Turkey’s War on Kurds: Who is the Actual “Terrorist?”

While Turkey, backed by the Western propaganda as it is, officially continues to blame Russia for the so-called ‘in-human’ strikes in Syria, its own direct—un-authorised and illegitimate—bombing of Syria has actually resulted in the death of scores of Kurds, who have been fighting for their legitimate political rights for many decades. While Saudi Arabia and its principle allies have been fighting the war in Syria in their bid to establish Salafi-hegemony in the Middle East, for Turkey, however, this war has turned out to be a ‘blessing in disguise’ in terms of allowing it to surgically cleanse the Kurds. The ‘great purge’ is, therefore, well under way; while the mainstream Western media continues to pay only lip service to the humanitarian crisis Turkey has created.

Turkish official propaganda, which reminds us of Nazi Germany’s war propaganda during the Second World War, reached its peak when on last Monday (15-02-2016) Turkish Prime Minister went on to describe Russia as a “terrorist organization.” Not only is it a travesty of responsible diplomatic statements, but also tends to divert the general public’s attention away from the havoc Turkish military interventions and operations in Syria and its own territory respectively have been playing for last one year or so.

While Turkish Prime Minister was busy in Kiev labelling Russia as a “terrorist organization”, Turkish forces were busy bombing Kurds in order to prevent them from making advances in their fight against ISIS currently going on in and around Aleppo. Following similar fire on last Saturday and Sunday, Turkish shelling again hit several parts of Aleppo province on Monday (15-02-2016) according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based monitoring group. According to a report of AFP, a journalist on the Turkish border said Turkish howitzers opened fire on Monday afternoon for around 20 minutes from the Akcabaglar region near a border crossing with Syria.

The reason for such attacks, as was explained by the Turkish Prime Minister himself on the same day, is that Turkey is not prepared, at any cost and under any circumstances whatsoever, to allow Kurds to have any territory under their control on the Turkish border. He further said that Ankara ‘will not let Azaz fall’, adding ‘the necessary intervention will be made’. The situation is a major headache for Washington too, which has backed the Kurds in their battles against ISIS despite the discomfort of fellow NATO member.

What ails Turkey?

All this is happening against the larger context of Turkish intransigence to allow the Kurds political accommodation within and outside Turkey. For decades, Turkey has been projecting ‘Turkish nationalism’ in a way that gives little to no space to Kurdish nationalism. For years, especially since Erdogan’s emergence in Turkey and his alliance with Turkey’s ultra-nationalists, resistance against Kurds has intensified manifold, forcing the Kurds into adopting militant methods of politics to ensure their survival against a highly intensified Turkish assault.

While Turkey saw in the on-going war in Syria an opportunity to impose a ‘final solution’ on the Kurdish question, the reverse has happened and continues to happen as Kurds have not only proven to be extremely resilient and militarily organized to withstand Turkish attacks, but also been making quite successful counter-attacks.

These particular developments have shaken the very foundation of Turkey’s traditional repressive strategy against Kurds. Consider this, for instance: for many years Turkey’s recipe for combating Kurdish nationalism was based on
pretending—taking its cue from typical policies of acute ethnic repression and denigration—that Kurds did not simply ‘exist.’ Even as Turkish troops battled the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), government propaganda maintained that Kurds were—virtually denying them any separate existence—merely a subgroup of Turks and that their language, banned from official use, was merely a dialect of Turkish language. This tactic has, however, not only failed but also backfired in terms of an ascendant Kurdish militant resistance. Hence, Turkish resolve of imposing a ‘final solution’ to the Kurdish question.

The Final Solution!

Since the beginning of the war, Turkey has been attacking Kurds both inside and outside Turkey. In Diyarbakir region, Turkish tanks, along with more than 2,000 police and soldiers, appear bent on burying in rubble the Kurds as well as PKK fighters. While official and semi-official sources claim that ‘no innocents’ have been killed, local sources have been making different claims. Residents fleeing Sur say swathes of their neighborhood have been destroyed by artillery fire. Historical sites, including a 16th-century mosque and a newly restored Armenian church, have been damaged, says Ahmet Ozmen, deputy head of the local bar association. In November the bar’s president, Tahir Elci, was shot dead during a gun battle moments after making a televised plea for peace.

The local economy, which was just emerging from decades of war, is again reeling. Metin Aslan, of the local chamber of commerce, estimates the cost to Diyarbakir alone at more than $300m; the unemployment rate threatens to climb from 16% last year to over 30%. The city’s gleaming new international airport, a reminder of the faith investors once placed in peace talks between the PKK and the government, is nearly empty.

On other hand, Turkey’s assault on Kurdish areas received fresh boost with Erdogan’s win in the re-election of November, 2015. The two-edged ‘final solution’, which involves military operation against KPP and YPG and economic strangulation of Kurds within Turkey, received a fresh and ‘legal’ boost with Erdogan’s victory in the re-election of November, 2015.

Erdogan’s ruling party, which self-ironically once called for an end to Kurdish persecution, has now been selling the ‘final solution’ of the Kurdish question to its voters since its initial failure to win absolute majority in June 2015 elections. To secure the required majority, it started conflict with the PKK, sell the idea of re-establishing the glory of ‘Ottoman Empire’ under the re-defined banner of Turkish nationalism and now feels politically obliged to eradicate the Kurds. The extent of anti-Kurd sentimentalism being injected into the Turkish society can be gauged from the fact that state prosecutors have placed over 1,100 Turkish academics under investigation for writing a letter calling for an end to military operations in the south-east.

Such radicalization of Turkish society is deeply rooted in Erdogan’s fall to a classical colonial fantasy that he can resolve the Kurdish question by bombing them, or that that he can end Kurdish nationalism by force. Turkey has already wasted decades trying to do so. Returning to suppression is futile, since Kurds form a large minority and control a lot of territory in Syria and northern Iraq. Instead, due to following such repressive policies, Erdogan is most likely to be drawn into a familiar vicious cycle, as the attempt to crush insurgents alienates moderate Kurds and creates favourable conditions for fresh recruits.

As such, of all the wars being currently fought in Syria in the name of ‘fighting terrorism’, Turkey’s is not only the most terrorizing but also aimed at ethnic repression, reaching the extent of potential ethnic cleansing, of Kurds—the world’s largest state-less ethnic group. Turkish shelling of YPG positions during the second week of February has signalled that worse will follow from Turkey if Kurdish advances continue.

In this context, Turkish Prime Minister’s accusations against Russia’s legitimate intervention in Syria are only a way to downplay the extent of Turkey’s own hysteric drive against Kurds. While Erdogan sternly continues to ride the horse of the ‘final solution’, the fact of the matter is that before PKK and YPG can be fully decimated, Turkish forces will have to raze the cities and towns of south-eastern Turkey and of Syria too. They are already on the road to doing this; while the so-called ‘champions of democracy’ relax and watch the ‘game of terror.’

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