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US, Turkish Troops Headed for Military Showdown in Syria

By Zero Hedge
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Two days after we reported that Turkey valiantly demanded that US forces vacate military bases in the Syrian district of Manbij, when Turkey's foreign minister Melet Cavusoglu also said that Ankara is calling upon the US to cease any and all support to Syrian Kurdish forces and militias, not surprisingly the US refused, and on Monday a top American general said that US troops will not pull out from the northern Syrian city of Manbij, rebuffing Ankara demands to withdraw from the city and risking a potential confrontation between the two NATO allies.

Speaking on CNN, General Joseph Votel, head of the United States Central Command, said that withdrawing US forces from the strategically important city is "not something we are looking into."

Last week Turkish troops crossed into Syria in an push to drive US-backed Kurds out of Afrin. As part of the Turkish offensive, which is grotesquely code-named 'Operation Olive Branch', president Erdogan warned that the offensive could soon target "terrorists" in Manbij, some 100km east of Afrin.

> "With the Olive Branch operation, we have once again thwarted the game of those sneaky forces whose interests in the region are different," Erdogan said in a speech to provincial leaders in Ankara last week. "Starting in Manbij, we will continue to thwart their game."

But not if the US is still there, unless for the first time in history we are about to witness war between two NATO members. And the US has no intention of moving.

Colonel Ryan Dillon, spokesperson for the US-led coalition, told Kurdish media on Sunday that American forces would continue to support their Kurdish allies – despite Erdogan's threats.

kesman remarked last week that the operation "risks conflict between Turkish and American forces" in Syria. In an unprecedented step, last week the Turkish presidency went so far as to correct the White House readout of the phone conversation between Trump and Erdogan, explicitly accusing Trump of lying.

The Afrin campaign follows Erdogan's vow to "strangle" the US-backed Border Security Force (BSF) in Syria. As discussed previously, the US-led coalition announced in January that

it would help create the 30,000-strong BSF, half of which would be comprised of the Kurdish-dominated SDF.

Meanwhile, confirming that Turkey has no intention of backing down, and if anything will keep pressing on assuring an armed confrontation with the US is inevitable, Jenan Moussa with Arabic Al Aan TV, reports that "a huge story is developing right now." Namely, that a big Turkish army convoy including APCs drove thru HTS controlled Idlib in Syria heading towards AlEis, a rebel controlled frontline with Syrian gov forces &allies. Turkish army convoy was escorted whole time by Al-Qaeda linked HTS group."

> 1/ Huge story developing right now. Big Turkish army convoy including APCs drove thru HTS controlled Idlib in Syria heading towards AlEis, a rebel controlled frontline with Syrian gov forces &allies. Turkish army convoy was escorted whole time by AlQaeda linked HTS group. @akhbar pic.twitter.com/1cdRYwu8xC
>
> — Jenan Moussa (@jenanmoussa) January 29, 2018

> 4/ I just made this map. Have a look at it in order to better understand the situation. The Turkish army convoy has stopped around Kafr Halab. The Russians are bombing &Syrian regime is shelling area around Al-Qammari. The convoy is intended for Al-Eiss so it can't pass. @akhbar pic.twitter.com/XzkdudigKR
>
> — Jenan Moussa (@jenanmoussa) January 29, 2018

> 5/ Here is another video of the Turkish army convoy when it was still driving earlier through Idlib before the Russians started bombing the route. I am just sharing it so you know how big this convoy is. @akhbar pic.twitter.com/iaOBR8Se0Q
>
> — Jenan Moussa (@jenanmoussa) January 29, 2018

And some additional starting details, according to Moussa, who notes that Russian planes were in the sky as the Turkish convoy drove through HTS controlled Idlib province. They even bombed 15 KMs away from the convoy. "So big question now: Is the Turkish convey moving with the approval or in defiance of the Russians?"

For now the answer appears to be no:

> Seems for now the Russians are not going to allow the Turkish army convoy to pass. I am hearing from one source on the ground that the convoy will go back in the direction of Turkey. I am in touch with sources on the ground in Idleb & will update as news develops.
>
> Due to nearby Russian bombing &Syrian shelling, witnesses on the ground now say that the Turkish military convoy has basically turned off its lights and is waiting in the area. We are trying to find out if they will turn back or continue advancing despite warnings.

Will Erdogan be crazy enough to start a regional battle against both the US and Russia at the same time on Syrian soil, or will Russia flip and side with Turkey in its “defensive offensive” yet as it careens to a military confrontation with US troops? We expect to find out in the immediate future.

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