

The Russian-Turkish Deal on Syria: Who Won and Who Lost?

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Presidents Putin and Erdogan reached a deal on Syria that represents a decisive victory for Turkey while being a drastic climbdown for Damascus after President Assad vowed earlier that day that the Syrian Arab Army was “prepared to support any group carrying out popular resistance against the Turkish aggression” only to later “fully support” the Russian-brokered agreement to give Ankara practically all of what it wants once he was informed about the details by his counterpart in Moscow.

Practically everyone in the [Alt-Media Community](#) has an opinion about the latest Russian-Turkish deal on Syria that was reached after [hours of negotiations](#) between Presidents Putin and Erdogan during their summit in Sochi, with most portraying it as a victory for Damascus and a defeat for Ankara, though the reality is close (key word) to the polar opposite. Turkey received practically all of what it wanted by being given its long-sought “safe zone” in Northern Syria, albeit in a “modified” format. According to the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) published on the official Kremlin website, the two leaders agreed to the following ten points:

- “1. The two sides reiterate their commitment to the preservation of the political unity and territorial integrity of Syria and the protection of national security of Turkey.
2. They emphasize their determination to combat terrorism in all forms and manifestations and to disrupt separatist agendas in the Syrian territory.
3. In this framework, the established status quo in the current Operation Peace Spring area covering Tel Abyad and Ras Al Ayn with a depth of 32 km will be preserved.
4. Both sides reaffirm the importance of the Adana Agreement. The Russian Federation will facilitate the implementation of the Adana Agreement in the current circumstances.
5. Starting 12.00 noon of October 23, 2019, Russian military police and Syrian border guards will enter the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border, outside the area of Operation Peace Spring, to facilitate the removal of YPG elements and their weapons to the depth of 30 km from the Turkish-Syrian border, which should be finalized in 150 hours. At that moment, joint Russian-Turkish patrols will start in the west and the east of the area of Operation Peace Spring with a depth of 10 km, except Qamishli city.

6. All YPG elements and their weapons will be removed from Manbij and Tal Rifat.
7. Both sides will take necessary measures to prevent infiltrations of terrorist elements.
8. Joint efforts will be launched to facilitate the return of refugees in a safe and voluntary manner.
9. A joint monitoring and verification mechanism will be established to oversee and coordinate the implementation of this memorandum.
10. The two sides will continue to work to find a lasting political solution to the Syrian conflict within Astana Mechanism and will support the activity of the Constitutional Committee.”

Here’s a point-by-point interpretation of them:

1. Turkey reassured Russia that it isn’t interested in annexing any Syrian territory unlike what Alt-Media has repeatedly alleged, so Russia reconfirmed its support of Ankara’s anti-terrorist operation.
2. Not only does Russia support Turkey’s anti-terrorist actions, but it’s also on the same side as Ankara when it comes to its opposition to Kurdish separatist ambitions.
3. The “established status quo” talked about in this point is simply a euphemism for legitimizing the indefinite presence of Turkish military forces in the current area of operations.
4. Russia doesn’t agree with Syria’s [repeated claims](#) that the [Adana Agreement](#) is invalid until Turkey withdraws its military from the country, and is actually basing the following points on this international agreement.
5. Per the above, Russia committed Syria to assisting it with the disarmament and removal of Damascus’ new Kurdish “allies”, after which it’ll jointly patrol a 10-kilometer-deep “safe zone” with Turkey to enforce this.
6. Syria’s new Kurdish “allies” will be forced to surrender the doubly strategic and symbolic city of Manbij, further weakening their military position in the country.
7. This vague point doesn’t mention what exactly is supposed to be protected from terrorist infiltration, though it’s assumed to refer to the “safe zone”, in which case it simply reaffirms Russia’s support for Turkey’s plans.
8. This is yet another vague point because it doesn’t specify whether the repatriated refugees will be concentrated in the “safe zone” [like Turkey wants](#) or scattered throughout all of Syria.
9. Both sides will ensure that the other keeps its word, which for the Russians refers to the promises that they made on Syria and the Kurds’ behalf, while for the Turks this concerns the return of refugees.
10. Russia and Turkey reaffirm that they’re on the same side when it comes to promoting a political solution to the Hybrid War of Terror on Syria.

To summarize the Sochi Agreement, Russia is giving Turkey its “safe zone” and committing Syria to assist it with this by having Damascus disarm and remove its new Kurdish “allies” from Ankara’s envisaged sphere of influence, though the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and the country’s border guards will reportedly be allowed to control parts of the international frontier from “from Kobani to Tell Abyad and from Ras al-Ayn to the Iraqi border...supported by Russian military police” according to [RT](#). It’s unclear, however, whether that’s temporary or will remain in force when Russia and Turkey patrol up to 10 kilometers deep in those regions next week.

What’s so surprising about all of this is that President Assad “[gave his full support](#)” to it after being informed about the details by President Putin after the summit ended since the Syrian leader had vowed earlier that day that the SAA is “[prepared to support any group carrying out popular resistance against the Turkish aggression](#)”, which would of course also imply the YPG Kurdish militia that Ankara regards as terrorists and which Russia agreed to sweep out of the “safe zone” per President Erdogan’s wishes. The SAA’s possible support of this group’s anti-Turkish attacks would violate the Adana Agreement that Moscow said it will implement.

In fact, it can even be reasonably speculated that President Assad’s vague vow might have been the reason behind Russia so strongly declaring that it “will facilitate the implementation of the Adana Agreement in the current circumstances” and even speak on Syria’s behalf to commit the SAA to helping it with this in order to teach its leader a “lesson” about how dangerous it is to use such rhetoric during as sensitive of a time as this one when the delicate peace process is at stake. Even so, this unexpected twist can’t exactly be characterized as a “loss” since it nevertheless preserves international peace and pushes the conflict resolution process forward.

Therefore, an assessment of the Sochi Agreement reveals that while it’s a huge victory for Turkey, it’s not necessarily a “loss” for Syria even if it does indeed represent a dramatic climbdown from what President Assad had vowed to do earlier that day. Ankara “compromised” by receiving the breadth of what it wanted but only one-third the depth, while Damascus’ “compromise” was to “fully support” President Putin’s promise that it would actively facilitate the disarmament and removal of its new Kurdish “allies” in exchange for being allowed to jointly patrol part of the international frontier together with the Russian military police.

The militant Kurds, however, are definitely the losers after having their fate decided for them by Moscow and Ankara. While their separatist dreams are shattered and they’ll be unable to pose a credible terrorist threat to Turkey following the successful implementation of the Sochi Agreement, Russia might proverbially throw them a bone by “encouraging” Syria to “seriously consider” [granting them some level of “autonomy” in the Northeast](#) in exchange for all the concessions they were forced to undertake after being [abandoned by the US](#) earlier this month. If that happens, then this scenario could possibly stop them from being “sore losers” and spoiling the complex peace process.

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