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## Turkey will be in tough talks with Russia, US on Syria after referendum

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4/15/2017

A heavy loaded foreign policy agenda is awaiting Turkey in the post-referendum era, regardless of the result on April 16.

One of the most important and immediate issues Ankara will face is likely to be the upcoming Raqqa operation under the leadership of the United States and with the participation of the international coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). It is believed that the operation will start in the days after the referendum.

That was why Turkish Defense Minister Fikri Işık paid a snap one-day visit to Washington on April 13 to once again reiterate Turkey's readiness to carry out this much-anticipated operation jointly with the U.S. and other partners, on condition of the exclusion of the People's Protection Units (YPG).

Although Ankara is aware that it is not realistic to expect a drastic change in Washington's plans for the liberation of Raqqa with the YPG alliance, it once again warned about the potential consequences of this cooperation, as well as security measures that the Turkish security forces could take in the event that the country's security is threatened.

The meeting would also create another opportunity for the Turkish government to discuss potential American contribution or even involvement in Turkey's preparations for potential action against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) presence in Iraq's Sinjar province on the Syrian border.

Işık's meeting with U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis came only a day after Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's crucial visit to Moscow, which seemingly resulted in gradual de-escalation of tension between the two rivals over issues concerning Syria. Turkey welcomed the U.S. attack on the Syrian airbase after the chemical attack, but Tillerson's talks in Moscow led to a kind of deal between the two world powers that no such unilateral attacks would take place in the future without consultations.

While Işık was in Washington, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan held a phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin on recent developments in Syria, after a chemical attack at the hands of the Syrian regime led to a fresh spat between Ankara and Moscow.

The Russian, Iranian and Syrian foreign ministers have also held a trilateral meeting, while neither the Geneva process nor the Astana process is mentioned as a possible venue for achieving a genuine political and military solution to the problem.

Amid serious disagreements with both Russia and the United States on different subjects stemming from the Syrian unrest, Ankara seems to be working to stay in the loop on both political and military fronts.

Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu underlined this point in an interview on April 14, stressing that Turkey's role in Syria will continue to be pivotal, although Washington-Moscow conciliation is very important.

"There can be differences of opinion between countries. For example, we think differently from Russia on [Syrian President Beshar] al-Assad but we put this issue to the side and talk about other issues," Çavuşoğlu said on April 14. Citing the importance of U.S.-Russia talks in Moscow on April 13, the foreign minister stressed that "this is an issue to the concern of all parties."

"This is not a matter only of the U.S. and Russia. The roles of Russia and of the U.S. are important for resolving such a big problem, but Turkey is an important actor as well. We want to continue [our cooperation with them] by putting these differences of opinion in parenthesis," he added.

We will see whether Turkey, Russia and the U.S. will indeed be able to put these differences in parenthesis and continue their problematic cooperation when it comes to resolving the Syrian question and defeating terror organizations in the war-torn country.