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The prospect of a peacekeeping operation in Syria

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In light of the continuous violence affecting civilians in Northeast Syria, an overview of what a peacekeeping operation could look like

On 9 October 2019, Turkey announced the launching of its *Peace Spring Operation* over the territory of Northeast Syria. Since then, 175.000 persons have been displaced. At least 120 civilians have been killed, while Amnesty International has accused Turkey and its allied forces of war crimes and other serious violations of international law.¹

Numerous deals between different state and non-state parties to the conflict have ensued. On 17 October, the White House announced an “agreement putting an end to a week of hostilities in the border region of Syria”.²

The latest development occurred on the 22 October, when Turkish President Erdogan and Russian President Putin met in Sochi, Russia, and agreed on a Memorandum of Understanding maintaining the Turkish presence in the current *Peace Spring Operation* area, to deploy Russian military police and Syrian border guards on the Syrian side of the Turkish-Syrian border, to remove any YPG presence to a depth of 30 km from the border and to start joint Turkish-Russian patrols in the border area. Despite this agreement, acts of warfare continue to be conducted on a daily basis, putting at risk the life of civilians. The illegal use of force also creates conditions for a new state armed conflict involving Turkey in a region that had against all odds managed to provide a sense of democracy and security to its population.

The peacekeeping mission implemented by Russia and Turkey in Idlib has proven insufficient. Hayat Tahrir al Sham, who was deemed to leave the area according to the deal, expanded its reach, joint Russia-Turkey patrols provided for by the deal were never able to access the area, and the Syrian government resumed its offensive on the region in April 2019.³ The UN Security Council’s mandate, provided for by Article 24 of the UN Charter, to maintain international peace and security, commends a prompt action, in line with the Commission of Inquiry’s call for a halt to violence in Syria.⁴ On the basis of Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the UN Charter, what could the deployment of a peacekeeping operation (PKO) in Northeast Syria look like?

¹ Amnesty International, “Syria : Damning Evidence of War Crimes and Other Violations by Turkish Forces and Their Allies,” October 18, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/syria-damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-and-other-violations-by-turkish-forces-and-their-allies/>.

² “The United States and Turkey Agree to Ceasefire in Northeast Syria,” *White House*, October 17, 2019.

³ France 24, “UN Warns ‘worst Humanitarian Disaster’ of the Century Is Unfolding in Syria’s Idlib,” 31 July, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190731-un-lowcock-warns-worst-humanitarian-disaster-century-syria-idlib>.

⁴ UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, “A New Wave of Violence Is the Last Thing Syrians Need,” 10 October, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=25123&LangID=E>.

Past experiences of PKO in various contexts and areas provide significant insights into critical aspects of PKOs, that advocates and drafters of a potential deployment could reflect on in order to increase the potential for success of the operation, with particular regards to the principles on the basis of which the mandate is drafted, the mandate itself, the resources allocated to the operation, and the geographic area of the operation.

Principles:

Although seemingly restrictive and heavy in times of conflict, the three principles of PKOs, that are consent of the state, limited use of force, and non-interference in internal affairs of the host states have proven critical in ensuring the legitimacy, the sustainability and *in fine*, the success of the operation.

Mandate:

In line with the Brahimi report's recommendations, it is critical to set a "clear, credible and achievable" mandate that, in light of the danger weighing on civilians, could focus on their protection.

More than 175,000 of them have already been displaced by the invasion launched by Turkey in Northeast Syria. It is essential to the long-term objectives of peace that they are allowed to go back to their home and are protected from any physical threats.

The protection of civilians, identified by the 2015 High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations Report (HIPPO report) as "a core obligation of the United Nations", is said to lie on the basis of three 'tiers' of activities:

- (i) protection through political process;
- (ii) protection from physical violence; and
- (iii) establishment of a protective environment;

Resources:

The resources allocated to the PKOs condition its success. Several operations, such as UNMISS, deployed in South Sudan, have suffered a dire attribution of resources, where in average one soldier was deployed to cover 100 kilometers, that is three times less than other missions. The full commitment by the Security Council to the effective deployment of

troops, the delivery of needed material and the allocation of a budget accordingly would contribute to the success of the operation.

The mandate operating in Northeast Syria could also rely on the recommendation by the HIPPO of a two-step process, where the mandate would be revisited six months after the mission onset, in order to tailor and adjust needs to preliminary implementation.

Geographic area:

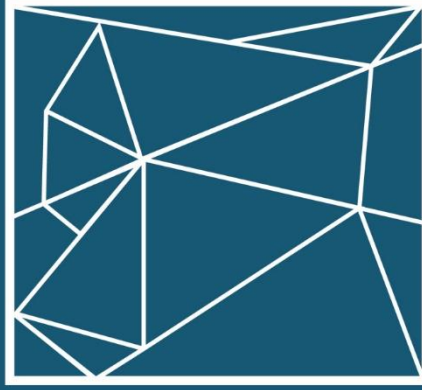
Recent practice consisting in deploying peacekeeping troops on large territories, such as Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mali, and South Sudan have invariably failed to achieve their objectives, while operations where a large amount of troops were deployed on a small territory have shown more positive outcomes. In the case of Northeast Syria, a natural delimitation could be understood to comprise the territory occupied by Turkey, where the Syrian government would be the most likely to concede to the presence of international peacekeepers on its territory.

Impartiality:

Some recent PKOs have sided with contested governments, at the expense of the founding principle of impartiality. This has, in different occasions, impeded the success of the operations. Advocates and drafters of a peace operation in Northeast Syria may pay peculiar attention to this aspect.

The success of a PKO cannot be guaranteed, but elements such as the principles guiding it, its mandate, the resources allocated to it, its geographical area and safeguard for its impartiality are essential to increasing the chances of success and the achievement of the most important objective of such an operation, that is the protection of civilians.

سوريون
من أجل
الحقيقة
والعدالة
Syrians
For Truth
& Justice



History

Syrians for Truth and Justice was conceived during the participation of its co-founder in the Middle-East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) Leaders for Democracy Fellowship program, who was driven by a will to contribute to Syria's future. Starting as a humble project to tell the stories of Syrians experiencing enforced disappearances and torture, it grew into an established organisation committed to unveiling human rights violations of all sorts.

Convinced that the diversity that has historically defined Syria is a wealth, our team of researchers and volunteers works with dedication at uncovering human rights violations committed in Syria, in order to promote inclusiveness and ensure that all Syrians are represented, and their rights fulfilled.

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 - ✉ editor@stj-sy.org