Who is Behind the Terrorist Provocation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq?

Since July 20, Iraq has been swept by a spontaneous wave of anti-Turkish actions after the night missile strike of the Barakh resort zone in the Zakhu district of the Northern Iraq province of Duhok, a city at the border of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Turkey. According to the information available, eight tourists were killed and another 23 wounded as a result of this incident, with children, including a one year old, among the victims. Allegedly, all the victims were the citizens of Iraq.

The place of the incident is well known to Iraqi tourists who come to this Kurdistan Region from the South of the country in hot summer months. Here are also located the military bases established by Turkey and used by it for carrying out, since 2019, operations against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Syrian Kurdish Home Guard, YPG, based in the mountain areas of North Iraq and regarded by Ankara as terrorist groups. Earlier, on June 5, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdophanumeric{s}an announced his intention to conduct new anti-terrorist operations in the North of Syria against the PKK and YPG “in order to maintain national security of Turkey.” The Turkish leader specified that the ultimate aim of the operation consisted in completion of the 30 kilometer “safe corridor” along the Turkish border.

In such conditions, the Iraqi information agencies, without carrying out any investigation whatsoever, quickly attributed the missile strikes in Duhok to the Turkish armed forces who, starting from April, have been carrying out a new offensive on the Kurdish forces in some parts of Northern Iraq, under the code name Operation Claw-Lock. As a result, the National Security Council of Iraq, convoked after that, published a declaration demanding that Turkey remove its armed forces from Iraq.
However, the Turkish authorities flatly denied their involvement in the incident, urging Iraq to refrain from hasty unjustified accusations of Ankara and proposed to carry out the joint careful investigation into what had happened.

At the same time, Turkey did not exclude the possibility of involvement of terrorist groups (clearly meaning the PKK) in the missile strike in Duhok, and admitting that such provocation could be aimed at destabilizing the cooperation of Turkey not only with Iraq but with the countries of the region at large.

The aforementioned provocations quickly entailed public unrest in Iraq, with thousands of people walking out into the streets of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, burning Turkish flags and protesting against Ankara’s actions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In the Najaf province in the Southern Iraq, the residents closed the Turkish consulate after burning the Turkish flags. Muqtada al-Sadr, the leader of one of the influential Shia organizations, “the Mahdi Army,” called on the Iraqi government to make a counter-strike, practically calling to declare a war. The Iraqi charge d’affaires ad interim was recalled from Ankara, the Ambassador of Turkey was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for explanations. The National Security Council of Iraq instructed the MFA to prepare a dossier on violation of the country’s sovereignty by Turkey. The United Operational Command of Iraq was instructed to take measures for the defense of the State, coordinating its security actions with the Government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

In view of the Duhok incident, Baghdad lodged a complaint with the UN Security Council. It cannot be excluded that the death of the people may be used to intensify the pressure on Ankara, including as an argument against Turkey’s operation in Syria.

National mourning day was declared in Iraq.

Currently, as one of the versions regarding those guilty of the incident, the Iraqi side does not exclude that Turkish forces could be behind the strike in Duhok. Iraqi residents question Ankara’s exculpatory statements and in this connection the protest activities near the Turkish diplomatic mission do not cease. It is both notable and alarming that the Western media, including the US media, actually unanimously supported the statements made by the Iraqi government, without waiting for any investigation whatsoever. Therefore, covert Western participation in the provocation cannot be excluded.

According to another version concerning those behind the missile strike, actively supported by Turkey, it cannot be excluded that terrorist and some particular pro-Iranian groups participated in the incident. Such suggestions are made in view of the consideration that a number of Iraqi Shia groups have long ago tried to create in Iraq, despite Tehran’s cautious approach, a wide anti-Turkish front and to involve in it various Kurdish groups with whom they maintain close relations.

In any case, the Turkish social media demonstrate a growing confidence that the strike at the tourist area in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was an attempt to stage an operation under an alien flag in order to compromise Turkey’s policy in Iraq and in the region.

Turkey acted quickly in response to the strike in Duhok, as its intelligence service had anticipated a provocation after the summit in Tehran, anonymous Turkish sources report. It is emphasized that the Turkish authorities, similar to the information attack aimed personally against the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar, make note of the excessively quick reaction to the events in Duhok by the US authorities and media outlets, such as Reuters and others, who had long been involved in the anti-Turkey campaigning and had at one point laid blame on the Turkish armed forces for anything and everything.

It is especially noteworthy that the provocation occurred in the period directly following the meeting of the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Russia that demonstrated their uniform stances on many issues and regional political problems, including on the situation in the Middle East, their joint resentment of the US policy in Syria, and laid the foundation for an emerging anti-Western alliance. According to a Daily Mail article citing the Director of Oxford’s Crisis Research Institute Mark Almond, the aforementioned meeting paved the way for a new anti-Western alliance stretching from the outskirts of the Eastern Europe to the South China Sea, with Russia at its center.

It is therefore not surprising that the said rapprochement between Turkey, Iran and Russia has caused clear discontent in the West, especially in the USA, who fear the cooperation among the countries of the region, the growth of Russian influence and the end of the US supremacy. Moreover, Washington’s striving to “tame” the disobedient Erdoğan for his sympathy towards Russia, including using the Kyiv government, stirring criticism of the Turkish leader among the population of his country and even incitement of steps to change the Turkish government, is quite well-known. It is no secret either that the USA has always opposed the Turkish military presence in Iraq and
the military operations carried out by Turkey both there and in Syria, especially those against the Kurdish National self-defense groups (YPG), affiliated with the PKK, who are considered allies by Washington. In this connection, the USA could quite possibly be the organizers of the provocation that took place in Duhok and used its controlled militants who were located in this region.

The position of the Iranian leadership regarding the inadmissibility of the Turkish military operation in Syria, demonstrated during the “Astana triumvirate” summit in Tehran on July 19, certainly also provides for the USA an opportunity to make use of such differences of opinion in order to undermine the cooperation among Iran, Russia and Turkey, and the tragedy in Duhok clearly facilitates this goal.

As far as Iran is concerned, one should not forget that it remains Baghdad’s alley and is not interested in worsening of relations with Turkey. Not to mention a break-up, as, notwithstanding some particular issues related to the Syrian policy and military operations in Iraq, Tehran and Ankara have many common spheres of cooperation. One should not forget either that Iran appreciates Turkey’s not joining the anti-Iranian sanctions introduced by the USA and the West. The level of the two countries’ cooperation and their recent approach was clearly demonstrated by the recent meeting in Tehran with participation of Russia.

In any case, to make the situation absolutely clear with regard to the culprits behind the said provocation in Duhok, it is necessary to carry out an independent investigation. Especially taking into consideration various provocations and misleading operations, that have become quite frequent recently, carried out by the USA and the West, who are trying, by different means, to retain their influence on the minds of the international community, obstructing the formation of a multipolar world.

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