

Armed attack on Turkey's critical defence industry facility after calls for dialogue with Öcalan and PKK

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On Wednesday afternoon, two well-equipped assailants arrived in a taxi at the entrance gate of the Ankara facilities of the state-owned strategic defence company Turkish Aerospace Industries Corporation (TAI) and carried out a bomb and gun attack.

A taxi driver and four TAI workers lost their lives and 22 people were injured, including seven Special Branch police officers. The two people who organised the attack, a man and a woman, were killed after the clash.

Minister of National Defence Ya?ar Güler suggested that the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was behind the operation. Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said that both identified attackers were PKK members. At the time of writing, the PKK had not made a statement claiming or denying responsibility for the attack.

TAI, whose website describes itself as "Turkey's technology centre for the development, modernisation, production, systems integration and life-cycle support of aerospace industry systems", has recently been a key pillar of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government's "domestic defence industry" campaign. The Ankara plant where the attack was organised reportedly employs between 15,000 and 18,000 people.

Erdoğan, who was in Russia for the BRICS summit at the time of the attack, said, "The terrorist attack against TAI, one of the locomotive organizations of the Turkish defense industry, is a despicable attack targeting the survival of our country, the peace of our nation, and our defense initiatives that are the symbol of our ideal of 'Fully Independent Türkiye'."

The Kurdish nationalist Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party) deputy group deputy chair Sezai Temelli said the attack was a "provocation", referring to the call made by Erdoğan's fascist ally, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli, to imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan the day before the attack.

"Against such developments, we have to persistently respond to the expectation of the society to live in peace," Temelli added, hinting that such attacks should not undermine the government's new negotiation initiative with the PKK.

Selahattin Demirta?, former co-chair of the People's Democracy Party (now the DEM Party), who has been in prison as a political prisoner since 2016, condemned the attack in similar terms: "The understanding that tries to stop the search for a solution to our problems through talk, dialogue and politics with blood should

know that if Öcalan takes the initiative and wants to open the way for politics, we will be behind him with all our strength."

CHP leader Özgür Özel also pointed to a provocation, saying: "When you see this attack, you cannot help but think how remarkable the timing is."

In response to the attack, the Erdoğan government carried out air strikes on alleged PKK-YPG positions in Iraq and Syria overnight. The Ministry of National Defence stated, "Air strikes were carried out against terrorist targets in northern Iraq and Syria, and 32 targets were successfully destroyed. Our air strikes continue decisively."

The Mesopotamia Agency reported that the air strikes targeted "the cities of Kobanê, Rimêlan, Amûdê, Til Rifat, Dêrik, Qami?lo, Tirbespiyê, Qereçox Mountain and the village of Mêrkamira in northern and eastern Syria, killing 12 people and wounding dozens."

Mazlum Abdi, General Commander of the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), of which the YPG is the backbone, issued a statement on his social media account: "Turkey is systematically and baselessly bombing our areas. They are targeting service centres, health centres and civilians. These are war crimes. We have expressed our readiness for dialogue many times, but we declare that our armed forces are ready to protect our people and our country".

The attack on TAI came on the heels of an unprecedented statement on Tuesday by Bahçeli, leader of the MHP, part of the "People's Alliance" led by Erdoğan. Bahçeli suggested that jailed PKK leader Öcalan should lift his isolation and address parliament, "shouting that terrorism is completely over and the organization [PKK] has been dismantled".

Bahçeli's statement, supported by Erdoğan, was welcomed by the opposition DEM party and the CHP as the beginning of a new "peace process" with the PKK. On the morning before the attack in Ankara, Abdullah Öcalan was allowed to meet with his nephew Ömer Öcalan, DEM deputy for ?anlı?urfa, as a sign of lifting the 44-month isolation imposed on him.

These unexpected developments come at a time when, in the Middle East, US-backed Israel has turned the genocide in Gaza into a war of extermination, invaded Lebanon and is preparing a full-scale attack on Iran.

On Tuesday, Erdoğan revealed what was behind the attempt to

negotiate with the PKK with these words: “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.”

Despite Ankara’s signs of a deal with the PKK through Öcalan, Turkey continued to target PKK-YPG forces, particularly in Syria and Iraq. “Last week, 45 terrorists were neutralised, bringing the number of terrorists neutralised since 1 January to 2,194,” the Defence Ministry said in a statement on October 17.

While the Turkish ruling elites wanted to strengthen their hands and tighten their ranks in the face of the escalation of the war in the Middle East by their allies, the US and Israel—with whom they want to avoid a confrontation—it was unclear how the PKK leadership based in Iraq’s Qandil Mountain would react to Ankara’s initiative.

There is every reason to doubt that the PKK leadership will take part in this process with the same motivation as its leader Öcalan, who has been imprisoned on Imrali Island for 25 years, and the DEM party, which articulates the interests of the Kurdish bourgeoisie and middle class in Turkey.

As a movement organised in four countries, the PKK also represents the interests of the Kurdish bourgeoisie in Iraq, Syria and Iran and has become an important political-military force in the Middle East on the basis of close cooperation with the US in the last decades.

After welcoming the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the PKK became the main US proxy force in Syria during the war for regime change that began in 2011. The YPG-SDF, operating with the Pentagon in north-eastern Syria, is described as a well-trained and heavily armed force. According to the European Union Agency for Asylum in 2020, “Various sources estimate SDF’s strength to be around 40,000 to 60,000 fighters, of which estimated 20,000 to 30,000 fighters are from YPG.” The Iranian regime fears that the PKK-affiliated PJAK could play a separatist role in any potential war.

The Kurdish nationalist forces led by the PKK cannot be expected to welcome Erdoğan’s and Öcalan’s unconditional call to “lay down arms”, under conditions where they are making their plans in line with the USA’s war to reshape the Middle East under its complete domination.

Drawing attention to this, journalist Fehim Ta?tekin stated in an article in *Gazete Duvar*:

When the US plans to change the balance of power in the Middle East through Israel were added to this picture, a state of panic emerged [in Ankara]. The Kurds who think in terms of Rojava are positioning themselves as potential allies [of the US and Israel] in the new order on the US-Israel-Gulf axis. In this context, it is estimated that a great opportunity will arise if the counter-axis extending to Syria, Iraq and Iran collapses.

In an interview with *Yeni Özgür Politika* before the attack in Ankara, PKK leader Murat Karay?lan drew attention to the

escalating war in the Middle East, the US-led transformation of the region and the possibility of redrawing borders:

Today our region, the Middle East, is boiling. The Third World War in the region is in a state of escalation, and it can be seen that it will develop more and more. The global hegemonic powers want to reshape the region with this war. This is clearly visible.

Karay?lan said that the aim of the Erdoğan government is “to prevent the Kurdish people from taking part in the new design that may develop in the region and to condemn them to statuslessness” and added the following:

This war, which is developing ruthlessly with massacres in the region, will bring about some radical changes. This process may have some dangerous aspects, but it will also have some advantages and opportunities.

Karay?lan stated that the PKK leadership, rather than Öcalan and the DEM party, would be decisive in any negotiations with the Erdoğan government: “Undoubtedly, as leader Apo [Öcalan] pointed out, the PKK and legal-democratic Kurdish politics have an important role to play in the solution. What the regime is doing is a simple tactic of playing one against the other. This should be avoided. The role that each of the Kurdish components can play must also be taken into account.”

Israel’s genocide in Gaza with the full support of the US, its attacks on Lebanon and its preparations for an all-out war against Iran are fuelling a Middle East-wide conflict involving the major powers and regional states. The Turkish and Kurdish ruling elites are trying to consolidate their positions and advance their reactionary interests in this escalation. The claim of the bourgeois nationalist leaderships, which are closely linked to imperialism, to ensure “peace and democracy” in Turkey under the conditions of the escalating conflict on the Middle East front of the global war, expresses a greater fraud than ever before.



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