



Moscow Disapproves of Erdogan's Plans in Syria

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was in Moscow on 23 January 2019 to discuss a post-US Syria and the establishing of a security zone in northern Syria with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The meeting revealed more differences in priorities in Syria than cooperation between the countries. While the first accompanying excerpted article from *Al-Monitor*, a news website with analysts from the Middle East, highlights the differences that emerged at the Moscow meeting, the second article from Turkish daily *Hurriyet* analyzes President Erdoğan's meeting in two points.

The first article by Semih Idiz, a well-respected Turkish journalist, states that Erdoğan hoped to achieve two objectives in Moscow. First, the Turkish president aimed to “get a green light for a cross-border Turkish operation east of the Euphrates against” the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Kurdish armed group that Turkey considers a terrorist organization. The second objective was to “seek support for a Turkish security zone in the region.” However, Moscow showed no sign of support for either a Turkish military operation into Syria nor the security zone. Putin's priority was the situation in Idlib. Furthermore, the article quotes Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Hamdi Aksoy, who called the deployment of Syrian forces to the outskirts of Manbij a “provocation.” Idiz notes that deployment of Syrian forces was done with the approval of Moscow as Russian forces were photographed near Manbij “conducting a joint patrol with YPG.” The article states this development has frustrated Turkish officials as it was indicated by spokesman Aksoy's statement and writings of pro-government commentators. Overall, the Moscow meeting showed the Russian “disapproval of Turkey's plan for northern Syria.”

As the second passage states, the results of the Moscow meeting can be analyzed in two points, including the situation of Idlib and establishing a security zone in northern Syria. First, the situation in Idlib has rapidly deteriorated as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), an al-Qaida linked terrorist group in Syria, has seized control of almost all of Idlib, challenging the Sochi agreement signed between Russia and Turkey to establish a de-escalation zone in the northwest Idlib region. In September 2018, Turkey promised Russia to clear Idlib from HTS to avert a Russian backed Syrian regime's military operation against Idlib. However, Turkey has yet to deliver on this promise. Both Erdoğan and Putin acknowledged the strong presence of HTS in Idlib and signaled a joint Russian-Turkish operation in Idlib to implement the Sochi agreement. Second, when it comes to establishing a security zone in northern Syria, while Turkey insists upon it (especially in the areas controlled by Kurds), President Putin did not bring up the possibility of establishing a security zone. The Russian president also stated that there is no United Nations Security Council Resolution on establishing security in Syria. Putin further complicated the situation for Erdoğan by suggesting a dialogue between the al-Assad regime and the Kurds in northern Syria, which is likely to prevent Turkish cross-border military operation. Putin also called on Turkey to collaborate with the al-Assad regime, referencing the Adana Agreement of 1998 as a framework for cooperation between Turkey and Syria against terrorism. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gunduz)**

Source: Semih Idiz, “Erdoğan-Putin summit highlights differences over Syria,” *Al-Monitor*, 25 January 2019.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/01/turkey-russia-syria-moscow-summit-highlights-differences.html>

...President Recep Tayyip Erdogan returned empty-handed from his summit in Moscow this week with President Vladimir Putin...

Erdogan hoped to not only get a green light for a cross-border Turkish operation east of the Euphrates against the US-backed People's Protection Units (YPG) — which Ankara considers a terrorist organization — but to also seek support for a Turkish security zone in the region...

It was clear from the start... volatile situation in Idlib... would be Putin's priority...

Ankara also faces opposition from Moscow. The Erdogan-Putin talks did not provide any indication that Moscow would support a Turkish military incursion into northern Syria.

Complicating matters further for the Turkish side is the fact that Russia is working to secure an agreement between the Kurds in northern Syria and Damascus, in order to prevent a Turkish operation...

“This region is currently in the hands of the Kurds,” Putin said. “Damascus must talk to the representatives of the Kurds...”

This is not music to Ankara's ears... The remarks also indicate that Moscow is seeking to accommodate the Kurds...

A small indication of this was the recent deployment of Syrian forces on the outskirts of Manbij, just west of the Euphrates River, which Turkey wants full control of after US forces leave.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamdi Aksoy expressed Ankara's annoyance over this development last week. He accused the regime of “provocation in Manbij,”...

Some prominent pro-government commentators have also started to acknowledge that Ankara's problem in Syria is not just with Washington, but also with Moscow.

(continued)



Continued: Moscow Disapproves of Erdogan's Plans in Syria

“The Erdogan-Putin talks did not provide any indication that Moscow would support a Turkish military incursion into northern Syria.”

Source: Sedat Ergin, “İki başlıkta Erdoğan’ın Moskova gezisinin dökümü (Analysis of Erdoğan’s Moscow visit in two points),” *Hurriyet*, 25 January 2019. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/sedat-ergin/iki-baslikta-erdoganin-moskova-gezisinin-dokumu-41093889>

We can evaluate the results of the Moscow meeting between Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian Leader Vladimir Putin under two headlines: Idlib and an East of Euphrates-Safe Zone.

...The crisis in Idlib is particularly urgent. The reason is the implementation of the Sochi agreement in which Erdoğan and Putin decided to establish a “de-escalation zone” in Idlib last September [2018]. All plans were turned upside down. Al-Qaida linked Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) expanded its dominance in the region by defeating the groups supported by Turkey...

When it comes to the safe-zone headline, there is no exact overlap in the statements of the two sides as in the Idlib heading.

The Russian leader wants to solve the issue of the east of the Euphrates primarily through a dialogue between Damascus and Kurdish representatives; thus, [he] recognizes the main actors of this region as the Assad regime and Kurdish representatives. Putin also said specifically regarding the “safe zone”... the “UN Security Council has no decision on this.”

Putin also emphasized the need to implement the “Adana Agreement that was signed between Turkey and Syria for cooperation to fight against terrorism...”



Vladimir Putin, Hassan Rouhani and Recep Tayyip Erdogan gave a joint news conference (2/19).

Source: President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59830>, CC 4.0.