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### **Turkey-U.S. Cooperation is Essential to Move Closer to Peace in Syria**

*It is high time to press ahead with the agreed roadmap and work in close coordination to facilitate safe and orderly return of US troops.*

As the United States prepares to withdraw its forces from Syria, we meet this week in Washington to plan the future of our coalition to fight DEASH (ISIS) in Syria and beyond. Turkey's commitment to facilitating safe and orderly withdrawal of US troops is firm. It is critical that we work together to manage the withdrawal process well. By effective cooperation not only can we bring the U.S. troops safely out of Syria, but also help create conditions that would deny terrorists the opportunity to control territory and pose an existential threat to neighboring countries and Syria's territorial integrity. Overall, at this critical juncture our effective cooperation can help move forward the political process in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254.

To that effect, a number of essential steps lie ahead of us. In the military field our mobilization and vigil must continue. We cannot rely on airpower alone nor can the U.S. sustain reliance on a terrorist entity. NATO's second largest military is already mobilized as a rampart.

Turkey's capacity and resolve to fight all terrorists including DEASH and PYD/YPG/PKK is rock hard. In 2016, Turkey responded to DEASH attacks by becoming the first country to deploy ground troops against DEASH in Syria. Our operation was effective in clearing vast territory from the hands of terrorists. A similar operation was conducted against another terrorist organization with similar result. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of displaced Syrians were able to return to their country free from the oppression of terror organizations. Turkey will not allow a power vacuum to emerge which DEASH, PKK/PYD/YPG or other terrorists organizations can exploit for territorial and strategic resource acquisitions.

In that regard, setting up viable interim local structures will be critical until a political solution is found to the fighting in Syria. Local units that are representative of all segments of the population, comprised of Syrians with no links to terror organizations, can help stabilize the north of Syria. We can make this happen together with all stakeholders.

As importantly, local governing councils could also be facilitated to take charge of their municipal affairs. Demographic realities need to be respected. As President Erdoğan has underscored, for example, local councils in predominantly Kurdish parts of northern Syria would include the Kurdish community's legitimate representatives even as all other groups enjoy free and fair political representation. Turkey is ready and able to deploy experts to advise on full range of public services such as infrastructure, education, health care, emergency services, among others.

It is no less essential that we address the root causes that facilitate the recruitment of youth by terror organizations. Human Rights Watch has already documented the recruitment of children by PYD/YPG, the Syrian extension of the PKK. Whether it is DEASH or others, terrorists must not find a fertile local and international ground to pursue their propaganda, intimidation even hijackings to recruit youth among their ranks. According to Johny Messo, President of the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs) and to Nobel Prize winner Nadia Murad, PYD/YPG is in that sense a direct threat to young Christians and Yazidis in Syria and in Iraq.

We have always worked closely with the U.S. and other coalition allies to track DEASH terrorists down, prevent attacks, gather critical intelligence, all of which must continue. The repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters to their countries of origin would again need us working together.

As U.S. withdraws over a period and in an orderly fashion, we have options to remain on course. The U.S. is not condemned to the services of a terrorist organization and has options. There is already an agreed foundation that would benefit the US and Turkey, the people of Syria but also the international community. This is the time to press ahead with the full implementation of the mutually agreed Manbij roadmap and apply this model in the east of the Euphrates River, as well. This model would be perfectly compatible with President's Trump's idea of a 20-mile safe zone. All heavy weapons, ammunition and equipment must be collected from the terrorists and U.S. bases must not be taken over by them.

This is a critical period for Syria. Turkey will remain to be enterprising and determined to help Syria to re-emerge from the ashes of the eight year long civil war, preserving its territorial integrity and political unity. We will continue to cooperate, coordinate and make use of our means and our network of friends and allies, whether in Geneva or Astana, in a bid to help bring back sanity, peace and development to our neighbourhood.

*Mevlut Cavusoglu is Turkey's Minister of Foreign Affairs.*