

Kurdish nationalists pursue US-backed talks with Turkey

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Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader and founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has drafted and sent out a 'roadmap' for ending the 30 year conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state.

Ocalan's draft peace plan was announced after two meetings with delegations of Kurdish lawmakers mostly from the Peace and Democracy party (BDP), as well as meetings with Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT). This is the first time Kurdish politicians were involved in peace negotiations with Ocalan, who has been held in seclusion on Imrali prison since his arrest in 1999.

Ocalan concluded his second meeting with the BDP delegations by mailing three 20-page handwritten identical draft plans for peace. Each draft was reportedly given a different cover letter: one was addressed to the "BDP co-chairs", the letter sent to the PKK's European affiliates was addressed to "Kongra-Gel Presidency," and the letter sent to the PKK bases in Iraq's Qandil mountains addressed to "KCK executive council presidency."

Bulent Arinc, Turkey's deputy Prime Minister from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) quoted Ocalan's draft saying that the PKK, "will declare at the very least a ceasefire by Newroz [March 21, a New Year holiday celebrated by the Kurds] and lay down arms by July-August, after which departure from the country will be discussed."

Hurriyet Daily News has also quoted the letter, noting that one of the stipulations for the PKK's withdrawal was that "no ethnic identity should be underlined, including Kurdish," in the Constitution that is currently being drafted.

The government has claimed that Ocalan is willing to drop the demand for an autonomous Kurdish region in Turkey, in exchange for legal reforms to free thousands

of Kurdish prisoners, increase local governments' powers, and allow for education in the Kurdish language.

Ocalan has warned that the failure to free Kurdish prisoners could have dire consequences, stating that "there will be a people's war with 50,000 people" if those demands are not met.

There is powerful opposition to such a deal both within the Turkish state, which has fought a decades-long war with the PKK, and within the PKK itself—for whom Ocalan's deal means abandoning plans for an independent Kurdish state inside Turkey's territory. It is widely supposed that the assassination of three Kurdish activists in Paris in January aimed to derail such talks.

Conflicts between the Turkish army and PKK have led to the death of over 900 people in the past 18 months, according to International Crisis Group, in some of the bloodiest fighting since Ocalan's imprisonment in 1999.

The opposition Turkish-nationalist Republican Peoples' Party (CHP) is vocally opposed to the deal. Its leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu said he was opposed to talks with Ocalan in late September, before the talks had even begun. Since the draft peace plan was sent out, CHP deputies have indicated that they would block the AKP from drafting a new constitution in line with the PKK's demands.

For their part, the BDP, the ruling AKP, the media, and Ocalan himself have praised the peace process as a 'democratization' that will grant the Kurdish population civil rights. On Sunday Erdogan offered to mediate talks between Turkish intelligence and the PKK, if the PKK decided to disarm.

The AKP and Ocalan are pursuing these talks with support from Washington.

In an interview with the Turkish daily *Milliyet*, President Barack Obama hailed the talks: “I applaud [Turkish] Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan’s efforts to seek peaceful resolution ... A peaceful resolution will not only improve the lives of millions of citizens living in the violence-torn regions of southeast Turkey, it will mean more security and prosperity for people across Turkey for generations to come. The Turkish people should know that the United States will continue to support—in concrete ways their desire to close this terrible chapter and begin a new chapter of peace and security.”

Neither the AKP nor Ocalan is striving for a democratic solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey. Instead, each side is colluding with US imperialism in order to improve their own position within the Middle East that has been devastated by a series of neo-colonial US wars.

Since the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Turkey has become the number one trading partner of northern Iraq’s US-backed Kurdistan Regional government (KRG) and is predicted to have an economic growth of 7 percent this year. This partnership is rooted in Turkey’s demand for petroleum imports from northern Iraq.

Through these talks between Turkey and the PKK, the US also hopes to develop relations with the PKK’s ally in Syria, the Kurdish Democratic Union (PYD)—which it aims to develop as another proxy force in its war to oust Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The PYD and its armed wing, the People’s Defense Units (YPG), control parts of northern Syria and there are increasing efforts to integrate them into US-backed opposition forces. The PYD is part of the Koma Civakên Kurdistan (KCK), the Union of Communities in Kurdistan, which was founded by Ocalan. The leader of the US-backed Syrian opposition, Moas al-Khatib, recently declared in an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, that he was willing “to be a bridge” in a dialogue between Turkey and the PYD.



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