

Ceasefire Ends, Talks on Syria Between Erdogan and Putin Begin

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Monday marks the thirteenth day since Turkey began its third cross border military operation in Syria ironically named "Operation Peace Spring". In the past two weeks civilian and militant lives on both sides have been lost, a large exodus has taken place, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly approved a resolution that opposes US troop withdrawal, a five-day ceasefire was brokered between Turkey and the United States, and Kurdish militias have withdrawn from the "safe-zone".

On Wednesday, there was overwhelming bipartisan approval for a measure that opposes President Trump's U.S. forces withdrawal from Syria. The resolution was introduced by Reps. Michael McCaul, Republican from Texas and Eliot Engel, Democrat from NY and it calls on the White House to put forth a plan for the "[enduring defeat](#)" of Daesh and demand that Turkey cease its military operations in Syria.

The measure which passed 354-60 with four members voting present and all sixty of the nays coming from Republican's stated,

"An abrupt withdrawal of United States military personnel from certain parts of Northeast Syria is beneficial to adversaries of the United States government, including Syria, Iran and Russia."

It's absurd that there's outrage about ending a war and allowing Syria to handle its own domestic affairs. However, nothing of the sort happened when Nobel Peace Prize winner and former US President Barack Obama was bombing seven countries and creating some of the wars that President Trump has inherited including Syria. Bipartisan support for carrying on with endless wars is mind-boggling.

On Thursday, a ceasefire was brokered between the United States and Turkey. This pause was meant to for the Kurdish militias to dismantle their posts and retreat from the 32km "safe zone" and in response the US would not impose any new sanctions on Turkey. However, there's a lesser mentioned point that prompted the ceasefire and that's the entrapment of US/UK Coalition Joint Special Operations Task forces in northern Syria. It was necessary for hostilities to cease long enough for them to withdrawal out of harm's way.

Washington and Turkey do not want the Kurdish militias to work in conjunction with the Syrian Arab Army, but for different reasons. The US would rather see them stay independent from the SAA and keep them as an ally in case US troops return. Remember northeast Syria

is advantageous to the US because they can keep an eye on Iran and protect Israel plus there's oil. Turkey would like to see the Kurdish militias dissolved along with any separatist Kurdish hopes and dreams of establishing an independent Kurdistan on its border.

Ankara has made it clear that if the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) plans on protecting the YPG/SDF that this will be considered an "act of war". The Turkish administration is worried that the SAA will enter Manbij, Ayn al-Arab, and Qamishli to protect the Kurdish militias, but that wouldn't be in the Syrian governments best interest.

There's been some disagreement among the Kurdish militias as to where they need to be withdrawing from, Turkey is demanding that they entirely vacate the 32km border, and not just some of their posts. If the Kurdish militias entirely withdrawal from Turkey's "safe zone" by the ceasefire deadline, what excuse will Ankara have to continue their military operation? None.

In the past week or so Syrian troops have made significant progress in regaining territory previously occupied by Kurdish militia's in northern Syria, and Russia tried to broker negotiations between the Kurdish militias and the Syrian government.

Turkey's stated goals are to fight the terrorist organizations on their southern border, create a safe-zone, and a "peace corridor" for the resettlement of 1-2 million Syrian refugees. They have stated that they are not looking to land grab or encroach but if we know anything about Turkey's politics it's that surprises lie behind every corner, much like the United States.

It's no coincidence that the 120-hour ceasefire ends on Tuesday, and that's precisely when President Erdogan will be going to Russia to meet with President Vladimir Putin. President Putin has taken on the role of negotiator and is usually the most level-headed adult in the room when it comes to the Syria conflict and dealing with Turkey, Syria, the Kurdish militias, and yes even the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia along with other players.

I assume the seasoned politician serving his fourth term in office will handle the Sochi meeting on Tuesday with Turkey, in the same polite and diplomatic manner we've grown accustomed to.

There were some questions as to whether the ceasefire will continue till then, due to violations on both sides. Turkey defense ministry stated on Sunday that one of their soldiers was killed and that the Kurdish militias violated the ceasefire over 20 times in the past three days. The SDF is stating that 16 of their fighters have been killed. Also, as part of the agreement between the US and Turkey, an 86- vehicle Kurdish convoy left Ras al-Ayn toward the town of Tal Tamr this weekend.

On Sunday, hundreds of trucks carrying almost 500 US personnel were seen withdrawing troops near Al Hasakah to Iraq's border. It's also been noted that US troops are destroying their own airfields and equipment before fleeing.

It appears that out of the supposed 1,000 US troops that about 500-700 will be sent to Iraq and about 200-300 will remain in Syria to perform what a senior US official referred to as a "counter Daesh mission". Back in December President Trump had said he wanted to bring all 2,000 troops back home, and now it doesn't seem like any of them will be coming back home anytime soon.

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