

Blinken visits Ankara with Israel and Turkey on collision course in Syria

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Following the overthrow of the Russian/Iranian-backed regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad by militias led by the al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the struggle by the US, Israel and Turkey to carve up and plunder the country has accelerated.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Turkey Thursday evening after a visit to Jordan and held separate meetings with President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

Also Thursday, ?brahim Kal?n, head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (M?T), travelled to Damascus and met with HTS leader Mohammed al-Jolani (real name Ahmed Hussein al-Shara) and Syria's newly appointed Prime Minister Mohammed Bashir.

Turkey has just re-established diplomatic relations with Syria, broken off in 2012, by appointing a temporary *charge d'affaires* to its embassy in Damascus. This and Kal?n's visit are attempts to legitimise the HTS, which is considered a "terrorist organization" on paper, and to draw it into Ankara's sphere of influence.

After their talks with Blinken, Erdo?an and Fidan made clear that Ankara's main concern is to prevent the Kurds from gaining official status in Syria under the leadership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-affiliated People's Protection Units (YPG). Ankara demands that Washington stop supporting the YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as a condition for closer cooperation with its imperialist ally.

After the meeting between Erdo?an and Blinken, the Directorate of Communication stated, "President Erdo?an noted that, primarily for its national security, T?rkiye will take preventive measures against all terrorist organizations operating in Syria and posing a threat to T?rkiye, mainly the PKK/PYD/YPG and DAESH [ISIS], adding that as the only NATO country that has engaged in close combat against DAESH, T?rkiye will prevent the PKK and its extensions from taking advantage of the

situation on the ground and will never allow any weakness in the fight against DAESH."

Blinken, who met with Fidan Friday morning, said afterwards, "As the (foreign) minister said, we're very focused on Syria, very focused on the opportunity that now is before us," adding that "We talked about how Turkey and how the United States, how other partners in the region, can support those efforts, and I think there's broad agreement on what we would each like to see going forward."

What both Washington and Ankara agree on is deepening collaboration with their al-Qaeda-linked proxies and plundering Syria.

In his remarks, Fidan said, "We discussed in detail the roles of both T?rkiye and the US, as well as regional actors, and how we can cooperate. Our priorities are to stabilize Syria as soon as possible, to prevent terrorism, to prevent DAESH and PKK from dominating there. We talked about what we will do about these, our common concerns and their solutions."

The Erdo?an government has stepped up its efforts to impose the interests of the Turkish ruling class as much as possible in Syria. On November 27, following the launch of the HTS offensive, the Turkish-backed Islamist Syrian National Army (SNA, former Free Syrian Army) captured the SDF-held town of Tal Rifaat and then attacked Manbij. SDF commander Mazlum Abdi said that after the clashes they reached a ceasefire with the SNA in Manbij under US mediation.

Turkish airstrikes also destroyed 12 trucks loaded with missiles, heavy weapons and ammunition, two ammunition depots and two tanks in Qamishli that had been transferred from the Syrian army to the SDF. According to reports, the new target of the SNA militias could be the city of Kobani, a major centre for Syrian Kurds on the Turkish border.

With the fall of the regime, the SDF had taken control

of cities such as Qamishli, Hasaka, and the oil-rich Deir ez-Zor. But after the HTS took control of Damascus, Arab tribes that had supported the SDF reportedly switched sides, and Deir ez-Zor fell to the HTS.

The SDF is seeking to use its close ties with the US and the American military presence in the region as leverage to gain official status within the new regime. Speaking to BBC News Türkçe, Salih Muslim, former leader of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), said that “HTS has spoken very good words and they are waiting for it to put them into practice,” before adding, “If HTS takes one step towards us, we will take two.” The PYD, to which the YPG belongs, is a member of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) along with the PKK.

Muslim also called for support for Israel and the NATO imperialist powers behind it as Tel Aviv continues the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza and provokes a Middle East-wide war against Iran and its allies, saying, “Israel’s behaviour can influence international politics, especially the European approach. I hope that their ability to act on this issue will become more evident. We expect practical action beyond verbal support. Our friends here applaud Israel’s position and welcome it wholeheartedly.”

This approach testifies to the bankruptcy of the Kurdish nationalist movement and the bourgeois nationalist perspective. The forces that the Kurdish nationalist movement orients to and collaborates with are none other than the imperialist and Zionist powers that have subjected the Palestinians to genocide and dragged the peoples of the Middle East, including the Kurds, into bloody conflicts for decades.

As Washington has signalled its continued support for the SDF, the Zionist regime, which has invaded Syria from the south and is preparing to escalate its war with Iran, has called for strengthening ties with Kurdish nationalist forces. In early November, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar declared the Kurds Israel’s “natural ally” in a statement, referring to the Kurdish bourgeois leaderships across the region.

This support for Kurdish forces and Israel’s growing presence in Syria could lead to a clash between Tel Aviv and Ankara, which sees preventing both the strengthening of the PKK/YPG and the creation of a Kurdish state as a strategic priority. Although Turkey continues to feed Israel’s war machine, Erdoğan has warned repeatedly that a war between Turkey and Israel could break out.

Sa’ar said in a statement Monday, “The [Turkish-backed SNA] attacks against the Kurds must stop, as we saw yesterday in Manbij. The international community

must get involved and take action to protect the Kurds who are bravely fighting ISIS. We have discussed this with the US administration and other countries.”

Since the HTS took over Damascus, Israel has severely crippled Syria’s defense infrastructure with more than 500 airstrikes carried out as of Thursday. The Israeli army is expanding its invasion in the south of the country and is reportedly within 25 kilometres of Damascus. HTS spokesman Obeida Arnaout refused to denounce Tel Aviv when asked by Channel 4 News about Israel’s strikes.

Israeli Defense Minister Yisrael Katz announced Friday that the Israeli army’s illegal occupation of Mount Hermon will continue during the winter months.

Regime change in Syria only signals a deepening of the struggle for resources and influence as part of the emerging Middle East war. This conflict could escalate not only between proxy forces in Syria, but also between allied powers such as Turkey and Israel, amid an escalation against Iran and its allies across the region.

The only way forward for workers in Syria and throughout the Middle East--drawn into the maelstrom of war deepened by the US and its regional allies like Israel and Turkey--is to unite and mobilise under an international socialist strategy and leadership against imperialism and all bourgeois regimes and proxies. The essential ally of the workers of the Middle East in this struggle is the American, European and international working class.



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