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Ankara testing the US stance in Syria

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On our return from a NATO meeting, I spoke to Defense Minister Fikri Işık about the new U.S. administration's stance. He said, "They are more open to dialogue compared to the Obama administration. They are listening carefully to our justifications."

The first sign that the Trump administration was listening to Turkey's theses came from Sinjar. U.S. Consul General in Arbil Ken Gross told Sinjar District Governor Naif Seydo, "We are in search of a new mechanism for the PKK to withdraw from Sinjar." Our intelligence units also confirm this. The USA instructed PKK, the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, to withdraw from Sinjar also in the past. But the PKK continued its presence by forming new structures under the name of Sinjar Resistance Units and Sinjar Women Resistance Units. The Trump Administration's Sinjar decision will be a test in this manner. Ankara believes the USA initiative in Sinjar should be given a chance. If the PKK leaves Sinjar, this will have positive effects on Turkish-American relations.

There are three chapters in relations with the U.S. administration. The Trump administration's regional strategy, the struggle with ISIL and the matter of the PYD-YPG.

Turkey has a two-fold effort. On one hand, it has submitted a plan to the USA for the Raqqa operation; on the other hand, it is trying to prevent the U.S. from conducting the Raqqa operation

with the PYD-YPG. Defense Minister Işık said, “They have listened to us about PYD-YPG also. Their decision will be made after military contacts.”

Despite that, Ankara is cautious. News about the U.S. making armored weapons reinforcements to SDG, the backbone of which is PYD-YPG, is monitored with concern.

Turkey’s first priority is to have good relations with the U.S. Compared to this, struggle with the PYD-YPG and ISIL have a second-degree importance.

In case we conduct the Raqqa operation together with the U.S., we would be able to shoot two birds with one stone. First, the PYD-YPG will stop being the land force of the West in the fight against ISIL; second, as a result of Turkey-U.S. convergence, the meaning of the PYD-YPG cantons will weaken.

For this reason, the Raqqa operation has a meaning beyond being a military plan. In the case we conduct the Raqqa operation together with the U.S., then without any need to hold a Manbij operation, it is expected that PYD-YPG would vacate Manbij upon U.S. pressures.

We had offered to conduct the Raqqa operation together to the Obama Administration. At that time, when the Free Syrian Army (FSA) option was submitted, the USA mocked by saying “Erdoğan’s imaginary troops.” They have seen what the imaginary troops have done in Jarablus and al-Bab. We are offering them a plan to fight ISIL, the success of which has been proven in the field.

There is of course, the other side of the coin. If the U.S. conducts the Raqqa operation with the PYD-YPG, a new situation will occur. Ankara has a B Plan for this but it has not been disclosed.

However, this is clear. With operation Euphrates Shield we have cleared a critically important field from ISIL.

We have formed a de facto buffer zone along our border. It is not possible to give up on this. Our intelligence units are reporting that ISIL is going crazy because it is not able to transfer explosives across the border. Euphrates Shield was a belated move but a successful one.