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US-Turkey Invasion Derailed by Syrian Army Triumph at Kuweires

By Mike Whitney
November 11, 2015



The Syrian Arab Army (SAA) achieved its greatest victory in the four year-long war on Tuesday when it recaptured the strategic Kuweires military airbase in North Syria. Hundreds of ISIS terrorists were killed in intense fighting while hundreds more were sent fleeing eastward towards Raqqa. The victory was announced just hours after Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour that Turkey would be willing to invade

Syria as long as Washington agreed to provide air support, create a safe zone along the Syrian-Turkish border, and remove Syrian President Bashar al Assad.

Now that Kuweires has been liberated, Davutoğlu will have to reconsider his offer taking into consideration the fact that Russian warplanes will now be within striking distance of the border while troops and artillery will be positioned in a way that makes crossing into Syria as difficult as possible. The window for Turkish troops to enter Syria unopposed has closed. Any attempt to invade the country now will result in stiff resistance and heavy casualties.

To fully understand the significance of Kuweires, we need take a look at Amanpour's interview with Davutoglu and see what was being planned. Here's an excerpt:

Christiane Amanpour: Would Turkey, under the right conditions, agree to be a ground force?

PM Ahmet Davutoğlu: "A ground force is something which we have to talk [about] together. There's a need of an integrated strategy including air campaign and ground troops. But Turkey alone cannot take all this burden. If there is a coalition and a very well designed integrated strategy, Turkey is ready to take part in all senses."

C.A.: Including on the ground?

Davutoğlu: Yes, of course....We have to solve the Syrian crisis in a comprehensive manner.

C.A.: So I understand what you're saying is that the condition for Turkey to be more involved would be an agreement by a coalition to also go after Assad?

Davutoğlu: Yes, and against all groups and regimes that are creating this vacuum and this problem. On many days we are assisting the coalition in (the fight) against ISIS, but it is not enough. Now we are suggesting to our allies for many months—and now we are suggesting again—to create a safe haven and to push ISIS far away from our borders.

C.A.: So what do you make of the US, Europe and especially Russia saying Assad must and can stay for a period of time?

Davutoğlu:The question is not how long can Assad stay, the question is when and how Assad will go. ...What is the solution. The solution is very clear. It is when millions of Syrian refugees are able to return home, assuming there is peace in Syria, then this is the solution. And if Assad stays in power in Damascus, I don't think any refugee will go back. There is a need of a step by step strategy, but what is the endgame? What is the light at the end of the tunnel, that is what is important to the refugees.

C.A.: Why is the Turkish government making it hard for the US government to arm and train and use Kurdish fighters as their ground troops?

Davutoğlu: (we are not making it hard for the US government to use the) "Kurds", but the PYD as a wing of the PKK...

There is another Kurdish group, the Peshmerga. We allowed the Peshmerga to go through Turkey to go to Kobani in order to help Kobani to be free. If the US wants to arm Kurdish fighters on the ground against ISIS, we are ready. But not Kurdish terrorists like PKK. If they want to arm and help Barzani, or Peshmerga and help them go to Syria, we are ready to help. But everybody must understand, that today PKK is attacking our cities, our soldiers and our civilians. We will not tolerate any help to any PKK-related groups inside Syria or Iraq. If that happens, Turkey will take all measures to stop it.” (“For refugees to return, Assad must go, says Turkish PM“, CNN)

Let’s recap: Even though the Russian-led coalition is conducting major military operations in Syria, Turkey is willing to invade provided that Washington meet its demands, demands that have never changed and which (we have said in earlier columns) were part of a secret deal for the use of the Incirlik airbase so the USAF could conduct sorties over Syria.

What are Turkey’s demands:

- 1 A safe zone on the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border
- 2 A no-fly zone over areas where Turkish troops are conducting operations
- 3 A commitment to remove Assad.

For a while it looked like the Obama administration might abandon their alliance with Turkey and join with the PYD (The Kurds) in their effort to create a buffer zone where they could harbor, arm and train Sunni militants to continue hostilities in Syria. In fact, Obama went so far as to air-drop pallet-loads of weapons and ammo to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) militia just 10 days ago. (Note: The US has already stopped all weapons shipments to the PYD) Whether Obama did this to force Turkey into playing a more active role in Syria, we don’t know. But what we do know is that a Turkish-US alliance is more formidable than a PYD-US alliance, which is why Washington is planning to sell out the Kurds to join-forces with Turkey.

Another sign that US-Turkish relations have begun to thaw, is the fact that Obama phoned Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to congratulate him on his party’s victory eight days after the election. The delay suggests that they were working out their differences before expressions of support. Erdogan needed the landslide victory to consolidate his power in Parliament and to persuade the military brass that he has a mandate to carry out his foreign policy. Obama’s phone call was intended to pave the way for backroom negotiations which would take place during next week’s G-20 meetings in Ankara. But now that the Russian-led coalition has retaken Kuweires, it is impossible to know how the US and Turkey will proceed. If Putin’s warplanes and artillery are able to seal the border, then Washington will have to scrap its plan for seizing the 60-miles stretch of northern Syria that’s needed to keep vital supplylines to US-backed jihadis open or to provide sanctuary for mercenaries returning from the frontlines. The changing battlescape will make a safe zone impossible to defend.

The fact is, Kuweires changes everything. ISIS is on the run, the myriad other terrorist organizations are progressively losing ground, Assad is safe in Damascus, the borders will soon

be protected, and the US-Turkey plan to invade has effectively been derailed. Barring some extraordinary, unforeseeable catastrophe that could reverse the course of events; it looks like the Russian-led coalition will eventually achieve its objectives and win the war. Washington will have no choice but to return to the bargaining table and make the concessions necessary to end the hostilities.