

Turkey leads regime change battle in Syria

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As the Israeli genocide in Gaza escalates into a Middle East region-wide offensive against Iran and its allies, the US and NATO-backed war for regime change in Syria, launched in 2011, has been revived. Turkey, Syria's northern neighbour and occupying power since 2016, is playing a major role.

Russian media blamed Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for the attack on Aleppo, but the proximity of government forces and proxy groups, as well as US, Turkish, Russian and Iranian forces in Syria, raises the possibility of a dangerous escalation.

On Wednesday last week, the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) launched an offensive that met little resistance from forces loyal to the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, backed by Russia and Iran, and quickly captured Aleppo, the country's second largest city.

HTS then moved on to the city of Hama, from where it was pushed back following Russia's military intervention in 2016. Meanwhile, Turkish-backed forces from the Syrian National Army (formerly the Free Syrian Army) also went on the offensive, capturing the town of Tal Rifaat from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), led by the US-backed Kurdish nationalist People's Protection Units (YPG).

On Monday, Erdoğan said, "We have long warned that the spiral of violence in the Middle East could also affect Syria. Recent events have confirmed and registered Turkey's rightness."

"It is our greatest hope that Syria's territorial integrity and national unity will be preserved and that the instability that has lasted for 13 years will end with a consensus in line with the legitimate demands of the Syrian people," Erdoğan added.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan claimed ludicrously that Turkey was not involved in the conflict. "The latest developments show once again that Damascus must reconcile with its own people and the legitimate

opposition," said Fidan, who hosted his Iranian counterpart Abbas Erakchi on Monday.

These statements express the hypocrisy of the Turkish government and ruling class, one of the main accomplices of the now renewed war for regime change in Syria, which has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands, the displacement of millions and the destruction of the country's infrastructure.

The attack on Aleppo, took place at the beginning of Israel's ceasefire with Hezbollah and the extension of the genocidal war against the Palestinians to Lebanon. It coincides in its consequences with the aims of the US and Israel. On the Middle East front of this global war against China, Russia and Iran, Israel's genocide in Gaza is only part of a wider US offensive against Iran and its allies to dominate the oil-rich region.

On Monday, White House National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan expressed Washington's satisfaction with the advance of al-Qaeda-linked forces against the Assad government, which is backed by Russia and Iran.

"We don't cry over the fact that the Assad government, backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, are facing certain kinds of pressure," Sullivan said, before adding, "We have seen activity in Syria coming off of all the other things we have seen in the Middle East and Ukraine and elsewhere, that is something that is the natural result of those adversaries ending up in a weaker strategic position."

On Tuesday last week, Israel's fascist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu listed Syria as one of the Zionist regime's war fronts and threatened, "Assad must understand that he is playing with fire," accusing Syria of mediating Iranian arms shipments to Lebanon.

Along with the CIA and the Gulf regimes, the Erdoğan government played a major role in arming al-Qaeda-linked jihadist forces into Syria in the war for regime change that began in 2011.

At the same time, Ankara initiated a "peace process"

with the Kurdish nationalist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) at home and had relatively good relations with the PKK's sister organisation in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its militia, the YPG. In October 2014, PYD leader Salih Muslim was hosted in Ankara, and in February 2015 the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the YPG even conducted a joint operation.

But when the dominance of the Islamic State (ISIS), which the US and its allies had made the main force fighting for regime change in Syria, began to threaten US interests as it spread from Syria into northern Iraq, Washington made the SDF, of which the YPG is the backbone, its main proxy force.

The Turkish ruling class, horrified by the prospect of a Kurdish state on Turkey's southern border and the encouragement of similar tendencies within the country, has shifted its priority from overthrowing the Assad regime to preventing the creation of a Kurdish state. It has launched a violent offensive against Kurdish forces at home and in Syria.

Turkey, together with its Islamist proxies, has organised three military operations in northern Syria to prevent the creation of a unified region controlled by Kurdish forces. It occupied a territory that included Jarabulus, Afrin, Ras al-Ayn and Tal Abyad.

The growing disagreement between the United States and its ally Turkey over the Syrian war was an important dimension of the tensions that culminated in the failed military coup attempt to overthrow Erdoğan in 2016. This process led Turkey to seek to mend its relationship with Russia, with which it was on the brink of war after the downing of its aircraft in Syria in November 2015.

However, Turkey's illegal presence in Syria and its use of the Islamists of the Syrian National Army as a proxy force not only against the YPG but also against the Assad government has caused serious tensions between Ankara and Moscow. In 2020, an attack by the Russian and Syrian air forces on Turkish forces in Idlib killed 36 soldiers, but Erdoğan took it in stride.

Eventually, the Astana talks between Turkey, Russia and Iran led to a ceasefire and the declaration of de-escalation zones in Idlib. As Turkey set up outposts and checkpoints around Idlib, the city gradually became the centre of HTS, which consolidated its dominance at the expense of other groups.

The Erdoğan government has taken initiatives to

strengthen the hand of the Turkish ruling class and advance its reactionary interests under the conditions of the escalating war in the Middle East. The Syrian leader rejected Erdoğan's calls to open a "new page" with Syrian President Assad. Assad put forward the conditions that Turkey should withdraw from the occupied territories and stop supporting terrorist organisations.

A new "peace process" was also signalled in October through the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. However, this was accompanied by attacks on the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party), several of whose elected mayors were unconstitutionally dismissed.

The latest developments make clearer that the negotiations with both Assad and the Kurdish nationalist movement are not the result of the Turkish ruling class's "search for peace", but a preparation for the coming regional upheaval.

Regarding the new "peace process", Erdoğan's statement that "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," was a clear expression of this.

Devlet Bahçeli, leader of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the fascist ally of Erdoğan, who called for the release of Öcalan and for him to come to parliament and declare the end of the armed struggle, also discussed the developments in Syria yesterday.

Bahçeli said, "It is in the interest of Assad himself and then his country to establish contact and dialogue with Turkey without preconditions and to show the will for normalisation." Saying "Aleppo is Turkish and Muslim to the bone," Bahçeli supported the attacks on the YPG, adding, "Tel Rifat has been cleared and now it is Manbij's turn."

"It is wrong that the DEM party does not yet know where it stands," Bahçeli said, threatening that the DEM party would either become a party of Turkey or be suppressed.



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