

Turkey attacks Kurds, threatens military action against Syria

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On the eve of an expected major offensive in Aleppo by the Syrian regime, Turkey has threatened to invade Syria, using the pretext of Kurdish groups seizing control of northern border areas.

Such a move could pitch Ankara directly into war against Syria, after it has long sought to dictate events through control of the opposition Syrian National Congress and Free Syrian Army.

This would be done with the full support of the United States.

Al Ahram cited reports in the Turkish media that the US embassy in Ankara and the consulate in Adana in southeast Turkey have “been planning military operations against the Baathist regime in Syria with the knowledge of the Turkish government.”

Large numbers of trucks have been seen coming out of the US airbase at Incirlik, laden with arms for distribution to the Syrian opposition.

Turkey’s foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, has warned of an impending massacre in Aleppo, close to the Turkish border, and appealed for action. This is combined with ever escalating rhetoric over the “terrorist threat” posed by the Kurds.

In the past fortnight, up to 115 Kurdish fighters have been killed in a south eastern Turkey in military operations, including air strikes near the town of Semdinli. Sunday saw a counter-offensive in which Kurdish forces raided three military posts near the Iraq border that left at least six soldiers and 14 rebels dead. Turkish officials claim to be combating a 200-strong force of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK.

Kurds make up 17 percent of Iraq’s 31 million people, including the semi-autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, nine percent of Syria’s 21 million population, and seven to ten percent of Iran’s 75 million people.

Turkey, which has a 25 percent Kurdish population (20 million Kurds), is bitterly opposed to the creation of an independent state. The Turkish army has targeted PKK forces, with which it has been in conflict since 1984 at a cost of 40,000 mainly Kurdish lives. However, the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) has made clear that its ultimate aim is to intervene directly into Syria.

Without naming anyone, Prime Minister Raci Tayyip Erdogan accused foreign countries of backing the Kurdish fighters, who had made “dastardly” attacks on at least three military bases. “Turkey has the strength to put enemy nations and circles who hold the strings of the terrorist organisation in their place,” he threatened.

Deputy AKP Chairman Omer Celik stated more directly, “The preparations and multi-pronged attack by the PKK in Hakkari exceeds the PKK’s capabilities. The PKK, in carrying out the attacks in Semdinli and Hakkari, acted in parallel with the massacres carried out by [Syrian President Bashar al] Assad’s forces in Aleppo.”

The AKP has placed itself at the head of the movement to depose Assad, breaking its former alliance with Syria. It calculated that this would secure its leadership of an alliance of Sunni powers, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar, which the United States is utilising as a proxy through which to establish a client regime in Syria. This would cut Shia Iran off from its major regional ally and deprive Russia and China of a foothold in the Middle East.

It has worked to secure the support of Kurdish groups in Syria and to bring them into the SNC, which is now led by Abdelbaset Sayda—a Kurd living in exile in Sweden. But most Kurds view the SNC with deep suspicion, due to the dominant role played by the Muslim Brotherhood and the involvement of Riyadh

and Qatar in funding, arming and training the insurgents. Routine professions of non-sectarianism count for little against the growing weight of Al Qaeda and Salafist forces in the anti-Assad camp.

The most widely supported Kurdish group, the PKK, and its local unofficial affiliate, the Democratic Unionist Party (PYD), initially allied themselves with Assad based upon opposition to the Sunni insurgency and anticipation of being rewarded with some form of autonomy.

In recent days, the transfer of Syrian units to build up a reported Aleppo force of 20,000 has left a vacuum that has been filled by the PYD and other groups that are now said to control four or five of the main towns and cities in northern Syria.

To this threat, Erdogan has stated, “It is our most natural right to intervene since those terrorist formations would disturb our national peace... In the North, (Assad) has already allocated five provinces to the terrorists.”

Turkey has been working to secure some form of accommodation with the leader of Iraq’s autonomous Kurdish administration, President Massoud Barzani, to prevent movements in Syria, Iraq and Turkey from meeting up. It sent Davutoglu to the capital, Erbil, on August 1 for talks. A joint statement expressed “deep concern regarding instability and chaos in Syria” that posed “a threat to regional security and stability” and promised coordinated efforts to establish a democratic, non-sectarian Syria.

However, this follows an earlier admission by Barzani to *al-Jazeera* that Syrian Kurds have been trained militarily in Iraq.

Any prospect of a Kurdish autonomous region, whether under Assad or a post-Assad government, is anathema to Ankara. But it is also utilising the Kurdish question as a means of establishing a bridgehead in Syria.

The SNC and the Syrian Kurdish National Council (KNC) have agreed to establish a committee to address Turkey’s concerns about the threat of “terrorism” following a meeting with Davutoglu. Abdulhakim Bashar, the head of the KNC, denounced the PYD as an ally of Assad and stated that the best option for Syrian Kurds is to form a Kurdish confederation affiliated with Turkey.

Stressing the Kurdish threat above all provides Turkey with a *casus belli* for declaring war on Syria and opening up a second front to complement the invasion of the commercial capital, Aleppo, by FSA and jihadist fighters. Ankara has already moved 2,000 troops to the Syrian border, as well as missiles, helicopters and tanks.

Turkey’s repression of the Kurds is being carried out with the full backing of Washington, which sees Turkey as the best candidate for leading a proxy war in Syria. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is to travel to Turkey for talks this week. The Obama administration is presiding over the arming and training of the Syrian opposition by its regional allies and has its CIA and military operatives on the ground.

This week the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the Syrian Support Group (SSG) has been granted a license to send funds to the opposition by the US Treasury, described by the group as a “game changer”.

Washington’s criminal actions in deliberately provoking a sectarian war in Syria are at the centre of a still greater crime. In order to secure unchallenged hegemony over vital oil supplies, the US is allying itself with Al Qaeda elements, the Muslim Brotherhood and Gulf despots to redraw the map of the Middle East in blood.



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