

Scenarios for Turkish Military Intervention in Syria

Estimation of stances

February 2016

All rights reserved for JUSOOR for STUDIES 2016 ©

Jusoor (for Studies) Center is an independent institution specialized in disseminating information, conducting studies and research concerned with political, social, economic, and legal affairs in the Middle East with a special focus on Syrian affairs. Jusoor extends bridges for authorities and decisions makers in different state specializations and development sectors. Jusoor aims to help them to make balanced decisions regarding issues in the region by providing them with data and detailed realistic scientific reports.



Turkey - Gaziantep

+90 537 558 5821

www.jusoor.co

info@jusoor.co

@jusoorstudies

Scenarios for Turkish Military Intervention in Syria

The First Scene

The subject of Turkish military intervention in Syria is not a good thing, as many reports at the end of 2011 mentioned the existence of a Turkish plan to intervene militarily in Syria, but Turkish ideas and solution about the intervention and other issues such as creating a safe zone in northern Syria always received American opposition as America always proposed its priority of confronting Islamic State forces over any other priorities¹.

The difference in opinions and perspectives between Turkey and the United States led to Turkey preventing NATO airplanes using the Turkish air bases for long periods of time. It soon after agreed following some strategic changes on the ground in northern Syria, and perhaps the most important was Daesh's withdrawal from areas to the advantage of the Kurdish Protection Units.

The dispute between Ankara and Washington facilitated other parties such as Russia to intervene directly in Syria under the pretense of confronting terrorism at the end of September 2015. The Russian intervention complicated issues for Turkey that did not want its relations with Turkey to deteriorate. The Turkish fighter jets shooting down the Russian Al-Soukhoy 24 jet in northern Syria complicated the Turkish stances greatly other than what followed from that incident in the development of the Russian defense system and operations to stop military and logistical support reaching the opposition.

From another angle, the Turkish political support for the Syrian opposition in Vienna and Geneva, and publically supported them in front of the International Community with the hope of reaching a political formulation for a solution, even if that included

¹ Turkish military forces amassing on the border preparing to enter and impose a no-fly zone in Syria, Al-Arabiya net, 12 august 2011.

www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/08/12/161980.html

accepting Al-Assad temporarily. However events on the ground and diplomatic movements that the UN representative Stephan Di Mastora, and the American stance only pointed to more negative stances and more destruction on the humanitarian, political or military levels in Syria.

The Latest Developments

Commentary on the Geneva Negotiation

The most important recent development on the Syrian political scene was the announcement of the international delegate Stephan Di Mastoura's comments on the halting of the negotiations until the 25th of February 2016, after the end of the indirect negotiations that he was leading. The negotiations were supposed to begin on the 29th of February 2016, and one of the most important reasons was his inability to convince the Higher Committee for Negotiations that represents the Syrian opposition to enter the negotiations which the Higher Committee found to be useless given the continued Russian airstrikes on many parts of Syria in support of the regime in a bid to recapture many strategic locations. The Higher Committee refused to participate due to its feeling that the international community has backed down from guarantees it made regarding humanitarian issues that were part of the Committee's conditions.

The field developments

Regarding the field developments, the unprecedented Russian bombardment in the past few days has enabled the Syrian regime forces with support from militias, Iranian soldiers, the Lebanese Hizbullah, to entrench themselves in Aleppo's northern countryside and take control over villages in the area amongst them Riytan and Mayer. Their objective is to cut the principle supply line between the opposition headquarters in Aleppo and the Turkish border, and end the siege on the pro-regime villages of Nibel and Al-zahra². These movements led many regional countries supporting the opposition such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia to light danger signals.

Indicators of the Turkish Military Movements

² The Syrian opposition counters the attacks in Al-Ghouta and the Russian bombardment continues, Aljazeera net, 8 February 2016.

<http://goo.gl/oX3yLH>

In the context of the varying responses to events on the ground, Saudi Arabia criticized the Russian military operation on Syria based on the comments of the Minister of Foreign Affairs who accused Russia of working to influence the Geneva discussions. The military advisor in the Saudi ministry of defense, General Ahmed Al-Aseer, confirmed a few days ago the Saudi readiness to participate with land forces in Syria alongside the international forces under the command of the United States of America against “Daesh”³.

Regarding the Turkish stance, especially regarding the issue of military intervention, the Russian ministry of defense announced through the ministry spokesperson, General Igo Konshnikov, that it has “trusted information” that directs it to support Turkey is preparing for a “military intervention” in Syria. The developments on the border indicated Turkey’s military readiness to intervene militarily in Syria. An authority in the Turkish prime minister, Ahmed Davtuglu’s office said: Russia is trying to distract attention from its crimes in Syria by claiming that Ankara is preparing to entrench itself militarily in Syria⁴.

From another angle, Hassan Adi, the editor in chief for the Iranian Mahr agency, based on data he received said, “Turkey is more serious about sending its infantry into Syria. He believed that Turkey is more serious and determined to send its land forces into Syria”⁵.

The Turkish President Recyip Tayyip Erdogan announced in a press conference that there are signs that the Syrian crisis will not continue for long, and that his country is ready for any development that occurs on Syrian territory. He said his country will not repeat the mistake that it committed regarding its non-intervention in the situation in Iraq in 2003.

³ Assayri: Saudi is prepared to participate with its land forces with NATO against Daesh in Syria, CNN Arabic, 5 February 2016.

<http://arabic.cnn.com/world/2016/02/05/saudi-arabia-willing-send-ground-troops-fight-isis>

⁴ The Russian defense suspects Turkey is preparing for a “military intervention” in Syria, Arabi 21, 4 February 2016.

<http://goo.gl/YAFSrN>

⁵ Iranian press authority forecasts effects of a Turkish Saudi intervention in Syria, Arabi 21, 7 February 2016.

<http://goo.gl/0vWUHI>

Regarding the field situation, the lieutenant Imad Nadim Shahoud, the leader of the liberation movement in Homs, “The reconnaissance from the Syrian-Turkish border indicates there is serious military movements represented in notable military movements all along the Syrian-Turkish border. There are military reconnaissance missions, and part of the Turkish army is being trained to operate in organizational groups which goes against its planning as a traditional army organized in the shape of coordination units, brigades, and platoons. Also the engineering weaponry was advanced to the first class alongside the infantry weaponry which happens in the preparation for an attack operation. The air plans were also conducting reconnaissance missions over the course of 24 hours”⁶ .

Motives for the Turkish intervention

There are many motives pointing to the possibility of Turkish military intervention in Syria, of the most important:

1. The failure of the Geneva talks which predict the end of the possibility of a political solution in Syria, with the lack of conviction about their effectiveness especially given the behavior of the current American administration. In particular, the ways the UN delegate Di Mistora and the Secretary of foreign affairs John Kerry dealt with the negotiation committee representing the Syrian opposition.
2. The dramatic development of events in northern Syria to the advantage of the Syria regime with Russian support. The events warn that the Syrian opposition’s supply lines connecting to the Turkish border will be cut completely, especially with the regime’s preparations to take control over Aleppo city. The continuation of the situation in this context increases the possibility of the opposition facing a defeat in Aleppo leading Turkey to lose one of its strongest cards. The regime regaining control over Aleppo would place Turkey in perhaps the worst situation it has faced since the start of events in Syria, and Turkey will also be dealing with the threats directly.

⁶ The Turkish army begins training predicting the military intervention in northern Syria, Today, 8 February 2016.

<http://www.alvaum.com/article/4118686>

3. The increase in the Kurdish influence in northern Syria leading Turkey to fear the amalgamation of the Kurdish cantons in northern Syria with each other, especially the around the remaining 90 kilometers, as well as Turkey's anger over the American relations with the Kurdish People's Protection Units. In this context, Erdogan voiced heavy criticism over Bret McGurk, the American President's special delegate to the United Alliance against Terrorism, visit to the Kurdish "People's Protection Units" controlling Syrian Kobani. He called for Washington to choose between Turkey and between those he named the "Kobani terrorists"⁷.
4. Saudi preparedness to participate in the land operation in Syria against the Islamic State. There is a Saudi, Turkish, Qatari accord drawing from their fear of leaving the Syrian opposition alone to face Russian bombardment and the Iranian intervention on the northern front.
5. The Turkish desire to limit the Russian and Iranian influence and intervention in the region.

Obstacles to the intervention

1. The American opposition to an intervention and the disagreement of the NATO alliance over giving support to an intervention as well as the pressure that any intervention should be against Daesh only.
2. Fear of the situation reaching a direct confrontation with Russia and Iran whereby the situation could evolve to an all-out war.
3. Being forced to enter into an open confrontation with the Kurdish forces in northern Syria all along the Turkish-Syrian border which would ignite confrontations in cities with a Kurdish majority inside Turkey.
4. There are no real guarantees for the effectiveness of an intervention or its ability to achieve its goals in light of the lack of Saudi progress in Yemen, their

⁷ Erdogan to Washington: Either us or the Kobani Terrorists, Arabic Russia, 7 February 2016.
<https://goo.gl/Lfmp2E>

inability to force the Houthis from Sanaa despite the absence of the complications that exist in Syria.

5. The existence of different agendas with contradictory aims especially as Turkey will not solely intervene militarily, so the alliance is subject to the possibility of division, dispersal, or the possibility of different countries within the alliance to deal with the intervention with varying degrees of seriousness.
6. The absence of a political vision for the military campaigns that are being spoken of.
7. In the event of the failure of the military intervention Turkey will be the most harmed part because of its border with Syria, and the presence of a large number of Turkish Kurds and Alawies opposing the government inside Turkey.
8. The possibility of Daesh increasing its targeting operations inside Turkey
9. The Turkish side has belief in the possibility of finding a solution through discussions and negotiations.

The possible scenarios

1. A wide Turkish military intervention

This scenario is based on the cooperation with other countries' military forces. It is principally based on entering to execute the no fly zone in the direction of Jarablous. It would ensure the supply lines to the Syrian opposition as it would expand to include areas beyond the border with Syria after a time. It is believed the plan for this intervention has been ready for a long time, but this intervention has faced difficulties and many challenges. It is not possible to execute it without American approval. It requires the time to begin the execution, a strong will, and courage from the side of Turkish command.

2. A limited Military intervention

It aims at keeping the communication lines open with the opposition forces and strengthening their position in the north to act as a pressure to return to negotiations or prevent more changes on the ground to the advantage of the regime. In this scenario Saudi and Turkey increase their work against Daesh between Azaz and Jarablous with American approval. Simultaneously, they

would develop the capabilities of the opposition there to prevent Aleppo from falling and the possibility of this scenario being put into effect increases with step of the regime's advancement towards Aleppo. This scenario is described as 'Turkmaniet' and the graduation towards increasing the size of the intervention at a later time. This scenario considers the importance of the time factor in light of the Russian hastiness to develop the regime's capabilities in more strategic areas. The opposition can encourage its supporting parties to execute it.

3. Accepting reality, not intervening, and securing the border as sufficient action

This scenario is based on a realistic reading of the lack of approval of greater countries such as the United States for an intervention. The possibility of a confrontation with another great country such as Russia. This scenario is unlikely based on readings of the Turkish movements, Turkish authorities' statements of their desire to avoid repeating the experience of Iraq in 2003. This scenario is considered a huge compromise for Turkey which does not agree with the Turkish outlook.