

John Bolton's *Mysterious Trip to Turkey*

06-01-2019

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The US national security advisor, John Bolton, have been on a visit to Israel and Turkey to discuss Syria and the Kurds. Bolton met with Turkish officials on Tuesday. The meeting was particularly important for the Turks, as they expected the final, so they could start launch operations in Manbij and east of Euphrates.

But, does Bolton make a cooperation deal with Ankara? Does the US allow Turks to cross Syrian northeastern borders? Does Bolton keep his promise of not leaving Syria until the security of the Kurds is guaranteed?

Hypothesis: as we have recently noted, The US president's abrupt decision to pull out forces from Syria will pit the public opinion against the Trump administration. This might be one of the reasons that urges President Trump to infer walking back from Syrian pullout policy, to ease the internal pressure and reduce the discontent with his administration.

The US: internal and external equilibrium

The US and Turkish government have agreed on the withdrawal from Syria. To leave the northeastern Syria and the war on terror in those areas for the Turkish forces is component of the US plan. Trump's surprise decision to evacuate forces from Syria has turned upside down the a whole range of issued in the region. This might be an opportunity for the Turks, as they have dreamed of entering into Kurdish controlled areas in Syria for some time, and now they have the chance to fulfill the dream. But Turkish government understands the risks involved in any operation in the east of Euphrates, as the state of affairs in those areas is very different from the circumstances around the Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch operations.

The Syrian policy has triggered divisions within Washington; Pentagon and military commanders are at odds with the withdrawal decision, while the White House and the State Department regard themselves as the owner of the plan. Trump's pullout announcement caused chaos in the Defense Department, and in the following days a number of senior officials submitted their resignations, including the former Defense Secretary, James Mattis, the US President's special envoy to the US-led Anti-ISIS Coalition, Brett McGurk. Trump's decision was not unexpected; he had promised on many occasions to bring soldiers back home. But to Trump's surprise, the announcement has so far provoked a wide range of public dissatisfaction, which might harm his popular base. This is the reason behind his constant change of tone on the withdrawal plan.

Thus, the internal equilibrium is impacting the external one. The Trump administration intends to examine a new formula on the pullout policy with the Turks, while trying to focus on the Kurdish genocide and the likelihood of the violation of their right by the Turkish forces. The Americans are looking for ways to forge a kind of cooperation and partnership between the Kurds and the Turks. Ankara, however, is very tough on this issue, and this might deteriorate US plans.

Now, Bolton intends to negotiate this issue with Turks, and this time from a different dimension. Israeli lobbies in the US has played a remarkable role in building the new US push to make a balance between Turkish ambitions and the safety of the Kurds. The US President's top security aide traveled to Turkey with the aim of ensuring the Kurds are not endangered by the Turkish incursion into the northeast of Syria. Fresh disagreements could emerge from this policy. The Turks have known about this new US policy for quite a while, hence they declare that they do not have any problems with Kurds so much as they are concerned about YPG and PYD. This does not convince the Americans, as they know PYD and YPG is not about a small group, but a group which have become an issue relevant to millions of people.

The US administration still hopes to facilitate Kurdish-Turkish talks. In meetings with Turkish officials, Bolton will lay a new

card on the table, which is to sever YPG and PYD from PKK. It is very likely that the US officials will bring forward their proposals. It is not the first time Washington indicates the enlisting PKK leaders as terrorists and putting bounties on them. The problem, however, is that Turkey is opposed to any solution to the Kurdish question and reject any idea of a Kurdish territory in Syria, and the Turkish generals are particularly insistent on this attitude, while the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has taken advantage of his hostility towards Kurds in internal politics.

Any final Turkish-American resolution seems very unlikely when John Bolton meets the Chief of the National Intelligence Organization of Turkey, Hakan Fidan, so temporary frictions are expected to occur, as two sides disagree on key issues.

Turkey: political divisions and change in discourse

Erdogan has, recently, softened his tone while speaking on the Syrian Kurds. He constantly talks of protecting the Kurds, insisting that they have problems with PYS and not the Kurds per se, this is quite a change compared to what he was saying before and after the Olive Branch operation in Afrin, northwest of Syria. The Turkish Presidential spokesperson, Ibrahim Kalin, has converted the same signals to the Americans before Bolton's visit to Turkey.

Back in Ankara the concerns are not restricted to the Kurds, as the prospect of a Turkish incursion into the northeast of Syria has prompted a new developments with the Turkish army. Some prominent Turkish generals and army officials believe that the president and the defense minister's intentions will lead to disasters, considering the new developments in Syria a trap for Turkey. They object the idea of a Turkish invasion of the Kurdish-controlled areas in Syria. In recent days two Turkish well-known commanders have been removed from their post and transferred to desk jobs. These commanders argue that five thousand carriers of the US ammunitions have been delivered to the YPG forces, which would inflict heavy damages on the Turkish troops and prolong the war for months or even years, not to mentions the possibility of sinking Turkish troops in the quagmire of Syrian crisis for a long period of time.

Turkish Minster of National Defense, Hulusi Akar, has warned Turkish commanders that anyone who is opposed to the incursion plan could leave the army. He has also insisted that Turkey does not tolerate the creation of a "terror corridor" (that is a Kurdish corridor) and that, if needed, they are ready to die. These are aftershocks of the invasion plan within the Turkish army ranks. The Turkish invasion of the Kurdish-controlled areas might also cause chaos in Kurdish areas of Turkey, this possibility becomes stronger in the spring.

Erdogan, however, eyes to take advantage of the incursion in the internal politics, particularly in the upcoming local elections. But the Ankara knows very well that it cannot succeed in the operation on its own. Meanwhile, Russians are sending mixed messages, and Americans have new condition for their withdrawal from Syria.

The Kurds, however, have gained new maneuvering space. New actors are playing their role, including Israeli lobbyists whose efforts have been remarkable in the last couple of weeks. Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt have launched a new campaign, including normalization of relations with Assad, to counter both Shia and Turkish blocks simultaneously. All these are relieving the Kurds of the recent intense pressure.