

Interview with Lusin Hovsepyan, Commander of the Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Armenian Brigade

### **“Oppressed Peoples Must Stand Against Turkey's Occupation Policies”**

Lusin Hovsepyan, one of the commanders of the Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Armenian Brigade, talked about the developments in Rojava and the struggle of the Brigade: “Rojava lands are under great danger. We want a peaceful process, but we will continue to defend our lands against attacks.”

We had an interview with **Lusin Hovsepyan**, one of the commanders of Ş. Nubar Ozanyan Brigade, about the fall of the regime in Syria and the developments in the aftermath.

#### ***- What is your role in the brigade? Could you introduce yourself?***

- My name is Lusin Hovsepyan and I am the commander of the Brigade. We are a military force, a military force representing the Armenian nation in the territory of North-East Syria. This force was established on April 24, 2019. We aim to protect the Armenian community here and all its components, to unite the peoples of Rojava, to unite the Armenian Diaspora, and to work for the preservation and development of the Armenian language and culture.

#### ***- How did Assad, who had been clinging to power since 2011, fall so quickly? On the other hand, did the jihadists have a chance to carry out a militarily powerful offensive on their own?***

- Regarding the first part; it is true that the Assad regime was trying hard to cling to power and all means were permissible. However, after 2011, the regime has weakened considerably, especially in terms of human resources and military power. It relied on groups from Iran, Iraq and Lebanon and had almost endless Russian support. Thousands of fighters from Iraq and Lebanon and militias from Iran were fighting to keep the regime alive. All these reasons prolonged the life of the regime. With the decline of this support and the departure of some groups, the Assad front has weakened considerably.

Of course, there were the Israeli attacks and genocide against Lebanon and Palestine, and the attacks against Iran. These were important reasons for the weakening, because these groups were preoccupied with their own problems. This led to a rapid collapse of the regime. Corruption, poverty, mismanagement and a host of other problems must also be mentioned. Apart from Russian air support, there was no other substantial support. The lack of qualified fighters on the ground or the lack of proper fighting on the ground - and it is important to remember that the Assad regime was short of soldiers - led to a rapid collapse.

As for the jihadist front... Of course, Turkey's support for HTS's victory was very clear. It was Turkey that trained and equipped these groups and supported them from logistics to military infrastructure. It offered technological opportunities. HTS was equipped especially in terms of airstrikes. Its military quality was increased. In this sense, this is not a victory for the jihadist groups alone; many external political authorities enabled HTS.

#### ***- Before Assad's overthrow, the HTS leadership's public statements were deliberately intensified. Alawites, Shiites, Christians... How do you see these statements? How do you define HTS and the forces it acts with? What awaits the Syrian people in the coming days? Especially for the Shiites, Alawites and Christian peoples...***

- Everyone knows that Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is Jabhat al-Nusra. Jabhat al-Nusra was the organization considered to be al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. It is true that this movement announced its split from Al-Qaeda. Al-Nusra was updated and transformed into Hayat Tahrir

al-Sham. However, since it is a sister organization of Daesh, its jihadist ideology remains. Both were born from the womb of al-Qaeda.

Today, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham has thousands of jihadist fighters in its ranks, as well as groups with takfirist ideologies and different nationalities working together. In addition, there are groups supported by Turkey that are presented as the National Army. These are just as takfiri as the others. Their kidnapping of people, theft of property and theft have been documented. Not to mention their attacks on the people. We have not heard anything else about these groups in the past, which is why we are worried about the future of Syria. The future of the Syrian people will be more difficult under the rule of these groups. Especially for religious and ethnic minorities, life will become more difficult.

**“We will continue to defend our lands!”**

***- What has happened in Rojava with the recent jihadist attacks? There has been an invasion of Tel Rifaat and Manbij. What do you see as the attitude and goals of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or more specifically the YPG, in this process?***

- Rojava is witnessing a regime change in Syria. As a result of the changes taking place here, there are expectations and concerns. Everyone is on high alert in terms of security. Especially the territories of Northern and Eastern Syria have been reoccupied. The occupation area has been expanded. The SDF forces that withdrew from Til Rifaat had prioritized the security of the people. However, Turkey-backed gangs attacked Minbic, Tishrin and other Euphrates regions. A tremendous resistance was organized. Finally, a ceasefire was made in Minbic to prevent further bloodshed. The opposing forces did not respect the ceasefire. Rojava territory is still under great danger. The Syrian Democratic Forces and of course our Brigade are fighting to protect the gains of Rojava.

Turkey wants to take this region under its control. Military but also political preparations are being made for an invasion. Of course, our wish is for a peaceful process to begin. But we will continue to defend our lands against the attacks.

***- What is your current position as the Nubar Ozanyan Armenian Brigade and what kind of a plan of action do you have as a brigade in terms of your region and the Rojava Autonomous Administration as a whole?***

- As the Martyr Nubar Ozanyan Brigade, we have a frontline position as an Armenian military force. In order to defend our areas of existence together with other components. We are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces and have an important position in the areas where we are present. Our position is not independent from the SDF. We are part of the Syrian Democratic Forces. In this sense, all kinds of preparations are being made. We are positioned on the front lines against any attack. Depending on the course of developments, we will of course be bound by the decisions taken by the Syrian Democratic Forces.

***- What awaits Syria in the coming days? For instance, should we expect the clashes to stop or will they continue in different parts of the country? What kind of social structure will be established in Syria in the future? What will or should be the place of Armenians and other peoples in it?***

- We believe that great challenges await Syria in the coming days. We do not expect the conflict situation to end. It may calm down, but the atmosphere of war and tension will continue again. The ideological and political line of the groups that have captured Damascus, and the differences among them, will cause them to clash both against the people and against each other. This is because each political actor or group has its own

interests. These groups have clashed with each other at times in the past. Therefore, the conflict will remain.

As for the social structure, in general, the social structure of the Syrian people stands in a different place as it is composed of different nationalities and ethnic groups. Historically, the Syrian people are bound together by strong ties. These ties must be preserved as follows: It is necessary to initiate a national and comprehensive dialogue involving all segments of the Syrian people. It must be prevented that the peoples are not hurt each other in the name of the interests of foreign powers. This is, of course, a challenge for the Syrian people. This can only be achieved through the establishment of a democratic environment.

Rojava is a symbol of unity and solidarity. As a result, social cohesion has been achieved. If this democratic atmosphere disappears, contrary developments will take place. The Armenian people must also take their place in all this diversity and be able to represent themselves. All other ethnic groups also have the right to make their own representation.

**- Finally, do you have a call for the people of Syria, Turkey/Kurdistan and the peoples of the world?**

**-Our call is** for the peoples of the region in general and the Syrian people in particular to stand by the Syrian people. We demand that they support the Syrian people in their just demands. We ask the oppressed peoples to stand against Turkey's occupation policies.

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