



Tensions Escalate between Kurds and the Syrian Regime

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying articles provide insight into the reasons behind the recently escalating tension between the Kurds and the Syrian regime in northern Syria. As the first article from *al-Monitor*, a news site with analysts from the Middle East, discusses, Damascus is encouraging Arab tribes to escalate their violence against the Kurds to undermine the self-declared autonomous Kurdish Administration's control over the region. In addition, as per an interview of a Kurdish official published in *Hawarnews.com*, pro-Kurdish news site closely monitoring developments in northern Syria, the Syrian regime has also increased the presence of pro-Iranian militias in some Kurdish areas. These pro-Iranian militias and the provocations of Arab tribes by the Syrian regime creates instability in northern Syria, which endangers the safety and security of American forces stationed there.

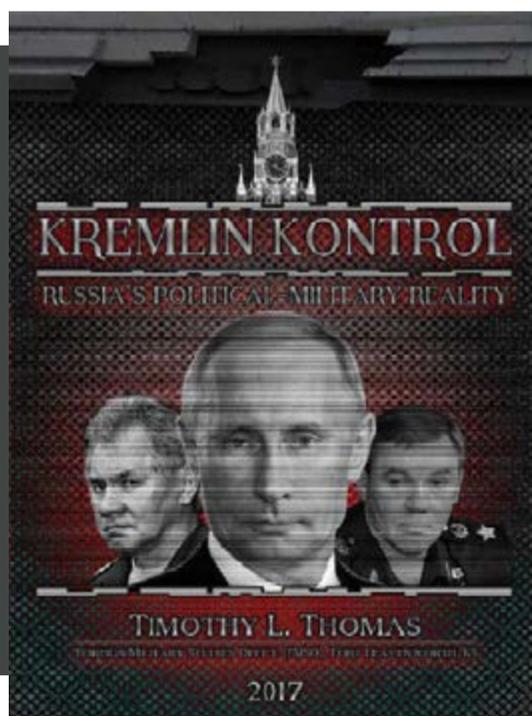


Press conference by the spokesman of the SDF, Kino Gabriel (center).
Source: VOA, via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Forces_d%C3%A9mocratiques_syriennes_22_janvier_2018.jpg, Attribution: CC-PD-Mark|PD VOA

The article also discusses some other possible triggering factors. For example, Turkey and the Syrian regime might have brokered a deal to weaken the Kurds because the perception is that the new US administration is likely to increase support for the Syrian Kurds who both Damascus and Ankara see as a threat. Another incentive for Russia-backed Damascus to cooperate with Ankara is the prospect of ending the US military presence in Syria. The author also points out that some have argued that the Kurds might have escalated the tension to clear the remnants of regime forces from Hasakah and Qamishli. However, Kurdish officials stated that the regime escalated the situation and Kurds seized the opportunity to fully take the control of both cities. The tensions seem to be diffused for now. Both sides engaged in a dialogue with Russian mediation in the past, but this time around Russia shows no indication that it will mediate to find a sustainable solution. In fact, when Kurds wanted to send a delegation to Damascus for a dialogue, Russia refused to provide security guarantees to the Kurdish delegation.

The Kurdish official interviewed by *Hawarnews.com* states that Kurds have been in touch with Russians to de-escalate tensions. While Russian mediation in some areas stabilized the situation locally, no progress has been made on long-term solutions. The Kurdish official claims that behind these attacks is a coordinated strategy by the Syrian regime and Turkey to undermine territorial control of Syrian Kurds in northern Syria. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“Damascus is inciting Arab tribes against the Kurds to undermine the autonomous administration and make the region less secure for the Americans.”



In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country's security forces and reestablished the nation's military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fms0/m/fms0-books/197266/download>



Continued: Tensions Escalate between Kurds and the Syrian Regime

Source: Fehim Tastekin, “How Turkey fits in regime-Kurdish showdown in Syria,” *al-Monitor* (a news site with analysts from the Middle East), 4 February 2021. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/turkey-syria-damascus-kurds-escalation-where-ankara-stands.html>

The fragile ties between Damascus and the Kurdish-led autonomous administration in northern Syria have seen a dangerous escalation...

...

Kurdish sources told Al-Monitor that the Russians did little to mediate in the crisis and declined to provide a security guarantee to a delegation the Kurds wanted to send to Damascus...

...Intelligence contacts between Turkey and Syria make sense in the context of the common threat the two sides perceive from Kurdish autonomy, but they are unlikely to have advanced that much yet, he said.

...According to the Syrian daily al-Watan, senior Turkish intelligence and military officials held talks in Damascus Dec. 29. Meeting on the same day, the Turkish and Russian foreign ministers discussed the strategic town of Ain Issa, which Turkish forces had been shelling for weeks...

The Kurds also float a scenario whereby the Russians are making use of the Turkish threat to compel the Kurds to cede territorial control to the government, while Damascus is inciting Arab tribes against the Kurds to undermine the autonomous administration and make the region less secure for the Americans. In other words, Damascus is trying to deter the Americans as much as possible as Washington becomes more protective of the Kurds under new President Joe Biden.

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The final scenario has to do with Turkey. The argument goes that Turkey’s prospects of mounting a fresh military offensive or expanding Operation Peace Spring on the eastern bank of the Euphrates have dimmed after Biden’s victory... Turkey was believed to also eye the Derik area on the border, which US forces use as a supply route from Iraq to Syria. The new reality, however, is forcing Ankara to abandon such plans and seek cooperation with Damascus instead to crush the Kurdish self-rule.

From Damascus’ point of view... Another incentive to cooperate with Ankara would be the prospect of ending the US military presence in Syria. Although reconciling Turkish and Syrian interests remains a tall order, observers do not rule out the possibility of a pragmatic Turkish-Syrian understanding against Kurdish-held areas to the east of the Euphrates. A destabilized northeastern Syria might curb the Americans’ incentives to stay in the region, which would serve the interests of both Damascus and Ankara.

Source: “Çiya Kurd: Provokasyon encama hevkarîya hikumeta Şamê û dewleta Tirk e (Çiya Kurd: The provocation is the result of cooperation between the government of Damascus and the Turkish state),” *Hawarnews.com* (a pro-Kurdish news site closely monitoring developments in northern Syria), 30 January 2021. <https://www.hawarnews.com/kr/roportaj/ciya-kurd-provokasyon-encama-hevkarîya-hikumeta-sam-dewleta-tirk-e-r181.html>

Bedran Çiya Kurd stated that they did not meet with Damascus... and instead met with Russia, “Russia should fulfill its responsibilities and end the provocations.”

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According to available information, the Damascus government has increased its power in the region. It especially increased the Fatimiyun Battalion affiliated with Iran.

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The Damascus government and the Turkish state are collaborating. On one hand, the Turkish state makes threats, while on the other hand, the Damascus government carries out attacks. They want to continue the attacks on the region from all directions.