

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-plays-kurdish-card-as-us-turkey-watch.aspx?pageID=449&nID=109813&NewsCatID=409>

Russia plays Kurdish card as US, Turkey watch

MURAT YETKİN

2/16/2017

Moscow hosted a Kurdish conference on Feb. 15 that drew Kurdish political figures from four neighboring Kurdish-populated countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Kurdish media outlets called it a “Kurdish National Conference,” though Russian officials refrained from labeling it.

The conference came to the agenda after a meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and representatives of the Democratic Union Party (PYD) on Syria on Jan. 27 in Moscow. That meeting was followed by Turkey’s blocking of the PYD’s participation in a conference on a cease-fire on Syria in Astana on Jan. 23-24. The PYD and its militia, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), is collaborating with the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) as their ground units against the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL), or DEASH.

Turkey did not want the PYD to take part in cease-fire talks, despite being a fighting party, because the PYD is the sister organization of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has been fighting against Turkey for more than three decades in a war in which more than 40,000 people have been killed. The PKK is also designated as a terrorist organization by the

U.S.. Actually, the collaboration with the PYD is a major source of the rift between the two NATO allies and pushed Turkey to cooperate with its NATO rival Russia in Syria.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan is waiting for a clear signal from U.S. President Donald Trump about his Syria strategy to revise his own, especially after the belated telephone conversation of Feb. 8. But the Trump administration is deep in controversy over Russian involvement in the U.S. election that has resulted in National Security Adviser Michael Flynn having to resign. As Trump waits for a new Pentagon plan for Syria and ISIL and Erdoğan waits for Trump to respond to his questions about Syria and the PYD, Russian President Vladimir Putin seems to be playing the Kurdish card to consolidate the Russian position in the Middle East.

Even the date of the Moscow meeting is enough to play with the nerves of both Ankara and Washington.

Feb. 15 is the 18th anniversary of the capture of Abdullah Öcalan, the founding leader of the PKK, in 1999 through a joint operation by U.S. and Turkish intelligence services in Kenya, after he had spent months on the run from Syria, where he used to be based, to Greece, Russia, Italy and once again Greece before the final destination of Nairobi.

It is an irony that one of the biggest Kurdish groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq, (KDP) whose leader, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masoud Barzani, rejected the invitation in Moscow. It is another irony that the KDP was founded in 1946 in the Moscow-backed Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan (with its base in Iran), which survived only for two years before his father, Mustafa Barzani, had to seek refuge in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, before migrating back to Iraq. Barzani does not want to risk his relations with any of Turkey, Iran or especially the U.S. now. Plus, the KDP has its own rivalry with the PKK and its affiliates in Syria and Iran.

Another irony is that PYD leader Salih Muslim, who openly recognizes Öcalan as his guide, used to have red-carpet treatment in Ankara during the dialogue between the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) government and the PKK through Öcalan in prison and the head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT), Hakan Fidan, between 2012 and 2015 during a halt in Turkey's bloodshed. The dialogue period ended when the PKK restarted its acts of terror in Turkey in July 2015 (coincidentally, ISIL started to hit Turkish people in Turkey at almost the same time), and the PYD was denounced as a terrorist, like the PKK, by the government.

Osman Baydemir, a member of the Turkish parliament for the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), which focuses on the Kurdish problem, is attending the Moscow conference as well. Baydemir was recently taken into custody and released in late January after being questioned on charges of "insulting the president" and "humiliating the Turkish Republic." But a number of MPs of the HDP, including the co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, are in prison because of accusations of helping the PKK. The HDP used to play a facilitator role between the Turkish government, Öcalan and the PKK headquarters in Iraq during the dialogue period. Meanwhile, Öcalan's niece, Dilek Öcalan, who is also an MP in Turkey's parliament, was in Moscow for the

meeting.

It is interesting that on the same day as the Kurdish meeting in Moscow, a round of cease-fire talks in Astana could not be held because some Syrian rebel groups complained that the Russians have not been able to stop the Bashar al-Assad regime from attacking them as agreed in the first round of Astana talks. Turkey, on the other hand, wants the Astana talks to focus on consolidating the cease-fire and leave the political future of Syria to the Geneva talks scheduled to take place on Feb. 23. It is still a question mark as to what the Turkish stance will be as both Russia and the U.S. insist that the PYD should take part in the talks – which risks the exclusion of Turkey, the country with the longest border with Syria.

Nevertheless, it seems the Moscow meeting has the potential to mark a turning point in the future of not only Syria but the Middle East in general.