
ISLAM IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

OLGA BIBIKOVA. TURKEY'S INTERESTS IN IDLIB // *The article was written for the bulletin "Russia and the Moslem World."*

Keywords: Idlib, jihadists, Hatay, Erdogan, neo-Ottomanism.

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Citation: Bibikova O. Turkey's interests in Idlib // Russia and the Moslem World, 2020, № 4 (310), P. 75–86.
DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2020.04.05

Abstract. The enclave of Idlib has become a battleground for terrorists supported by Ankara, although Erdogan does not stop talking about his peacefulness. In fact, we are talking about an attempt to annex part of the territory of a neighboring state.

The name Idlib dominates the international agenda. Today it is one of the hottest spots on our planet. The end of hostilities in Syria, which has been going on for 10 years, as well as the fate of Syria itself as a state, depends on how soon the situation in Idlib is resolved.

Idlib, the administrative center of the governorate in northwestern Syria, is located in close proximity to the Turkish border. This is not the most economically developed area, there is soap and glass production, olives and many other agricultural

crops are grown. But Idlib is the last major enclave in Syrian territory still under the rule of the armed opposition.

In March 2017, Iran, Turkey and Russia agreed in Astana (Kazakhstan) that Idlib would become a de-escalation zone and set up military observation posts to monitor the observance of the ceasefire by the warring parties. However, from January 2018, fighting resumed.

The current population of Idlib consists of a part of the indigenous Syrians (many of them fled), as well as the various radical groups gathered there, which, while fighting against Assad's troops, are simultaneously sorting out relations among themselves. Having driven out local residents from their homes, the jihadists settled their families there. Since 2011, more than 700,000 people have moved there, fearing reprisals from the regime for the participation of their family members in the anti-government rebellion. By the way, it was Damascus that provided transport for their transportation within the framework of the evacuation agreements concluded between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups. Others sought refuge there, having lost their homes as a result of the fighting in the territories closest to Idlib. Thus, the population of Idlib has reached 2.5 million people, including a large number of displaced persons from other parts of the country living in camps and dependent on aid from terrorist sponsors.

Turkey, fearing a new flow of refugees, closed its border along Idlib back in July 2017. It was then that the armed opposition group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) seized the province, what resulted in a temporary suspension of humanitarian aid. In the northern part of Idlib, close to the border, several camps have been set up, where the largest number of displaced persons were concentrated. In many camps, access to food and water is limited, and it is cold in winter. Many schools have closed due to lack of funds, leaving children without education. There were also problems with

medical services: some doctors working in Khan Sheikhun hospitals were kidnapped.

Western media, which traditionally blame the Syrian tragedy on its President B. Assad and Russia, nevertheless report that refugee camps have witnessed raids and arrests organized by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which thus forced Syrian men to enter their ranks.

Two more or less numerically equal groups are concentrated in Idlib: Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the Syrian wing of the former Al-Qaeda, and the National Liberation Front (NLF), a coalition created by Turkey to unite all opponents of HTS, ranging from remnants of the Free Syrian Army and ending with the Nuraddin al-Zingha Brigade¹ and Ahrar al-Sham², supported by Turkey. These formations were reinforced by thousands of other militants expelled from Aleppo,

Guta, Daraa and Rastan, where the rebels were defeated by government forces.

There are also Uighurs – Moslems, immigrants from China³, who believed the ISIS propaganda and by roundabout ways – through neighboring countries – moved with their families (!) To Syria, under the wing of jihadists. Having moved “to the land of the caliphate,” they have established themselves as brave warriors, but due to their loyalty to ISIS, they are poorly integrated into the new situation in Idlib. Later, the ranks of Idlib militants were replenished with militants of the Ansar al-Tawhid group, associated with al-Qaeda⁴ banned in Russia.

In total, about ten groups are concentrated here, which are internally divided into dozens of more or less independent brigades. In the fall of 2017, clashes broke out between the HTU and the pro-Turkish rebels.

By the spring of 2018, HTS secured the north of the Idlib enclave, the provincial capital and territory along the Turkish-Syrian border. The jihadists assumed that from there they would be able to control the northwestern part of Syria and the strategic M5 road connecting Damascus and Aleppo, the industrial capital

of Syria. In addition, “leaning” against the Turkish border, they believed that in this way they can always find refuge in this country.

Turkey, supporting the National Liberation Front, seeks to weaken HTS, but does not want to enter into direct confrontation.⁵ According to French political scientists, Ankara tried in vain to get HTS to break with jihadist ideology and return to the National Liberation Front: in this way, it could have exerted long-term pressure on Damascus, making the Idlib region a Turkish protectorate north of Aleppo. In this case most of Idlib could have entered the projected buffer zone on the Syrian-Turkish border. However, the exclusive presence of HTS north of Idlib calls into question the existence of this buffer zone.⁶

However, they did not take into account that it is extremely important for Syria to protect the port city of Latakia (which Turkey had sights on at the dawn of the 20th century, during the formation of the Syrian-Turkish border), as well as the Russian bases of Khmeimim and Tartus. Therefore, after the victory of the troops loyal to the Syrian government in the area on Dera’a, the Idlib area became one of the last areas in Syria still controlled by the rebels.

In December 2019, 4 days before the outbreak of hostilities, government forces managed to liberate up to 40 settlements in Idlib, previously controlled by militants of the Jabhat al-Nusra terrorist group banned in Russia. The advance of the Syrian army towards Maarat An-Numan has caused undisguised alarm in Ankara. A high-ranking delegation was sent to Moscow, and Erdogan, speaking in Istanbul on December 22, said that: “Turkey is making every possible effort to end the attacks on Idlib ...”.⁷

Finally, at the end of January 2020, with the support of the Russian Aerospace Forces, it was possible to liberate the strategically important city of Maarat An-Numan in the southeast of Idlib province. Maarat An-Numan is an ancient Syrian city, which was mentioned back in the 9th century. In 2011, it was

seized by the rebels and changed hands during 2011–2012. In particular, after the Free Syrian Army militants formed a coalition with Islamic extremist groups from Al-Qaeda (former Al-Qaeda in Iraq) and the Islamic State, they were able to take this city. The “13th Division” settled there, later it was defeated by terrorists of the HTS coalition, who became the real rulers of the city. And the remnants of the Division became part of the pro-Turkish coalition Syrian National Army. It is characteristic that when the city finally came under the control of government forces, many weapons, including those of Western origin, fell into the hands of the Syrians.⁸ This indicated that a massive offensive was being prepared from which the territories neighboring Idlib, including the cities of Aleppo and Hama, could suffer.

Syria insists on the unconditional withdrawal of Turkish troops from the territory of Idlib. In turn, Ankara, referring to alleged obligations to fulfill the “Sochi agreements”, is trying in every possible way to prevent the offensive actions of the Syrian army, caused by reasons of self-defense, although in Astana it was recognized that the Syrian government troops have the right and even the obligation to liberate their national territory from terrorists. An analysis of the actions of the Turkish side shows that “the Turkish leaders simply did not make any efforts and do not intend to comply with the provisions of the Sochi memorandum and seeks to take all measures in order to maintain control over this territory.”⁹

The question arises: why Erdogan latch on the Idlib enclave so eagerly? Let us consider first the momentary reasons. Firstly, a large number of militants really concentrated here, which can still be used against the hated by Turkish leader B. Assad, although at negotiations with Putin Erdogan always speaks out in defense of the civilian population, etc. But in this case these militants must be fed, equipped, as well as reconciled among themselves, etc.

Secondly, the events in Syria were not useless for Ankara. The whole world knows how the Turks pumped oil from the Syrian fields Khuryet-Ist, Yuzevie and South Kishma,¹⁰ exported

equipment from the factories and factories of Aleppo, the industrial capital of Syria. Under the pretext of helping the “unfortunate Syrian refugees,” Turkey sent over a million migrants of various ethnic origins to Europe. As it turned out, there were less than a quarter of the Syrians, and the bulk of the Syrians were transported already at the end of this refugee stream, as if to justify the name “Syrian refugees.” Witnesses reported that the day before, people appeared in refugee camps in Turkey urging the Syrians to “go to Europe.” In fact, Ankara did not really care about the fate of those who lived in these camps. However, young women and girls were taken from there to the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, where they joined the local harems. And the brothel industry has in Turkey has grown in fact. Until now, little is known about how organs were removed from refugee camps, but that did take place...

Thirdly, Turkey is tolerant towards the terrorist rabble gathered in Idlib. It is not going to expel the Mujahideen. Some of them have already been sent to Libya, where, as it turned out, Erdogan also has interests. As reported by the London-based Human Rights Observatory, “... at the end of January, Turkey sent 1,750 people to Libya. Another 1,500 militants are being trained in Turkish camps. Mercenaries were recruited in Afrin and other settlements occupied by the Turkish army during Euphrates Shield operation.”¹¹ There is another place where militants can be useful - Turkish Kurdistan. By resettling them there, you can dilute the local population disloyal to Ankara. As for the locals living in Idlib, the militants use them as a shield in combat operations or recruit new fighters among them.

But there are also geostrategic tasks that Ankara wants to implement through Idlib. Sultan Erdogan hides his goals behind lofty words about humanism. These goals were outlined by former Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (2014-2016) in his book “Strategic Depth. Turkey’s international position”.¹² A. Davutoglu is considered one of the most educated and intelligent statesmen in Turkey, which hardly appealed to

Erdogan, who dismissed him, although the policy that Erdogan is pursuing today is largely motivated by the provisions of A. Davutoglu's book. And although the author himself rejects the term "neo-Ottomanism", the book outlines a strategy for turning Turkey into a world power by restoring relations with the countries that were once part of the Ottoman Empire as provinces.

As noted by the Belarusian researcher G.N. Mikhalkevich, "According to A. Davutoglu," strategic depth "means that Turkish diplomacy should proceed from the fact that modern interstate borders in foreign policy are of much less importance than the deep historical and cultural roots of Turkey. Balkans, Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia. Such an approach presupposes the establishment of dialogue and mutual understanding with formerly warring countries (the principle of "zero problems with neighbors"), strengthening of economic interdependence, and the establishment of regular multi-level intercultural communications. It should be borne in mind that Turkey itself combines many regional identities. There are more Azerbaijanis in the country than in Azerbaijan, there are more citizens of Albanian origin than in Albania, there are more Bosnians than in Bosnia, and there are more Kurds than in Iraqi Kurdistan. This reality, according to A. Davutoglu, means that violence and instability in the immediate vicinity of Turkey threaten to spread in Turkey itself, regional external conflicts can destroy the country from within."¹³

Thus, the author explains the need to change foreign policy priorities (by abandoning the focus on Europe), and the prospects for Turkey's becoming a world power. This is what constitutes the basis of Turkey's new foreign policy pursued by its President Erdogan.

Syria, which from 1517 to 1918 (i.e. 400 years!) was a part of the Ottoman Empire, is the closest state to Turkey. The events that have shaken this country for 10 years are, from the point of

view of Ankara, a convenient excuse to return Syria to its zone of influence.

Let me also remind you that at the dawn of Syrian independence, Turkey managed to “bite off” a tidbit from the territory of Syria – Iskanderun / Alexandretta vilayet, located near the sea (Iskanderun Bay).¹⁴ This happened after the given territory, according to the decisions of the conference in San Remo (1920), came under French control. A year later, the Alexandretta sanjak was separated into a special autonomous administrative unit within the French Mandate. The population living there was mixed: Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Turks. Due to the strategic position of this territory, Turkey refused to recognize the Alexandretta sanjak as part of the French mandated territory of Syria. But the French mandate was limited and had to end in 1935. By that date, the Turkish government headed by Kemal Ataturk (1881–1938) had developed a whole program of measures that were supposed to contribute to the unification of Iskanderun with Turkey. The Armenian population was massively intimidated, and, remembering the atrocities of the genocide period, began to leave the area. From 1925 Iskanderun became an autonomous sanjak within Syria. In the middle of 1938, elections to the Legislative Assembly of Hatay sanjak (in Turkey since 1936 it has been called Hatay) were organized, according to which 22 out of 40 seats were won by Turks, 9 by Arabs-Alawites, 5 by Armenians, 2 by Sunni Arabs and 2 by Orthodox Arabs.¹⁵ Such figures were obtained due to the fact that shortly before the elections, a census was carried out in the sanjak, as a result of which the Turkish population was in the majority. Later, it became known that the census was falsified: the names of residents of neighboring Turkish cities were included in the lists.¹⁶ Following the behests of the recently deceased President Kemal Ataturk, Iskanderun sanjak was annexed by Turkey (06/29/1939). For the world community, this event passed almost unnoticed. Europe was preparing for war, and Syria was too weak to be heard in the League of Nations.

So, in addition to a huge territory – 5678 km², the area of which is twice the territory of Luxembourg, Turkey received a convenient port, because the sanjak occupied a strategic position on the coast of the Iskanderun Bay of the Mediterranean Sea. There are also ferrous metallurgy enterprises there.

Turkey also received the ancient city of Antioch, founded in the 4th century BC by Seleucus I Nicator, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, who received Syria under his control when dividing the heritage of the great commander. Since 64 AD e. the city became the seat of the governor of the Roman province of Syria. Antioch was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome, Ephesus and Alexandria, and the second largest city in the Eastern Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire after Constantinople. Later, Antioch was called the cradle of Christian theology. Today it is the provincial town of Antakya, famous for its beaches. Naturally, Ataturk did not fight for Christian shrines...

Analyzing Ankara's behavior in the light of the Sochi agreements, it seems that Erdogan sees in them only the points which may correspond to his plans for the future of Idlib. As A. Areshev notes, "Ankara's interpretation of the above-mentioned agreements was initially radically different from what it was imagined in Moscow. If not control over this entire country, which for centuries has been part of the Ottoman Empire, then the occupation of at least its northern regions is directly conditioned by the Turkish strategic culture and centuries-old political practice."¹⁷

The former intelligence chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, Ismail Hakkı Pekin, spoke about the same in the article published on April 9, 2020 in the newspaper "Eny Akit". He said with a high degree of confidence that the rule of Bashar al-Assad will end in June, and Syria will either be divided or become a federation or confederation. "It is very important that the region west of the Euphrates, including Idlib and Aleppo, called the Republic of Aleppo, is ruled by Turkish-controlled

forces.”¹⁸ By the way, the newspaper in which he published his “message to the world” adheres to the right-wing views, focusing on the Justice and Development Party. At one time, it published a condolence to the family of Osama bin Laden, as well as several articles against Kemalism, although a law was passed in Turkey that does not allow questioning the ideas of the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Atatürk.

It is easy to be convinced that the ideas of neo-Ottomanism are quite popular today among the power structures in Turkey. Dan Bielefsky, in his article “Disappointed in the West, Turks Dream of Past Greatness,” writes: “Longing for the days of past glory – and this is felt by both Moslems and secularists – partly reflects Turks’ vexation at the European Union, which, apparently, does not want to accept them into its ranks.

He quotes İlber Ortaylı, a Turkish historian and former director of the Topkapı Museum: “Turks are attracted by the heroism and glory of the Ottoman past because it belongs to them.”¹⁹

It is clear that Ankara’s actions in Syria are part of a long-term expansionist “neo-Ottoman” strategy. Erdogan’s appetites today are fueled by historically motivated revanchism.

However, Ankara will go beyond the capture of Idlib. Erdogan needs the coastal strip of Syria in connection with the discovery of an oil and gas field on the shelf. Turkey has already joined the struggle for energy resources in this region through the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, as well as by signing an agreement on the division of zones of the Eastern Mediterranean with Libya. That is why, declaring its commitment to peace, Turkey is flooding the region with its troops in support of the jihadists.

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ELENA DMITRIEVA. ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION IN MODERN IRAQ // *The review was written for the bulletin “Russia and the Moslem World.”*

Keywords: Iraq, powers of the state, administrative corruption, fight against corruption, Anti-corruption court, developing countries.

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Citation: Dmitrieva E. Administrative Corruption in Modern Iraq // Russia and the Moslem World, 2020, № 4 (310), P. 86–94.
DOI: 10.31249/rmw/2020.04.06

Abstract. The problem of administrative corruption, as an integral part of corruption in general, has become especially urgent in modern Iraq. In recent decades, the level of corruption in all spheres of Iraqi society has increased significantly. The authors of the articles consider certain aspects and overall situation with administrative corruption in Iraq, investigate the causes of its occurrence and propose measures to combat this phenomenon.