

## Afrin: Is Idlib the Next Aleppo?

### News:

Turkey to crush 'terror army' to be set up by US in Syria: Erdoğan

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Jan. 15 threatened to thwart the creation of a U.S.-backed 30,000-strong border security force manned mostly by the People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria.

"America has acknowledged it is in the process of creating a terror army on our border. What we have to do is nip this terror army in the bud," Erdoğan said.

He warned Turkey's allies against helping what he called terrorists in Syria, saying, "We won't be responsible for the consequences."

The U.S. is trying to create an "army of terror" on Turkey's southern frontier by training a Syrian border force including the Kurdish militia, he stated.

Turkey objects to the formation of the new force comprised mostly of the YPG, which Ankara accuses of being a terrorist organization for its links with the PKK. ([hurriyetdailynews.com](http://hurriyetdailynews.com))

### Comment:

The statements of Erdoğan and the Turkish authority give the impression that Erdoğan is openly confronting the US backed Kurdish PKK branch, PYD and YPG. So, the question which arises; is Turkey setting its own course and securing its own interests in the region by intervening militarily in the Kurdish enclave Afrin against American and Russian interests? Or is there something more than meets the eye?

Such a claim would in fact disregard the role of Turkey in Syria since the Syrian Revolution started. Turkey, in its capacity as a close US ally, has been heavily involved in the neighbouring country, Syria, to enact the American plan for Syria.

For example, it functioned as a host for a future "secular transition government"; it is one of the "three guarantor" states besides Russia and Iran; it has intervened militarily in cross-border operations like the "Operation Euphrates Shield" in North Syria together with Turkey-aligned Syrian opposition groups; it controls the biggest de-escalation zones in Syria, Idlib.

All of these tasks were assigned by the US to Turkey. The real question should be really, why should the recent military operation in Afrin be excluded from this sequence?

### Turkey and Russia about Afrin

Besides this established line of expectation, the earlier statements of the Turkish establishment itself contradict this claim. In November 2017, Erdoğan told the Hürriyet newspaper that as part of the deal in Astana, Turkey is monitoring the ceasefire inside Idlib and Russia outside the province, and Erdoğan said Turkey is "in solidarity with Russia on Idlib." And "This (deal) will also cover Afrin province. Because Afrin could present threats to us at any moment. Members of the separatist terror organization may try to reach the Mediterranean through the north by occupying Idlib," he added, referring to the People's Protection Units (YPG)."

So, the deal to attack Afrin was already settled back in September 2017 at the Astana summit with Russia who brokered this meeting. In December, Russian officials began with relocation of a portion of the Russian military observers from Afrin, and the remaining ones moved before Turkey entered Afrin. It was just a done deal with the consent of Russia.

## **Greenlight from US to Turkey for Afrin**

Also, the Americans gave green light for Turkey to enter Afrin. The spokesman of the United States-led coalition against the group of Bagdadi, Col. Ryan Dillon said that Syria's northern Afrin region was not a part of the U.S.' area of operations against the Daesh terror group and that it does not support the People's Protection Units (YPG) elements in the area."

His statement came in a response to Anadolu Agency's question as to whether the U.S. or the coalition would support Afrin, where a Turkish operation is being seen as imminent, based on statements by Turkish leaders.

"We are not operating in Afrin. We are supporting our partners in defeating remaining ISIS [Daesh] pockets along the Middle Euphrates River Valley, specifically in areas north of Abu Kamal, on the eastern side of the Euphrates River," he said.

And the Pentagon spokesman Eric Pahon said "We acknowledge Turkey's concerns regarding these [Border] Security Forces being trained. We have regular close communication with our NATO ally Turkey," told Anadolu Agency.

And the Pentagon spokesman, Maj. Adrian Rankine-Galloway, said "We don't consider them as part of our Defeat ISIS [Daesh] operations which is what we are doing there and we do not support them," Anadolu Agency in an email. "We are not involved with them at all," and "There is no train-advise and assist program going [on] in Afrin he added.

## **The real purpose of Afrin operation**

So, what is the purpose of this misleading information then if both Russia and the US gave Turkey their approval to enter Afrin? Is there something to hide then?

Yes, the deployment of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as part of the de-escalation deal is a problem. The previous cross-border operations with the FSA was also against the same Kurdish terror groups in North Syria. This was called the "Operation Euphrates Shield" and now it is called the "olive branch." Back then, Aleppo was in the hands of the fighting opposition groups. Turkey deployed thousands of fighters from the allied groups from Aleppo to North Syria to join "Operation Euphrates Shield." This caused devastating weakness in the defence system of Aleppo and together with severe bombardments of the Russian planes and Iranian ground forces, the Syrian regime could easily takeover Aleppo.

So, Aleppo fell easily and was captured by the brutal regime and the remaining civilians and fighters were killed or forced to leave to Idlib.

Now, the majority of the opposition groups are centred in Idlib province which is a de-escalation zone under control of Turkey. The opposition groups can't easily cross this zone, so in a sense they are entrapped. Moreover, in accordance with the Astana agreements they are disarmed and de-militarized by Turkey. But Russians, however, are bombing Idlib together with the regime forces till today.

If Turkey relocates again, thousands of fighters of the allied groups will fight in a battle which has no importance or priority, and the defence of Idlib will come under immediate danger. Idlib is already in a weak position, and this pull-out of a large number of fighters could be a last blow of the regime to destroy the weakened opposition.

If Idlib is awaiting the same destiny as Aleppo, and that's how it looks right now, then the foul play of Afrin is nothing more than a misleading plan of the US and Russia to brake the back of the Syrian Revolution. So, to get back on the question whether Turkey sets its own course, the answer is no, Turkey does not, and it also does not oppose the US or Russian plan, rather, it imposes it, fully!

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