

Syria - Erdogan's Lost Bet - Trump Likely To Follow A Cautious Strategy

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The last Syria thread [noted](#):

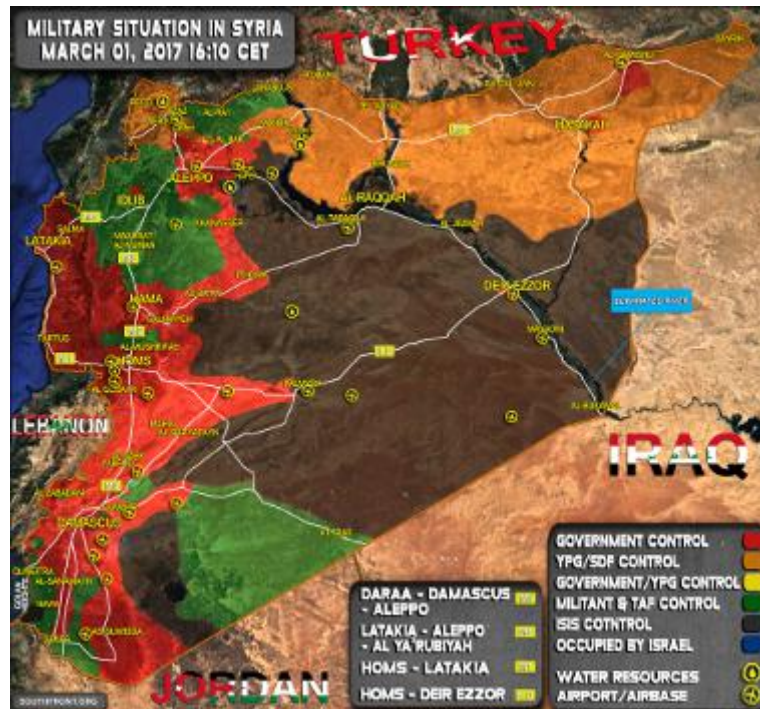
South of Al-Bab the Syrian army is moving towards the Euphrates. It will cut off the Turkish forces path to Raqqa and Manbij.

That move concluded. The Turkish invasion forces are [now blocked](#) from moving further south. They would have to fight the Syrian army and their Russian allies to move directly onto Raqqa. They would have to fight the Syrian-Kurdish YPG and its U.S. allies to move further east.

For the first time since the start of the war the supply lines between Turkey and the Islamic State are cut off!



map by [Peto Lucem bigger](#)



map by [South Front bigger](#)

Erdogan is still hoping for U.S. support for his plans for Raqqa but I doubt that the U.S. military is willing to give up on their well regarded Kurdish proxies in exchange for an [ill disciplined Turkish army](#) in general disarray and with little fighting spirit. Erdogan removed any and all officers and NCOs that he perceived as not being 100% behind his power grab. That has now come back to haunt him. He is lacking the military means to pursue his belligerent policies.

Last year Erdogan had allied with Russia and Iran after a (U.S. supported?) coup attempt against him failed. He felt left alone by the U.S. and its reluctance to support his plans in Syria. After Trump was elected Erdogan [perceived](#) a coming change in U.S. policies. He exposed himself as the ultimate turncoat and switched back to a U.S. alliance. His believe in a change of U.S. policy drives his latest moves and announcements.

Elijah Magnier reports that his sources in Damascus have the same impression of Trump as Erdogan. [They believe](#) that Trump will strongly escalate in Syria and will support the Turkish moves against the Syrian state.

But it is the U.S. military that drives the strategy in the Trump cabinet. The Pentagon has [no appetite](#) for a big ground operation in Syria. The plan it [offered Trump](#) is still the same plan that it offered under Obama. It will work with Kurdish forces to defeat the Islamic State in Raqqa. Notable is also that a director of the Pentagon financed think tank RAND Corp [publicly argues](#) for better cooperation with Russia in Syria. The [old RAND plan](#) of a decentralized Syria with zones under "international administration" (i.e. U.S. occupied) is probably no longer operative.

Recently Erdogan announced that his next move in Syria would be to towards Manbij, held by the YPK. Shortly thereafter pictures of U.S. troops in Manbij displaying U.S. flags were [published](#) on social networks. The message was clear: stay away from here or you will be in serious trouble.

On Monday planes from the Iraqi air force attacked Islamic State positions within eastern

Syria. The attack followed from intelligence cooperation between Syria and Iraq. It is easier for Iraq to reach that area than for Syrian planes stationed near the Mediterranean. This cooperation will continue. In western Iraq militia integrated with the Iraqi military are ready to storm Tal Afar. This is besides the besieged Mosul the last big Islamic State position in the area. The U.S. had planned to let the Islamic State fighters flee from Mosul and Tal Afar towards Syrian and to let them take the Syrian government positions in Deir Ezzor. Syrian-Iraqi cooperation blocked that move. The U.S. attempt to separate the war on the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq failed. Any attempt to again use the Islamic State as a means to destroy Syria will meet resistance in Iraq where the U.S. is more and more engaged. U.S. commanders in Iraq will be well aware of that threat.

In my opinion Trump's more belligerent remarks on Syria, on safe zones and military escalation, are rhetoric. They are his negotiation positions towards Russia and Iran. They are not his policies. Those are driven by more realistic positions. Obama balanced more hawkish views supported by the CIA, Hillary Clinton and the neoconservatives against reluctance in the military to engage in another big war. Trump will, even more than Obama, follow the Pentagon's view. That view seems to be unchanged. I therefore do not believe that aggressive escalation is the way Trump will go. Some additional U.S. troops may get added to the Kurdish forces attacking Raqqa. But any large move by Turkish or by Israeli forces will not be condoned. The big U.S. invasion of Syria in their support will not happen.

Meanwhile the Syrian army is moving on Palmyra and may soon retrieve it from the Islamic State. A new Russian trained unit, the 5th corps, is in the lead and so far makes a good impression. With Palmyra regained the Syrian army is free to move further east towards Raqqa and Deir Ezzor.

Erdogan may still get some kind of "safe zone" in the area in north Syrian his forces now occupy. But Damascus will support Kurdish and Arab guerilla forces against any Turkish occupation. The Turkish forces in Syria will continue to be in a lot of trouble. Erdogan will not get active U.S. support for further moves to capture Syrian land. His change of flags, twice, was useless and has severely diminished his standing.

Netanyahu and the Israel lobby [also want a "safe zone"](#). This one in south Syria and under Jordanian command. This would allow Israel to occupy more Syrian land along the Golan heights. But the areas next to the Golan and towards Deera are occupied by al-Qaeda and Islamic State aligned group. These groups are a serious danger for the unstable Jordanian state. There is nothing to win for Jordan in any "safe zone" move. Likewise the U.S. military will have no interest in opening another can of worms in south Syria. Like Erdogan Netanyahu will likely be left alone with his dreams.

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