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Erdogan policies have played a major role in the Region

Zaher Baher

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In this article I will try to show how the regional policies, executed by Erdogan and his AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Justice and Development Party) in respect of Rojava, Bakur and Iraqi Kurdistan, meet the goals of the Turkey’s president.

None of these policies are in the interest of Turkey. They already have suicidal impact on the country’s social, economic and political situation. In future it may even cause a military coup in Turkey.

As for the economic situation, the biggest damage is done to the tourism sector.

- 8% of the workforce working in the tourist industry generates 12.9% of Turkey’s GDP.
- According to Burak Cosan, The Daily News Istanbul, in 2014 almost 42m people visited Turkey.
- Murat Ersoy, the head of the Tourism Investors Association in a press meeting on the 1st of June 2016 said “Our country’s loss in tourism revenue may increase up to \$15 billion over

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this year and the decline in tourist numbers by 30 percent compared to 2015”.

- The number of foreign arrivals visiting Turkey declined by 28% in April to 1.75 million compared to the same month of 2015, marking the steepest decline since May 1999, according to data by the Tourism Ministry.
- The number of foreign people visiting Turkey decreased by 16.5% to 5.82 million in the first four months of this year compared to the same period of 2015.
- In the first three months of 2016, tourism revenue decreased to \$4.07 billion with a 16.5% drop, according to data that was released by the Turkish Statistics Institute (TÜİK) on April 29.
- Tourism revenue was \$31.5 billion in 2015, an 8.3 percent decline compared to the previous year. Leading Turkish tourism player expects \$15 bln loss in revenue

We can all see at present that the social and political situation is getting worse as well. I believe the problems Turkey is currently facing are caused by ISIS which Erdogan has based his entire policy on.

How did that come about?

From the very beginning I said and believed that the main aim of invading Mosul by ISIS was because of Rojava and its social movement. The Democratic Self Administration (DSA) in Rojava up to this moment is exemplary not only in this region, but can be said for other parts of the world. As much as Erdogan is unhappy with the type of administration like the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), compliant in meeting his demands completely, he deeply hates DSA, which does not yield to his will.

The so called “international community” may have approved Erdogan’s war against Rojava in 2014. But instead of getting

the moment the KRG employees are getting less than half of their salary even they do not get that regularly. They are three to four months behind. This has affected the markets badly, whole services, projects have been stopped and poverty for many people will soon become unavoidable. Whenever and wherever people try to complain and protest they were told “they have to be grateful, at least they do not live under ISIS control and should not rock the boats because this is in the interest of ISIS and other our enemies”

Erdogan and his MIT policies for the time being were right and met their aims, even if they create a damage for Turkey in the long run. They were good for Erdogan, AKP and bad for Kurdish people and the rest of the region. It looks like Erdogan and his AKP now want to change their policy from war to peace with everybody except the Kurdish society. His future peace policy in the region certainly will be if not aimed to eliminate Rojava cantons, at least to reform them in the KRG manner.

Turkey involved directly, he decided to use a proxy – a terrorist group, ostensibly independent from Turkey. The problem was the terrorist groups supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar were not strong enough to defeat YPG/J (the people and the women protection Units). Erdogan had to choose the most fanatical, brutal and ideological one, ISIS, to achieve all his plans with a very little risk.

Why Erdogan and his National Intelligence Organization (MIT) have chosen Mosul for ISIS?

There were many reasons for Mosul chosen to be invaded by Erdogan and his MIT plans. The historical reason is, Mosul was one of the regions of the Ottoman Empire in the olden days; it is very close to both Turkey & Syria; it is also well connected by public transport with both of these countries. The Community of Ezidis mainly situated in that area, and also the closeness of Mosul to Kurdish towns like Erbil, Duhok, Tikrit and Kirkuk. The region of Mosul is very rich with oil. It was one of the weakest points in the country, probably second to Falluja. The vast majority of its residents are Sunni who resent the central government. They were marginalized and having very difficult time on the hands of the Iraqi army, police and the security. There were also several minor reasons in favor of this option.

Using ISIS to invade Mosul

The important point in this article is the invasion of Mosul. Without this operation it would have been impossible for Erdogan to carry out the rest of his plans successfully and to play a major role in the region.

Following the invasion of Mosul, ISIS declared al-Raqqah its Caliphate capital. The connection between these two cities is strong. The land controlled by ISIS has expanded, al-Raqqah became stronger. The invasion has made it easy for Turkey to support ISIS politically and militarily. In the meantime, ISIS supported the state of Turkey by supplying it cheap oil and caused an influx of refugees, used by Erdogan as a bargaining chip in

trading with Europe. Erdogan made it easy for ISIS to enter Turkey to terrorize the Kurdish and killing innocent people.

ISIS forces were under 5000, whereas the Iraqi forces were over 60.000 and equipped with new weapons including helicopters and tanks. It appeared, there was a conspiracy between Erdogan, KRG, Qatar and the Iraqi military generals in Mosul. Mosul was an easy victory for ISIS. There was no bloody battle; the entire town was taken within less than 24 hours. ISIS managed to gain many new powerful weapons easily that nobody could have expected. This boosted the confidence of ISIS and it then made its next move, to Kobane.

Why was Kobane, not Jazeera?

In order to execute their plans, Erdogan and MIT had to choose Kobane or Jazeera as their target. Distance wise, Qamishli in Jazeera is closer to Mosul at around 150 km, whilst from al-Raqqah is around 370 km. However, there were many other reasons to choose Kobane instead.

- Kobane is smaller than Jazeera in size and in population, as such it would be easier to control.
- Secondly, Kobane is between Afrin and Jazeera. Taking Kobane would cut the communications between remaining cantons.
- Thirdly, Kobane is poorer than Jazeera economically; its YPG/J forces are smaller as compared with Jazeera. Furthermore, Assad's has an army stationed in Qamishli and it is still there up to now; the army controls a few kilometers within Qamishli, the postal service and the airport. Kobane is free from Assad's control.
- The state of Turkey could support ISIS in Kobane and around Kobane through Sruce easier and better than supporting ISIS though Nusaybin, neighbor of Qamishli.

In regards to Kurdistan and KRG, Erdogan brought them endless war. In this war Kurdish Peshmerga became the main forces to fight ISIS. The war between the Kurds and ISIS made Kurds an enemy of Sunnis and to certain extent to Arabs as a whole and the Iraqi government. In the meantime the war made KRG be more dependent on Turkey and closer to US and Western countries. In effect Iraqi Kurdistan has become a big military base for Turkey and US.

By using ISIS in the region of Mosul so successfully, Erdogan managed to make KRG in particular and Kurdistan in general almost a part of Turkey. He is working on Iraqi Turkmens as well to increase the dispute between them and Kurdish communities and to escalate the tension. The dependence from Turkey made KRG, particularly Barzani Party, KDP, the main enemy not just of PKK and PYD, in fact to whole Kurdish society in Rojava and Bakur. From time to time, obviously at the order of Erdogan, Barzani even closes KRG borders completely. The most recent embargo was almost for 3 months between March of this year and June. Even worse is the fact that Barzani became silent about everything that happens in Bakur and Rojava. He neither supports the Kurds there, nor protest against the state of Turkey.

ISIS also put the Kurdish Islamic political organizations under pressure. They must clarify their attitude towards ISIS, either "with us or against us". In Iraqi Kurdistan we have a couple of Islamic political organizations and both have their own MPs in KRGs' Parliament. However one of them is very pro-Erdogan and both of them so far have not denounced ISIS as a non-Islamic group. The vast majority of Kurdish does believe they are sleepy cells of ISIS. They might be right.

One more important effect of arriving ISIS to Mosul and the rest of Kurdish areas, was preservation of the position held by Barzani and his government. Despite the bad situation of KRG economy, people there are reluctant to protest. They have made people scared to go on strike, protest, even demanding their wage, salary. At

ISIS managed to invade Mosul, the second town of Iraq and became a major threat. Invading Mosul meant the other towns and cities in that region, like Erbil, Tikrit and Kirkuk faced a big threat as well. ISIS managed to control entire oil fields and refineries in the area; the income from their production fueled ISIS' war effort instead of the government. Invading Mosul revived the old historic question of Mosul that always was in Erdogan's mind. He wanted to annex it for Turkey.

I believe this can be one of the reasons as to why Erdogan last year before the eyes of so called "international community" brought 5000 heavy military forces with variety of different weapons, including tanks, to the border of Iraq close enough to Mosul. Since then Iraq keeps demanding Turkey to withdraw its forces, while Erdogan keeps ignoring these demands.

By invading Mosul ISIS controlled the dam of Mosul that can threaten flooding Baghdad and many small towns and villages in the middle of Iraq. In supporting ISIS in invading Mosul, Erdogan managed to give strength to Arab Sunni tribes in the region at least if they do not support ISIS, they abstain to support the Iraqi government. Invading Mosul pushed the Iraqi government into deep debt by borrowing lots of money and buying more weapons. ISIS became more powerful and started to threaten to occupy Baghdad.

In 2014 ISIS rendered nearly a third of the country out of government control by taking more cities like Fallujah, Tikrit, Ramadi, Hit, Rutba and Telafar, with many villages. The threat of ISIS to Iraq was very real, up to this moment there has been no peace, no security in Baghdad and a few more towns in middle of Iraq.

In addition to all that Erdogan fighter jets since July of 2015 and even before that every week regularly crossed the borders and bombed heavily Qandil Mountain and the villages in the bottom of the mountain. This has caused the killing of so many people, injuring many more, displacing hundreds of family and killing their cows, cattle, dogs, sheep and destroying the environment.

- Finally, al-Raqqa is much closer to Kobane than Qamishli to Kobane.

I believe until the defeat of ISIS in January 2015 in Kobane, Erdogan and MIT policies were successful. In June and July of last year Erdogan adopted a couple more policies. Both policies were created to terrorize Kurdish people.

First, they did not approve the outcome of the general election held in June 2015 while the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) achieved excellent result well above the election threshold and gained 80 seats.

The second policy was his fascist attitude towards Kurdish people by terrorizing them, killing innocent people, arresting activists and creating a climate that was easy for ISIS to use suicide bombers. In July 2015, the suicide bomber attacked a gathering of a large group of leftist youth, communists and anarchists in Sruce; many people were killed and injured.

Erdogan was the beneficiary of using terror policy for three reasons. First, grounding a lot of forces there and restricted the freedom of movement to people. Second, made claim to his own people, Europe and the world that ISIS is his enemy too. Third, provoking PKK to start a war that gave him the justification to cancel the peace process and entering the war with Kurdish people all the way.

Alas, Erdogan was very successful and managed to provoke PKK and go with his tactic. Now the killing, arresting people, enforcing Curfew in Kurdish towns and cities, starving people withdrawing the political immunity on the HDP MPs continues. He also sacked 134 of the heads of Municipalities and replaced them with his supporters. All of this has been carried out in the eyes of US and the Western countries. All of this damaged the social movement in Bakur and were in the interest of Turkey government, its MIT, the right wing and racist groups.

Another success of Erdogan's was that since 05/07/15 he hasn't let Ocalan to be seen by any of his people including his own lawyers. This cut off the entire communication between Ocalan and PKK or other forces. This policy has again served the state of Turkey but not the Kurds from Rojava or Bakur.

Erdogan Policy in regards to Syria and Rojava

In this point of my article I draw the attention of the readers to both successful and failed policies of Erdogan.

Failures:

- Bringing down a Russian fighter Jet and killing its pilots was a disaster for Erdogan. He was not able to participate in the war in Syrian skies, and it also economically and politically damaged Turkey. In effect, president Putin introduced boycott of Turkey as a tourist destination.
- Erdogan also failed in convincing US and Western countries to set up a none-fly zone in Rojava. His main aim was just to fight the YPG/J forces there.
- Another failure policy was he could not go ahead with the joint plan with Saudi Arabia to take their forces into Syria to support the terrorist group against Assad's forces and YPG/J in the same time. By supporting ISIS and other terrorist groups damage was done to diplomatic relationship of Turkey and the USA.

At the same time, Erdogan scored some successes.

- Economically, ISIS supported Turkey by providing very cheap oil, letting some of the companies in Turkey using the Syrian children labors, and also using refugees as a bargaining chip with Europe.
- Normalizing diplomatic relationship with Egypt and also with Israel.

- Erdogan and MIT managed to form a military group from Syrian Turkmen against Assad and use them directly, supporting and providing them everything to make them powerful enough to claim that they represent all Turkmen in Syria.
- He also managed to make Kurdish opposition political parties (ENKS), the Syrian Kurdish National Council (that occasionally commit terrorist act especially in Jazeera), stand up against YPG/J and DSA.
- The most successful policy of Erdogan and MIT was making ISIS so powerful against YPG/J that pushed them in line of US and jointly fighting ISIS. YPG/J now are facing the most terrible war perhaps after Kobane, with support of US forces to liberate the Caliphate capital, al-Raqqah.

Erdogan policy in regards to Iran:

Erdogan and MIT have a double policies towards Iran. On one hand the Kurdish question became a common problem for both of them, that can make them friends. On the other hand the same issue can make them enemies if Iran starts supporting PKK or PYD.

In the meantime, it is quite obvious that a big number of Iranian solders are taking part in the war side by side with Assad's forces and Assad received other help from Iran. Assad also relies on support from Lebanese "Hezbollah" who are supported by Iran as well. Meanwhile Turkey is indirectly working on weakening Iran as a close ally of Iraqi government by supporting ISIS against Iraq. At the moment Iran-Turkey economical relationship is getting better and that is helping them to improve their political relationship too.

Erdogan's policy in regards of Iraq and KRG

Erdogan and MIT used ISIS not only in Syria and Rojava. In fact ISIS was the most powerful and active group that Turkey has been using to execute their policy against the Iraqi government and KRG.