggle. For us, the popular struggle is the strategic perspective. There are three important points in the popular struggle. The first one is the society, the people. The second one are armed forces, for example the HSD, YPG, YPJ and the third one is to build up a defence, in the form of self-defence-force within the society. We take all that as experiences with us and when it is needed, we initiate the necessary changes and continue with them. In urban combats you basically have to use every tactic. For instance, you can use big, strong weapons. You can also act as a sniper. You can also use mines and do sabotage. You can also hide a little team somewhere, which appears and attacks suddenly. For urban combat many tactics can be used. Previously, we said that you also have to build

up a system and fight below ground. That doesn't mean that we have to stay below ground and could never come out again. No, we can also fight and live above ground. But

fighting below ground is one way for us and it is important that we find our way to fight successfully. We have to be like a ghost. So, no one can see us. No one sees us but we're there. Just, where are we?

For example, if we lose a street or a village in one city doesn't mean that the whole city is lost. No, we'll continue fighting. We can turn the street or the village they took from us into their hell. It would be very weak, if we would say: They took our village, so we have to withdraw from the city because they're coming and bombarding us with jets and drones. Because this is exactly how they try to weaken us and destroy our believe and our trust. But we don't accept that.

In the past, in our urban combats we took one step after another above ground. Took some houses, continued walking. Took some houses, continued walking. But that doesn't play a role anymore. It is more important to us now where we can install a mine. Where we can make a *Suîqast* (markswoman mission). Where we can go inside with our troops or where we beat with heavy weapons. In some places we'll move a lot and be very active. In some places we will be calmer but much more will happen.

Another important point is not letting people leave the villages. Because the most important thing in a popular struggle is that the people stay. The enemy can't bombard that strongly when the people stay. Now, our work implies also transferring this knowledge to the people, that they should stay. Consequently, we're working towards building something up in the villages, in the houses of the people, so they can defend themselves, when they're getting bombarded. This is a battle, this is a revolution. It may be that we're giving many *Şehids* for it. For the people.

Heval Barbara: I'm coming to my last point. It regards internationalism. What do the newest developments mean for internationalism that has to develop further with and during the fight. The question about specialisation, development and transfer of the technological know-how should get included. Most of us are living and fighting in the heart of the capitalist and imperialist beast, where highly technological developments in

the sense of profit, competition and position of power are realized. Why not appropriate this knowledge and opportunities for the revolutionary process?

Heval Sozdar: In your place it is even more difficult. We're in our homeland. We're here, for example in Rojava, with our people, with our family. The enemy is attacking us strongly and obviously we also have our story about how we came to this day and what we've experienced. We have it live, so close. We smell it, we see it, we experience it. But outside of this, people are right in the middle of capitalism, where a lot is technologized. The knowledge about how it is here, to see it, to live it, to experience it, is far away from that. For sure, that is why we have to bring it together and continue it together. But one also has to learn that and get conscious about it. For instance, I live in a capitalist world. I have a job and I have my family and everything but I also have to understand what this is making with me. You have to understand this deep inside yourself.

For humans it is quite natural: If someone attacks you, you'll have your reflexes. You'll give an answer and defend yourself. For instance, in Syria previously, the Syrian state didn't attack the people directly very often. But actually, the state still changed and assimilated a lot. Instead in Bakur (the Nordic part of Kurdistan, which is under Turkish occupation, is meant) the history was always like that: Children got killed. People were beaten and killed. That's why the revolution and resistance in Bakur was so strong in the beginning. Therefore, you should know, when you're living in capitalism, that although it is not attacking you directly, it is still attracting you. When you see and experience these attacks live, your reflex gets triggered. You'll say: Okay, then I'll fight. We don't say that it's the mistake of the people that are living in Europe. Because the capitalism is doing this, the enemy is doing this. One could also say: It is even good that they're nevertheless in this process, in this place, with the enemy, they are having inside knowledge and do their research. This is very good actually. There are many Kurds that went to Europe or the US. They were caught up in that system. Because they forgot their truth and their history. They're united and got one with the system. Their situation, their position is a sorrow for us. How is it possible, coming from this

kind of story and then... The attitude, the participation of our international Hevals gives us power and moral strength.

Heval Barbara: Do you want to add anything? I think that this was a very beautiful ending.

Heval Sozdar: Thanks a lot for the interview! It is very important for us to share and pass on our experiences to other people, especially to the outside and especially as a women's movement. It is a duty giving this to other women. In this ocean full of women, every woman has a place. Distributing all these experiences to the others, is our heritage. Every woman has the right to have access to this heritage and experiences. Many people are talking about Amazons, maybe you've heard about them. As we're also living in this world, it is a story that is important to us. We've written a lot with blood. We've sacrificed many people for this. It is a heritage for us. We can't say that we've built everything up. That we have done all of this. Of course, not. Many memories were given to us by our history, too. Our great motivation is based on this. And that is why we can't say that everything is coming only from us. Still, we resisted for this. We've built something up. In the name of all Hevals, all YPJ commanding officers, we're thanking you.

Heval Barbara: I seriously want to thank you for this message, which I can take with me and pass on. Especially to young women, to young women that are standing up and resisting: In the fight you can find a continuity, too. It may be difficult. But there are possibilities to recognize, how the next steps should look like. And it is possible to put them into practice successfully. And that is also what the women of the YPJ are standing for.

Heval Sozdar: Here and here. Eyes and head.