

DISSEMINATED BY MERCURY PUBLIC AFFAIRS, A REGISTERED FOREIGN AGENT, ON BEHALF OF THE EMBASSY OF TURKEY. MORE INFORMATION IS ON FILE WITH THE DEPT. OF JUSTICE, WASHINGTON, DC.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/07/opinion/erdogan-turkey-syria.html>

Erdogan: Turkey Has a Plan to Restore Peace in Syria

A comprehensive strategy to promote long-term peace and stability in Syria can be achieved through Turkey's leadership, the president of Turkey writes.

By Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Mr. Erdogan is the president of Turkey.

Jan. 7, 2019

President Trump made the right call to withdraw from Syria. The United States withdrawal, however, must be planned carefully and performed in cooperation with the right partners to protect the interests of the United States, the international community and the Syrian people. Turkey, which has NATO's second largest standing army, is the only country with the power and commitment to perform that task.

In 2016, Turkey became the first country to deploy ground combat troops to fight the so-called Islamic State in Syria. Our military incursion severed the group's access to NATO's borders and impeded their ability to carry out terror attacks in Turkey and Europe.

Unlike coalition operations in Raqqa and Mosul, which relied heavily on airstrikes that were carried out with little or no regard for civilian casualties, Turkish troops and fighters of the Free Syrian Army went door to door to root out insurgents in Al Bab, a former stronghold of the so-called Islamic State.

Our approach left the city's core infrastructure largely intact and made it possible for life to return to normal within days. Today, children are back at school, a Turkish-funded hospital treats the sick, and new business projects create jobs and bolster the local economy. This stable environment is the only cure for terrorism.

Turkey is committed to defeating the so-called Islamic State and other terrorist groups in Syria, because the Turkish people are all too familiar with the threat of violent extremism. In 2003, when I became prime minister, coordinated attacks by Al Qaeda claimed dozens of lives in Turkey.

More recently, the so-called Islamic State terrorists targeted our citizens, our way of life and the inclusive, moderate worldview that our civilization represents. A few years back, the terrorist

group called me "treacherous Satan." We saw the horror in the faces of thousands of Christians and Yazidis, who sought refuge in Turkey when these terrorists came for them in Syria and Iraq.

I say this again: There will be no victory for the terrorists. Turkey will continue to do what it must to ensure its own safety and the well-being of the international community.

Militarily speaking, the so-called Islamic State has been defeated in Syria. Yet we are deeply concerned that some outside powers may use the organization's remnants as an excuse to meddle in Syria's internal affairs.

A military victory against the terrorist group is a mere first step. The lesson of Iraq, where this terrorist group was born, is that premature declarations of victory and the reckless actions they tend to spur create more problems than they solve. The international community cannot afford to make the same mistake again today.

Turkey proposes a comprehensive strategy to eliminate the root causes of radicalization. We want to ensure that citizens do not feel disconnected from government, terrorist groups do not get to prey on the grievances of local communities and ordinary people can count on a stable future.

The first step is to create a stabilization force featuring fighters from all parts of Syrian society. Only a diverse body can serve all Syrian citizens and bring law and order to various parts of the country. In this sense, I would like to point out that we have no argument with the Syrian Kurds.

Under wartime conditions, many young Syrians had no choice but to join the P.Y.D./Y.P.G., the Syrian branch of the P.K.K., that Turkey and the United States consider a terrorist organization. According to Human Rights Watch, the Y.P.G. militants have violated international law by recruiting children.

Following the United States withdrawal from Syria, we will complete an intensive vetting process to reunite child soldiers with their families and include all fighters with no links to terrorist organizations in the new stabilization force.

Ensuring adequate political representation for all communities is another priority. Under Turkey's watch, the Syrian territories that are under the control of the Y.P.G. or the so-called Islamic State will be governed by popularly elected councils. Individuals with no links to terrorist groups will be eligible to represent their communities in local governments.

Local councils in predominantly Kurdish parts of northern Syria will largely consist of the Kurdish community's representatives whilst ensuring that all other groups enjoy fair political representation. Turkish officials with relevant experience will advise them on municipal affairs, education, health care and emergency services.

Turkey intends to cooperate and coordinate our actions with our friends and allies. We have been closely involved in the Geneva and Astana processes, and are the sole stakeholder that can work simultaneously with the United States and Russia. We will build on those partnerships to get the job done in Syria.

It is time for all stakeholders to join forces to end the terror unleashed by the Islamic State, an enemy of Islam and Muslims around the world, and to preserve Syria's territorial integrity. Turkey is volunteering to shoulder this heavy burden at a critical time in history. We are counting on the international community to stand with us.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is the president of Turkey.