

Committee : Advisory Panel

Agenda Item : Addressing the border disputes in Northern Syria, with an emphasis on Türkiye's foreign military policies on the region

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Introduction

Most representative of the more complicated and long-standing questions that international relations have to offer are the territorial conflicts in Syria. These are issues that do not happen suddenly; they stem from general geopolitical rivalries that date back, from historic grievances, and from the shifting sands of the regional and international alignments. What started as a purely domestic uprising in Syria is gradually turning into an intricate conflict with several state and non-state actors each carrying their goals and aspirations into the box. Among the several disturbing changes that the conflict has brought to the region include instability, humanitarian crisis, and more threats from extremists groups.

Well beyond the borders of Syria, the fallout from this crisis has effects on global security, impacts international migration, and endangers a precarious equilibrium of power in the Middle East. Among a dozen other serious facets of the conflict, the disputes and clashes in Northern Syria have turned into a really critical battlefield of competing interests.

The interaction of local factions, regional players, and international powers created a volatile environment in this area that represents broader challenges in the Syrian conflict. In addition, when border disputes form a complex interplay: struggle for territorial control, pursue ethnic and political objectives, and interests of neighboring countries and global actors. Northern Syria became a point of convergence where overarching themes of security,

governance, and human rights meet local and regional dynamics. The issue is that Turkey will continue to play a significant role as a neighbor and regional player in shaping the course of the conflict in Northern Syria. Turkey's last decade of activity in the area is primarily the result of security concerns in humanitarian issues and strategic interests that have combined in a complex way. The strategy had actually been a multifaceted one, where different kinds of actions had been taken.

Being a major bordering country as well as a regional actor, Turkey fully accounts for every event today in the conflict dynamics in Northern Syria. In this sense, it has already stepped into a complicated phase of active engagement to date-over ten years-long-within the region, with all that diverse set of intertwining security imperatives, humanitarian imperatives, and strategic interests. This involves the multitasking approach of directly intervening into hostility, initiating what has been termed "safe zones," as well as even controlling refugees from Syria. Thereby, the Turkish approach is envisioned to counter the existence of armed non-state actors, exert less national security threat, and generate spill-over effects of the Syrian Civil War. In addition, the policy of Turkey was inspired by its aspirations to shape the future of Syria and the region.

Beyond assessing the existing scene of the violence, this report will continue and expand on that. This report will put into context what has already been analyzed in terms of how issues interact and interrelate, highlighting the larger regional and international contexts involved. It will analyze Northern Syria's conflict in the view of widespread geopolitical competitions, which are among the



world's global powers, considering the ramifications of these competitions on peace and stability across the Middle East. The humanitarian dimension will also be covered in the report and would consider having to do with the plight of displaced populations together with the management of refugee movements and integrated responses for immediate and long-term needs in all those areas.

The report has offered insightful and informative insights to delegates to help them make an effective contribution to future discussions about the future of Northern Syria. After a thorough articulation of the issues, this report should strengthen delegates to propose original and pragmatic solutions that take up the interests fueling the conflict. Prioritizes and creatively negotiates between competing priorities among various stakeholders towards sustainable peace and stability. Ultimately, this report seeks to be an important part of the continuing solution to one of today's most complex and long-lived conflicts and offers the significant starting point for making that change go for a region that remains at the center of global attention.

The analysis of the present conditions concerning the conflict will be complemented by exploring the greater regional and international aspects, illustrating how interconnected the issues are. It further shows how the conflict in Northern Syria forms part of greater rivalries in geopolitics, such as those between great powers, and considers these rivalries' implications for peace and stability in the whole Middle East region. In addition, the report will cover the humanitarian factor in the crisis, dealing with the plight of the displaced populations, the complexities of refugee flows management, and the need for extensive solutions to both immediate and long-term aspects.

Hence, the focus of this report is towards equipping delegates with adequate knowledge and insight to debate soundly and constructively on the future of Northern Syria. Of crawling understanding of the problems at hand, it empowers delegates towards proposing innovative and pragmatic solutions in addressing the basics of the conflict. The report thus emphasizes the balance of interests, dialogue between stakeholders and people at odds, and strategic premising in favor of sustainable peace and stability. This report, then, aims at

contributing to ongoing efforts to solve one of the planet's toughest and most enduring conflicts by providing guidelines for tangible progress in what is still a focal area in global attention.

Definition of Key Terms

Border Disputes: Conflicts or disagreements over the demarcation and control of territorial boundaries between states or regions. In the context of Northern Syria, this term primarily refers to disputes involving Türkiye, the Syrian government, and Kurdish groups over control and influence in the region.

Foreign Military Policies: Strategies and actions taken by a state's military beyond its national borders to protect its interests, address security threats, or engage in conflict. Türkiye's foreign military policies in Northern Syria include operations such as "Operation Euphrates Shield" and "Operation Peace Spring."

Safe Zones: Designated areas intended to provide safety and security for civilians, often established in conflict zones. These areas are typically free from active hostilities and may involve international monitoring or military presence.

Non-State Actors: Groups or organizations that hold significant influence or power but are not affiliated with a specific state. In Northern Syria, non-state actors include groups such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and other Kurdish militia organizations.

Kurdish Groups: Ethnic and political organizations representing Kurdish populations, some of which operate in Northern Syria. These groups, including the People's Protection Units (YPG), play a central role in the region's political and security dynamics.

Humanitarian Concerns: Issues related to the welfare and safety of civilians affected by conflict, including displacement, access to basic needs, and protection from violence.

Territorial Integrity: The principle under international law that emphasizes the inviolability of a state's borders and its sovereignty over its territory. This concept is often central to discussions of border disputes and foreign intervention.

Cross-Border Operations: Military or strategic actions conducted by a state within the territory of another state, often aimed at addressing security threats or pursuing strategic objectives. Türkiye's cross-border operations in Syria are significant examples of this.

Major Actors Involved

Republic of Türkiye

Türkiye is a central actor in the Northern Syria border disputes. The country views the Kurdish forces in the region, particularly the People's Protection Units (YPG), as an extension of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), which it designates as a terrorist organization. Türkiye has conducted multiple military operations in Northern Syria, such as "Operation Euphrates Shield," "Operation Olive Branch," and "Operation Peace Spring," aiming to establish buffer zones, push Kurdish forces away from its borders, and address security concerns. Additionally, Türkiye aims to facilitate the resettlement of millions of Syrian refugees currently hosted within its borders, further complicating its role in the region.

Syrian Government

Led by President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian government seeks to regain sovereignty over the entire country, including territories controlled by Kurdish forces and other groups. Damascus views Türkiye's presence in Northern Syria as a violation of its sovereignty and has repeatedly called for the withdrawal of

Turkish forces. Despite limited resources due to the prolonged civil war, the Syrian government has allied with external actors such as Russia and Iran to reclaim lost territories and challenge foreign interventions in the region.

Kurdish Groups

Kurdish groups, particularly the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and its military wing, the YPG, have been key players in Northern Syria. They have established semi-autonomous governance structures in the region, especially in areas liberated from ISIS. While they have allied with the United States in the fight against ISIS, their aspirations for greater autonomy have faced resistance from both Türkiye and the Syrian government. The Kurdish groups' role in Northern Syria adds a layer of complexity to the ongoing disputes, as their control of territory and political ambitions directly conflict with the interests of other major actors. This flag represents the military organisation of the YPG. YPG is one of the most active Kurdish groups in this region

United States of America

The United States has played a significant role in Northern Syria, primarily through its support of Kurdish forces in the fight against ISIS. U.S. military aid and political backing have strengthened Kurdish control in the region. However, this support has strained relations with NATO ally Türkiye. The U.S. has also sought to mediate between Türkiye and Kurdish groups, but its policies in the region remain a point of contention. In recent years, U.S. troop withdrawals and shifting priorities have left a power vacuum in parts of Northern Syria, further complicating the situation.

Russian Federation

As a staunch ally of the Syrian government, Russia plays a pivotal role in Northern Syria. Russian forces have mediated agreements between Türkiye and the Syrian government while supporting Assad's efforts to regain control of lost territories. Russia's involvement has provided military and diplomatic leverage in the region, allowing it to act as a key power broker. Its coordination with

Türkiye and Iran through the Astana Peace Process underscores its strategic interest in maintaining influence over the outcome of the Syrian conflict.

Iran:

Iran, another ally of the Syrian government, supports Assad's efforts to regain full sovereignty and opposes foreign interventions, including Türkiye's presence in Northern Syria. Through its military proxies and advisors, Iran has bolstered the Syrian regime and challenged U.S. and Turkish influence in the region. Iran's role reflects its broader geopolitical strategy of expanding influence in the Middle East and countering rivals like Saudi Arabia and Israel.

ISIS (Islamic State)

Although significantly weakened, ISIS remains a destabilizing force in Northern Syria. The group's remnants continue to carry out insurgent activities, exploiting the fragmented control of the region. The presence of ISIS has justified international interventions, including U.S. and Kurdish operations, but also complicates efforts to stabilize the region, as multiple actors prioritize their own agendas over coordinated counter-terrorism strategies.

The European Union

While not directly involved militarily, the European Union is a significant stakeholder due to its concerns over refugee flows, humanitarian aid, and regional stability. EU countries have provided financial assistance for humanitarian efforts in Syria and supported diplomatic initiatives to resolve the conflict. However, divisions within the EU over migration policies and relations with Türkiye have limited its influence in the region.

Iraq

As a neighboring country, Iraq is indirectly affected by the border disputes in Northern Syria. Kurdish forces in Iraq have ties to their counterparts in Syria, and cross-border movements of militants pose security risks to Iraq. Additionally, Iraq's internal dynamics and relationships with both Türkiye and

Iran shape its stance on the conflict. The country's fragile political and security environment adds another layer of complexity to regional dynamics.

The Free Syrian Army (FSA)

The Free Syrian Army (FSA), established on July 29, 2011, is a coalition of defected Syrian Armed Forces officers and soldiers, as well as civilian volunteers, united in opposition to President Bashar al-Assad's regime. The FSA's primary objective is to overthrow the Assad government and establish a democratic system in Syria. Operating mainly in Northern Syria, the FSA has received support from various international actors, including Türkiye, which has provided military assistance and facilitated the group's restructuring under the Syrian National Army (SNA) umbrella. Despite facing challenges such as internal divisions and allegations of human rights abuses, the FSA remains a significant player in the Syrian conflict, particularly in regions under Turkish influence.

General Overview of the Issue

Dispute over the borders of Northern Syria is the culmination of a complex, historical, political and security process. The Syrian Civil War (2011-present) has been remarkably successful in producing a power vacuum in the area and, as a direct result, it has been depopulating it through a very diverse and complex constellation of state and non-state actors. The breakdown of central authority in Syria led Kurdish organisations e.g., the YPG) de facto to control vast parts of Northern Syria. This development raised alarms in Türkiye, which perceives these groups as an extension of the PKK, a designated terrorist organization.

The Turkish response has encompassed a diverse set of military operations with a view to establish an area of enclosure on that border, and to degrade apparent security actors. This kind of activity, though for all its current strategic usefulness, has been targeted by international outcry due to humanitarian effects, such as civilian congestion and regional fragility.

As a result, because of the participation of these global hegemons (i.e., United States and Russia), everything became much more complicated. These, and their support of Kurdish insurgent groups who fought against Isis in the fight against the so-called Islamic State, and Russia's support of the Syrian state in their bid to reassert lost land and territory. Such competing or conflicting interests have generated a precarious power balance with no clear endpoint. Humanitarians' risk to humanitarians is still super high, although millions of Civilians are internally displaced in Northern Syria, isolated, deprived of their basic needs and exposed to the violence. Refugee flows into neighbouring countries, for example the case of Türkiye, have also exacerbated the situation by overstressing resources and generating political tensions.

The answer to the dilemma of the borders of Northern Syria requires a whole approach that takes into account the security interests of the local agents, the Kurds' ambitions and the necessity of a sustainable solution to the humanitarian crisis. On the one hand, the challenge is to reconcile these conflicting goals toward some possible solution, in other words, peace and stability, to the area.

Timeline of Important Events

Date	Event
March 2011	The Syrian Civil War begins, leading to widespread instability and the emergence of factions.
July 2012	Kurdish groups establish de facto control over parts of Northern Syria as the government withdraws.

September 2014	U.S.-led coalition begins airstrikes against ISIS, supporting Kurdish groups like the SDF.
August 2016	Türkiye launches "Operation Euphrates Shield," targeting ISIS and Kurdish forces.
January 2018	"Operation Olive Branch" is conducted by Türkiye to seize Afrin from Kurdish control.
October 2019	Türkiye launches "Operation Peace Spring" to create a safe zone along its southern border.
March 2020	Russia mediates a ceasefire between Türkiye and Syrian forces in Idlib.
October 2021	Renewed tensions as Türkiye increases its military presence in Northern Syria.

Related Documents

[UNSC 2178 \(2014\)](#): Addresses the threat of foreign terrorist fighters, calling for states to prevent their recruitment, travel, and financing.

[UNSC 2165 \(2014\)](#): Authorizes cross-border humanitarian aid delivery in Syria without requiring Syrian government consent.

[UNSC Resolution 2254 \(2015\)](#): Establishes a framework for a political solution to the Syrian conflict, including a ceasefire and political transition process.

[UNSC Resolution 2401 \(2018\)](#): Demands a 30-day ceasefire across Syria to allow humanitarian aid and medical evacuations.

UNSC Resolution 2642 (2022): Extends the mandate for cross-border humanitarian aid into Northwest Syria to assist civilians in need.

Past Solution Attempts

Efforts to resolve the border disputes in Northern Syria have been made through a combination of military interventions, diplomatic negotiations, and international resolutions. Below are some key solution attempts.

Astana Peace Process (2017-Present): Initiated by Russia, Türkiye, and Iran, this ongoing diplomatic effort aims to reduce hostilities in Syria and establish de-escalation zones, including in Northern Syria. While progress has been made in reducing conflict in some areas, comprehensive solutions remain elusive.

Geneva Talks (2012-Present): Led by the United Nations, these negotiations have focused on achieving a political resolution to the Syrian Civil War. While territorial integrity and governance structures have been addressed, the Northern Syria conflict has seen limited tangible results from these discussions.

Türkiye's Safe Zone Proposals (2019): Türkiye proposed creating a 30-kilometer safe zone along its border with Syria to address security concerns and accommodate Syrian refugees. While partially implemented, this plan faced criticism for its potential displacement of Kurdish populations and its unilateral approach.

Ceasefire Agreements (Various, 2016-2020): Brokered by international powers such as Russia and the U.S., several ceasefire agreements have been implemented to de-escalate violence in Northern Syria. However, these agreements have often been short-lived, with violations reported by multiple parties.

United Nations Humanitarian Aid Resolutions (Ongoing): The UN has passed multiple resolutions to ensure humanitarian aid reaches Northern Syria. These efforts have helped mitigate the impact of the conflict on civilians, but

challenges in access and delivery persist due to ongoing hostilities and political tensions.

International Coalition Against ISIS (2014-Present): The coalition's efforts to eliminate ISIS have significantly altered the power dynamics in Northern Syria. While this has weakened a major destabilizing force, it has also intensified territorial disputes among local and regional actors.

Kurdish Autonomy Proposals: Various proposals for Kurdish autonomy within Syria have been discussed but have faced strong resistance from both the Syrian government and Türkiye. These discussions highlight the complex interplay of ethnic, political, and territorial concerns in the region.

Possible Solutions

To address the ongoing border disputes in Northern Syria, the following solutions could be considered:

Strengthening Diplomatic Channels: Reinforce negotiations under existing frameworks like the Astana Peace Process and Geneva Talks to promote dialogue among key stakeholders, including Türkiye, Syria, and Kurdish representatives.

Establishing Internationally Monitored Safe Zones: Create demilitarized safe zones under the supervision of neutral international forces to protect civilians and reduce tensions in contested areas.

Comprehensive Refugee Resettlement Plans: Work with international organizations to develop sustainable resettlement and reintegration programs for displaced populations while respecting their rights and choices.

Targeted Economic Aid and Development: Provide financial support to rebuild infrastructure and improve living conditions in affected areas to reduce the appeal of extremist groups and promote stability.

Addressing Kurdish Concerns Through Autonomy Models: Explore decentralized governance models that grant greater autonomy to Kurdish regions within Syria while preserving the country's territorial integrity.

Useful Links

1. United Nations Official Website - Syria:

[\[https://www.un.org/syria\]](https://www.un.org/syria)(<https://www.un.org/syria>)

2. International Crisis Group - Syria Reports:

[\[https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria\]](https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria)

3. BBC News - Syria Conflict:

[\[https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868\]](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868)(<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>)

4. ReliefWeb - Humanitarian Updates on Syria:

[\[https://reliefweb.int/country/syr\]](https://reliefweb.int/country/syr)(<https://reliefweb.int/country/syr>)

5. Brookings Institution - Policy Papers on Syria:

[\[https://www.brookings.edu/topic/syria/\]](https://www.brookings.edu/topic/syria/)(<https://www.brookings.edu/topic/syria/>)

6. Human Rights Watch - Syria:

[\[https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria\]](https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria)(<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria>)

7. Council on Foreign Relations - Global Conflict Tracker:

[\[https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria\]](https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria)(<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria>)

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3. BBC News. (n.d.). Syria Conflict Background.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868>
4. ReliefWeb. (n.d.). Humanitarian Updates on Syria.
<https://reliefweb.int/country/syr>
5. Brookings Institution. (n.d.). Policy Recommendations for Syria.
<https://www.brookings.edu/topic/syria/>
6. Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). Syria Reports.
<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria>
7. Council on Foreign Relations. (n.d.). Global Conflict Tracker: Civil War in Syria. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-syria>
8. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (n.d.). Syrian Refugee Crisis Data. <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>
9. The Atlantic Council. (n.d.). Analysis on Turkey's Role in Syria.
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org>
10. Chatham House. (n.d.). Conflict and Diplomacy in Syria.
<https://www.chathamhouse.org>
11. Al Jazeera. (n.d.). Syria's War Explained.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/tag/syria-war>