

East of Euphrates, New Reality!

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On Wednesday (22 Aug) the YPG forces withdrew from Sari Kani with their heavy weapons, and on Saturday (24 Aug) first group of YPG and SDF forces withdrew from Al-Edwaniyah village (35km west of Sari Kani) which is the border area will be included in the US-Turkey agreement to establish joint security mechanism. Later these forces under American military ground supervision and Turkish-American air supervision have filled their trenches and removed defense walls. And on 25 August the American and Turkish forces have conducted the first joint ground patrols in the designated area between Sari Kani and Gre Spi along with 88km length and 5-14km depth.

These ground developments in the East of Euphrates are coincides with ground developments in the areas north of Hama and east of Idlib which is called the forth de-escalation zone, that during Astana talks Russia-Turkey and Iran agreed on.

If the Syrian army that backed by the Russian forces control strategic city of Khan Sheikhoun in south of Idlib (70km) on the international road (M5) links Aleppo to Hama, and likely extend its control over the entire northern countryside of Hama governorate which before were under control of Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Al-Nusra front) and their allies in the Syrian opposition groups.

These two concurrent developments will make new reality regarding to the Syrian crisis in general and particularly in the East of Euphrates. And some of the consequences are intertwined and interrelated.

Impacts on the East of Euphrates:

If the security mechanism agreement happen between US and Turkey (the US designation that Turkey calls as peace corridor or security zone.) this will prevent Turkey from invading East of Euphrates, at the same time weakens the position of autonomous administration and its military forces SDF (Kurdish part) the removal of YPG in the border areas will weaken their position in the favor of Arab units within SDF which now increasing in numbers and get better armed by US and receive some gulf countries support especially from Saudi Arabia. Their removal from Syrian border areas with Turkey will weakens their position in any possible negotiation with Syrian government (if the self- administration adopts agreement option with the Syrian government) therefore is likely the autonomous region play with this card for some achievements from Syrian government on its authorities of the administration.

However, US-Turkish understandings and US announcement to continue its support for the SDF forces, and American _European efforts to launch political process to reformulate the existing administration in Eastern Euphrates, in other hand will narrow the room for maneuver in the front of Syrian government which did not dare to invade Eastern Euphrates in the presence of US troops.

There is some information that one of the terms of US-Turkey agreement is that US pledged to expel non-Syrian PKK cadres in western Kurdistan. And US has informed the military leadership and self-administration on this decision that should abide in a period no later than 2019.

Also there is American and European project to transform the existing administration for the comprehensive one that includes all political parties and social components. This will end the monopoly of union democratic party (the actual arm of PKK) on the units of this administration politically, militarily and administratively. There is French initiative and British efforts to bring the Kurdish parties together are in the same context with the American _European deal.

If the decision to expel non-Syrian PKK cadres implemented, this could have security implications on the Kurdistan region of Iraq, especially if there is tense relation with PKK, they could use this force (which in the past years received practical training from the Americans in Syria) to strengthen PKK in southern Kurdistan areas especially in the disputed areas with Baghdad and this could make trouble for Kurdistan region.

Security threats on East Euphrates

Apart from the American-Turkish border security agreement, there are security developments in Syrian Kurdistan and Eastern Euphrates that could pose serious threat on the regional stability. There is information that some of the ISIS sleeper cells in Shaddadi area (60km south of Hasakah) and al-Hol area (which is a camp that includes more than 70,000 people that most of them are from ISIS affiliated families and its sympathetic environment with ISIS) have moved into well organized and armed force. And in some villages around Qamishli , largest cities of Syrian Kurdistan and Eastern Euphrates Iran formed kind of popular mobilization forces.

In the depth of Arab Eastern Euphrates anti- Kurdish sentiments are growing within SDF. In other side there are more attacks on the Syrian democratic forces some of them likely to be carried out by the Syrian government forces. Despite that the ISIS cells have grown in the region. All of these data pose a risk of widespread security chaos in the region that could evolve to ethnic wars where the Kurds will become main target.

Conclusion:

There is no doubt that the developments in Syria in general and in Eastern Euphrates in particular will affect the Kurdistan region directly, therefore Kurdistan region need to be open with the parties concerned with the Syrian crisis at the internal, regional and international level.

At the international level KRG should intensify its contacts with the main players on the Syrian file to avoid steps that are harmful to Kurdistan region (for example: deployment of the Turkish troops within the safe zone to the crossings with Kurdistan region with Syrian Kurdistan and Arab areas of Iraq) as well as joining the US-European efforts to create rapprochement between Kurdish parties and to reformulate the existing administration and work to involve the Kurdish national council and other parties. Because this will dismantle the one party rule and create pluralistic administration. And in this form the administration will have better relations with Kurdistan region than its now. As well as create political and economic stability that will contribute the return of Kurdish refugees (at least part of them) and this will be a factor to mitigate the risks of demographic changes against the Kurds. The Kurdistan region tension with administration and political parties of Rojava will increase the chances to use it against Kurdistan region interests, also pushes to incite the community base in western Kurdistan against KRG's leadership, knowing that such community base was and still a historical support for Kurdistan region and its leadership. The current administration of rojava represent (or controls) the will of half of the Kurdish community in Syrian Kurdistan. Therefore is wrong to antagonize it.

It seems the Syrian regime will become a partner in solving the Syrian crisis. There was no real international will to remove it. Because this would hand over power to a religiously oriented majority Sunni. And would have led to formation of a regime loyal to Turkey. As handing over power to religiously oriented Shiite majority in Iraq has also lead to the establishment of a regime loyal to Iran, this does not satisfy the international and regional powers that are influential in Syria. Therefore opening communication channels with the Syrian regime will give the Kurdistan region an opportunity to have a presence in the endeavors in solving Syrian crisis especially in the dossier of relations with post-crisis Syria and Kurdish cause in Syria which ultimately will be solved with the central power in Damascus. And such solution will have impact on Kurdistan region. And will lead to improve relations with the Syrian government which is an ally of Iraq and Iran would also help the region in some files with the latter two countries.