

Turkey re-opens talks with Kurdish PKK as war in Middle East escalates

Ula? Ate?çi

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On Tuesday, Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the fascist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), part of the “People’s Alliance” led by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, declared, “When the isolation of the terrorist chief [imprisoned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan] is lifted, he should come and speak at the [Kurdish] DEM [People’s Equality and Democracy] party group meeting of the Turkish parliament.”

“Let him shout that terrorism is completely over and the organization [PKK] has been dismantled. If he shows this resilience and determination, the way for the legal regulation of the ‘right to hope’ and its use should be wide open,” he added.

This unprecedented statement comes as the Zionist regime of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, with the full support of the US and European powers, has escalated the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and attacks on Lebanon and is preparing a comprehensive military strike on Iran.

The overwhelming majority of the Turkish people oppose the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and an escalation of the war against Iran. The Erdoğan government, noting the growing danger, has declared its opposition to the expansion of the war in the region.

The Erdoğan government’s initiative follows Ankara’s application to join BRICS as part of its policy of manoeuvring between its NATO allies, and Russia and China, amid the escalation of the Ukraine war. Erdoğan is expected to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin in Kazan, Russia, Wednesday on the sidelines of the BRICS meeting. Iran also joined the organization in early 2024.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in Qatar: “All our neighbors have assured us that they won’t allow their soil or airspace to be used against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Kuwait is the 11th country I have visited in the region. All the countries in the region have expressed their opposition to an Israeli attack on Iran.” Araghchi was also in Turkey on Friday.

Bahçeli’s call to reopen negotiations with the PKK, which Ankara considers a “terrorist group” and has been fighting to suppress since 1984, received the endorsement and support of Erdoğan.

Shortly after Bahçeli’s speech, Erdoğan declared, “The historic window of opportunity we have opened as the People’s Alliance should not be sacrificed to greed. As the political establishment, parliament, civil society, press, academia and society, let’s build a Turkey without terrorism.”

Behind the signal of the Erdoğan government of a change in its

policy of “military annihilation” of the PKK is the concern of the Turkish ruling elite that the escalation of the US-Israeli war against Iran and its allies could draw Turkey in and lead to a redrawing of borders in the Middle East, including the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.

In his remarks Tuesday, Erdoğan made clear that this was aimed at strengthening the hand of the Turkish ruling elite against the escalating war across the region: “While the maps are being redrawn in blood, while the war that Israel has waged from Gaza to Lebanon is approaching our borders, we are trying to strengthen our internal front. We want 85 million of us to come together under the common denominator of Turkey.”

The Kurdish population is estimated at 15-20 million in Turkey, 10-12 million in Iran, 8 million in Iraq and 3.5 million in Syria. The PKK has influence in all these countries through its umbrella organisation, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), and the PYD/YPG, which controls north-eastern Syria, is closely allied to the US--the architect of the regime change war in Syria that began in 2011.

Recently, Erdoğan has repeatedly warned of a possible war between Turkey and Israel. “The Israeli leadership, acting with the delirium of the promised land and with a purely religious fanaticism, will set its sights on our homeland after Palestine and Lebanon,” he said in early October.

The possibility of a war between Turkey and Israel as part of the escalation in the Middle East is real. However, this criticism of the US and Israel comes from a government allied with Washington and Tel Aviv.

For more than three decades, the Turkish ruling elites have supported US imperialism’s interventions and regime change wars in the region in line with its drive to dominate the Middle East and, like other Arab regimes, have been complicit with Israel in oppressing the Palestinian people.

With their support for the invasion of Iraq starting in 2003 and the war of regime change in Syria starting in 2011, they have not only been complicit in the deaths or displacement of millions of people. They have also contributed to the dynamics of the disintegration of these countries and to the growing US-Israeli aggression across the region.

As the Socialist Equality Group explained at the time, the so-called “peace process” between the Erdoğan government and the PKK, which started in 2009, was an initiative developed with the approval of the US and European powers as part of the imperialist

war of plunder in the Middle East. When the US made the YPG militia the main proxy force in the war for regime change--and a YPG-led proto-state emerged in in Syria--Erdo?an ended the talks and launched a violent offensive against the Kurdish movement in both Turkey and Syria.

While the Erdo?an government officially cut trade with Israel in May in the face of popular anger and opposition, it has been revealed that exports of critical products such as steel to that country continue to flow through Palestine. Moreover, Turkey's strategic partner Azerbaijan is Israel's main supplier of oil, which continues to feed Israel's war machine through Turkish pipelines and ports. US-NATO bases in Turkey, which are believed to provide Israel with intelligence for its aggression against Palestinians, Lebanon and Iran, continue to operate.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* recently stated, "At the root of this contradiction is the bourgeoisie's deep-rooted attachment to imperialism. The main fear of the Turkish ruling class, which, far from being able to oppose imperialism, acts as its proxy in the Middle East, is that a revolutionary movement of the working class against imperialism and Zionism will develop."

Tülay Hatimo?ullar?, co-chair of the Kurdish nationalist DEM, welcomed Bahçeli's call and said, "If there is to be a start, the isolation must be lifted immediately. The compass for the solution of the Kurdish question is democratic negotiation and honourable peace." The legal Kurdish leadership, and its pseudo-left allies fully supported the previous negotiations in the name of "peace and democracy" as part of their orientation to the imperialist powers and reactionary aims of the Kurdish and Turkish bourgeoisies.

Özgür Özel, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), which came first in March's local elections, said: "As the CHP, we will fully support the end of terrorism... Whatever needs to be done should be done in parliament. There will be no result without a full social consensus. If this problem is to be solved, it must be discussed at a table that includes all parties."

Öcalan has been imprisoned on ?mral? Island in the Marmara Sea since he was captured in Kenya in 1999 in a CIA-backed operation and extradited to Turkey. He was subjected to arbitrary isolation for the past 44 months.

The "right to hope" to which Bahçeli referred means a possibility of prisoners being "conditionally released for good behavior within the time limits set by law." In 2014, the European Court of Human Rights ruled against Turkey based on the "right to hope", finding that a sentence of aggravated life imprisonment without the right to conditional release violated the European Convention on Human Rights.

Bahçeli's statement, backed by Erdo?an, is an admission of the political character of Öcalan's isolation and imprisonment. Many people who have raised this issue of basic democratic rights and demanded the release of all political prisoners in Turkey have been imprisoned.

Bahçeli's statements on the Kurdish question since the beginning of October were welcomed by the DEM but received a harsh reaction from a KCK/PKK leader.

On October 7, Besê Hozat, co-chairman of the executive board of the KCK, said that these moves were a "game and a

conspiracy" by Erdo?an and Bahçeli, and that the aim was "to completely neutralize the internal opposition, to create confusion among the Kurds... to create a disintegration within the DEM party, within democratic politics, if they can, if they succeed, to completely take over the CHP and put it at their service."

She added, "Turkey's fear is not that Israel will attack Turkey. It is that the Kurds can benefit from this war environment. The Kurds can gain more." This statement, which confirms the calculation of the PKK leadership to profit from the escalation of the war, confirms the impulse that drove the Turkish bourgeoisie to this step. It also testifies to the reactionary character of both Turkish and Kurdish nationalism.

A few days after this statement, a report in *Al Monitor*, citing unnamed sources, claimed that Öcalan had recently spoken by telephone with KCK/PKK leaders in Mount Qandil in northern Iraq. "Öcalan told them it was time to discuss laying down arms," one of the sources said. Another source said, "They want to prevent another Syria [a reference to the strengthening of the YPG]. They want to be proactive this time," said another source.

A new "peace process" between the Turkish ruling elite and the Kurdish nationalist movement, allies of US-NATO imperialism--the forces behind an aggression that might involve the major powers in the Middle East--is as fraudulent as the previous one. As Leon Trotsky explained in his theory of Permanent Revolution, the Turkish and Kurdish bourgeoisie, like the bourgeoisies of the Middle East and other parts of the world with belated capitalist development in the imperialist epoch, are organically incapable of opposing imperialism or establishing a democratic regime. These are the tasks of the working class.

The democratic solution to the Kurdish question, and an end to the escalating genocide and war in the Middle East depends on uniting and mobilizing the international working class on an anti-war, socialist program to take power against the imperialist powers and their bourgeois proxies.



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