The Situation in Syria is Heating Up Again

It would seem that Syria is finally experiencing a period of relative calm after a protracted and debilitating war. Having defeated DAESH (banned in the Russian Federation) with the help of Russian partners, Syrian authorities hoped to focus on rebuilding the economy and infrastructure. The Syrian Constitutional Committee and the Syrian opposition resumed work in Geneva, hoping to compromise constitutional reform in the country.

However, the peace plans may be derailed because Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has already started preparing another military operation against the Kurds in northern Syria. This was prompted by the October 6 attack on a Turkish military convoy in Idlib, Syria, which killed two servicemen, wounded five others, and destroyed an armored vehicle. One can get the impression that the anti-tank guided missile launcher attack on the Turks was carefully prepared. In response to the incident, Erdoğan indicated that Turkey is determined to address the threats in the region and act more firmly.

In that way, the Turkish President demonstrated his readiness to launch a new military offensive against the Kurdish-controlled northern regions of Syria (Tell Rifaat, Manbij, etc.). Notably, Ankara blames the United States and Russia, which were supposed to ensure that the People’s Defense Units move 30 kilometers away from the Syrian-Turkish border. These are the terms under which Turkey agreed to halt the offensive on Syrian territories in 2019.
Now it turns out that Turkey can use any incident as a pretext for another invasion of Syria. The only hope of stopping it, for now, is the prospect of complicating already strained relations with Washington, which has been supporting the Kurds and, back in the day, guaranteed their security in exchange for help in the fight against DAESH.

On October 15, Turkish drones dropped leaflets over the Syrian town of Tell Rifaat, 25 kilometers north of Aleppo in northwestern Syria. They warned locals about the imminent cleansing of the town of Kurdish fighters, calling for assistance to Turkish soldiers and volunteers in the areas of Operation Olive Branch and Operation Euphrates Shield. The People’s Defense Units (YPG, the armed formations of the Supreme Kurdish Council), the Afrin Liberation Forces, units of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA), and Russian military police units are known to be in Tell Rifaat. Thus, if Ankara implements its plans for a new military operation in northern Syria, Russian soldiers could also be hit by the Turkish army.

Regarding Erdoğan’s plans to seize Aleppo, Reuters, citing its sources as two high-ranking officials in the Turkish government, suggests taking them seriously. Reuters also points out that “Turkey is preparing for further possible military action against the US-backed Kurdish militia in northern Syria if talks with the United States and Russia on the issue fail.” The target of Erdoğan’s military operation is the town of Tell Rifaat, from where YPG fighters allegedly launched the October 6 attack and killed two Turkish soldiers. Reuters further notes that Turkey will launch the operation if Ankara’s diplomatic efforts fail to force Kurdish forces to withdraw another 30 kilometers from the current frontline. It is expected that Erdoğan may make controlling warning calls to Putin and Biden before hitting Tell Rifaat.

However, Ankara’s current bid to seize Aleppo will meet strong resistance from Syria, Russia, and the US.

According to the Arab news agency SANA, Turkey and the Turkey-backed opposition have already resumed attacks on populated areas in Syria on October 19 with artillery and missile shelling of Al Dardara village located north of Tal Tamir in the northwestern Al-Hasakah Governorate, resulting in material damage to infrastructure and property. Turkish troops in northern Al-Hasakah Governorate are reportedly receiving reinforcements from a Turkish base in Ras al-Ayn.

At the same time, Turkey is moving additional special forces to the zone of a possible military operation against Kurdish paramilitary groups in the northern regions of Syria. Before this, Ankara-controlled militant forces were sent to the area of Tell Tamer in Syria in anticipation of a possible Turkish Armed Forces military operation to dislodge Kurdish militias.

Following Turkish President Erdoğan’s aggressive statements threatening a new invasion of the neighboring Arab republic, the Syrian army command is moving reinforcements to a possible front line in the Aleppo province. The Syrian military has been conducting intensive combat readiness checks and sending additional units north to the Tell Rifaat and Manbij areas, suspected of another cross-border operation by the Turkish army. In particular, heavy Russian T-90 tanks, Grad multiple rocket launchers, BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles, and other weapons have been sent there. Although the situation here has been relatively calm over the past 24 hours, it appears that Turkey needs time to prepare for an attack on Syrian-controlled territory.

Russian warplanes dropped leaflets printed by the General Command of the Syrian Arab Army on the positions of the militants and the Turkish troops with an ultimatum: any attack will be seen as a violation of the agreements, and Russia will be ready to attack the terrorists and protect the Syrian army as its ally.

The Syrian media reports that Assad’s Armed Forces and the Russian military are deadly serious. US officers, the YPG’s advisors, are also preparing to repel a Turkish attack, finding themselves “in the same trench” as the Syrian and Russian militaries.

Against this backdrop, the situation in Syria is visibly deteriorating. Terrorist formations in Syria have visibly increased their activities in anticipation of possible chaos due to a new military operation being prepared by Ankara in the north of the country. In particular, on the morning of October 20, there was a terrorist attack in the center of Damascus. Two explosive devices detonated as a bus carrying Syrian troops drove past the Presidential Palace, killing 14 soldiers and wounding dozens more with varying degrees of severity. The fact that such attacks in Damascus have been rare in recent years after government forces took control of suburbs of the capital that were once held by rebels may serve as a proof of just how much influence Turkey’s preparations for a new military operation in Syria have on the intensification of terrorists in the country.
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