

Yemen's government vows to mitigate effects of Houthi terrorism designation

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AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's prime minister has vowed to address any impact on humanitarian assistance or the remittances of citizens abroad following the US move to designate the Iran-backed Houthis as a terrorist organization.

Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed also urged the international community not to surrender to "Houthi blackmailing" and intimidation.

Saeed defended his government's strong support of the designation during a virtual interview with foreign journalists sponsored by the Sanaa Center for Strategic Studies.

He said that his government had formed a committee to handle any effects on the delivery of humanitarian assistance inside Houthi-controlled areas and the remittances of Yemenis abroad.

"We are determined to prevent any impact of the decision on the Yemenis. We have formed a committee to mitigate effects of the decision," he said.

When the US announced its intention to designate the Houthi movement as a terrorist organization last week, Yemen's government quickly urged the US administration to put the decision in place, predicting it would stop Houthi crimes and their looting of humanitarian assistance, and would smoothe the way for peace.

Referring to the impact of the US designation on peace talks between the Yemeni government and the Houthis, Saeed said that the decision would not undermine peace efforts. He said that the Houthis would be accepted as part of the Yemeni political and social spectrum when they abandoned hard-line ideologies and embraced equality and justice.

The Yemeni government agreed to go to Stockholm for reaching a solution to stop fighting and saving the city. This model has failed.

Maeen Abdul Malik Saeed, Yemen's prime minister

"This is an important pressure card on them and a real definition of them," he said, adding that the Yemenis would not allow the Houthi movement to rule them.

"Yemen would not be ruled by a racist and terrorist group," he said.

Formed under the Riyadh Agreement, Yemen's new government's ministers narrowly escaped death on Dec. 30 when three precision-guided missiles ripped through Aden airport shortly after their plane touched down.

The government accused the Houthis of staging the attack, saying that missile fragments collected from the airport showed that they were similar to missiles that targeted Marib city in the past.

The prime minister said that the Yemeni government had offered many concessions to reach an agreement to end the war. It had agreed to engage in direct talks with the Houthis in Stockholm in 2018 despite the fact that the Yemeni government forces were about to seize control of the Red Sea city of Hodeidah. However, the Stockholm Agreement had failed to bring peace to Yemen, he said.

“The government forces were about to capture the city within five days maximum. The Yemeni government agreed to go to Stockholm for reaching a solution to stop fighting and saving the city. This model has failed,” Saeed said.

In Riyadh, Yemen’s president Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi on Friday appointed Ahmed Obeid bin Daghar, a former prime minister and a senior adviser to the president, as president of the Shoura Council.

Hadi also appointed Ahmed Ahmed Al-Mousai as the country’s new attorney general.

Fighting continues

Heavy fighting between Yemeni government forces and the Houthis broke out on Sunday for the third consecutive day in contested areas in the districts of Hays and Durihimi in the western province of Hodeidah. Official media said that dozens of Houthi rebels and several government troops were killed in the fighting and loyalists pushed back three assaults by Houthis in Durihimi district.

In neighboring Hays, the Joint Forces media said on Sunday that the Houthis hit government forces with heavy weapons before launching a ground attack in an attempt to seize control of new areas in the district.

The Houthis failed to make any gains and lost dozens of fighters along with several military vehicles that were burnt in the fighting, the same media outlets said. Heavy artillery shelling and land mines planted by the Houthis have killed more than 500 civilians since late 2018, local rights groups said.



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Still hope for Yemen despite violence and famine, says UN envoy
Workshop outlines plans for malaria support in Yemen

[Patients die at home as Lebanese oxygen supplies run low](#)

Mon, 2021-01-18 00:28

BEIRUT: Many doctors specializing in bacterial and infectious diseases expect a further jump in the number of people infected with COVID-19 next week in Lebanon with hospitals exceeding their capacity.

On Sunday, the total number of laboratory-confirmed infections exceeded a quarter of a million people in the country.

In the first 17 days of the year 67,655 new cases were recorded, and the lockdown period is expected to be extended for at least 10 more days.

Suleiman Haroun, head of the Lebanese Syndicate of Private Hospitals, said: "The epidemiological scene in Lebanon reflects part of the reality, not all of it. The real situation will be worse yet."

He said: "All the beds designated for COVID-19 patients in hospitals are occupied, as well as in emergency departments, and there are dozens of patients moving from one hospital to another in search of a bed. Hospitals have exceeded their capacity."

Pulmonologist and intensive care specialist Dr. Wael Jaroush said: "I have never seen anything like what I see in the hospitals now. I never imagined that I would ever go through such an experience. There is no room for patients in the emergency departments.

"They are dying in their homes. Some of them are begging to buy oxygen generators, new or second hand.

"The price of a new one is normally \$700, yet people are selling used devices for about \$5,000, and some patients are forced to buy them in foreign currency, meaning that the patient's family buy the dollar on the black market for more than LBP8,000."

Jaroush said that patients were infected with the virus because of mixing

with other people at the end of last year and in the first 10 days of January. He expected that their number would increase during Monday and Tuesday. He would wait to see if the numbers declined on Wednesday and Thursday.

He said that 10-liter oxygen bottles and smaller ones are out of stock "because of the high demand on them, either for storage due to lack of confidence in the state, or because they are not available in hospitals."

"As a doctor, I come across patients who tell me that they bought the oxygen bottle two months ago, for example, and put it in their homes, just as they did when they resorted to storing medicines."

He pointed out: "These oxygen bottles do not last long. A COVID-19 patient who cannot find a vacant bed in the hospital and is asked to find oxygen and stay at home needs 40 or 50 liters of oxygen. So when the 10-liter oxygen bottle runs out, the patient dies because his heart stops. This is happening now and some patients have died in their homes."

Jaroush said: "The cardiologist Dr. Mustafa Al-Khatib suffered from COVID-19 yesterday and could not find even a chair in the emergency department. Since yesterday we doctors have been trying to find a place for him so that he can have a blood test and a scan for his lungs. This is our situation."

On Sunday, it was announced that the Military Hospital in Beirut also exceeded its capacity. The hospital cares for military personnel and their families.

This prompted its management to take 23 rooms in a private hospital that was damaged in the Beirut port explosion last August. The Lebanese Army Works Regiment is working to make it available within days to accommodate cases that need intensive care.

In addition to the lack of capacity, there was also a lack of medical supplies.

Activists on social media circulated calls to secure oxygen bottles that are needed for patients in hospitals that are needed for patients.

The search for hospital beds has caused disputes between the Lebanese Red Cross paramedics and some hospitals.

Georges Kettaneh, Lebanese Red Cross secretary-general, said: "The Red Cross responds to all crises in the country, especially COVID-19, and from the beginning we demanded hospitals to be ready. It was expected that disputes would arise between the Red Cross and some hospitals due to the decision of the Minister of Health in the caretaker government, Hamad Hassan, to receive all cases in hospitals."

Assem Araji, the head of parliament's health committee, said: "Despite the sanctions that the Ministry of Health decided to impose on some private hospitals that did not respond to the request to open departments to receive patients, certain hospitals did not comply. We have reached a catastrophic

stage that calls for national responsibility.”

Araji expressed his belief that “a complete lockdown for 11 days is not sufficient to limit the spread of the virus. Rather, it should be closed for three weeks, as recommended by the World Health Organization.”

Many well-known figures in Lebanon have died of the coronavirus during the past days.



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Lebanon signs with Pfizer for 2.1 million vaccine doses
Lebanon approves law to import vaccines as coronavirus hits new record

[Erdogan looks for new allies ahead of elections](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-18 00:18

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is hunting for potential electoral allies to bolster the People's Alliance that he formed with the ultra-nationalist party MHP.

The next elections are not scheduled until June 2023, but the growing popularity of the opposition has made him aware of his vulnerability in a possible snap election.

The unification of the opposition brought victory in key municipalities, including Istanbul and Ankara, during the 2019 local elections. The mayors of both cities are potential presidential challengers to Erdogan.

The Nation Alliance, which stood against People's Alliance in previous elections, consists of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) and the right-wing nationalist Good Party (IYI), with the backing of the Islamist-leaning Felicity Party (FP) and the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP).

However, the FP has been approached by Erdogan in his attempt to broaden his own alliance. He had a meeting with Oguzhan Asilturk, a senior member of the party and a prominent political figure in the Islamist movement in Turkey, on Jan.7, stirring speculations about his motives.

Speaking to reporters the next day about meeting a senior figure in the FP rather than its leader, Erdogan said they discussed a possible future election alliance and the FP's support in the government's counterterrorism fight.

The FP, with 2.5 percent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections, shares the same Islamist roots as the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), and is a rising star among religious voters who are disillusioned by the authoritarian rule of Erdogan.

Its leader, Temel Karamollaoglu, has been in close contact with the breakaway parties from the AKP, especially with the leader of the Future Party, Ahmet Davutoglu, as both seek to capitalize on disenchanted AKP supporters in the coming elections by criticizing the rhetoric and one-man rule of Erdogan.

Joining the FP would help the AKP to keep its majority in the parliament, and would also undermine the smaller party's opposition allies. All small parties need an electoral alliance to enter the parliament because of the 10 percent threshold.

The eroding support of the AKP and the threat to its parliamentary majority is no secret.

The latest survey by Ankara-based polling firm MetroPoll found that support for the AKP has fallen to its lowest point since 2002, when it came to power. It was down to around 30 percent, followed by CHP with 20 percent.

AKP's ultra-nationalist partner MHP is expected to get only 6 percent, far below the threshold, obliging it to remain in the alliance.

“As Karamollaoglu’s rising power as an opposition figure continues, it won’t be easy for the FP to join the ruling coalition with Erdogan,” Osman Sert, research director at the Ankara Institute, told Arab News.

“FP electorate has now other alternatives with the newly established breakaway parties,” he added.

However, he thinks that Erdogan will continue to search for new coalition members. “Otherwise difficult days are ahead for AKP,” he said.

Levent Basturk, a political scientist who was also a candidate for the FP during March 2019 elections, said the party’s leverage in Turkish domestic politics has been rising since 2015.

“The Felicity Party challenges the polarizing discourse of President Erdogan. Its alliance with the main opposition CHP in the last elections helped the secular segments of Turkish society to reconcile with conservative people,” he told Arab News.

Erdogan has often accused the CHP of being indifferent to the concerns of the conservative people in Turkey, but with the new communication policy of the party, CHP has been reaching out to different segments of society, partly through the support of its electoral alliances.

Basturk thinks that a partnership with the ruling party would scare away a great proportion of the FP’s supporters who are categorically against the AKP.

“If the Felicity Party opts for an electoral alliance with the ruling AKP regardless of the objections coming from its hardcore voters, the party could dissolve in favor of the AKP. Several members of the Felicity Party therefore see the latest attempts of Erdogan as a move to weaken their party,” he said.

According to Basturk, the Felicity Party received an unexpectedly high share of votes in the latest elections with a rhetoric based on its objections to the authoritarianism in the country.

“The Felicity Party will not close all communication channels with the government right now. If it joins the ranks of the government, it will get more seats in the parliament but will be part of the corrupt system and so abolish the reason for its existence,” he said.



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Facing Biden, Erdogan extends olive branch to EU Turkey hopes to turn new page with US and EU in 2021, Erdogan says

[New satellite images show latest 'attack' on Ethiopia refugee camp](#)

Author:

Mon, 2021-01-18 00:29

NAIROBI: New satellite images of a refugee camp in Ethiopia's embattled Tigray region show more than 400 structures have been badly damaged in what a research group believes is the latest "intentional attack" by fighters.

The report by the UK-based DX Open Network nonprofit, shared with The Associated Press, says "it is likely that the fire events of Jan. 16 are yet another episode in a series of military incursions on the camp as reported by (the UN refugee agency)."

The Shimelba camp is one of four that hosted 96,000 refugees from nearby

Eritrea when fighting erupted in early November between Ethiopian forces and those of the defiant Tigray region.

The fighting has swept through the camps and two of them, including Shimelba, remain inaccessible to aid workers. Many refugees have fled.

On Thursday, UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi cited recent satellite imagery of fires and other destruction at the two inaccessible camps as “concrete indications of major violations of international law.”

On Sunday the UN refugee agency urged that it be given access to the camps.

“Until November, 8,700 refugees were registered in Shimelba. We have no information on how many refugees were still in the camp last week,” UN refugee agency spokesman Chris Melzer said in an email.

“We still have no access to the two northern camps, Shimelba and Hitsats (25,248 refugees registered in November). We demand access since the refugees are without supplies for two-and-a-half months now and we are extremely concerned. We also saw satellite pictures and heard frightening reports. But since we don’t have access we cannot confirm them.”

The new report says the satellite images show “smoldering ruins, blackening of structures and collapsed roofs.”

It said the structures “match the profile of mud-brick dwellings constructed by the refugees themselves. The attackers likely split into multiple groups going door to door to set fires inside buildings,” consistent with previous attacks on the Hitsats camp, which also is inaccessible.

Neither the UN nor DX Open Network has blamed anyone for the attacks, but the presence of troops from Eritrea, a bitter enemy of the Tigray region’s now-fugitive leaders, has caused alarm.

Grandi noted “many reliable reports and firsthand accounts” of abuses including the forced return of refugees to Eritrea.

The day after Grandi’s statement, Eritrean Information Minister Yemane Gebremeskel tweeted that “UNHCR seems to indulge, yet again, in another bout of gratuitous & irresponsible smear campaigns against Eritrea.”

He said Eritrea rejects the “forced repatriation of refugees.”

Thousands of people have fled Eritrea over the years to avoid a system of military conscription.

Fighting continues in parts of the Tigray region. Thousands of people have been killed and more than 2 million displaced.



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Ethiopian envoy says Sudan border issue must be resolved 'amicably, urgently' Ethiopia accuses Sudan of violating its borders, calls for negotiations to address the crisis

[How the Biden presidency might impact Turkey's Kurdish problem](#)

Sun, 2021-01-17 23:14

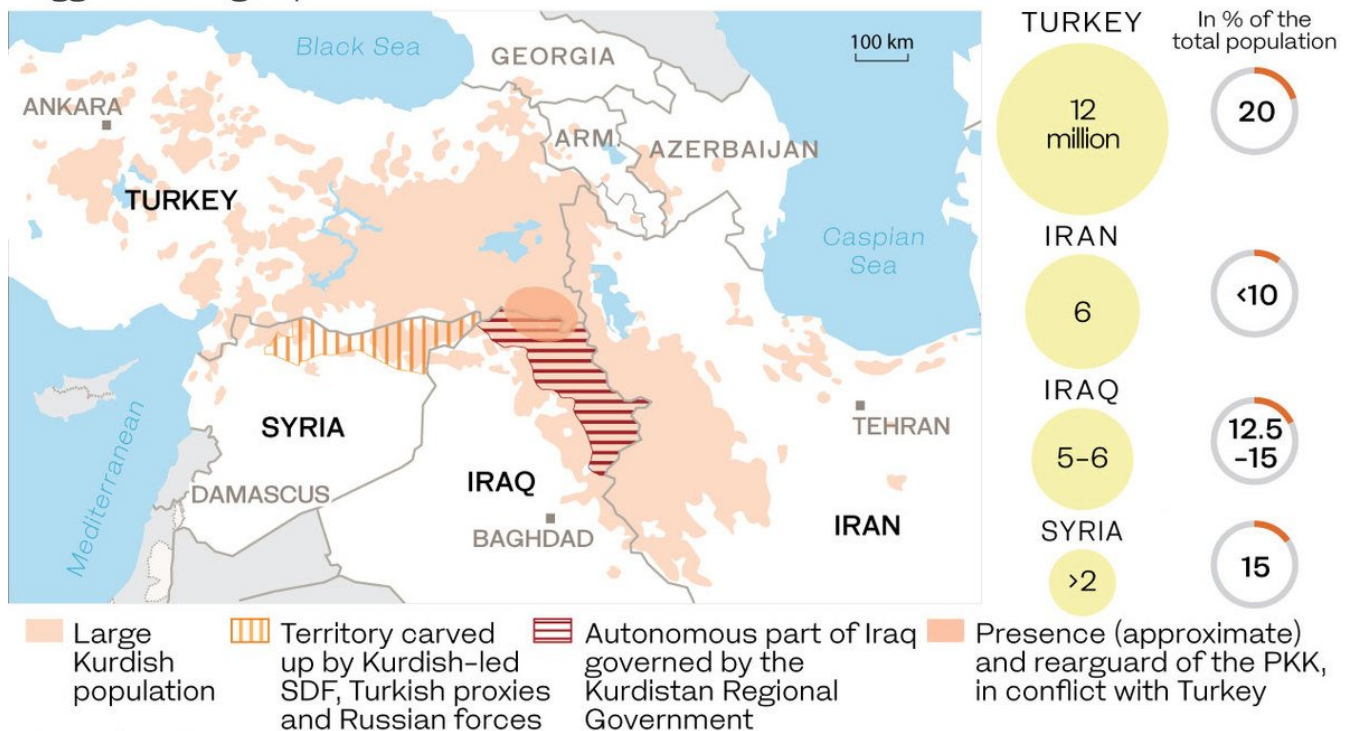
MISSOURI, US: A good many Kurds in Turkey and elsewhere will be celebrating the departure of US President Donald Trump when he leaves office on Jan. 20.

Those in Iraq will remember when his administration hung them out to dry during their independence referendum, allowing Iran, Baghdad and Shiite militias to attack, while Turkey threatened to blockade them.

Turkey, meanwhile, had little reason to fear American outcry over its human rights violations as it arrested and jailed thousands of pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP) activists and their elected representatives.

KURDS: MIDDLE EAST'S 'LARGEST NATION WITHOUT A STATE'

Living mainly in four countries, 25-35 million Kurdish people constitute the region's fourth biggest ethnic group



ARABNEWS

Sources: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, F. Balanche & M. Horan

And in case this did not prove sufficiently disappointing for the Kurds, Trump withdrew US troops from the Turkish border in northeastern Syria in October 2019, giving Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan the green light to invade the Kurdish enclaves there and ethnically cleanse hundreds of thousands from the area.

Kurdish forces in Syria, who had just concluded the successful ground campaign against Daesh, found themselves betrayed by a callous and unpredictable American administration. Just days before Trump greenlit the Turkish operation in a phone call with Erdogan, the Americans had convinced the Syrian Kurds to remove their fortifications near the Turkish border to "reassure Turkey."

Most Kurds therefore look forward to President-elect Joe Biden taking over in Washington. In Turkey, from which roughly half the world's Kurdish population hails, many hope the new Biden administration will pressure Ankara to cease its military campaigns and return to the negotiating table with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).



In this April 28, 2016 photo, then US Vice President Joe Biden talks to Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani (R) during his visit to the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq. Turkish Kurds are hoping to get help from the US, now that Biden has been elected president. (AFP file photo)

At the very least, they hope a Biden-led administration will not remain silent as Erdogan's government tramples upon human rights in Turkey and launches military strikes against Kurds in Syria and Iraq as well.

Judging by the record of the Obama administration, in which Biden served as vice-president, Kurds may expect some improvements over Trump. But they should also not raise their hopes too high.

One need only recall how Erdogan's government abandoned the Kurdish peace process in 2015, when the Obama administration was still in power. At that time, the HDP's improved electoral showing in the summer of 2015 cost Erdogan his majority in parliament. He responded by making sure no government could be formed following the June election, allowing him to call a redo election for November.

Between June and November, his government abandoned talks with the Kurds and resumed the war against the PKK. The resulting "rally around the flag" effect saw Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) improve its showing in November, boosted further by the Turkish army siege of entire Kurdish cities, which in effect disenfranchised them.

Following the November 2015 vote, Erdogan formed a new government with the far-right and virulently anti-Kurdish National Action Party (MHP).

The militarization of Ankara's approach to its "Kurdish problem" increased

even further under the AKP-MHP partnership. In 2015 and 2016, whole city blocks in majority Kurdish cities of southeastern Turkey were razed to the ground as part of the counterinsurgency campaign. In the town of Cizre, the army burned Kurdish civilians alive while they hid in a basement.



Mourners lower into a grave the coffin of Kurdish leader Mehmet Tekin, 38, who was killed at his home in Cizre by Turkish troops, during his funeral in Sirnak on December 23, 2015. (AFP file photo)

In Sirnak, footage emerged of Turkish forces dragging the body of a well-known Kurdish filmmaker behind their armored vehicle. In Nusaybin, MHP parliamentarians called for the razing of the entire city.

Urban warfare is never pretty, of course, and the PKK held part of the blame for the destruction as a result of its new urban warfare strategy. Many aspects of the Erdogan government's counterinsurgency actions of 2015 and 2016 went beyond the pale, however, and should have earned at least some rebukes from Washington.

The Obama administration stayed largely silent during this time. Policy makers in Washington had finally gained Turkish acquiescence to use NATO air bases in Turkey in their campaign against Daesh and Ankara has also promised to join the effort.

What Obama really received from Ankara, however, were a few token Turkish airstrikes of little significance against Daesh and a rising crescendo of heavy attacks against America's Kurdish allies in Syria.

Erdogan's government duly reported every cross-border strike and various

incursions and invasions into Syria as “operations against terrorist organizations in Syria” – conveniently conflating Daesh and the Syrian Kurdish forces.

Turkey even employed former Daesh fighters and other Syrian radical groups among its proxy mercenaries in these operations, further aggravating Syria’s problems with militant Islamists.

INNUMBERS

- 87 Media workers detained or imprisoned for terrorism offenses.
- 8,500 People detained or convicted for alleged PKK ties.

The quid pro quo of this arrangement involved Washington turning a blind eye to Turkey’s human rights abuses against Kurds both in Syria and Turkey. Even Turkish airstrikes in Iraq, which at times killed Iraqi army personnel and civilians in places like Sinjar, failed to elicit any American rebukes – under Obama or Trump.

If the new Biden administration returns to the standard operating procedures of the Obama administration regarding Turkey, little may change.

Although a Biden administration would probably not callously throw erstwhile Kurdish allies in Syria or Iraq under the bus as Trump did, they might well continue to cling to false hopes of relying on Turkey to help contain radical Islamists.

Many in Washington even think Turkey can still help the US counter Russia and Iran – never mind the mountain of evidence that Turkey works with both countries to pursue an anti-American agenda in the region.

Alternatively, Biden may prove markedly different to his incarnation as vice president. Biden knows the region well, has called Erdogan an autocrat on more than one occasion and has repeatedly shown sympathy for the Kurds and their plight in the past.

In charge of his own administration rather than acting as an aide to Obama’s, Biden could conceivably break new ground regarding Turkey and the Kurds.

If so, he might start by pressuring Turkey to abide by human rights norms. Selahattin Demirtas, the former HDP leader and 2018 Turkish presidential hopeful, as well as tens of thousands of other political dissidents have been languishing in pre-trial detention in Turkey for years now.



In this October 8, 2020 photo, a woman and her child are seen at the Washukanni refugee camp near the town of Tuwaynah, west of Syria's northeastern city of Hasakah. They are among tens of thousands whose homes and belongings have been seized or looted since the Turkish offensive in October 2019. (AFP file photo)

In December 2020, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that Demirtas' detention is politically motivated and based on trumped-up charges and that he must be released.

Although Turkey is a signatory to the court, it has repeatedly ignored such rulings. A more human rights-oriented administration in Washington might join the likes of France and others in pressuring Ankara on such matters.

A determined Biden administration might also try to coax or pressure Ankara back to the negotiating table with the PKK. A return to even indirect negotiations, especially if overseen by the Americans, could go a long way towards improving things in both Turkey and Syria.

Little more than five years ago, Turkey's southeast was quiet and Syrian Kurdish leaders were meeting as well as cooperating with Turkish officials.



Turkish ruler Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (AFP)

If Erdogan and his MHP partners nonetheless remain adamant in maintaining their internal and external wars, then Biden should look elsewhere for American partners.

Biden said as much only last year, expressing his concern about Erdogan's policies. "What I think we should be doing is taking a very different approach to him now, making it clear that we support opposition leadership He (Erdogan) has to pay a price," Biden said.

Washington should embolden Turkish opposition leaders "to be able to take on and defeat Erdogan. Not by a coup, not by a coup, but by the electoral process," he added.

This kind of language from the new Biden administration might go a long way towards changing the current policy calculus in Ankara.

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Survey reveals alienation of Kurdish youth in Turkey
Europe's top human rights court orders immediate Turkish release of jailed Kurdish leader Demirtas