

# Syrian HTS forces escalate military offensive against Kurdish SDF

## The only way to fight the Al-Qaeda regime in Syria is to fight imperialism

Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal  
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The new Damascus regime, led by the al-Qaeda-rooted Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), has expanded its military offensive launched early this year on neighborhoods in Aleppo controlled by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) to the northeast of the country known as “Rojava” (West).

The SDF leadership responded by calling for mobilization and resistance throughout Kurdistan, though a four-day ceasefire has now been declared.

Mass protests were held in many countries, including Türkiye and Iraq. As a result of military attacks carried out by the HTS regime, it is reported that alleged members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) escaped from prisons controlled by the SDF.

US Ambassador to Türkiye and Special Envoy for Syria, Tom Barrack, Trump’s man in the Middle East, made clear that HTS’s military offensive was carried out with the approval of the United States. He declared Tuesday evening that Washington opposes any “separatism or federalism” in Syria and that, according to the January 18 agreement, SDF fighters must join the Syrian army as individuals and transfer the “ISIS prisons” under their control to the Damascus regime.

This followed a five-hour meeting on Monday between SDF leader Mazlum Abdi and HTS leader and “interim president” Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus, also attended by Barrack. Amid ongoing clashes, the talks ended in failure.

Barrack’s comments were made in Ankara, Türkiye, speaking alongside the country’s foreign minister Hakan Fidan. Expressing his pleasure at the suppression of Kurdish forces’ quest for autonomy on Türkiye’s southern border, President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said in a statement on Monday, referring to the SDF, “Despite the provocations of armed elements occupying northern Syria, the Syrian army has passed the test successfully.”

The SDF leadership has announced in connection with the ceasefire that it is “ready to continue implementing the January 18 agreement.”

The situation unfolding in Syria has confirmed the warnings issued by the *World Socialist Web Site* in December 2024 following the overthrow of the Russian- and Iranian-backed regime of President Bashar al-Assad by Al Qaeda-linked forces. The WSWs then wrote:

Although the interests of the Kurdish and other elites in the region are pushing the SDF towards a compromise with HTS, the imperialist spiral of violence in the Middle East and the struggle for control of resources point to a deepening of the conflict. The SDF ... controls important oil, natural gas and grain resources that will be of great concern to the new regime in Damascus.

The Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) unequivocally opposes the HTS regime’s Türkiye-backed offensive on the Syrian Kurds. As a result of an imperialist-backed proxy war in Syria that has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands and turned millions into refugees, HTS was brought to power in Damascus with the support of Washington and Ankara. It now seeks to consolidate its control of the country by violently suppressing all minorities, including the Kurds.

The new regime in Damascus, which remains silent on Israel’s aggression and occupation of Syria and welcomes Türkiye’s military and political presence in the country, serves the broader aims of US aggression against Iran. The regime change in Syria and the war against Iran and its allies in Palestine, Lebanon, and elsewhere are integral part of US imperialism’s pursuit of complete hegemony in the Middle East.

However, the situation that has emerged once again demonstrates the bankruptcy of Kurdish nationalism’s collaboration with imperialism—once again, at the expense of the Kurdish people. For days, various Kurdish nationalist leaders, including Abdi and those in Türkiye, have been calling on the US to “intervene in the situation.” Abdi previously declared that they wanted the approximately 2,000 American soldiers in the SDF-controlled region of Syria to remain there as a guarantee of their security.

The SDF, which has become the main proxy force for the US in the war for regime change in Syria, applauded the overthrow of President Assad in December 2024. Last March, in the midst of the HTS regime’s massacres against the Alawite minority in the country, Abdi himself signed an agreement with al-Sharaa, demonstrating his desire to adapt to the new regime.

It has been made clear that an alliance with imperialism offers no path to liberation for oppressed peoples.

Murat Karay?lan, one of the leaders of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the sister organization of the SDF, now says that “This attack is against all the gains of the Kurdish people. It was prepared as a conspiracy. Both international and local powers are involved in this conspiracy.” He adds: “These powers saw their interests here. They organized these attacks for this reason. The current stance of international powers, primarily the US, England, Germany, France, and other coalition states, which is enabling attacks, will be a black mark on their reputation.”

This is not the first betrayal by the imperialist powers led by the US that has brought disaster upon the Kurdish people. Nor will it be the last until an internationalist, socialist leadership is built that unifies and mobilizes the working class among the Kurdish and other peoples of the Middle East and internationally against imperialism and its regional capitalist allies.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), of which the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi is a part, wrote in 2019 following Türkiye’s offensive against the SDF, launched with the approval of

Trump administration:

Washington's blatant double-cross of its Kurdish allies is another bitter lesson in the bankruptcy of Kurdish nationalism as a strategy to advance the Kurds' democratic and cultural rights. ...

The Kurdish people is spread over Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The only viable strategy to defend their democratic rights, like those of the Turkish people, is a common revolutionary struggle of workers of all ethnicities to take state power and build the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The Kurdish nationalist movement's willingness to act as an ally of imperialism is not a mistake but the outcome of its bourgeois class character.

As Leon Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, in regions with belated capitalist development, such as the Middle East, the national bourgeoisie is incapable of establishing even formal democratic rights, including those of minorities, or of pursuing an anti-imperialist policy due to its deep ties to imperialism and its fear of the working class above all else. These tasks fall to the working class as part of a struggle for socialism, which must unite all the oppressed behind it in the struggle for workers' power against the bourgeoisie and imperialism.

HTS's offensive in Syria and its attempt to seize resources controlled by the SDF to prevent the Kurds from gaining any independent status is part of a broader struggle for the re-division of the Middle East.

Since October 2024, Ankara has been conducting a US-backed negotiation process with the PKK. Erdoğan and Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK, have advanced an equally reactionary "Turkish, Kurdish, Arab" bourgeois alliance to counter Israel's growing influence in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and across the Middle East, and against its "Greater Israel" ambitions.

The PKK has dissolved itself at Öcalan's suggestion but retained its organizational existence. Ankara has demanded that the SDF, the Syrian sister organization of the PKK, do the same, without obtaining any legal status, and subordinate itself to the new Damascus regime—on pain of a war waged through HTS.

The Ankara-backed HTS offensive exposes the false claims that the PKK's negotiations with the Erdoğan government can secure "peace and democracy" in Turkey, just as it exposes the Kurdish movement's goal of reaching a "democratic compromise" with the Al-Qaeda regime in Syria.

In fact, as in the previous negotiation process that collapsed under the weight of developments in Syria in 2015, what is involved is not the legitimate democratic rights of the Kurdish people, but rather an attempt to reconcile the reactionary interests of the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie in line with the US imperialism. Events in Syria point to the fragility of the Ankara-PKK agreement and the danger of a resurgence of military conflict in Turkey that could overshadow the civil war that cost thousands of lives in 2015-16.

HTS's decision to launch a military offensive instead of negotiating with the SDF came after the Damascus regime and Israel held talks in Paris on January 6, under US auspices, and established a "security mechanism" between the two countries. The joint statement issued after the meeting declared that "Both sides have decided to establish a joint fusion mechanism—a dedicated communication cell—to facilitate immediate and ongoing coordination on their intelligence sharing, military de-escalation, diplomatic engagement and commercial opportunities under the supervision of the United States."

The reconciliation between Damascus and Tel Aviv was followed by Trump inviting Erdoğan to join the neo-colonialist "Peace Council" in Gaza. Erdoğan has supported Trump's Gaza plan and quietly accepted the

invasion of Venezuela and abduction of its elected President Nicolas Maduro.

The day after the Paris agreement, Damascus forces declared war on two neighborhoods in Aleppo controlled by the SDF. With this offensive, which forced more than 100,000 civilians to flee the city and caused numerous deaths, HTS seized control of the city. Subsequently, as Arab tribes within the SDF shifted to a pro-Damascus position, HTS forces entered provinces such as Deir ez-Zor and Raqqqa, then turned their attention to cities with larger Kurdish populations.

In an interview with the *Rudaw TV*, Rohilat Efrin, General Commander of the Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ), who was part of the SDF delegation in Damascus, said: "During the technical talks held on January 4, there was a consensus on the SDF joining the army in three divisions and preserving the autonomous structure. However, at this last meeting, they denied everything. They told us, 'Immediately evacuate Hasakah and Kobane, lay down your arms, and join the army individually (one by one).'"

She added, "They had previously said they could implement this agreement within a month. However, following the attacks in Deir ez-Zor and Raqqqa, they demanded immediate acceptance of their terms. They wanted to rush this through, which clearly had been planned in advance."

Speaking to the *Rohani* channel, Abdi expressed his disappointment, stating: "First and foremost, this war has been imposed on us. On the 4th of this month, we held a meeting in Damascus; then we had many discussions and finally came together in Erbil. Our goal was to prevent this war. Unfortunately, however, this war had been planned by many forces and has been persistently imposed until today."

Abdi does not reveal who these "forces" are. However, the US—seeking to establish dominance in the Middle East and completely eliminate the influence of Iran, Russia, and China—was pressuring its allies in Syria to reach an agreement as soon as possible. With the Trump administration making plans towards military intervention and regime change in Iran, it wants to bring into line its proxies in Syria and its regional allies Israel and Türkiye. The SDF has been handed an ultimatum to do so on HTS's terms.

An intervention by Israel, however, which has declared the Syrian Kurds its "natural ally," or a change in Trump's stance, could bring Türkiye, Israel, or the US directly into the conflict.

Under any circumstances, the bankruptcy of nationalist politics, which involves accommodation and cooperation with imperialism and the regional powers serving it, such as Türkiye or Israel, has been clearly demonstrated. Workers and oppressed people cannot advance the struggle for democracy, social equality, and peace without fundamentally opposing all these powers and developing their own independent politics.

The dire situation facing the Kurdish people in Syria cannot be separated from the fate of the Palestinians subjected to genocide in Gaza and the entire population of the Middle East who have been under imperialist aggression for over 35 years. The only way forward is through the political unification of the working class of all nationalities in a common revolutionary struggle against imperialism and its bourgeois proxies, with the aim of establishing a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

The decisive political task is to build sections of the ICFI in Syria, Turkey, and across the region to lead the working class in this struggle.



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