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Turkey has been a strong actor in Syria for a long time, but the engagement changed a bit last week. When President Erdogan first became prime minister, his lead principle was zero problems with neighbours. Today, it seems to be the principle of having zero friends among the neighbours and even zero friends among the international partners and allies Turkey is and used to be working with. Can you explain to us what the Turkish government is actually trying to achieve with its recent - we are not allowed to call it an invasion as Europeans because Mr. Erdogan said if we did, he would send us an invasion of refugees? Therefore, we call it an incursion, so please explain what the Turkish government is about with this incursion.

Memduh KARAKULLUKCU

I actually did have two comments about your introductory remarks but let me take this first and then get back to that. I think the Turkish government has been clear on what it intends to do, and this has been true from the beginning and with very broad support from the country. One, there will not be a YPG/PKK terrorist corridor by the Turkish border. That has been very clear, predictable and consistent from the beginning, so I do not think there is any surprise there. We can all think about all the convoluted and complex reasoning and rationales, but I think that is a very simple statement and I think it has the full backing of the Turkish people, which is very important. I think that needs to be registered, realized and recognized by all those in the international community who are concerned with terrorism and struggling with terrorism. That is the first thing. The second thing is that again, I do not know why this is not coming across as clearly and this is probably a failure on the Turkish side in terms of public diplomacy, but 3.5 million Syrians in Turkey is an issue. I do realize that our friends around the world in the West think that somehow Turks are managing this, but it is difficult. It is an economic burden. It is a social burden. It is becoming a political burden and we have to deal with it. Since our friends around the world including those who have these high values are very reluctant and unwilling to take those refugees, it seems only reasonable that the only way forward is to actually create a safe zone for them so that they can go back or create the conditions in Syria so that they can go back. How do we do it? It would be ideal if we could create a better Syria so that everyone can go to their original homes but in the absence of that solution it seems we need to come up with something.

Volker PERTHES

In the absence of that solution, you send them to other people's homes.

Memduh KARAKULLUKCU

No, no, no. In the absence of that solution we need to come together and think of a solution. The problem is that the default absence of a solution means 3.5 million people are living in Turkey forever. It is a very asymmetric problem. As time passes and the international community does not find a solution, the burden and cost accrue on Turkey not on anyone else. A few billion here or there helps, but it does not really address the fundamentals of the problem. Therefore, in response to your question, the two very clear and predictable and I think very coherent and consistent principles, objectives are one, no terrorist corridor by the Turkish borders, and two, we need to find a way forward to bring the 3.5 million Syrian guests in Turkey back to Syria. Those are the two objectives.

Volker PERTHES

Two additional questions or footnotes to that. Firstly: everybody in the broader Middle East now calls their adversaries terrorists, I think we should be a bit more cautious with the term. We know about the PKK and its long struggle with



Turkey and we know that the YPG, PYD has a very strong relationship to say the least, with the PKK. At the same time, it seems to be true that from the SDF, which is now being fought by the Turkish army, no shot has ever been fired into Turkey because they had enough to do organizing their self-administration in the Syrian-Kurdish areas. Is terrorism here actually the wrong term to talk about, whereas settling refugees who are a burden in Turkey back into Syria seems to be the main background to that incursion? There also seems to be a degree of ethnic engineering in northern Turkey, if you settle Sunni Arabs from southern or central Syria in northeastern Syria, which is mainly Kurdish.

The second question is that there are already immediate political effects from the incursion, which is that the Kurdish administration and their militia, the SDF, has now made an agreement with the Syrian army, the Syrian regime in Damascus, to invite the Syrian army in. Is that in the end also the solution for Turkey, to have the Syrian regime or government recover its authority over the entire country or most of it and have the Syrian army on the border with Turkey rather than an American-backed Kurdish militia?

Memduh KARAKULLUKCU

On the first one, the definition of terrorism is obviously a universal conversation going on, but in the Turkish case the PKK has actually inhabited the Iraqi space and from there attacked Turkey. Therefore, the roots of PKK terror go beyond its presence in Turkey. The PKK actually inhabits regions that are south of the Turkish border. For us the PYD-PKK link, is very real. The fact that this or that person or faction within YPG has not taken a shot does not mean much. We have experienced this for 40 years and we know how the PKK functions and how it cooperates with other parties in that region. It is the kind of risk and kind of definitional subtlety that the Turkish security sensitivities cannot accommodate. It is just too sensitive because over 40 years we have lost too many people and we know how the PKK functions. The mere fact that, as you have shared, the link with YPG and the PKK is very real, I think that is sufficient for Turkish sensibilities. That is number one.

In terms of ethnic engineering I think that engineering has already taken place.

Volker PERTHES

You are an engineer after all.

Memduh KARAKULLUKCU

I was going to say that my CPU works well with integrated circuits but not with the Middle East, it is just too complex. Even general equilibrium models are fine, it is just the Middle East that is too much, but I am trying.

It seems that the YPG has already done some of that ethnic engineering so arguably, it is really allowing people to come back. The second thing, I understand that our European friends are very concerned about demographic shifts and that is very understandable. I think that is the point at which our European friends should say, "not allowed." If that happens, if that materializes, then the EU will act. However, I do not think it is constructive to pre-emptively say that this may happen at some point and then going after the Turkish operation forcefully with sanctions and threats of sanctions. I do understand your concern about ethnic engineering. The Turkish government, the President himself has come out and said that we are not going to do it, so we can hold him to that promise. When that happens, if the operation somehow strays from that very strict rule, then I think our European friends would be rightfully in the position to point out that they had said that this was not okay. We are not there yet. It is not happening.

Your other big question is what the endgame is. We do not know. I personally do not know. I can tell you about what I sense will happen. I understand that they have invited the Syrian government, the Syrian military to interfere. Again, this morning the President said in Kobani and Manbij, the area where there is a possible conflict with the Syrian army, that there is cooperation with the Russians or that the Russians are aware of the situation and are cooperating, so it will not happen. My guess is that the YPG is a tactical instrument for big powers in Syria. I think it was a tactical instrument for the Americans and I think it may well be a tactical instrument for the Russians. We know what the Russians want. They want Assad and the Turks to come together so that Syria can be under the control of Assad and that is the endgame for the Russians. I think they want to steer the whole system in that direction. In going towards that direction, as I said, if the Turkish part, our side, does not fully cooperate with that scenario and there is foot-dragging



for this or that reason, my guess is that our Russian friends, will use the YPG instrumentally, try to bring them together with Assad and see whether that can nudge the Turkish side. Looking at the picture, I do not think that Turkey can be at odds and in continuous conflict with both the YPG and the Syrian government; at some point we will have to choose. I do not know when that point will come. It may be soon and between the lines I think there is some room for some rapprochement with the Syrian central government, Assad.

Volker PERTHES

Thank you very much. I guess we will have the answer by next year's World Policy Conference.