

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN SYRIA AND THE RUSSIAN TURKISH AGREEMENT IN SOCHI

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ABSTRACT

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a meeting in the southern resort city of Sochi, with one issue on the agenda: agreeing on the final stage of the civil war in Syria, which has been going on for eight years.

Russia and Turkey have announced a large-scale agreement that removes Ankara's main concern about the presence of Kurdish self-defense units near the Turkish border. But the agreement also recognized an important concern of the Kurds — that Turkish-backing Syrian rebelling groups could have launched a campaign of ethnic cleansing against them and other minorities.

This paper discusses Russian policy towards the Syrian crisis, and identifies the impact of bilateral agreements between Russia and Turkey on the Syrian crisis

INTRODUCTION

Today, by contrast, Russia's regional presence is strong - and getting stronger. In Syria, Moscow has succeeded in strengthening its naval base in Tartus (and now has a long-term lease), established at least three additional military bases in the country, and strengthened its naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, Russia has been able to take advantage of its military involvement in Syria to launch a historic expansion in the region by increasing arms sales, establishing new bases in North Africa, and a stronger presence in regional politics. Over the past few years, this strategy has helped Russia restore its role as a powerful mediator in regional issues.(1)

This reality was forced when the Russian President Vladimir Putin met Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Black Sea resort of Sochi to reach a bilateral agreement on the future of Syria. The new agreement, which comes after the recent Turkish military invasion, contains a number of key provisions that help simultaneously strengthen Russian-Turkish strategic relations and secure Moscow's regional position today.(2)

The first item noted the codification of a common commitment to deeper cooperation to combat terrorism. This undertaking is important, as it indicates a further Turkish departure from Europe. After all, Ankara blamed European countries for not resolutely fighting Islamic extremism and this failure was one of the main reasons behind the Erdogan's decision to take independent military action. Clearly, Turkey's conclusion is that Russia - which has military assets deployed and operating in Syria - will be willing and able to take more steps than Europe (3).

The agreement also guarantees the commitment of the two countries to conduct joint patrols in the newly created buffer zone in northern Syria. Here, too, Russia intelligently positioned itself as a guarantor of Turkish security. The administration of US President Donald Trump, and after initially giving Turkey a "green light" to invade Syria, late tried to soften Ankara's

actions by imposing new sanctions and hints of possible more serious consequences. However, this is unlikely to happen as long as Russia is a participant - something Erdogan understands well. Thus, his government sees Russia's involvement in protecting northern Syria as a kind of insurance policy against America (4).

CONCLUSION

So the October 22 deal should be seen for what it is: a clear victory for Moscow. Through it, Russia managed to outpace both Europe and the United States, strengthen its political role in Syria, and make it an indispensable player in regional geopolitics. In other words, the Kremlin has played what was once a very weak politician role very well.

The Russian-Turkish agreements have become a forced compromise where virtually all parties win. The Kurds were the losers. And the conflict in Syria has begun to take on the contours of a long-awaited conclusion. It looks like the long and grueling 8-year-old Syrian Saga has reached the finish line, the conflict in Syria, which began in the distant and forgotten by many in 2011, is slowly but surely coming to its gradual end(5).

Russia's Sochi hosted, without exaggeration, the most important meeting in 2019 dedicated to the situation in Syria, which adopted one of the most significant documents of this war that could put an end to the main fighting in the country and actually launch a political process to resolve the situation.

The Memorandum of understanding between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey, dated October 22, was the fruit of 6-hour negotiations.) Conversations between presidents Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who arrived in Sochi after reaching an interim truce agreement with the Americans in northeastern Syria. It is difficult to overestimate the value of the Russian-Turkish agreements, given the context of what is happening and the many additional events that fill in the picture of what happened around Syria.

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