

# After attacks in Syria, what is Turkey's military plan?

Author:

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ANKARA: After two Turkish police officers were killed and two others injured on Sunday in a missile attack on Azaz in northern Syria launched from the neighboring Tal Rifaat area by Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units, all eyes are on Ankara to see whether it will carry out a ground operation in the region.

In line with rules of engagement, Turkish security forces also retaliated after five mortar shells fired from an area controlled by the Kurdish militia landed in Turkey's southeastern Gaziantep province on Monday.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan vowed late on Monday that Turkey would take necessary steps in Syria as soon as possible, signaling a new operation against the Kurdish militia. "We have run out of patience. Turkey is determined to remove threats arising from northern Syria, either together with the active forces there, or by our own means," he said during a press conference.

Ankara considers both the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units and Syrian Democratic Forces as offshoots of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which seeks autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish minority and has carried out attacks since 1984 against the Turkish state.

The majority part of northeastern Syria is still under the control of the Syrian Democratic Forces, whose main component is the Kurdish People's Protection Units.

Last month, two Turkish soldiers were killed and three others injured in another attack in Syria's Idlib de-escalation zone, the latest major opposition stronghold in Syria. Several parts of the region, home to some 4 million civilians, are patrolled by Russian and Turkish troops.

After talks between Russia and Turkey failed to produce a meaningful outcome in September, Turkey deployed more troops and tanks in Idlib to strengthen its presence against Syrian regime attacks and Russian air raids.

Following his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sept. 29, Erdogan said that Turkey was committed to the March 2020 ceasefire with Russia and to "clearing radical elements."

But he added that Turkey expected its partners to do the same and contribute to the de-escalation.

As part of its commitments to Russia, Turkey pledged to combat militancy in Idlib and eradicate Al-Qaeda-linked militant group Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham, while it also committed to reopen M4, a vital link between Aleppo and

Latakia. Russia claims that these commitments remain unfulfilled so far.

Prof. Emre Ersen, an expert on Turkey-Russia relations from Marmara University in Istanbul, said that these attacks demonstrated the two leaders had failed to reach a conclusive agreement on Syria during their latest meeting in Sochi last week.

“However, it is unlikely that the attacks will significantly change the status quo in the region as Turkey has strengthened its military position in Idlib in the last few months and this is also why Russia will not risk a direct confrontation with the Turkish forces in order not to upset the delicate military balance in Syria,” he told Arab News.

According to Ersen, there is still no better alternative for Ankara and Moscow than trying to sustain the shaky Sochi deal they reached in March 2020 on Idlib.

“More importantly, at a time when Turkey has significant problems in its relations with the US, Russia will most probably try to take advantage of the rift between the two NATO allies and make sure that the Syrian issue does not cause a major crisis in Turkish-Russian relations for the time being,” he said.

Turkey has launched three cross-border operations in Syria since 2016 to drive the Kurdish militia and Daesh threat from its border.

Navvar Saban, a conflict analyst and expert at Omran Center for Strategic Studies, and a nonresident researcher at ORSAM in Ankara, thinks that the latest attacks against Turkish-controlled zones in Syria carry a strong message from Russia.

“These regions from where the attacks were carried out are mostly controlled by Russians and they somehow allow SDF to launch any kind of offensive. When Turkish soldiers were killed last month by the YPG (Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units) attack, Turkey retaliated and interestingly Russians responded to Turkey by hitting an empty area. This is a diplomatic message,” he told Arab News.

According to Saban, this latest episode underscores Russia’s willingness to push the Turkish side to communicate with Moscow instead of directly launching any kind of attack against the Kurdish militia-held areas.

“They want to show that they have the leverage in this area and although they have the ability to stop these attacks against Turkish-controlled zones, they don’t do it because they want to remind Ankara to go through its Russian counterparts before launching any operation in the area,” he said.

However, Levent Kemal, a Middle East political commentator, does not expect an imminent Turkish ground operation in the Tal Rifaat region.

“Russia accords high importance to its military depth in Syria’s Aleppo province and Tal Rifat region is considered as the forefront of such a depth. In case Turkey insists on launching an operation to Tal Rifaat, it would

probably have to offer something big in return to Russia,” he told Arab News.

Tal Rifaat has been at the center of Turkish-Russian negotiations for a long time, as the region is also known as an important logistical hub for Kurdish militias while attacks against Turkish troops have been mainly carried out from this region.



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## [US, Israel, UAE to launch working groups at trilateral meeting: State Department](#)

Tue, 2021-10-12 23:36

WASHINGTON D.C.: The US, Israel and the UAE will launch two new working groups on Wednesday, a senior State Department official said, as Washington hopes to expand the agreements between Israel and its neighbors known as the Abraham accords.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will host a trilateral meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan at the State Department on Wednesday.

One working group will focus on religious coexistence and the other on water and energy issues, said the official, who briefed reporters ahead of the meeting.



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## [Tunisian PM says implementing economic reforms top government priority](#)

Tue, 2021-10-12 22:38

TUNIS/WASHINGTON: Tunisian prime minister said on Tuesday that fixing public finances and implementing economic reforms will be a priority – the first sign of the government’s intention to launch reforms demanded by lenders – as Tunisia suffers a financial crisis.

Tunisia’s president unveiled a new cabinet government on Monday, but gave no hint when he would relinquish his near total control after seizing most powers in July.

Under rules President Kais Saied announced last month when he swept aside much of the constitution, the new cabinet will ultimately answer to him rather than Prime Minister Najla Bouden.

Meanwhile, the US on Tuesday praised the appointment of the new Tunisian government as a positive step and encouraged further action three months after a presidential power grab.

“The new government, which includes 10 female ministers, is a welcome step forward toward addressing the significant economic, health and social challenges facing the country,” State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.

“We look forward to further announcements to establish a broadly inclusive process for a rapid return to constitutional order,” he said.

Bouden was named Monday as the North African country’s first female prime minister and vowed that she would put a priority on fighting corruption.

Saied in July suspended parliament and sacked a government supported by Islamist-inspired party Ennahdha, following months of growing public anger over an economic crisis and the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*(With Reuters and AFP)*



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## [UN 'extremely worried' about plight of migrants in Libyan detention centers](#)

Tue, 2021-10-12 21:20

NEW YORK: UN human rights experts are “extremely worried” about the suffering of migrants and asylum seekers held in detention centers in Libya. Detainees are subjected to “a myriad of daily violations and abuses at the hands of both state and non-state actors,” they said.

Marta Hurtado, spokesperson for the UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, on Tuesday highlighted a spike in the number of raids on migrants and asylum seekers, resulting in deaths and injuries, and an increase in the numbers of people being detained in dire conditions.

She also noted a growing number of expulsions from the country without due process in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, the practice of not forcing refugees and asylum seekers to return to a place where they might face persecution or death.

Hurtado gave as an example the death of one person and the detention of 4,000 people during a raid by Ministry of Interior officials on a settlement in Gergaresh, west of Tripoli, that housed migrants and asylum seekers awaiting the completion of the resettlement process. During the raid women, children and men were arrested and handcuffed, she said.

“Security forces used unnecessary and disproportionate force to detain them, including shooting and beating those who resisted or tried to escape,” she added.

Detainees were transferred to a government-run detention center in Tripoli and detained in “extremely overcrowded cells, (in) unsanitary conditions (and) with little access to food or water,” Hurtado said.

Those who tried to escape from the center were fired on by guards using live ammunition, she added. At least four were killed and many more were injured, although the true number of casualties “remains unknown.”

"This series of horrific events over a period of eight days is just the latest example of the precarious, sometimes lethal, situation facing migrants and asylum seekers in Libya," Hurtado said.

"They are criminalized solely for their migration status, are routinely detained in abhorrent conditions, are frequently subjected to extortion and abuse, and in some cases killed."

A recent report by the Independent Fact-finding Mission on Libya determined that the "systematic violations" inflicted on migrants could amount to crimes against humanity.

Although the OHCHR acknowledged a promise by the Libyan government to release some of the migrants, it said that "they should not have been detained in the first place" and reminded the authorities of their "obligation to protect everyone on their territory, including migrants and asylum seekers."

It urged Libyan officials to order an independent investigation into allegations of disproportionate use of force by the security forces and affiliated armed groups and to hold them accountable for their actions. The office also called for the release of all arbitrarily detained migrants and asylum seekers, a halt to raids on their settlements, an end to deportations, and the provision of safe accommodation with adequate access to healthcare, food and water.

The OHCHR statement comes after UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the agreement reached in Geneva on Friday by the 5+5 Libyan Joint Military Commission on a process for the withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters from the country.

Guterres said the action plan is "a cornerstone in the implementation of the October 2020 ceasefire agreement," as he called on Libyan and international authorities to act on it.

"The secretary-general trusts that the deployment of an initial team of United Nations ceasefire monitors will contribute to creating the conditions for successful implementation of the action plan," said spokesperson Stephane Dujarric.



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## [Cairo: Renaissance Dam talks almost stalled](#)

Tue, 2021-10-12 18:51

CAIRO: Negotiations over Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam are almost at a standstill, said Egypt's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation Mohamed Abdel-Aty.

Cairo demands a clear mechanism, a specific timeframe and international observers with regard to reaching a fair agreement on the filling and

operation of the dam, he added, stressing the need for Ethiopia to prove its seriousness.

“Egypt won’t wait for severe damage to occur, and whoever causes the damage bears the responsibility,” he said.

Abdel-Aty added that Egypt is ready to deal with any emergency regarding the water sector, and that it believes in development for itself and all Nile Basin countries. State agencies are coordinating to deal with the issue of the dam, he said.



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