

On the USA and Israel’s “Kurdish Project” within the “Syrian Case”

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Just a day after the fall of B. Assad’s regime, it became clear that the integrity of Syria is a challenging task. The processes that run counter to the interests of the Syrian sovereignty began much earlier. By December 10, 2024, units of the Turkish Army were spotted in the city of Jarabulus, Aleppo province. On the same day, Israeli tanks appeared on the distant approaches to Damascus, while the USA deployed B-52H heavy bombers and other aircraft in the region, which had not been seen in Syrian airspace since the battles with ISIS. According to the US Central Command (CENTCOM), American aviation carried out bombing raids on the positions of the “*remnants of ISIS*” in the eastern and southeastern Syria to prevent the militants from attempting to take advantage of the country’s destabilization once again.

It can be assumed that the massive air attack by the US Air Force is related to the Pentagon’s plans to “*clear*” the Iraqi-Syrian border of Islamist formations stationed there and create conditions for deploying US ground forces in the left-bank zone of the Euphrates River. The current US military contingent in Syria, numbering between 800 and 900 combatants, is insufficient to fulfill the tasks posed by the new Syrian reality.

Officially, the White House and the Pentagon state that they have decided “*not to leave Syria*” because the “Syrian Democratic Forces” (SDF) – a Kurdish-dominated international military alliance that, together with some Arab, Assyrian, and Turkoman units, controls the *Autonomous Administration of Rojava* in northeastern Syria, are currently in dire need of American military assistance. Washington has not yet spoken about plans to increase its contingent. However, its expressed concerns about the “*high possibility of an offensive*” against the Kurds by ISIS fighters and the conglomerate of pro-Turkish Islamist forces that overthrew B. Assad suggest that this possibility cannot be ruled out.

Thus, the outlines of “*occupation zones*” or “*areas of influence*” are already emerging in Syria, which contradict the stated plans of the leader of the “*Syrian revolution*” Abu Muhammad al-Julani (Ahmad Hussein al-Sharaa), to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Syrian Arab Republic.

At the moment, practically all of the central and northern parts of the country and its north, with Aleppo in the center, are under Turkish control. The south of the republic is under the actual oversight of Israel, which has occupied the Syrian Golan foothills, advanced its positions along the entire Syrian-Israeli buffer zone established by the 1974 agreement, and established its positions on Mount Hermon, approaching Damascus closely (IDF tanks are about 20 km from the Syrian capital). Eastern Syria, as already mentioned, is coming under US military control. Currently, the fate of the northwestern coastal province of Latakia, populated predominantly by Alawites, from whom the Assad dynasty hails, remains unclear. The cities and other settlements in this area are already occupied by the conglomerate of pro-Turkish “*rebel forces*” led by al-Julani, but the main asset of this region – the port of Tartus, remains without an evident “*possessor*” for now.

¹ The original (in Rus.) was posted on our website on 12.12.2024.

According to British sources, as of December 10, 2024, the Russian Mediterranean Squadron, consisting of five surface ships and one submarine, remained in the coastal zone. Meanwhile, according to the Israeli Ministry of Defense, on October 9, 2024, the IDF carried out a massive missile strike that destroyed the Syrian Navy docked in Tartus. The attack targeted only the vessels, while the port infrastructure of the Syrian Naval Base was practically undamaged. This may indicate that there is some agreement among the main actors of the “Syrian disintegration” regarding the future of this base, which has a strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean and is capable of receiving and servicing large military ships.

It can be assumed that the Russian side, which is keeping its squadron in the coastal zone, still hopes to negotiate with the Syrian actors to maintain its presence in Tartus. However, such a scenario is unlikely, because, on the one hand, Russia no longer has partners in the new “Syrian mosaic”, and on the other, the strategic asset of Tartus is one of the main acquisitions by the actors as a result of the dismantling of the Assad regime. Moreover, the continued presence of the Russian Navy at this base is hardly advisable due to the lack of air cover. This function was performed by the Russian airbase at Khmeimim, but it is now evacuated, and its territory is under the control of pro-Turkish forces.

The destruction of the Syrian Navy by Israel may indicate that Tel Aviv and Washington do not recognize the right of the pro-Turkish forces in Syria to have their own Navy. This could mean that they themselves intend to take control of the base in Tartus and possibly the whole Syrian coast in the future, thereby cutting off the new Syrian government’s access to the sea. The USA may do this in the near future despite Turkey’s displeasure. The reason could be the need to protect the Alawites in Latakia from the outrages of pro-Turkish forces, which are already taking place. Turkey understands this, as well as the prospects of the Pentagon turning Latakia into a convenient foothold for supplying the American grouping in Eastern Syria, which will be increased in support of the Kurdish administration of Rojava.

Several events indicate Ankara’s anxiety about the situation in Syria. Turkish officials have openly accused Tel Aviv of occupying southern Syria and have hurried to deploy their own troops in the Aleppo province. Soon there was an information leak from Ankara that the “*revolutionary forces*” led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) intend to move the capital of Syria from Damascus to Aleppo. Finally, HTS, in alliance with the “Syrian National Army” (SNA), directly controlled by Ankara, began an offensive on Deir-ez-Zor, which was handed over by Assad’s troops to the Kurdish formations of Rojava a week ago.

Ankara has become concerned that the manifesto of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham’s leader al-Julani, supported by Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, “*on maintaining the integrity and sovereignty of Syria*” is becoming unfeasible. The main threat to Turkey, as a result of the failure of the manifesto’s stated goals, could be the creation of a Kurdish state in northeastern Syria. Ankara suspects that the USA and Israel are violating previous agreements and aiming to partition Syria with the intention of occupying Damascus and Latakia, and ultimately removing Rojava and the entire left bank of the Euphrates from Syria.

For this reason, Turkey invaded Jarabulus despite having no military necessity and apparently plans to move further. It also quickly sent its allied SNA forces to Deir ez-Zor to

cut off the Kurds of Rojava from the region's oil wells. At the same time, Ankara warned its opponents that it could “*shift*” the Syrian capital directly to its border, then occupy it.

In response, Washington hurried to assure Ankara that it would not take any steps without considering its interests. On December 9, 2024, an unnamed high-ranking American official told the media that US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, CIA Director William Burns, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken were engaged in a “*constructive dialogue*” with the Turkish side regarding the situation in Syria. On December 12, 2024, Blinken arrived in Ankara, where he was personally met at the airport by R. Erdogan, an unprecedented event in Turkish diplomatic history. After the talks in Ankara, the US Secretary of State stated that the US had “*overcame*” all the misunderstandings with Turkey regarding Syria. The Turkish side, however, was more restrained in its comments and did not express optimistic assessments of the conversation with A. Blinken.

It is evident that high-ranking American officials are trying to dispel Turkey's suspicions regarding the plans of the USA and Israel. However, these suspicions are only growing. Another reason for these suspicions was the massive Israeli bombardments of Syrian military vessels, airfields, aircraft, missiles, and other arsenals, which Turkey believes legitimately fell into the hands of HTS and SNA from Assad's army after the revolution.

Judging by the indirect data reaching to the media, a scandal is brewing between the USA and Turkey, but both sides are trying to conceal it for now. Noteworthy in this context is the statement made on December 10, 2024, by high-ranking American official, US Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Robert Wood, which sheds light on the core of the problem. Wood noted that Turkey is an ally of the US and a NATO partner, and therefore their close cooperation will continue in the coming days, weeks, and months. He said nothing about the need to preserve Syrian sovereignty but emphasized that “*the authorities who have assumed control in Syria are under the close scrutiny of the international community, which wants to ensure that their rhetoric is implemented*”. Wood also added that “*the USA wants to ensure that the ammunition left by the regime in Syria does not pose a danger*”.

Thus, the official representative of the United States made it clear that the US-Turkish cooperation regarding the future of Syria is possible only under American strategy, which implies that the groups that have seized power in Syria should not hinder the plans of the USA and Israel. Consequently, the destruction of the arsenals that have fallen into the hands of the “*revolutionaries*” by Tel Aviv is a preventive measure to exclude their incorrect steps in the future.

Thus, Turkey found itself in a situation where it either had to join the plans for the division of Syria and be satisfied with the northern and central regions of the country or be ready to assume the role of Iran and Russia, which were trying in vain to maintain the unity of the country in the hands of the regime supported by force. However, the main difficulty of this dilemma for Ankara is that in both cases, the question of the creation of Kurdish statehood on the former territory of Syria, which in the future may also include the Kurdish-populated regions of northern Iraq, where PKK-affiliated groups allied with Rojava are stationed, remains relevant.

Ankara feels deceived but cannot speak about it openly. Turkish society is in euphoria over the fall of Assad and the *de facto* capture of Aleppo, and R. Erdogan does not want to spoil this celebration with the unpleasant news that allies like the USA and Israel are blatantly violating the “*previous agreements*”.

Meanwhile, the Israeli media openly states that Tel Aviv “*now more than ever*” needs to make efforts to create an independent Kurdistan. In turn, the Israeli authorities are more cautious in their statements, but they also make it clear that the process of resolving the “Kurdish problem” is entering a decisive phase. On December 10, 2024, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar stated that the factual fragmentation of Syria is inevitable: “*It is unrealistic to think that one Syrian state will have sovereignty over the entire region. It would be logical to achieve autonomy, and possibly a federal government for Syrian minorities*”. Sa’ar’s words indicate that Israel intends to prevent Turkey and its proxies from establishing a unified order throughout Syrian territory and is already conducting a complex of actions with the USA to weaken and divide the “*anti-Assad revolutionary coalition*”. The central task of this program, apparently, should be to create all conditions for the final removal of the Kurdish administration of Rojava from the hypothetical Syrian sovereignty. Doubts about this were dispelled by the news spread by Middle Eastern media on December 12, 2024, that SDF leaders, amid the threat of an Islamist offensive, turned to Tel Aviv, requesting Israeli military assistance and support in creating their own statehood.

Turkish media express concern that Israel and the USA are planning something in the territory controlled by the SDF. On December 10, 2024, the head of the US Central Command, General Michael Kurilla, visited eastern Syria, where he held a confidential meeting with Rojava Kurdish forces’ leaders at one of the US bases. After that, the American commander then travelled to Baghdad, where he held talks with Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad al-Sudani.

These urgent meetings suggest to the Turks that the American military is seeking to create a reliable logistical route through Iraqi territory to supply the Kurds with new batches of weapons. At the same time, Ankara is indignant that while Israel was bombing the Syrian military infrastructure inherited from HTS and SNA, Kurdish groups managed to evacuate Russian air defense systems (Kub SAMs) and heavy weapons and ammunition from Assad’s arsenals from Deir-ez-Zor to the areas they control. These events lead Turkish analysts to conclude that the SDF Kurds are actively preparing for clashes with HTS and SNA, and their protection from possible Turkish airstrikes will increase significantly, considering that the Americans have already transferred to them a sufficient number of portable Western-made air defense systems.

Thus, it can be stated that the likelihood of large-scale hostilities between the Syrian formations supported by Turkey and the Kurdish forces of Rojava, overseen by the Americans and Israelis, is very high. This indicates a deep fracture in the platform of the anti-Assad coalition.

Moreover, the contradictions between Turkey on one side and the USA and Israel on the other could escalate if HTS (Hayat Tahrir al-Sham) refuses the confrontation with the Kurds suggested by the Turks. There are reasons for such assumptions given the ambiguous assessments of international experts regarding the personality of al-Julani. There is

information that this person collaborates simultaneously with Turkish, American, and Israeli Special Services, making it difficult to predict which side he will favor if Ankara, Washington, and Tel Aviv fail to reach a consensus on the future of Syria.

According to several Russian analysts, it is possible that HTS, led by al-Julani, might refuse close cooperation with Turkey and not support its plans. Considering this possibility, it is too early to say that all actors of the “*Syrian revolution*” will unequivocally change their position on the final expulsion of the Russians from Syria. Depending on developments, there might be a situation where the presence of the Russians becomes advantageous for one of the main players in the region (primarily Turkey). It is not excluded that this is why the Russian Navi has not yet left the Syrian coastline.

Summarizing the above, it should be concluded that the USA and Israel, using the ambiguous situation in Syria and the difficulties Turkey will face in trying to assemble the Syrian “puzzle” into a configuration acceptable to itself, are already making attempts aimed at the final secession of Kurdish autonomy. Washington and Tel Aviv do not trust the idea of “assembling” the Syrian lands under the leadership of supposedly hastily secularized Islamist forces, which they themselves helped to create to combat Iranian influence in the region. With the fall of the Assad regime and the weakening of Hezbollah, the Shia “*Axis of Resistance*” in the Middle East is broken, but the legitimization of Sunni militant groups on the political heritage of the Assad family may create new challenges for the allies. The security of Israel and the strategic interests of the USA in the region require the fragmentation of Syria, with a series of internecine wars between Syrian parties, militant formations, and ethnic groups, the course of which will weaken their potential and create all the conditions for achieving Kurdish sovereignty.

According to US and Israeli strategists, the focus on the independence of the Syrian Kurdistan, potentially ready to integrate with its Iraqi counterparts, fully aligns with their interests in constructing a new order and balance of power in the Middle East. A sovereign Kurdistan under the tacit patronage of Washington and Tel Aviv means control over Syrian and northern Iraqi oil. It ensures oversight of future logistical and energy routes from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. It serves as a foothold enabling the USA-Israeli tandem to keep Iran, Turkey, and the Arab world in constant tension. Finally, it involves tens, and potentially hundreds, of thousands of well-trained fighters whose high motivation, unlike the region’s norms, is not associated with Islamist movements. The national idea rooted in the Kurdish identity has made it impossible for this people to assimilate into the Islamic world. The USA and Israel made this observation long before the recent events in the region and arrived at the idea of granting independence to the multi-million Kurdish population—the largest in the world among those who do not have their own national statehood. Naturally, this comes at the cost of the Kurds’ unconditional loyalty to the American and Israeli interests.