



Withdrawal of the US Troops from Syria and its Impact on the Security Environment in the Black Sea Region

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As it is known, US President Donald Trump recently adopted a decision on the withdrawal of about two thousands American military servicemen from Syria. It is possible that one of the main purposes of the American contingent withdrawal is the restoration of closer relations between USA and Turkey and the prevention of strengthening cooperation between Moscow and Ankara.

Due to different reasons, the relations between two leading NATO member states, USA and Turkey, have been significantly deteriorated. Particularly, whereas both countries were interested in ending the Assad regime in Syria, one example of disagreement could consist in the USA supporting the Kurdish military formations near the border between Turkey and Syria, while Turkey considers

the Kurdish armed formations on the territory of Syria as terrorist groups. Besides, officially, Ankara is afraid that a possible activation of separatist tendencies on the territory of Syria inhabited by ethnic Kurds could influence the situation in the South-Eastern provinces of Turkey, which are also inhabited by Kurdish population.

As the relations between Washington and Ankara were deteriorating, relations between Moscow and Ankara became ever closer. For example, in 2017, the volume of trade between Russia and Turkey was 23.36 Billion USD, which had overcome the volume in 2016 by 37%. In 2018, based upon different sources, their bilateral trade volume overtook 30 Billion USD. Besides, at the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin, a meeting of the leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran on the situation in Syria was held. Moscow and Ankara are actively considering the construction of a new gas pipeline in the framework of the project "Blue stream - 2", that would enable Turkey to import an additional volume of gas (more than 30 Billion Cubic Meters) from Russia.

As a result of the complicating relationship between USA and Turkey, Ankara and Moscow were also activating their relations in military-technical spheres. For example, Kremlin's readiness to sell Turkey the modern S-400 type anti-aircraft systems has

caused anger from the Pentagon. In this context, American congressmen, who worked on defense and security issues, required stopping the delivery to Turkey of the F-35 American military fighter jets.

Despite the fact that relations among the two strongest military NATO members (Turkish Army is the biggest in Europe) were deteriorating within the last months possible improvements of the bilateral relations should also be pointed out. Particularly, Washington agreed on selling Turkey the "Patriot" Long-Range Air-Defence Systems, and, despite the resistance from the Secretary of Defense James Mattis, President Trump decided to withdraw the American troops from Syria.

Two conditions for the American decision on Syria might be considered. In particular, in exchange for the American contingent leaving Syria, Turkey might have to protect the rights of the Kurdish population in the Northern provinces of Syria, near the state border with Turkey. At the same time, president Trump declared that in case of violations of the rights of the Kurdish population America would adopt new economic sanctions against Turkey (which USA had done several months ago after increasing the customs tariffs on Turkish products sold on the American market, which seriously affected the exchange rate of the national currency of Turkey - lira).

According to the second condition, if Turkey started a new military campaign on the territory near the Turkey-Syria

border and somehow tried to weaken the military potential of the Kurdish armed formations trained by US instructors, president Trump would strive to weaken the Turkey-Russia alliance and (as a result of the restoration of good relations with Turkey) would promote the activity of NATO and USA in the strategically important Black Sea Region.

Thus, most probably it was not a coincidence, that the U.S. Navy's dock landing ship "Fort McHenry" pulled into the Black Sea area in the beginning of 2019, in what officials termed a "routine port visit" after transiting the Dardanelles Strait from the Mediterranean Sea the day before.

That makes "Fort McHenry" the first American warship to enter the Eastern European waterway since Russia seized

three Ukrainian vessels on Nov. 25, 2018, in the Kerch Strait.

"We routinely operate in the Black Sea consistent with international law and the Montreux Convention and will continue to do so," said Navy 6th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Kyle Raines.

The possible improvement of relations between USA and Turkey could positively impact on the security environment in the Black Sea region. Otherwise, strengthening NATO's position in the Black Sea without taking into account the Turkish factor would be difficult. Thus, the establishment of good relations between USA and Turkey should be in the interest of the Western countries. Otherwise, Moscow could take advantage and increase its geopolitical influence in the strategically important Black Sea region.