

It's Curtains for US in Syria. Russia, Iran Owe Big Thanks to Erdogan

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The scenario agreed on behind the curtains through months of confidential exchanges, often one-on-one, between the Russian and Turkish leaders regarding north-eastern Syria is entering a critical phase of implementation on the ground with the agreement between the Kurds and the Assad regime.

We have a complex scenario where on the one hand the Turkish army and the Syrian opposition units loyal to Ankara are relentlessly continuing their southward offensive expanding control over Syria's border regions populated by the Kurds. According to Turkish President Recep Erdogan, 1000 sq.kms. of territory previously under Kurdish control have been "[liberated](#)".

On the other hand, following up on the agreement with the Kurds, the first columns of Syrian government forces have moved into the north of the country toward the Turkish border.

Prima facie, Damascus is challenging the Turkish offensive — as it should — and, in principle, a confrontation can ensue. But things are never really quite what they appear on the surface in Syria.

A clash between the Turkish and Syrian forces is simply out of the question. That is not how the game is being played. A Turkish Defence Ministry [statement](#) on Monday disclosed that the military chief Gen. Yasar Guler and his Russian counterpart Gen. Valery Gerasimov were in contact on the phone and discussed the "security situation in Syria and recent developments."

No further details have been divulged but the picture that emerges is that [Russia proposed and Turkey agreed](#) that Russian units will be patrolling between Turkish and Syrian forces in northern Syria after the withdrawal of the US troops from the area.

Accordingly, Moscow's Defense Ministry has revealed that its military police in the Kurdish town of Manbij have begun patrolling along the Syria-Turkey border and interacting with Turkish authorities. Russian troops entered Manbij town with the Syrian government forces on Monday.

More importantly, through Russian mediation, Ankara and Damascus will prefer to agree on dividing the zones of control in northern Syria. That is to say, things are broadly moving in the direction of what the Adana Agreement of 1998 (over the Kurdish question) between Turkey and Syria had envisaged, namely, that the security of the Syrian-Turkish border will

be a bilateral affair between Ankara and Damascus.

In the given situation, Turkey's imperative need is to prevent a contiguous "Kurdistan" emerging on its borders. The so-called "safe zone" aimed at frustrating the US plans to create a Kurdistan in Syria akin to what it succeeded in creating in Iraq in the Saddam Hussein era.

Arguably, there could be congruence of interests between Ankara and Damascus on this score. (Tehran too has common interests with its two neighbours in this regard.)

Indeed, for Damascus all this is a bonanza insofar as the "deliberate withdrawal" (as Pentagon put it), or, more accurately, the inevitable eviction of the US troops in the northern regions of Syria triggered by the Turkish incursion, enables it to reoccupy parts of the northeast regions, especially those parts that are well-endowed with water resources and hydrocarbon reserves, which the American military had designated as its exclusive zone.

For President Bashar al-Assad, this is a great leap forward in the fulfilment of his pledge to reclaim control of entire Syria. (See the Euronews commentary [*Damascus is looking stronger than ever': What next for Syria as Kurds join forces with Assad?*](#))

As for the Kurds, they have nowhere to go but to settle with Damascus. They are [*simply no match*](#) for the highly professional Turkish army.

Clearly, the Turkish incursion and impending offensive against Kurds has made continued American military presence in northern Syria untenable and Russia has leveraged the situation to bring about the agreement between Kurds and Damascus.

Having succeeded in this endeavour, Russians have taken Turks into confidence. Unsurprisingly, President Recep Erdogan is nonchalant about the agreement between the Kurds and Damascus and has shrugged off the Syrian troop movements close to Turkey's borders. He evasively referred to Vladimir Putin's assurances.

In the final analysis, the Americans are paying a heavy price for being clever by half — stringing Turkey along in the recent years while methodically consolidating the ground for the creation of an autonomous Kurdistan on its borders, apart from arming and training the Kurdish militia to shape up as a regular army.



Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in Northern Syria has reportedly advanced to a 1000 square kilometers area

Erdogan gave a long rope to the Americans to hang themselves, literally. When he struck, the contradictions in the US policy got exposed overnight — the game plan to balkanise Syria and overthrow Assad; the Faustian deal with a terrorist group that has been bleeding a NATO ally; and the geopolitical agenda to sever Iran's axis with Syria and the Levant.

Suffice to say, with the eviction of the US forces from northern Syria, the Turks have achieved something that Russia and Iran (and Damascus) all along wished for but couldn't attain. From this point onward, Russia and Iran will prevail upon Ankara to reconcile with Damascus.

The US has belatedly understood that Turkey has summarily terminated its 8-year old intervention in Syria to overthrow the Assad regime. The vitriolic reaction by Trump and US defence Secretary Mark Esper ([here](#) and [here](#)) is self-evident.

But the threat of US sanctions will not deter Erdogan, as the spectre of Kurdistan on its borders threatened Turkey's sovereignty and territorial integrity and there is no scope for compromise when national security is under threat. By the way, the Turkish [domestic opinion](#) is overwhelmingly supportive of Erdogan.

Turkey was uncharacteristically patient with the US, hoping that the latter would give up the nexus with YPG (Kurdish militia) once the fight against ISIS got over. It is not Trump so much as the Pentagon who is responsible for the breakdown in trust between Turkey and the US. Like on most foreign policy issues, Washington had two policies on Syria — Trump's and the US security and defence establishment's.

The US has no locus standi under international law to keep a permanent military presence in Syria and when Trump first announced the troop withdrawal, it should have been implemented. But, instead, the Pentagon undercut Trump's decision, whittled it down and finally ignored it altogether.

Erdogan knows that the US will huff and puff but will get used to the "new normal" in Syria. Europe won't have an alibi, either, as Russians will never allow the ISIS to surge in Syria. Trump is [reportedly deputing](#) V-P Mike Pence to travel to Turkey seeking a "negotiated settlement" — whatever that may mean in tackling the fait accompli that Erdogan has created.

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