Turkey: The Double Standard Policy

Officially, Ankara opposes the idea of the creation of an autonomous Kurdish region in North-East Syria, similar to that in Iraqi Kurdistan. This was stated by Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in the newspaper Hürriyet, when asked to give his opinion on the liberation of the city of Kobanî which had become a symbol of Kurdish resistance to fighters of the Islamic State (IS), as well as on the proclamation of a Syrian Kurdish canton there, with the possibility of a Syrian Kurdistan emerging on the heels of an Iraqi Kurdistan.

According to Erdoğan, Turkey does not need "a second Northern Iraq." In his opinion, the emergence of another Kurdish enclave may lead to serious problems in the region in the future. Turkish authorities are seriously concerned about the fact that the success of the Iraqi Kurds and of the Syrian Kurds may provoke Turkish Kurds to strive for the creation of their own autonomy, or even for achieving independence. Therefore, Ankara has been doing and will be doing everything not to allow it happen. Earlier, Erdoğan repeatedly stated that he will not allow terrorists from the Kurdistan Worker's Party to establish their camps in Northern Syria.

Erdoğan’s attitude towards the Kurds became clear during the exacerbation of the situation in Kobanî last fall, when Erdoğan pointedly refused to help the besieged city. Moreover, under his direction, Turkish security forces, army, and police brutally suppressed large-scale Kurdish protests in October 2014, and did everything possible to make crossing the Turkish-Syrian border difficult for Kurds wishing to support their compatriots in the fight with IS militants.

The Kurds are convinced that Erdoğan was interested in prolonging the hostilities in Kobanî. In their opinion, he was quite satisfied that both the Peshmerga and militants from the Jihadist groups suffered serious losses.

The only thing that Turkish authorities did was allowing Iraqi Kurds’ peshmerga units to pass through their territory, at the same time refusing to allow weapons and ammunition to the fighters in Kobanî. Journalists of the newspaper Hürriyet admit this is their country’s only contribution to the fight with IS.

In opinion of several American and European experts, this was a necessary symbolic step taken by Turkey, apparently in order not to “fall out” from the international coalition organized by the US to fight with IS. In addition, Erdoğan was forced to take such steps, taking into account the political landscape in the country, in anticipation of the upcoming parliamentary elections in June 2015.

If the Kurdish parties support the opposition or, as they did during the presidential elections, once again decide to unite with left-wing parties, then it is not clear whether the ruling party, Justice and Development, will win a constitutional majority in the new parliament (376 seats out of 550), and help Erdoğan rewrite the fundamental laws of the country to transform Turkey from a parliamentary republic into a presidential one. Therefore, it is not without reason that analysts are increasingly talking about how the Kurds may become key players in the fight for seats in parliament.

Denying the Syrian Kurds the right of autonomy, ingratiating with the Kurds, citizens of their own country, but not completely solving their problems, Ankara at the same time considers the Iraqi Kurds as allies, actively developing economic ties with them. It gives the opponents of the Turkish president cause to accuse him of carrying out a policy of double standards.
Judging by discussions taking place in Turkish society, the opposition is already using Erdoğan’s mistakes to their benefit. In social media and in some online publications, accusations against him have already appeared both for not fulfilling previous promises to Kurds and for unwillingness to seek mutually acceptable compromises.

Amid this situation, one of the January issues of the Al-Monitor newspaper featured information about the allegedly possible withdrawal of the Kurdistan Worker's Party from the ceasefire agreement which came into effect in March 2013, if the Turkish authorities do not fulfill their promises. The fact that this may occur indirectly supports the credibility of statements made by several American Kurdistan specialists about the Turkish security forces’ plan to amass large supply of tear gas in canisters, about 1.9 million units, and ready-to-use gas grenades. Experts regard this as preparation for the suppression of large-scale protests in anticipation of the upcoming parliamentary elections.

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