

# Turkey moves toward talks with Kurdish nationalists

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On July 15, Turkish President Abdullah Gul approved a bill to create a legal framework for negotiations between government officials and Kurdish militants. The bill is part of peace talks between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and Kurdish nationalist fighters from the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK).

Part of the legislation grants legal immunity to government officials involved in negotiations with the PKK, which is branded as a terrorist organization by Turkish authorities. The law also holds out the possibility of granting amnesty for PKK fighters if the peace process is successful.

The bill was passed by Parliament on July 10, with the help of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), which is involved in the AKP government's negotiations with the PKK.

Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader and founder of the PKK, has praised the legislation, even thanking "officials who have contributed to the settlement reform package."

The two largest opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), have denounced the bill as part of an election ploy by the AKP to gain Kurdish votes in the presidential election, which will be held on August 10. The CHP and MHP are running a joint candidate, Ekmeleddin İhsanoglu, for president.

The AKP and its allies in the HDP, certainly hope to use the legislation to win Kurdish votes despite the political crisis and unpopular policies of the AKP regime over the past few years.

For the last year, the AKP has been wracked by a corruption scandal in which leading government officials' sons, including the Presidential candidate and current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's son,

and a state-owned bank were accused of laundering money.

The Turkish government has also supported Washington's policy of stoking a sectarian civil war in Syria by allowing Sunni extremist rebels to operate out of Turkey. The Turkish government has even tried to provoke war between the US and Syria by aiding rebels in the August 21, 2013 sarin gas attack, according to *London Review of Books*.

US and Turkish policy on Syria has resulted in a debacle, with the main Sunni extremist group, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), taking over large swathes of Iraq. ISIS has also captured approximately 80 Turkish citizens -- 49 of whom were taken from the Turkish consulate in Mosul -- and is holding them hostage. Turkey's Human Rights Association has also reported that, on July 8, ISIS fighters carried out an attack on a Shiite mosque in Istanbul.

On July 15, Massoud Barzani, President of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), met with Erdogan and Gul on the possibility of KRG seceding from Iraq, as well as to discuss KRG-Turkish military and economic ties. Turkish officials voiced opposition to a KRG secession from Iraq, but expressed their hope of retaining close ties with the KRG.

A Turkish official who wished to remain anonymous told Agence France-Presse, "Nobody should expect us to make tough words (on Kurdish independence) like we did in the past," he added, "There is a continuing peace process at home."

Turkish officials also promised to continue supplying the KRG with refined oil products, which the KRG has experienced a shortage of since ISIS took control of Iraq's largest refinery. The KRG has also increased its crude oil output by 50 percent last month, exporting 360,000 barrels a day via a pipeline to Turkey,

according to International Energy Agency.

After Barzani returned to Iraq, the KRG has begun exporting oil to Turkey from Kirkuk, a city in Iraq that was seized by KRG forces last month. The shipment of oil is in defiance of Baghdad, which does not recognize the KRG as having legitimate control over Kirkuk.

Two Turkish politicians, Leyla Zana and S?rr? Süreyya Önder, an independent deputy and HDP deputy respectively, have travelled to northern Iraq for further discussions with KRG officials and Iraq's Kurdish President Jalal Talabani. The Turkish deputies will also meet with various Kurdish political organizations, possibly including the PKK, which is based inside the KRG, to communicate Öcalan's views related to regional developments, including the Kurdish region in northern Syria.

The Turkish government over the last two years has used peace talks with the PKK as a bridge to discussions with the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a PKK affiliated Kurdish group that controls part of Northern Syria. The PYD has in the past fought with the ISIS Islamist fighters along the Syrian-Turkish border.

In recent weeks, the ISIS has attempted a new push to take Ain al-Arab, a Syrian city just 190 miles from the Turkish border, from the PYD. The People's Protection Units (YPG), the PYD's armed wing, and the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), a Kurdish militant umbrella group founded by the PKK, have called on Kurdish youth to help defend the city.

"At least 800 Kurdish fighters crossed the Turkish-Syrian border to help their comrades in Ain al-Arab," Abdul Rahman, the director of Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, told Agence France-Presse.

Turkey has reacted to the fighting by deploying tanks and armored vehicles to the area and increasing border patrols. *Hurriyet Daily News* has also reported that the Turkish military has intervened to try and prevent Turkish Kurds from crossing the border and fighting alongside the PYD.

The AKP government has consistently used talks with the PKK as a bridge towards building closer alliances with the KRG and PYD. The AKP, having helped stoke bloody sectarian divisions in neighboring countries, seeks to use Kurdish nationalists as a buffer between Turkey and the ISIS, while posing as an advocate of plurality and peace. Regardless of what

agreement is worked out between the Turkish bourgeoisie and the PKK, it will be fail to create stability throughout the region or even within Turkey.



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