

Reports suggest Syrian opposition involvement in Turkish bombings

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The twin bombings that struck the town of Reyhanli, Turkey, near the border with Syria, this weekend are being used to push for direct, US-led military intervention against Syria. The Turkish government is blaming Syrian intelligence agencies and pushing for “international” action against regime of Bashir al-Assad, despite reports implicating US-backed “rebels” in the bombings.

Mehmet Ali Edibo?lu, a member in the Turkish parliament for Kemalist opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), told *Die Presse* that the Turkey had allowed Syrian opposition groups to operate in the border region. He said that the cars that were used had been smuggled into the country from areas controlled by the Al Nusra Front, the Islamist organization affiliated to Al Qaeda that has played a leading role in the campaign against Assad.

The attack, Edibo?lu said, was “very professional” and had the hallmarks of an Al Nusra operation. “It looks like an Al Qaeda-style attack,” Edibo?lu said. “They want to get Turkey into the war.”

He added, “Syrians knew something and left the town in the morning before the attack.”

Ismail Boyraz, the general secretary of the Turkish Human Rights Association, cited widespread unease about the large numbers of fighters in the border region: “People with arms walked the streets, and many cars were sent into Syria [by Syrian opposition members] from Reyhanli ... There is no border anymore, no border security. The Syrian opposition people can come and go as they please.”

Demonstrations have been held in the Turkish cities of Hatay, Istanbul, and Ankara by nationalist opposition parties, holding the Erdogan government responsible for the bombings. Reports have surfaced in the Turkish press that the Turkish National Intelligence

Service had foreknowledge that cars loaded with bombs were crossing the border, three weeks in advance of the attacks.

Reyhanli is a center for the Syrian opposition, which uses the town as a supply base. Prior to the bombings, anti-Assad groups were known to patrol the streets. Most of the victims of the bombings were Alawites, the ethnic group that is the main base of the Assad government.

Lebanon’s *Daily Star* quoted Syrian Information Minister Omran al-Zoubi, who blamed Turkey for the attacks. “The Turkish government should be held responsible for what happened. It turned the border area into a center for international terrorism.” Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has insisted that Syrian intelligence assets were behind the attacks.

In what critics are calling the most extreme act of censorship in decades, a Turkish state prosecutor imposed a gag upon all media coverage relating to the bombings on Sunday, a decision hailed by Erdogan. The gag follows the reports that Syrian opposition groups may have carried out the attacks.

The Turkish government has arrested nine individuals in connection with the bombings, claiming they are members of the Revolutionary People’s Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C). The government has yet to produce evidence substantiating its claims that these individuals are Syrian operatives or that they actually carried out the attacks.

The bombings come amid a series of victories by the Assad regime against the opposition in multiple strategic locations throughout Syria. On Sunday, government forces retook the town of Khirbet Ghazaleh, which sits along the Damascus-Jordan highway, in a development that opposition leaders acknowledged as a serious defeat.

Under these conditions, Syria would have little interest in carrying out the bombing, which could only serve as a pretext for more direct involvement of the US and Europe in the Syrian civil war.

Recent polls show that 68 percent of the Turkish population opposes any military action in Syria. Concerned about mass opposition, government officials have taken a two-faced approach to the issue, promising caution while also issuing bellicose statements. On Monday, Erdogan stated that Turkey will “not refrain” from retaliating against Syria for the bombings, while cautioning that his military will not be sucked into a “quagmire.” In reality, the Turkish military is preparing for intensified operations in Syria, in close coordination with the US and Israel.

“We won’t fall for the trap, but we will give the necessary response at the necessary time,” Erdogan stated to reporters on May 13. We will not refrain from this. Everybody needs to know this.”

“Regime change in Syria has become a matter of honor,” stated a senior Turkish official. “Imagine that he [Erdogan] fails and that Assad stays on,” added the official. “That would be the biggest humiliation of all.”

Erdogan will meet with Obama on Thursday in Washington, where the US president is currently holding war talks with British Prime Minister David Cameron. Erdogan will reportedly press for a US imposed no-fly zone over Syria and reiterate his entirely unsubstantiated claims that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons.



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