

Turkey escalates war drive against Kurds at home and across the region

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Some 10,000 Turkish military and police forces, supported by tanks and helicopters, are stepping up operations in the Kurdish provinces of Diyarbakir, Mardin and S?rnak, under the pretext of a “fight against terrorism” targeting the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

Turkey’s mainly Kurdish southeast has become the renewed conflict area between security forces and the PKK. The two-year “peace process” with the Kurds collapsed in late July under the impact of the escalating war in Syria. Since then, hundreds of people, including civilians, have been killed, as the prolonged armed conflict between the PKK and Turkish security forces turned into urban warfare.

Kurdish workers in the region are living under a repeatedly prolonged curfew and intensifying armed conflict. Due to renewed fighting between Turkish security forces and the PKK, some 200,000 people have been forced to leave their homes in recent few months, while some 1.3 million people are living under curfew in 17 districts. This is the largest Kurdish internal migration since the 1990s, when the Turkish army destroyed some 2,000 villages, supposedly for security reasons.

However, the government’s renewed military operations against the PKK have not been limited to Turkey. After the PKK killed two police officers on July 22, apparently in retaliation for the July 20 suicide bombing in Suruc, Turkish fighters have launched airstrikes against PKK forces both in Turkey and Iraq. Meanwhile, Ankara’s warmongering policy in Syria has acquired an ever more aggressive character since Russia actively intervened in the civil war in Syria.

Ankara’s renewed war against its own Kurdish population can only be understood as part of the bloodbath unleashed by the imperialist intervention to

oust President Bashar al-Assad’s regime in Syria, and US and European imperialism’s drive to redivide the entire Middle East. This conflict, in which the Turkish government sought to secure its interests by serving as an accomplice of the major imperialist powers, has now exploded within Turkey itself.

Tensions escalated further when Turkish fighters shot down a Russian bomber along the Turkish-Syrian border on November 24 and Turkey deployed troops to the Bashiqa area of Iraq earlier this month without informing—let alone getting approval from—Baghdad.

The deployment of additional Turkish troops to the base has further strained relations between Turkey and Iraq. Regarding the Turkish military presence on its soil as a violation of its sovereignty, Baghdad protested to the UN Security Council. As a result of the Iraqi government’s strong reaction, Ankara was forced to withdraw some of its heavily-armed troops, illegally stationed in the Bashiqa area, to another base inside Iraq’s Kurdistan region.

On Wednesday, however, the Islamic State fired rockets at a base in the Bashiqa area, where Turkish troops are stationed. Turkish authorities seized the opportunity to argue that the attack has justified its decision to send additional troops “to protect its personnel there”.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davuto?lu did not hesitate to assert Ankara’s expansionist aims in the region. “The developments we are facing in Iraq and Syria are such that the security of our borders starts from beyond the borders,” he said.

Following successive diplomatic manoeuvres and defeats, the Turkish ruling class and the government in Ankara are now making aggressive new moves to get some crumbs from the ongoing imperialist carve-up of the Middle East. It dreams itself of partially

reconstituting the Ottoman empire, dominating the northern parts of Iraq and Syria, where Kurdish and Turcoman people live.

The main accomplice of Ankara's reactionary expansionist policies is the Iraqi Kurdish nationalist leadership of Massoud Barzani, who, for years, has received Turkish financial, military and political support. In return for close cooperation with Ankara in its fight against the PKK in Turkey, Iraq and Syria, his corrupt regime in northern Iraq enjoys Turkish support against both growing opposition in the Kurdistan Regional Government, and from the Iraqi central government in Baghdad.

Moreover, in Turkey, the Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), known to be close to the PKK, though it is a legal party, has repeatedly offered olive branches to the government, even as the latter further intensifies its military campaign and destroys Kurdish towns.

Speaking on CNN-Türk TV channel on Wednesday, Altan Tan, a leading HDP member and deputy from Diyarbakir, said that it is vital for Ankara to embrace the Kurdish people not only in Turkey but also in Iraq and Syria. He insisted that the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which defined current borders of the Middle East, has already been junked. Tacitly endorsing Ankara's territorial ambitions, he called for a federal Turkish-Kurdish state, expanded into Syria and Iraq.

There are few prospects that Ankara would endorse a federal Turkish-Kurdish state amid the collapse of the "peace process", but it is manifestly asserting its ever broader regional ambitions.

On Wednesday, Turkish Ambassador to Qatar Ahmet Demirok declared that Turkey would establish a military base in Qatar and station some 3,000 ground troops there. He told Reuters that it would be Turkey's first overseas military installation in the Middle East. Qatar is also home to the largest US air base in the region, with around 10,000 military personnel.

Both Turkey and Qatar have provided support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and given financial, military and political support to the proxy forces fighting to overthrow the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. They have also strongly condemned Russia's intervention in Syria in support of the Assad regime.

Meanwhile, at an unexpected midnight press

conference on Wednesday, Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia's defence minister and deputy crown prince, announced the formation of an "Islamic military coalition", supposedly to fight "any terrorist organisation, not just ISIS". The Saudi-led organisation consists of 34 nations, including Turkey, which is a member of the NATO alliance.

The exclusion of Iran and its regional allies Syria and Iraq from the alliance underscores, however, that it has been established on a Sunni Islamic sectarian basis, as part of a broader imperialist strategy to push back and encircle Russia.

En route to Incirlik air base in Turkey on December 15, US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter hailed the coalition as a greater involvement of Sunni Arab countries in the war against the Islamic State.



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