

Global Hot Topics

Syria: Pressure to act in Syria increased after Paris

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Since the beginning of the Russian air campaign on September 30, all the actors of the proxy war increased their engagement. The Russian air offensive and Iranian proxies extended the Syrian regime's lifetime but the rebels still survive. Recently, the U.S. signaled further involvement, especially in the northern Syria, to defeat ISIS there. Turkey has also announced a deeper engagement in the conflict, proposing a Grand Coalition. Meanwhile, the International Syria Support Group proposed a solution process in Vienna. The Paris attacks will push for more rapid solutions but what is needed is a more comprehensive solution.

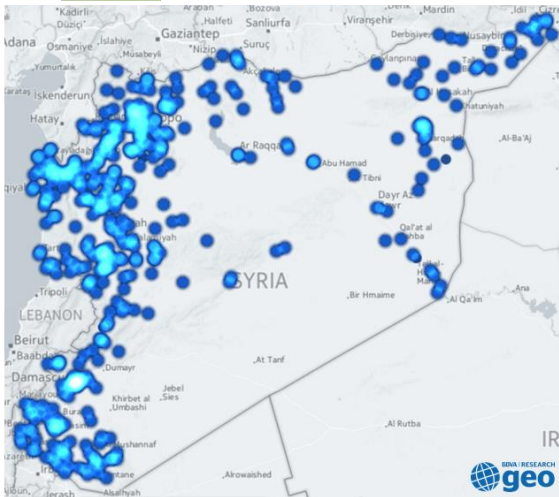
The far enemy came closer

The recent attacks in Paris indicated that fighting against ISIS should be the top priority. The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in Vienna proposed a ceasefire plan that suggests a political transition period to be initiated within 6 months. Elections would be held within 18 months after a new constitution is penciled in. However:

Syria Conflict Intensity Heatmap (last 3 months)

(Number of conflicts / Total events)

Source: www.qdelt.org, BBVA Research and Garanti Bank



- **There is no consensus on whether Assad can run in elections.** It is no secret that Russia and Iran will favor that Assad stay in power through an election process. However, Saudi Arabia declared that if Assad will not leave, they will maintain their support to the rebels.

- **The proposal suggests no plan on any kind of cooperation against ISIS and Nusra.** The ceasefire would not apply to ISIS or Nusra or any other groups that ISSG agrees to deem terrorist. This means, Russians and Iranian proxies can escalate their operations in Aleppo, Hama and Homs where ISIS and Nusra have presence.

Recently, taking Kuweires Airbase in Aleppo and making gains in the countryside have opened a path for pro-Assad forces through the countryside of ar-Raqqah in the east and Marea in the north. On the other hand, if ISIS comes closer to the heart of Syria, it can force Russia to concentrate on eastern Syria, as well.

The U.S. involvement can grow further

The U.S. does not want to lose the ground to Russia. It can engage more in northern Syria but they oppose any no-fly zone solutions as maintained by Turkey. The Pentagon deployed 50 military personnel to be located between Hasakah and Qamishli controlled by the Syrian Kurds (YPG). Although it could seek for an enlargement in ally network in the Northern provinces including the Arabs and Turkmens, as the State department of the U.S. highlighted that the YPG has been an effective fighting force on the ground against ISIS and right now, the U.S. is supporting the YPG militia through airstrikes, instead of providing ammunitions. There is no doubt about the Democratic Forces of Syria including the Kurds will initiate a gradual offensive for ar-Raqqah. Yet, the future of Jarabulus is uncertain.

Turkey suggests a Grand Coalition but without the deployment of ground forces

Turkey has recently suggested “a grand coalition” to defeat ISIS. The plan relies on rebels' boots on the ground combined with intensified air campaigns. Turkey will support from its own military facilities but will not deploy land forces. Yet, obstacles remain:

- **Uncertainties on who will fight:** Due to U.S. hesitation to deploy forces on the ground and Russia playing different interest in Syria, a ground offensive under a coalition will be difficult to materialize. The Free Syrian Army (Syrian rebels) and the Turkmens are not mobilized enough to defeat ISIS. Turkey does not want that the YPG (a PKK affiliate) to have an active role in the north. As long as Russia and U.S. don't reach a deal on Assad's future, the cooperation between these two countries against ISIS will be challenging.

- **Uncertainties on war against terrorism:** Jordan has accepted the mandate by the Vienna agreement to define the terrorist organizations in Syria. While this can be more or less efficient, can also pave the way for new rivalry among the participants in the war, as each country will try to label the rival proxy group as “terrorist” to legitimize their military offensives.

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