

Turkey's Safe-zone and Refugee Peace-corridor in Syria Is a Cover for Encroachment and Territorial Expansion

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*On Saturday, Turkey's **President Recep Tayyip Erdogan** announced that preparations have been made for a unilateral cross border [air and land military operation](#) in the next day or two, in northern Syria, east of the Euphrates River. Erdogan expressed his frustration with Washington's lack of adherence to a September 30th deadline to establish a thirty-kilometer-deep safe zone on Syria's northern border.*

In response to Erdogan's threat, the US-backed Kurdish militia group known as The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) stated that they are ready to respond to an unprovoked Turkish attack with an all-out war if necessary.

Sandwiched between the Turkish-backed Free Syrian army and their affiliates and the US-backed Kurdish militias are Syrian civilians who are at risk of losing their homes, land, and lives. They are opposed to both entities and want the war to end.

Erdogan has made this same threat to target Kurdish militias on Syria's northern border numerous times over the past year. Each time Washington strongly condemns any sort of unilateral military operation that could put US troops and their Kurdish militia allies in harm's way. Then at the eleventh-hour placates Turkey by agreeing to help protect their national security by establishing a safe zone on the Syrian border or creating a "peace corridor" for Syrian refugees to return from Turkey to Syria. Wash, rinse and repeat every few weeks.

In August, an agreement between the United States and Turkey was made to establish the safe zone and peace corridor on Syria's northern border. Some People's Protection Units Kurdish YPG fighters removed their posts and left the safe zone area. Three Turkish/US joint patrol operations have taken place since August. But Turkey still feels that not enough has been done and there are disagreements between the two regarding, depth, who should oversee the safe zone, and who needs to be removed from it. Turkey isn't satisfied with a 10-15 km safe zone; they want 30 km and to be in total control of it.

It's worth noting that the Syrian government has been vocal in their opposition to the creation of a Turkish safe zone or peace corridors on its land as well as joint patrol operations. Damascus knows that Turkey's true intentions are expansion and changing the demographics and forcing the return of millions of Syrian refugees to areas in northern Syria where they do not originate from.

On the surface, establishing a safe zone for refugees might not seem like much of an issue. Especially if one thinks of Syria in the same terms as the United States and considers Aleppo, Damascus, Homs, Al Hassaka etc. as just states within a united country. But it is an issue, and there are major differences in tribes, religion, ideologies, political affiliations and loyalties that are not being taken into consideration.

Now, this isn't to say that Syrians are incapable of peacefully coexisting, they can and have, but forcing entire populations to shift creating huge demographical changes on Syrian soil is problematic and if Turkey is truly worried about their national security they can establish a safe zone on Turkish land to protect themselves but they do not have a right to encroach on Syrian land.

In addition to the safe zone and peace corridor, Turkey has consistently demanded that the United States end their alliance with the Kurdish militias in Syria, the YPG and SDF who they consider to be an extension of the Kurdish Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) whom they have been at war with for over three decades.

Rather than cut ties to make their NATO ally happy, the United States has continued to support Kurdish militias since 2015, even assisting in a name change from YPG to SDF to disassociate them from the Turkish PKK.

Earlier this week another large convoy of US military trucks destined for the SDF made its way into northeastern Syria from Iraq.

If Turkey does carry out their alleged cross border military operation it will be the third of its kind in as many years. Just a few days ago, fragmented Turkish-backed militia groups including the Free Syrian Army [merged](#) into one with roughly 60,000 fighters, in preparation for this military operation.

The US is caught between supporting their Kurdish militia allies and supporting Turkey, their NATO ally. If US President Donald Trump truly wants to withdraw US troops from Syria like he has publicly stated numerous times, then he should use this opportunity as a perfect excuse. Pulling US troops would of course anger the Kurdish militias who the United States has supported for the past four years with weapons, funds, military equipment, intelligence etc. but it would cause the SDF to try to work things out with the Syrian government and army and unite with them.

Turkey has drawn out a detailed plan for resettling two million Syrian refugees in the safe zone and many are concerned that once these Turkish loyalists have resettled on Turkey's border, Ankara will claim ownership on Syria's northern region. Turkey's plan would cost roughly \$27 billion and Turkey is not planning on footing the entire bill and has asked for other nations to assist funds to carry out its plan.

Turkey's plan includes establishing 140 villages, 10 towns, a Turkish university with three faculties including an Islamic Sciences faculty in Azaz, an Education Faculty in Afrin and an Economics and Administrative Sciences faculty in Al Bab. Each village would have 1,000 homes which would house 5,000 people. Each town would have 6,000 homes and house 30,000 people. The project would have a total of 200,000 homes to house an estimated 1 million people.

Turkey is attempting to repeat across northern Syria what they accomplished in Afrin during

the Olive Branch operation. They drove out the Kurdish population and replaced them with Turkish aligned Syrian refugees, changing the demographics.

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