Provocation and Arm-Twisting — the Core Methods of Turkey’s Foreign Policy

The Turkish authorities are conspiring to wreck negotiations in Geneva being organized to work out ways of putting an end to the civil war in Syria. Ankara sees the prospects of participation of the Syrian Kurds in the talks as a real “stumbling block” to the process because President Erdogan and his team consider the major Syrian Kurdish party — The Democratic Union Party (PYD) — to be a terrorist organization. Turkey considers the PYD a “subsidiary” of the Turkish terrorist organization The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Having launched a new phase of military punitive action against local Kurds in the summer of 2015, Ankara also decided to simultaneously declare war on the Syrian Kurds living in the sovereign neighboring country (Syria).

Prime Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu forwarded a note to the Special Envoy of the UN to Syria Staffan de Mistura informing him of Turkey’s intention to withdraw its delegation from the negotiation process in case of participation of the Syrian Kurds in it. It could be that the Turkey’s position was one of the main reasons for rescheduling the talks from January 25 to a later date.

Ultimately, Saudi Arabia and Russia also have some disagreements (but not of such an antagonistic nature) as to the list of participants in the negotiations. And it is expected that the parties will be able to reach a consensus in the nearest future. It is quite possible that in the course of his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, US Secretary of State John Kerry, who served as an intermediary between Riyadh and Moscow, has helped Saudi Arabia and Russia harmonize their visions of what Syrian opposition groups should participate in the negotiations. US Vice President Joe Biden also visited Turkey on January 21-22, 2015, where he tried to persuade his partners in Ankara not to withdraw from the negotiations on Syria even if the Syrian Kurds will be present there.

Intransigent stance of Turkish authorities on the prospects of involvement of the Syrian Kurds in the negotiation process once again brought into focus Ankara’s aggressive and provocative behavior in the region. A question that inevitably arises in this connection is whether Turkey has a moral right to participate in the negotiations on Syria. It is well known that it was President Erdogan along with his team, who declared illegitimacy of Bashar al-Assad’s government and have been making every possible effort to overthrow it for some years now. Turkey has repeatedly shot down aircrafts and helicopters of Syrian Air Forces, shelled Syrian territory, including with use of mortar-guns and artillery, launched missile and bomb strikes on Syria in the areas adjacent to the Turkish border inhabited mainly by the Kurds. Ankara was convicted of supplying weapons and ammunition to armed gangs of Turkomans and other Islamist groups (Jabhat al-Nusra, Islamic State, etc.), hosting the camps and training bases for Syrian anti-government forces. The Turkish hospitals have been treating wounded militants from the mentioned groups. The country has, basically, turned into a “transit corridor” for the distribution of newly-trained jihadists from around the world, who would later get involved in the trade of smuggled oil, museum artifacts, weapons and drugs. The Russian aircraft that participated in the countering of ISIL terrorists (DAISH) and was treacherously shot down, the execution of the Russian pilots by gangs of Turkomans and Turkish nationalists, repeated incursions of Jabhat al-Nusra militants into Syria from the Turkish territory have clearly demonstrated whom Turkey supports.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that not only Turkey carries out acts of state terrorism in the region, but also acts as an ally, a base and a stronghold of international terrorists as well as a “transit corridor” for jihadist
militants of all sorts. Do envoys of Ankara have the moral right to negotiate peaceful settlement of Syrian crisis on a par with other participants of the Conference, some of whom represent the parties (Bashar al-Assad, the Kurds) Turkey is at open war with?

Who has entitled President Erdogan and his accomplice to determine the composition of the delegation of a sovereign state? This is strictly Syria’s internal business. The Syrian Kurds are indigenous people of this country and comprise approximately 10% of its citizens. They strictly adhere to neutrality in the ongoing civil war, act as, so to say, “third force” in all negotiations, do not pursue the collapse of Syria and do not act as separatists. On the contrary, the Kurds express their willingness to support any Damascus government as long as it guarantees their national rights and freedoms in a new Constitution. And those were not Kurds, who impinged upon the Turkish territory, but the Turkish authorities that tried to create a so-called “buffer zone” in the Kurdish enclaves of Syria, which, according to their design, was supposed to be run by the Turkish Army and pro-Turkish forces of the Syrian opposition.

It is a well-known fact that those were the Kurds, who stopped further progress of Islamist gangs in a tough battle on the Syrian-Turkish border (at Kobani, and in other places), and drove jihadists dozens of kilometers away from the areas densely populated by the Kurds. Even Ankara’s Western NATO allies had to admit a positive role and importance of the Kurdish militias in the struggle with the forces of the international terrorism. Washington has already sent several dozens of special operations soldiers and centerers to help the Syrian Kurds; it supports Kurdish military operations, targeting Islamists, with missile and bomb strikes. Russia has also expressed its willingness to intensify the assistance granted to the Syrian Kurds. Kurdish leaders, for example, the PYD’s Co-Chair Salih Muslim, regularly participate in consultations held by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and cooperate with other Russian state and public institutions.

Turkish representatives even brought up the issue of exclusion of the Syrian Kurds from the negotiation process in the EU countries. In particular, Prime Minister of Turkey Ahmet Davutoglu raised this question at the meeting with the German Chancellor A. Merkel, while visiting Germany. Turkish Prime Minister has also attempted to press the German authorities into accelerating the allocation of 3 billion Euros by the EU countries to assist Syrian refugees temporarily accommodated in Turkey. Ankara claims that it has not received the promised funds and uses that circumstance as an excuse for not taking any significant measures to restrain the influx of illegal immigrants (including those coming through the Balkans) to the EU. Heads of defense and economic departments, as well as Ministers of Foreign and Internal Affairs of the two countries participated in the negotiations in Berlin. The funds allocated by the EU are to be used to improve the living conditions of about 2.5 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Turkey. Prior to the trip to Berlin, Ahmet Davutoglu made it clear in one of his interviews that Ankara was dissatisfied with the amount of the promised financial aid. “We shall reconsider this issue in the future, as nobody knows how long the crisis will last,” noted Turkish Prime Minister. To exert more pressure on the German authorities, Turkey uses such arguments as the recent terrorist attack in Istanbul, and the three million Turkish community, comprising a considerable share of German electorate. It should also be taken into consideration that the Federal Republic of Germany is Turkey’s most important trade partner, with the annual volume of trade of 32.6 billion dollars, and that several million German tourists still opt for affordable holidays in Turkey.

So, what is really happening—Turkey is using the ongoing fierce war in the neighboring Syria, in which it is largely involved, to arm-twist the international community and the EU states to squeeze more benefits for itself. Turkey has also started using provocations and arm-twisting as the core methods of its foreign policy in an attempt to overcome the international isolation and political and financial crisis it found itself at the beginning of 2016.

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