Turkish Authorities Offer a Unique Response to Islamist Attacks

As we know, on July 20, 2015 as a result of a suicide bombing in the village of Suruç which borders Syria, 32 people were killed and over 100 suffered injuries. A large part of those killed and injured were Turkish Kurds who were preparing to come to the assistance of their Syrian brethren in the war with Islamists. The attack was allegedly carried out by a 20-year-old Turkish citizen, recently recruited by the Islamic State. Soon after, Islamic State militiamen attacked a Turkish border post and killed a Turkish soldier. In response, Turkish armed forces besieged Islamist positions in the regions bordering Syria using aviation, tanks, and artillery. These measures are accompanied by a large-scale Turkish special forces and police operation directed at subduing extremists on the territories of 13 Turkish provinces, including the capital and Istanbul. It involves over 5,000 people and, during recent raids, security forces have detained more than 600 suspects.

Moreover, not only members of radical Islamist groups were subject to arrest and detention, but activists of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that is banned in the country. The grounds for the reprisals against the PKK was the assassination by the younger part of the organization of two Turkish policemen in the Ceylanpınar, on the border with Syria, and a citizen of Turkey in Istanbul, suspected by the Kurds to have aided the Islamic State. The same days, PKK militiamen attacked a Turkish military base where eight Turkish soldiers were wounded. These actions are accompanied by demonstrations and protests by Turkish citizens of both right- and left-wing, including Kurds, speaking out against both internal and external policies of the Turkish Government.

The Kurds have good grounds to believe that the Turkish authorities not only opted out of aiding the bleeding Syrian Kurds, but also, in every way, hinder volunteers from Turkey to get to the epicentre of hostilities – the Syrian border town of Cobán, thus contributing to further expansion of the Islamic State in the areas with high Kurds population. In regions bordering Syria, Turkish Special Forces and police are tightening their control, mostly over Kurds free transportation, while Jihadists and Islamists enjoy freedom. In fact, Turkey has recently evolved into a base for terrorists and a transit corridor for transporting recruited Islamic State militiamen from around the world to Syria and Iraq. Along with the Syrian refugee camps, training camps for militiamen of the so-called moderate Syrian opposition composed of the defectors and deserters from the Syrian army are operating in the border regions of the country. It is not a secret that many of them will soon join the ranks not only of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) opposing al-Assad, but the “Jhabgu en Nusra” Islamic State and other radical Islamic groups. The intention of the Turkish authorities to change the undesirable regime in Damascus as soon as possible prevails over both common sense and morality. Today, Ankara turns a blind eye to the actions of terrorists who, one way or another, fight, or are prepared to fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad.

Ankara did not stop at arresting the PKK activists on its territory, but carried out a series of bombing and artillery attacks on the military positions, bases and arms dumps of the PKK located on the territory of the Iraqi Kurdistan. It seems that the no-force agreement between the Turkish authorities and the PKK, reached with such difficulty, is again being tested. It is the Islamic State who benefits from the escalation of violence between Ankara and the PKK.

There are opponents of further rapprochement of Erdogan and the Kurds among the Turkish nationalists as well who advocate the principle of "one government - one people". They continue to assert that "the Kurds are mountain Turks". Many of those opposing the Erdogan's government do not like the recognition of rights and freedoms of the
Turkish Kurds (education, the media in the Kurdish language, the accelerated social and economic development of the Kurdish regions, etc.). For the first time in the history of the state, at the recent parliamentary elections, the Turkish-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (PDP) reached the 10% threshold needed to enter the Parliament, gaining 12.9% of the votes, winning 80 of 550 seats. Given that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has lost the constitutional majority, it was necessary to block it with other parliamentary fractions, including with the PDP. It is no coincidence that, at the last parliament and presidential elections, the percent of those supporting both the AKP and Erdogan was far greater in regions with a higher Kurds population than in the Turkish regions. Many Kurds are committed to mutually beneficial cooperation with the authorities.

It goes without saying that there are opponents of a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem among the Turkish Kurds, they are mostly from certain extremist wings of the PKK and migrants to the EU. Over decades, the PKK created its military and political organization and structure, raised generations of functionaries and militiamen who know only how to fight against the ruling regime in Ankara by terrorist methods. Speculating on the protection of the Kurds interest, the militiamen launch terrorist attacks in public places, killing ordinary soldiers and policemen behind their backs. At the same time, civilians, including the Kurds, are periodically killed during these attacks. Part of the "Kurdish freedom fighters" is actively involved in subduing drug trafficking, arms smuggling, openly racketeering between the Kurds under the pretext of collecting funds to fight the Turkish authorities. These semi-criminal groups of the Kurds are pulled the carpet away from under their feet by the peaceful agreement with Ankara.

It can be said that the attack in Suruci, other actions of the Islamic State in the Syrian-Turkish border region, as well as responses of the PKK extremists, are the links to one and the same chain. These provocations are shadowed by a plan to tear apart peace talks and negotiations between the Turkish authorities and the PKK, to further destabilize the situation in the Southern part of the country, and drag Ankara into a new drawn-out armed conflict with the Kurds. Despite the obviousness of this whole scenario, Erdogan is influenced by provocateurs and, instead of decisively ridding the country of radical Islamists and jihadists, tightening control over the Turkish-Syrian border, he rounded the PKK supporters with all his repressive apparatus and army.

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