Kurds are Mere Pawns of Washington and Ankara

The US administration, determined to overthrow the Damascus regime at any cost, has gone as far as to activate its ties and contacts with Syrian Kurds, who have been trying to maintain their neutrality amidst the Syrian civil war. The Democratic Union Party and its military wing—the People's Protection Units, which are keeping the situation in Kurdish enclaves in Syria under control and successfully countering militants from radical Islamist groups, have upset Washington's plans by refusing to fight Bashar al-Assad's troops and demonstrating their eagerness to repel Turkish aggressors, should they try to cross Syrian border in the north. Since Ankara believes that the Democratic Union Party is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, banned in Turkey, it has repeatedly shelled the positions of the People's Protection Units.

Realizing that since the beginning of the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces operation in Syria, Turkey has been losing its positions and is no longer controlling the situations on the Turkish-Syrian border as much as it used to, and that attempts to create a "buffer zone" under the auspices of Turkey in the north of Syria have failed, Washington decided to change its strategy and instead of supporting Kurdish militiamen from the air, has set about establishing dialogue with the Democratic Union Party, protecting Kurdish enclaves from the claims and attacks of Turkey at political and diplomatic levels, sending American military instructors and fighters-artillery observer from its special forces, and supplying Syrian Kurds with arms and equipment.

It is a known fact that back in mid-October of this year, Washington created a new "moderate Syrian opposition" under the name of "Syrian Democratic Forces," incorporating armed gangs of a combined Arab-Kurdish Fajr al-Hurriya group. Soon after that, Americans initiated the establishment of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria in Erbil (Iraqi Kurdistan). And it turned out that Fajr al-Hurriya groups were meant to be the military force of this newly founded party. It seems that by taking these steps, Washington was trying to gather whatever was left from the failed Kurdish National Council, which had claimed the role of an organization representing interests of all Syrian Kurds, while collaborating with the "moderate Syrian opposition" and the West.

Ultimately, the US administration was nurturing plans of establishing (on the base of the Free Syrian Army) a new opposition to al-Assad that would unite Kurds, Syrian Turkmens, Assyrian Christians and all other groups not associated with the Islamic State or the Jabhat al-Nusra. But air strikes of Russian Aerospace Defense Forces and of the Syrian Armed Forces battered these groups as well as the armed gangs of Syrian Turkmens and Turkish nationalists.

Despite all efforts of the "transoceanic friends" to engage Kurds in an anti-al-Assad alliance, the leaders of Syrian Kurds explicitly stated that they are eager to participate in talks and discuss the future structure of the Syrian state, including the debates initiated by the opposition, and would continue fighting ISIS and other extremist groups, but only in the case that they have to defend their historic territory and lives of their tribesmen. Kurds underpin that they will be satisfied with any government as long as it grants Kurds the same rights and the same degree of freedom as to Arabs, and as long as this government does not challenge their status of the autonomy (that they acquired in struggle) and grants them the right of proportional representation in the bodies of the central authority. It does not seem that Kurds are willing to participate in offensives in Arab-Sunni provinces of Syria, or fight
The US has engaged in an even more intricate game with the Kurds in Iraq, where they relinquished the palm of victory to Turkey. Washington wholeheartedly embraces the further fusing of Ankara and Erbil into a union that has been taking shape in the recent years. The US administration is very much pleased that Turkey and Kurds have close ties, which is reminiscent of more of a strategic partnership encircling all aspects of life. The reason the US supports this partnership is because as long as Turkey and Kurds have an affinity, the influence of Iran and of the pro-Iranian lobby in Baghdad will be kept at bay. Amidst the war against the Islamic State, President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region Masoud Barzani has to account for the interest of the US and Turkey in the region since he heavily depends on their assistance and support in the military and other domains. Besides, it should be kept in mind that today Turkey remains an exclusive transit corridor for Kurdish hydrocarbons to the world market and the key trade and economic partner of the Kurdistan region. These circumstances explain the close-knit relations between Erdogan and Barzani. They also demonstrate why Turkey not only expands the mutually beneficial trade and economic relations with this de facto independent subject of Iraq, but feels free to intermittently shell bases and camps of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in the Qandil Mountains in the country’s north.

Having failed to fulfill its aggressive plans in respect of Syria, Ankara attempted to compensate its political and military blunders by invading the northern territory of Iraq. Turkey deployed troops to Iraq’s Nineveh province without a declaration of war. A ground force unit (estimated as a battalion of a regular army), supported by artillery, several dozen tanks and armored personnel carriers encroached upon the territory of the country near the town of Bashik, 30 km from the administrative center of Mosul in the province of Nineveh. Allegedly, Turkish troops were deployed to Iraq at the request of the local authorities to safeguard their instructors training local Sunni Arab, Kurdish and Syrian Turkmen militiamen there. Earlier Washington announced its readiness to deploy special US forces to this area.

Prime minister of Iraq Haider al-Abadi and Head of Parliament’s Security and Defense Committee of Iraq Hakim al-Zamili have decried the actions of the Turkish authorities and declared them an act of aggression and gross violation of the sovereignty of the country. Baghdad demanded that Turkish commanders immediately withdraw their troops from northern Iraq saying that they do not need any foreign ground force units or counsellors and military instructors to be present in the country. The Defense Minister of Iraq Khaled al-Obaidi has also warned his Turkish counterpart Ismet Yılmaz of the negative consequences that the deployment of Turkish troops to Iraq will entail. According to the reports received from Baghdad, Iraqi authorities were compelled to urgently appeal to the United Nations Security Council. However, most probably the UN Security Council will not condemn Turkish actions since ultimately the US, Great Britain, and France justify the aggression of their NATO ally and suggest that the conflict between Baghdad and Ankara be settled "on the bilateral basis only."

All Ankara’s attempts to justify its actions by saying that the deployment of troops to the territory of a sovereign state was coordinated with the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan or local authorities and specifically with the exiled governor of Mosul sound unconvincing since Nineveh, 2/3 of which is controlled by ISIS, is not a constituent of Iraqi Kurdistan, but is directly subordinate to Baghdad. It has a diverse ethnic and religious structure. Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Yazidis, Syrian Turkmen, Armenians, Assyrians, Christians, etc. live there. The liberation of the town of Sinjar by Kurdish peshmerga brigades and blocking of a strategic highway connecting Mosul and Raqqa—the key towns of the Islamic State, facilitated the further progress of the Shiite police, and the Iraqi government troops in the direction of Mosul and the liberation of the Nineveh’s capital from ISIS militants. Ankara’s urge to control the situation in this region was one of the causes of incursion of Turkish troops into the Iraqi territory.

President Erdogan and his entourage believe that Nineveh province was illegally annexed from Turkey in 1920 by the victorious countries of World War I. Taking advantage of the attenuation of the central Iraqi authority and de facto division of the country into three parts (Shiite south, Sunni center and Kurdish north), Mr. Erdogan cherishes the idea of restoring “historical justice.” Since Ankara has mutually beneficial allied relations with the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan, Mr. Erdogan can maneuver pretending that his aggressive actions in the north of Iraq are legitimate.

The fact that Mosul and adjacent areas are dotted with fields of hydrocarbons and that one of the main oil and oil product transportation routes to Turkey is running through this area makes Turkish incursion in the north of Iraq especially significant. These circumstances as well as the determination to curb actions of Iraqi Shiite Arabs and their patrons from Tehran in the northern part of Iraq explain Ankara’s desire to take advantage of the power vacuum in the north of Iraq and take control over these territories after the liberation of Mosul and Nineveh. And it will not necessarily look like a direct occupation of Nineveh and its subsequent annexation from Iraq. After the
liberation of this territory from ISIS militants, the Turkish authorities might initiate a referendum among the residents to determine a new status of the region and, supported by Sunni Arabs, Syrian Turkmen and friendly Kurds, create a new subject of the federation similar to Iraqi Kurdistan. There are no doubts that the new regional authorities are expected to be loyal to Ankara and that Turkey will become a sort of a "shadow master" of the northern part of Iraq.

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