

INFINITE CRISIS: ON TURKISH INCURSION INTO SYRIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

President Donald Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of northeastern Syria is tantamount to betraying the Kurdish forces who were in the forefront of the war against the Islamic State. Within days of the U.S. decision, [Turkey launched its much-anticipated military incursion](#) on Wednesday into the predominantly Kurdish northeastern Syria. The Syrian Kurdish region, Rojava, is now run by a semi-autonomous Kurdish government, and its militias People's Protection Units (YPG) are guarding the borders. The YPG was the dominant player in the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) that destroyed the IS "caliphate". Turkey, which is fighting a violent Kurdish insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in its Kurdish territories, sees an empowered YPG and a Kurdish autonomous government across the border a growing security threat to itself. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoan's plan is to carve out a buffer between the border and the Rojava, which will be controlled by pro-Turkish Syrian rebels. He also plans to resettle some Syrian refugees here. In its previous intervention, Turkey had already pushed the YPG out of Afrin, a border town. It is now planning to repeat Afrin in a longer and wider stretch of the border region. The American presence may have held Mr. Erdoan back, but with the White House saying that the U.S. troops "will not support or be involved" in the Turkish operation, the decks were cleared for Ankara.

To be sure, the U.S. withdrawing troops itself is not the problem. Mr. Trump had made the campaign promise to wind down America's military engagements in West Asia. Also, the U.S. cannot get stuck in the Syrian conflict forever. The problem is the way in which it is abruptly disengaging itself and the potential consequences. The Kurds have played a critical role in defeating the IS, whose fall began in Kobane, the Kurdish town which was liberated by the YPG in early 2015. Also, if there is a Kurdistan government in northeast Syria today, it is because the Kurds have captured all the major cities in the region, including Raqqah, the de facto capital of the IS, with U.S. support. But now, with the destruction of the IS "caliphate", the U.S. seems to be abandoning the Kurds. Mr. Trump could have opted for an orderly exit from Syria with security guarantees from Turkey for the Kurds. Instead, he has just given in to Turkey's demands. Second, only the IS caliphate was destroyed, not the IS. The remaining IS fighters have retreated to the Iraqi and Syrian deserts waiting for an opportunity to strike back. The Turkish incursion into Syria will not just set back the advances the Kurds have made in Rojava, but also weaken the most potent anti-jihadist force on the ground, besides throwing the whole region into chaos. It is a recipe for tragedy.

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