

Washington's "Failure" in Syria Is Not About Strategy. Washington and Ankara Have Consistently Supported Al Qaeda, ISIS

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So much has been said about the Syrian conflict in numerous analyses, yet one of the least discussed topics concerns the strategy and the relationship of cooperation and conflict between the United States, Turkey, the Kurds and Daesh.

From the beginning of the Syrian conflict, Washington and Ankara have never hesitated to exploit Daesh's advances. The occupation of Syrian towns near the Turkish border by Islamic extremists has been one of the preferred tactics endorsed by the United States and Turkey. Closing one eye, often both, concerning Daesh's operations meant attacking the Syrian state indirectly and threatening its integrity whilst simultaneously allowing the creation of safe havens where terrorist groups could receive weapons and material support to spread their attacks on the legitimate government of Damascus over the rest of the country.

In the specific case of Turkey, there were also other assessments. ISIS / ISIL was supported vigorously by Ankara in the process of sweeping Kurdish territories, wreaking death and destruction on the community. Given the historical conflict between Turkey and the Kurds, it is easy to assume that advances by ISIS/ISIL meant a victory for Erdogan and a successful degradation of the Kurdish community in the Middle East.

Subtly and somewhat complacently, the United States reacted to this behavior of Ankara in two ways. It primarily imposed a media blackout on trade deals between Turkey and Daesh and it especially never attacked ISIS in Syria with the so-called international coalition.

What has altered the chessboard is the Russian military intervention in September of 2015. Moscow has been able to smash the wall of silence and collusion present in Syria involving terrorist organizations such as Daesh, Al Nusra Front, Jaysh al-Islam, Ansar al-Islam and countries like the United States, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. In addition to military action, the Russian Federation has been able to apply strong diplomatic pressure on Western countries and, through the RT news channel, has repeatedly exposed the support of terrorism at any cost by the opponents of the legitimate government in Damascus.

Since September 2015 the war of aggression against Syria has been hit hard by Moscow's triad of military, diplomatic and media action. The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) quickly recaptured many territories previously lost. The liberation of Palmyra, and the road already opened to Deir ez-Zor, the vast areas around the Russian military base in the province of

Latakia cleared, the recent victory at Darayya and Aleppo – these finally showed a clear military solution to the crisis in Syria.

The consequences of the strategic re-conquests made by the SAA, combined with the inability of Washington to more explicitly intervene directly in the conflict with men and materiel, forced the US to change its initial tactics. Hidden support (deliberately never mentioned by TV and newspapers) of terrorist groups continues unabated, the same of which can be said for Washington's allies in the region. But what has changed is the media narrative of the conflict.

The terrorist attacks in recent months in Europe and the United States have arrested the attention of the public; and with a careful direction, especially in the US, thanks to the presidential election, people have been led to believe that a military intervention in Syria and Iraq was necessary to deal with a threat to national security. The inability to intervene directly with boots on the ground pushed Washington to arm and support directly (with the Air Force and with special forces) the Kurds as a force to opposing ISIS / ISIL on the ground.

For their part, not having other options to regain territories previously lost, the Kurds agreed to be the chosen on-the-ground force supported by the international coalition. They preferred to ignore the original sin of Washington (complicity with Daesh) to seize the unique opportunity available to them. It was a choice that in the short term ensured the desired results, with the recapture of several areas and an expansion and enlargement of their territory by over 50%. For some weeks, the Kurds even dreamed of the reunification of areas under their control in Syria and Iraq while Washington was enjoying the (self-proclaimed) media plaudits for combating Daesh, all the while preventing the Syrian Arab Army from regaining territory from ISIS.

From Moscow's point of view, this change of approach to Syria by the Obama administration is a direct result of Russia's military, diplomatic and media intervention, and the subsequent reconquests made by the SAA and its allies. It is a limited success, but still a victory against an enemy of Damascus (Daesh). It is a complicated affair, as the conflict in Syria stands out at times, wherein a partial victory is always preferable to the possibility of a defeat.

The second phase of the Russian plan, much more ambitious and difficult to achieve, is a military cooperation with Washington and its allies against terrorist organizations in Syria. The continued refusal of this proposal has once again exposed the real intentions of the United States and regional partners, namely the removing of Assad and the partitioning Syria's territory.

The massive support given to the Kurds by the Americans created the ideal environment for Ankara to justify an intervention in Syria. The threat of a unification of Kurdish territory on Turkey's border was a red line the crossing of which Erdogan could not countenance. What we understand is that the use of the Kurds against Daesh by Washington was a temporary move to last some months, probably agreed to with Ankara, designed for domestic consumption to appease public concern over Daesh. With these enabling conditions, Ankara did not hesitate to use them to its advantage. By entering Syrian territory and conquering Jarabulus, Ankara has prevented the reunification of Kurdish territories, has pleased its American ally by providing a structured land force (although very limited for now), and is now trying to clean up its own media image thanks to its portrayal of fighting Daesh. Analysing the battlefield in recent weeks, ISIL/ISIS has often abandoned its territories near

the Turkish border without even engaging with the Turkish Army. This behavior is consistent with the thesis that Daesh functions as the West's cat's paw for regime change in Syria.

The final American attempt to use the Kurdish card to achieve their strategic objectives against Damascus was the failed attempt to incite the Syrian Kurds against regular police forces in Aleppo. Unfortunately for US policy-makers, the attempt did not last long, thanks to Russian mediation that put an end to the fighting.

The situation continues to evolve in favor of Damascus in recent weeks. Aleppo is now surrounded and sealed off, signalling game over for the terrorist gangs in northern Syria. Washington, running out of options, promptly dumped its momentary Kurdish ally in favor of full military cooperation with Ankara. Erdogan, for his part, had meanwhile consolidated power thanks to the purge following the [failed military coup](#), and juggled his options so that he could easily play the direct-military-intervention card in Syria with the advantage of multiple excuses.

Erdogan even reiterated a few days ago at the G20 held in China that he would be willing to help and collaborate with Washington to regain the city of Raqqa, an ISIS stronghold in Syria. The substance of this change does not alter the balance of the war but exacerbates the conflict and places it on a new level. All armed groups in Syria over the years have shown that they cannot prevail in the military confrontation with Damascus and its allies. The United States, supporting the Kurds, has forced Turkey to become the much-needed force in the battlefield, essential in occupying territories currently held by Daesh, and preventing Damascus from further conquering and unifying Syrian territory.

This is Washington's Plan B in the making, an old idea of the dismemberment of Syria theorized by many Western think-tanks like the Brookings Institute and RAND Corporation. The chances of the plan being realizing remains unknown. Plan A failed miserably: Assad is still in power, and it is only a matter of time before the SAA and its allies finish liberating the rest of the country.

It remains to be seen how Daesh will react to the threat of losing their so-called capital, Raqqa, in favour of the same forces (Turkey and United States) that created and helped them rise from nothing. If ISIS/ISIL should decide to fight and not abandon the city, it would be a first for the international coalition and the Turkish army, finding themselves embroiled in the Syrian quagmire like never before. How would the people of Turkey and America react to their soldiers and special forces being killed, imprisoned or tortured? Would Erdogan and Obama still be able to justify the operation to the broader public?

The silence and proportional protests coming from Moscow in light of the Turkish incursion in Syria confirms these suspicions: territories reconquered from Ankara are not strategic; the Turkish force is numerically limited (hence the objectives), and the 'race' to Raqqa would probably cause more damage than gain for Erdogan and Obama. Moreover, the Arab Syrian Army has other strategic priorities to address and does not want to make the necessary countermeasures to arrive first at Raqqa.

Obama and Erdogan's bluff is all summed up in the last lines. Erdogan and Obama, in the efforts to free Raqqa and penetrate further into Syrian territory, hope to oblige Syrian forces to alleviate pressure on terrorist groups elsewhere in the country, especially in Aleppo, diverting troops towards the city of Raqqa. What we have been seeing in recent days are empty statements of small conquests by Turkish troops in Syrian territory, aimed at pushing

Damascus to fall into the trap prepared by Washington and Ankara.

The clock is ticking, and it is all in the favour of Moscow, Damascus and Tehran, who observe the situation with relative calm. Their planned strategy is providing most of the desired results, and now America and its allies have only the ability to react to events on the ground, not to determine or create them. Compared to a few years ago, this is a resounding change. If Erdogan and Obama still will want to start doing the dirty work in Raqqa against the same terrorist group they instigated against Damascus, then they are free to do so.

All options available for Washington and its partners-in-terror will have negative effects on the fateful goal to undermine Syria. Raqqa is a Syrian city, inhabited by Syrians, and even if Ankara liberated it, it is never going to be incorporated into an imaginary Turkish territory.

Strategic contortions, moral contradictions, media deception, and the recent military defeats of terrorist groups have transformed Syria into a recipe for disaster for Washington, Ankara, Doha and Riyadh, from which there is no way out or path to victory.

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