

# W ASIA: WITH US COMMITMENT DIPPING, REGIONAL POWERS WILL CONTINUE TO JOSTLE

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

Oct 11, 2019-Friday

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The Turkish military action against the Kurdish Syrian enclave, following a green light from the Kurds' former backer, the United States (US), is a useful indicator of several geopolitical trends in West Asia. The immediate response, especially in the US, has been to use the decision as an additional foil to attack President Donald Trump who, unusually, is receiving flak from even many Republican Party leaders. This is unlikely to sustain for too long. The Turks will seek to create a buffer zone between themselves and their long-standing opponents, the Kurds, but refrain from entering Kurdish population centres. Turkish President Reccip Erdogan will receive a badly needed domestic political fillip. Mr Trump will portray it as a fulfilment of his promise to limit, if not wind down, his government's overseas military commitments. A flash-in-the-pan war will be quickly forgotten by the world, with only the Kurds being the worse for it.

Syria's future will now increasingly be decided by the Russian-backed Syrian regime in Damascus rather than the mosaic of enclaves held by Syrian rebels, the Kurds, and even Turkey. Mr Erdogan's military push into Syria should be seen as a sign of weakness. Compared to his earlier overweening plans to make Turkey the dominant Islamic power of the eastern Mediterranean, taking on a lightly-armed Kurdish militia is hardly the stuff of empire-building. Talk of a neo-Ottoman revival has been reduced to only talk.

On its part, the US has reinforced the sense that its strategic commitment to West Asia continues to fade, its interventions intermittent and short-lived. India's interests lie with the Persian Gulf rather than in the Levant, but the shifting sands of one affect the other. The chaos of the Syrian civil war is being replaced by a more traditional jostling for influence by West Asia's many aspiring regional powers. Expect similar skirmishes and manoeuvring in the years to come.

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