



SMA Reach-back

Question (QL2): *What are the strategic and operational implications of the Turkish Army's recent intervention in northern Syria for the coalition campaign plan to defeat ISIL? What is the impact of this intervention on the viability of coalition vetted indigenous ground forces, Syrian Defense Forces and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (formerly ANF)?*

Executive Summary – Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois, NSI

There is general consensus among the expert contributors that the strategic and operational implications of the Turkish incursion are minimal: each sees the incursion as consistent with previous Turkish policy and long-standing interests. Turkey's activities should be viewed through the lens of its core strategic interest in removing the threat of Kurdish separatism, which at present has been exacerbated by renewed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) insurgency inside Turkey, its influence in northern Iraq, and the expansion of Kurdish territories in Syria more generally. As one commented, "Turkey will prioritize itself. This means preventing the strengthening of Kurds at all costs (including indirect support to those fighting them). It also means patrolling borders, harsh treatment of those who try to get through and/or corrupt practices such as involvement in smuggling." One implication of note however is the increased risk of escalation between Turkey and Russia and Turkey and the US-backed Peoples Protection Units (YPG) that the incursion poses.

Establishing a Turkish zone of influence in northern Syria accommodates multiple Turkish interests simultaneously: from the point of view of the leadership, it should increase domestic support for President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP); it should allow Turkey to gain control of costly and potentially disruptive refugee flows into Turkey and reduce the threat of ISIL or PKK activities in Turkey; it prohibits establishment of a unified Kurdish territory in northern Syria; and, it secures Turkey's seat at the table in any Syrian settlement. In addition, a Turkish-controlled zone could establish a staging area from which Syrian Opposition forces could check PYD expansionism, secure the Aleppo corridor and clear ISIL from Turkey's borders.

In terms of the impact of the intervention on the viability of coalition-vetted ground forces, Alexis Everington (MSI) argues that in order for the campaign against ISIL to succeed in Syria two conditions must be met: 1) that opposition forces in Syria believe that the effort to defeat ISIL goes hand-in-hand with defeat of the Assad regime; and 2) that there are moderate, "victorious" local Sunni opposition fighters that mainstream society can support. If not, the general population is likely to support more extreme alternatives (like Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) simply for lack of viable Sunni alternatives.¹ Hamit Bozarslan (EHES)

¹ It is for this reason that Everington believes providing "international support to Kurdish fighting forces will only push local Sunni Syrians more into the arms of extremist groups. Supporting Kurdish armed groups to the detriment of support to local Sunni ones is one of the most significant errors of the conflict in the past year."

suggests that unfortunately the ship may have sailed on this condition. He argues that the Free Syrian Army of today, that Turkey backs, has little resemblance to the Free Syrian Army of 2011: many of its components hate the US, are close to radical jihadis and most importantly, in his view are a very weak fighting force. He explains that they succeeded recently in Jarablus because ISIL did not fight (organizing a suicide-attack and destroying four Turkish tanks, simply showed that ISIL could retaliate).

Finally, Bernard Carreau (NDU) argues that “the U.S. should welcome the Turkish incursion into northern Syria and could do so most effectively by reducing its support of the SDF and YPG.” Doing so he believes could make Turkey “the most valuable U.S. ally in Syria and Iraq.” Additionally, the experts suggest that it is important to remember that the Turkish leadership has seen and will continue to see the fight against ISIL through the lens of its impact on Kurdish separatism and terrorism inside Turkey including Kurdish consolidation of power along the Syrian border. The impact on Opposition forces depends on the degree to which they see that the Turkish moves, as well as the campaign against ISIL address their objective of toppling the Assad regime.

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SME Input

Turkey's Kurdish Redline in Syria and the Fight Against ISIL

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Turkey’s military intervention in northern Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield) has raised both hopes and concerns about defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). While some regard it as a positive turning point in the anti-ISIL fight, particularly after Turkish and Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces quickly expelled ISIL from the strategically important border town of Jarablus, others see the incursion as a further setback. Turkish attacks on the U.S.-backed Kurdish People’s Protection Forces (YPG) — the military wing of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), an affiliate of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) and the most effective anti-ISIL force in Syria — may leave Washington trapped between allies fighting each other in Syria. Underlying these scenarios are assumptions that Ankara has fundamentally changed its

“Ankara’s intervention in Syria is neither surprising nor game-changing.”

strategy, that Syrian Kurds are vital to defeating ISIL, and that a portending U.S. “betrayal of the Kurds” will undermine their will to fight and thus the effectiveness of the campaign.

Neither of these predictions is fully accurate. Turkey’s incursion in Syria represents continuity of policy rather than dramatic change. While becoming more engaged against ISIL over the past year, Turkey still prioritizes the PKK and its affiliates as a strategic threat just like it did at the war’s outset. Nor does Turkey-YPG fighting create a new dilemma for the United States. The U.S. strategy of defeating ISIL “by, with, and through” local partners has meant balancing competing interests and differentiating between tactical and strategic allies. CENTCOM commander Gen. Votel made this distinction clear by affirming continued U.S. backing for the YPG while requesting its forces depart the territories west of the Euphrates. This upholds Ankara’s redline and keeps the Kurdish communities of northern Syria from linking up a geographically contiguous zone of territory along Turkey’s border. Vice President Biden did the same by warning Kurds that they “cannot, will not and under no circumstances will get American support” if they do not keep their commitment to withdrawing to the other side of the Euphrates. These dynamics are unlikely to undermine the YPG’s will to fight — they benefit greatly from U.S. support — but they could forge regional alliances committed to keeping Syria’s borders intact while further embroiling Turkey in Syria’s cross-border quagmires.

Turning Point or More of the Same?

Ankara’s intervention in Syria is neither surprising nor game-changing. Operation Euphrates Shield is not the first time Turkey has entered neighboring states to pursue terrorist threats — particularly the PKK kind — and it is unlikely to be the last. The incursion not only reveals Turkey’s increasing vulnerability and willingness to engage against ISIL, but a deeply rooted threat perception of Kurdish separatism that dates to the early state period. This perception has been reinforced by the breakdown of the Iraqi and Syrian states, renewed PKK insurgency in Turkey, growing PKK influence in northern Iraq, 186 percent increase in Kurdish-controlled territories in Syria since the anti-ISIL campaign commenced, and the failed Turkish coup. Any attempt to effectively counter ISIL with Turkey cannot be separated from its strategic priority of countering PKK threats, even if the United States insists otherwise.

The difference now is that Turkey no longer has allies in strong states to help control the PKK, and has to rely on sub-state actors to do so. During the Iran-Iraq War, for instance, Ankara negotiated an agreement with Baghdad that allowed it to search and seize PKK terrorists across Iraqi borders. When Ankara and Damascus were on the verge of war in 1998, they negotiated the Adana Agreement, which led to PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan’s ouster from Syria after years of refuge, as well as other anti-terrorism measures. Turkey’s efforts to check the PKK continued after the post-Gulf War breakdown of the Iraqi state. Instead of Baghdad, however, Ankara turned to Iraqi Kurds, and particularly Mas’ud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which assumed de-facto control of northern Iraq. This alliance helped create a Kurdish buffer zone that has permitted intelligence-sharing and border security, airstrikes against PKK bases in the Qandil Mountains, military incursions, and the creation of Turkish military bases in Iraqi Kurdish territories. Yet, it has not uprooted the PKK from northern Iraq. Barzani and other Kurdish officials may oppose the PKK presence, but after nearly 20 years, they have been unable and perhaps unwilling to expel PKK forces militarily. Turkish penetration in the Kurdistan Region has also instigated and embroiled Ankara in Kurdish power struggles between the KDP and the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the latter of which gained support from Iran, and the PKK.

Similar dynamics are unfolding in the hyper-fragmented Syrian state. The zone of influence that Ankara seeks to create near Jarablus is similar to earlier plans for a buffer zone that overlaps with territories that PYD Kurds had claimed. This zone would not be controlled by the Syrian government, which has residual forces in some parts of Hasaskah, but by a patchwork of local militias and non-state actors such as the FSA and Sultan Murad forces — mainly Sunni Arab and Turcoman groups. Under Turkish influence, this zone could establish a space for the Syrian opposition to check PYD expansionism as well as to secure the Aleppo corridor, clear ISIL from its borders, and control refugees.

Indeed, Turkey is likely to revive regional strategic alliances to further secure its borders and check PKK and ISIL terrorism. Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim has indicated the need for stability in Syria and Iraq for successful counter-terrorism efforts, to include normalizing relations with Syria. In his visits to Moscow and Tehran after the failed Turkish coup, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan indicated his readiness to enhance cooperation and desire to restore regional peace. In fact, Turkey's engagement against ISIL has involved greater regional cooperation, to include support for the recent but tenuous ceasefire brokered by the United States and Russia which would permit the United Nations to establish aid corridors into Aleppo via the Turkish border.

Still, Turkey's effort to re-establish regional alliances, although important, will not necessarily stabilize Syria, control the PKK or YPG, or help defeat ISIL and other jihadists anytime soon. Ankara ultimately depends on fractious local proxies to hold territories and ward off ISIL, radical jihadists, and PKK groups. Syrian Kurds worried about losing territories and influence, in turn, have reacted by creating another militia to resist Turkish forces. Numerous battles in Syria are also playing out on different fronts that have distinct problem sets. Alongside the PKK/YPG issue and ISIL, the general threat is Jabhat al-Nusrah, renamed Jabhat l-Sham (JFS), as well as separating moderates from extremists and the mixing of different extremist groups. The hyper-localized nature of the Syrian war also means that tactical gains or losses in Jarablus do not diminish the ISIL threat in other localities or for neighboring states. If the political order after the fall of key towns and cities such as Raqqah and Aleppo is unacceptable to Turkey, Gulf States, Iran, and Russia, then ISIL, radical jihadism, and PKK operations will continue.

These complex dynamics challenge the notion that Turkish-YPG conflicts place the United States on a "treacherous fault line" that will undermine the anti-ISIL campaign. From the outset, U.S. support to Syrian Kurds has remained tactical and situated around the parameters of its strategic partnership with Turkey and Syrian state sovereignty. Instead of directly or solely backing the PYD, the United States has channeled support to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), comprised largely but not exclusively of PYD Kurds. After complaints from Turkey that U.S. special operations troops were wearing uniform patches bearing the YPG insignia, U.S. military commanders ordered the patches to be immediately removed. Further, at no point has the United States officially recognized the Syrian Kurdish cantons or self-declared Kurdish federal autonomous zone, or permitted the PYD to attend the Geneva negotiations apart from the Syrian National Council (SNC), backed by Turkey and Arab Gulf states.

While Kurds and some western pundits can turn to history and charge the United States with betrayal, the current circumstances in Syria are nothing of the sort. On the contrary, PYD/YPG forces have been the biggest beneficiaries of the anti-ISIL campaign and have much to gain from an ongoing U.S. alliance. Some YPG fighters may continue to over-reach territorially, however, other Syrian Kurds, including some PYD members (I have spoken to) know full well of the transactional nature of their partnership with the U.S. and the limitations of their role in the anti-ISIL campaign. Many Syrian Kurds recognize that they cannot realistically connect all of their cantons given Turkish opposition and Sunni Arab populations in the area, and realize the need to reconcile with Ankara to keep borders open. This is why, instead of snubbing U.S. support or pushing west of the Euphrates *en masse*, YPG forces vacated areas around Jarablus, even if they insisted that they have the right to remain “as Syrians.”

Implications for U.S. Policy

Turkey’s intervention in Syria has reinforced Ankara’s red lines, clarified the conditions of U.S. support to Turkey and Syrian Kurds, and revealed opportunities and challenges to regional cooperation in Syria. It underlines a shared commitment to Syrian territorial integrity by all groups, including Kurds, even if internal boundaries and the status of the Assad regime remain disputed. As the United States moves forward with its anti-ISIL campaign in Syria, it should more carefully calibrate the following issues:

Don’t Mirror Image. Washington should more carefully consider Turkey’s threat perceptions and those of local Sunni Arab groups. Insisting that the PKK and PYD are distinct — even though everyone knows they are not — and telling Turkey to prioritize ISIL will not change Turkey’s strategic calculus or red lines in Syria. It is also a mistake to think that Turkey and the PYD will “put away their differences” to focus on ISIL — particularly as the PKK insurgency continues, the Kurdish problem in Turkey remains unresolved, and opportunities to assert influence exist in the weak Iraqi and Syrian states.

Clarify Conditions of Support. Encourage Local and Regional Pacts. Washington should continue to openly clarify the parameters of support to Syrian Kurds and other partners, including Turkey, and avoid sending mixed signals, such as high profile visits to PYD leaders in Syria, which are largely symbolic but can deepen local and regional resentments. While continuing to support Syrian Kurds, the United States should not enable them to the point where they do not think that they have to negotiate with local and regional partners. These measures should focus on lessening fears of Kurdish empowerment and preventing backlash against Kurds by Turkey and Sunni Arab populations who regard the YPG as encroaching on their territories and as the United States as seeking to divide Syria.

Recognize the limitations of Syrian Kurdish influence. While the YPG has been the most effective anti-ISIL force in Syria, its effectiveness is confined to Kurdish territories where ISIL no longer has a presence. As the campaign seeks to expel ISIL from strategic Sunni Arab strongholds such as Raqqah, the YPG role will be limited. Given reactions by Arab groups to Kurdish territorial gains, direct engagement by the YPG in such an effort could be counterproductive.

These dynamics have implications for countering ISIL and eventually stabilizing Syria. As long as Iraq and Syria remain weak and fractured and Turkey’s Kurdish issue remains

unresolved, Ankara will continue to prioritize the PKK as a strategic threat, even as it engages against ISIL. Telling Turkey that it should do otherwise or underestimating the effects of Kurdish territorial expansion on local and regional actors will only fuel these threat perceptions. The United States should pay more careful attention to these regional security priorities and how they are impacted by the second and third order consequences of the anti-ISIL campaign.

Turkish Bridgehead in Northern Syria

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Turkish incursion into Jarablus could not have taken place without Turkish-Russian normalization. After Turkey downed a Russian plane in November 2015, Russia had declared northern Syria a no-go zone for Turkish military. Russian reaction to Turkey after November seems to have intimidated Turkish President Erdogan.

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Russia is Turkey's historic nemesis and in the aftermath of the plane incident, the Russians terrorized the Turks in the intelligence, cyber and military realms. Russia also started to provide weapons to the Democratic Union Party (PYD)'s Afrin enclave in Syria. It was not a question of if, but when Russian weapons would end up in the hands of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

Erdogan wants to become an executive-style president and he needs to change the Turkish constitution to that end. To do this he needs to win a referendum or new elections for his AKP. In two recent elections, the AKP has

maxed out at 49.5 % popular support. Erdogan has been running on a strong-man, right-wing, nationalist platform to boost his own and AKP's popularity. This is why he will not stand down against the PKK until he defeats the organization militarily. This makes Turkey by extension hostile towards the PYD until Erdogan achieves his presidential agenda. Erdogan has realized that if Russia is providing weapons to the PKK, he can never defeat that organization, and that is why he decided to normalize relations with Putin, sending him a letter of apology before the July 15 failed coup in Turkey.

Never wanting to completely alienate Turkey and push Turkey fully to NATO's fold, Putin used the post-coup dark mood in Ankara to accelerate normalization with Turkey. Ankara seems to have gotten not only the green light from Moscow to go into Syria, but also Putin's (and potentially Iran's) blessing for the Assad regime to bomb the PYD near Hasakah. It is to be expected that Erdogan will want to cultivate better ties with Russia moving forward.

The Turkish incursion also shows that Ankara is reshuffling its priorities in Syria. For nearly five years, Turkey has been nearly obsessed with the goal of ousting Assad. Now, Ankara seems to have seen the writing on the wall. Anticipating the survival of the Assad regime, and even a potential U.S.-Russia settlement on Syria, Turkey has decided to prioritize two other objectives in Syria, namely pushing ISIL away from its border and blocking Kurdish People's Protection Forces (YPG) advances, simultaneously. The incursion

into Jarablus allows Turkey to do both at the same time. At least for the time being, the Turkish bridgehead not only blocks the PYD efforts to create their own bridge between Afrin and Kobane, but also increases Turkey's value to the US as a partner in fighting ISIL.

Turkey seems to be pivoting towards the Jordanian model in Syria in terms of managing the refugee issue. For five years, Turkey had an open door policy regarding the Syrians whereas Jordan, after allowing some refugees in, decided to manage the flows on the Syrian side of its border in an informal zone. By creating an informal safe haven on the Syrian side of its border, Turkey is replicating the Jordanian model, which means that Ankara will house future refugee flows in this area, as well as potentially moving some refugees from inside Turkey to this informal zone. Needless to say, this policy would find strong support in Europe when fully implemented.

Finally, establishing a bridgehead in northern Syria allows Turkey to be invited to any future and formal talks on Syria. And if these talks fail, Turkey can try to turn this bridgehead into a staging ground for anti-Assad rebels, boosting its support for US-vetted groups, and others in this area. Whichever way the Syrian war works out, Turkey seems to have gained a permanent bridgehead in northern Syria in the short to mid-term.

Turkey's incursion into northern Syria

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Turkey's direct intervention into the Jarabulus-Azaz gap increases the military pressure on ISIL, reduces the likelihood of Kurdish unification along the border, and gives rise to several crucial longer-term questions, particularly regarding the desired relationship between the SDF and the Assad regime, and Turkey and the regime. Most of all, the incursion heightens the risk of escalation between Turkey and Russia/the regime, and Turkey and the SDF/YPG. Coalition efforts to clear ISIL from Dabiq and Al-Bab should be conducted with an eye towards reducing the risk of Turkish-Russian and Turkish-Kurdish escalation, either of which could significantly complicate the overall effort to eradicate ISIL and stabilize Syria.

Immediate effects of the incursion

In the near-term, the Turkish incursion has a number of important effects. First, the offensive further insulates Turkey's border from ISIL infiltration, adding defense-in-depth to a section of the border which had proven particularly porous and where the new border wall had not been completed. This should increase the difficulty of moving people and supplies between Turkey and ISIL territory. Despite a recent ISIL counterattack north of Dabiq and subsequent rocket attack on Kilis, the Turkish-controlled buffer zone along the border should also end cross-border shelling and rocket attacks from ISIL territory. The attacks, which had previously hit Kilis and Karkamis, have been politically volatile within Turkey.

Second, the direct Turkish military intervention and Turkey's support for Arab and Turkmen rebel groups between Azaz and Jarabulus has reduced the odds that Kurdish forces associated with the PYD will establish territorial continuity between Afrin and the

eastern cantons of Kobane and Jazira. Turkey's stated aim is to drive ISIL from Al-Bab, but

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the capture of Al-Bab would also give Ankara effective control of the corridor and major roads linking Manbij and Tall Rifat, the nearest points of Kurdish control. The Turkish offensive should therefore also be seen as a wedge meant to prevent Kurdish control across the length of the border. It is far from clear if Turkey and the array of rebels they support (of decidedly mixed capabilities and intentions) will be able to take and hold Al-Bab, short of a major infusion of Turkish ground forces. But it is likely that Turkey has done enough to prevent Kurdish territorial continuity simply by demonstrating their willingness to directly intervene militarily to prevent it. (That is the likely explanation for Turkey's initial air and artillery strikes on YPG forces north of Manbij.) It will take time for the YPG/PYD to come to terms with this reality, but they have proven to be pragmatic actors over the past four years, avoiding fights with powerful adversaries, and

will be under U.S. pressure to avoid clashes with the Turks. That does not lessen the potential for local clashes or miscalculation leading to conflict between the YPG and Turkish forces or, more likely, Arab and Turkmen rebels backed by Turkey and the YPG or its affiliated local military councils (e.g. Manbij Military Council).

The Turkish offensive puts further military pressure on ISIL. Dabiq has special ideological and theological importance for many ISIL fighters. Al-Bab is a major logistical hub and, reportedly, where ISIL manages much of their foreign recruitment and external operations. This means ISIL is likely to fight to defend the towns; opening up this new front against Dabiq and Al-Bab may force the diversion of ISIL fighters and resources from other fronts. This may, in turn, lead to opportunities for gains against ISIL in Ain Issa or in Deir Ezzour, in addition to offering a chance to further degrade ISIL militarily and strike a damaging propaganda blow.

Turkey's push toward Manbij and Al-Bab also raises tensions with the SDF, particularly the YPG and the Manbij Military Council. While the U.S. has managed to secure an uneasy truce north of Manbij, Turkey continues to view the SDF as a fig-leaf for the YPG and, they argue, the PKK. While some of the Turkish-backed rebels have said they have no quarrel with the Kurdish forces, other groups regard the SDF as separatists and/or apostates and have said they will “take back” Manbij. Turkey continues to reinforce this anti-YPG sentiment, seeing it as a useful counterweight to prevent long-term Syrian Kurdish autonomy. Given the heavy losses SDF took in the Manbij offensive; it is unlikely they will hand the city over to Turkish-backed groups. The best the U.S. can hope for here is uneasy *détente*, which would be aided by consistent pressure on the YPG to withdraw east of the Euphrates—leaving the town to elements of the SDF more

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acceptable to Turkey—and the continued presence of U.S. special operators north of Manbij along the Sajur River to deter clashes.

Despite these efforts and the relative calm since the first week of Euphrates Shield, the prospect of wider conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish-aligned forces remains very real, as is the risk of conflict between the Syrian Arab Coalition fighting alongside the YPG and the Turkish-backed rebels. Turkey has deployed rebel units from Idlib as part of Euphrates Shield, and the SDF-backed militias from Jarabulus and Manbij view them as something approaching occupiers. Regarding the YPG and the Turks and their proxies, powerful factions on both sides view the standoff in the context of a wider ethno-nationalist struggle (which includes the PKK insurgency within Turkey). A widening of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict would be very damaging to the counter-ISIL effort; it could also lead to fighting and attacks along the length of the Turkish border with the Kurdish cantons and a further escalation of PKK attacks within Turkey. For these reasons, it is unlikely that Turkey will launch a direct offensive on U.S.-backed SDF/YPG forces, even if it cannot be ruled out. (President Erdogan has repeatedly said Turkey will not allow the establishment of a “terror corridor” in northern Syria, referring to the YPG.) But Turkey might carry out punitive strikes should they see continuing Kurdish efforts to push west from Manbij, or in response to any attacks along the border or within Turkey. If they feel particularly threatened, Turkey might launch military operations against the YPG in Tel Abyad, an area they consider to be outside “traditional” Kurdish purview. Ankara might also view such a move as a useful forcing mechanism to force the U.S. to abandon its support of the YPG. Turkey is

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also likely to pursue its goal of weakening the YPG/PYD by other means, and there are suspicions surrounding the recent assassinations of a YPG commander and several members of the SDF-affiliated military councils. Finally, on the Kurdish side, the forces operating from Afrin canton remain a wild card. The U.S. seems to have minimal leverage on this branch of the YPG, while Russia has offered arms and other support to the Afrin Kurds. Clashes in Tall Rifat and Marea have already created a climate of hostility between the YPG and the non-Kurdish rebels, and the U.S. should use its ties to the other cantons to urge the Afrin Kurds to exercise restraint.

Finally, the Turkish-backed offensive may lead to two other developments. First, it may provide a focal point for the disparate rebel groups operating in northern Aleppo province and, potentially, allow for some partial military consolidation. Second, the Turkish buffer zone may allow for the return of some Syrian refugees to Syrian border areas (and has done so already, in Jarabulus), with attendant humanitarian needs within Syria.

Second-order questions arising from the incursion

Turkish officials have consistently said Al-Bab is the primary target of the incursion. If that is true, the offensive raises a number of important second-order strategic and operational questions. The effort to take Al-Bab and the aftermath of its potential capture could recast relations between several major belligerents in the Syrian war beyond the immediate Al-

Bab front. The coalition should consider the desired end-state while shaping operations to liberate Al-Bab from ISIL.

It is unclear if the patchwork coalition of rebel groups Turkey is supporting will be able to take and hold Al-Bab without direct Turkish military support in the form of tanks, armored vehicles, and special forces soldiers, along with air support and indirect artillery fire support. Turkey seems to have secured Russia's acquiescence to the offensive thus far, likely as part of the two countries' recent rapprochement. Russia's position—or perhaps Russian pressure—appears to have led the Assad regime to tolerate the open deployment of Turkish forces onto Syrian territory. (In any case, the regime has little ability to resist the Turkish incursion and also views ISIL as a threat.) The exact terms of Turkey's deal with Russia and the regime are not clear; nor is it clear if there is an explicit "deal" or merely passive acquiescence, though Turkish Prime Minister Yildirim has hinted at a deconfliction arrangement with Russia. But it is unlikely that Russia and Assad will continue to tolerate direct Turkish military operations or a Turkish-backed rebel offensive should they become a direct threat to the regime (and Russia's interest of regime survival). Indeed, it was a similar rebel offensive in Latakia and Idlib—supported by Turkey and Saudi Arabia—in 2015 that provoked Russia's direct military intervention.

The capture of Al-Bab, then, should also be considered in this light – whoever takes the city will then be in close contact with regime forces around Aleppo, effectively opening another front in the multi-sided battle for the crucial city. Russia and the Assad regime have both shown themselves willing to go to great lengths (including regularly bombing civilians, hospitals, schools, and markets) to win the fight for Aleppo. The coalition should therefore expect Russia and the regime to react if they conclude that the Al-Bab offensive will threaten their efforts to secure Aleppo. Indeed, the imminent threat of a push on Al-Bab may be contributing to the recent escalation of Russian/regime efforts to clear the rebels from Aleppo (to preempt any second front).

If it is the Turkish-backed rebels (with or without direct Turkish military support) who take Al-Bab, they will be extremely tempted to attack regime forces around Aleppo, whom they have long viewed as their primary enemy. Even if Ankara reaches a policy decision to avoid a direct confrontation with regime forces, Turkey may not be able to control the rebel groups they are supporting. How will the coalition respond if the regime or the Russians strike those forces, which include U.S.-backed groups? What if the regime or the Russians hit Turkish forces embedded with the rebels? Would Turkey seek NATO intervention (with the attendant negative consequences of NATO's likely rejection of such a request)? What would this mean for the involvement of U.S. special operators accompanying these forces? And how would Washington respond to U.S. casualties in that circumstance? And, of course, how will these developments shape any eventual political negotiations or settlement?

Similar questions arise if it is the SDF that takes Al-Bab. What will their relationship be with the regime? How will the coalition respond if the regime or the Russians attack SDF forces? What would this mean for the involvement of U.S. special operators accompanying these forces? Additionally, if the U.S. supports an SDF offensive against Al-Bab, it will increase the likelihood of future conflict between the SDF and Turkey and the rebels they support; in this context, Turkey and the non-Kurdish rebels would see the SDF as part of the blockade of Aleppo, as well as fear the establishment of Kurdish territorial continuity along the full-length of the border.

It is unclear how the Turkish incursion will affect the timeline of any offensive to liberate Raqqah. The Turkish and rebel push on Dabiq and Al-Bab is likely to tie down ISIL forces, potentially preventing the group from shifting fighters and resources to counter offensives in other sectors, including around Raqqah. If the SDF are considered capable of pushing further towards Raqqah, simultaneous offensives might meet weaker ISIL responses in both areas. On the other hand, given the importance of having non-Kurdish elements of the SDF at the head of any offensive on Raqqah, these groups may be stretched thin, given the simultaneous need for their presence in Manbij. As a corollary, because the SDF feels threatened by Turkey, they may be reluctant to redeploy forces away from the Turkish front towards Raqqah.

There is also the issue of where ISIL fighters may go and how they may react to any potential capture of Dabiq and Al-Bab. In the past, fleeing ISIL fighters have offered open targets for coalition airstrikes, but the group now uses human shields to deter such strikes. This is likely to happen again in the wake of any successful offensive on Al-Bab. ISIL is also likely to turn increasingly to asymmetrical tactics as it loses ground, including trying to melt into the civilian population fleeing combat and resorting to hit-and-run tactics and assassinations. Ensuring restraint on the part of the Turkish-backed forces and the SDF will be important to securing any lasting calm in liberated areas.

Risks

The most obvious risk is that the Turkish offensive becomes bogged down, and Turkish forces incur increasing casualties from ISIL attacks. This is among the most likely outcomes, as the rebel groups Turkey is backing have shown limited military capabilities in the past, and much of the success thus far has been due to direct Turkish military (particularly armored) support. With their credibility on the line, Turkish forces will face pressure to expand their deployment – this mission creep is a serious risk. There is also the accompanying risk that the Turkish-backed rebel coalition splinters, especially if the push on Dabiq and Al-Bab drags on for an extended period. Many of the groups included in “Euphrates Shield” share little beyond a reliance on Turkey for military support, and they may withdraw or even turn on each other if they grow frustrated (or, conversely, in the wake of a rapid victory over ISIL, which would remove a common enemy and shift focus to the local political end-state).

The second—and more consequential—risk is of a widening of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, either as a result of unplanned escalation or due to conscious policy decisions by either party. Such an outcome could further destabilize NATO-ally Turkey, where there are already 400,000 people displaced from renewed fighting with the PKK. The worst-case scenario is that Turkey, confident after the initial success of Euphrates Shield and the lack of a response from Russia and the regime, sees an opportunity to further impose its will in Syria. This could manifest in a “Euphrates Sword” operation aimed at Manbij and/or Tel Abyad, meant to weaken the YPG/PYD and force the U.S. into picking a side and, Ankara would hope, abandoning the Kurds. Such an escalation would be devastating to the coalition efforts against ISIL and could possibly inaugurate fighting along the length of the Turkish border with the Kurdish cantons, including in sensitive Hatay province, as well as potentially increasing PKK terrorist attacks within Turkey.

Priorities

Both of the risks outlined above would damage the anti-ISIL effort and put U.S. special operators in danger. Therefore, the U.S. should continue to try and balance between its two partners on the ground (Turkey and its rebel alliance; and the SDF). Tactical efforts against ISIL should be subordinated, when necessary, to the broader strategic need to prevent Turkish-Kurdish and Arab-Kurdish escalation. Essentially, the U.S. must convince Turkey that its intervention has already achieved its goal of preventing PYD control of the length of the border in the hopes of preventing further escalation.

The YPG and their allies have bravely fought ISIL and have a legitimate right to self-defense; the U.S. should fully support the SDF in securing their current territory. But U.S. interests would not be served by a contiguous Kurdish territory along the full-length of Turkey's border; the ethnic makeup of the region would likely lead to clashes, and Turkey would view such a development as an existential security threat. Therefore, the U.S. should try to channel further SDF military efforts south, into Raqqah, using air support and the carrot of further military support as leverage. Further SDF expansion to the west, from Manbij, should be discouraged through political pressure and the threat of withholding the support outlined above. The YPG is likely to continue pressing for an offensive west towards Al-Bab, both due to their basic goal of unifying the cantons and as a tactic to secure other concessions from the U.S. – this should be resisted. The U.S. should ratchet up pressure on the PYD/YPG to incorporate non-Kurdish and non-PYD groups into the military coalition and the administration of the cantons, as well as allow non-Kurdish residents to return to their homes. This will reduce the risk of Arab-Kurdish conflict and may make it easier for Turkey to, eventually, accept some level of Kurdish autonomy as part of a larger bargain in Syria. The military effort against ISIL is a useful mechanism to advance these efforts at inclusion and cooperation.

The U.S. should continue supporting Turkish operations toward Al-Bab and against ISIL by providing intelligence, surveillance, and air support. But the U.S. should consistently reinforce to Turkey that any operations toward Manbij or against SDF would be highly damaging to the overall coalition effort and should be avoided. At the same time, the U.S. should reiterate that it supports inclusive local administration along the entire length of the Syrian-Turkish border and opposes Kurdish separatism. It should, however, make clear that Kurds must be given assurances regarding their status in a post-war Syria, as part of any eventual political settlement. All this may help reassure Ankara that the U.S. will not ignore Turkish interests. Of course, at some point in a putative settlement process, the U.S. would have to confront the politically difficult question of federation or some other form of Kurdish autonomy, vigorously opposed not only by the Turks but by many of the U.S.-backed rebels as well; given the sharply differing views of its two sets of Syria-based allies, Washington may want to postpone consideration of that question for as long as possible.

Regional Implications of the Turkish Incursion into Syria

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The strategic and operational implications of the Turkish incursion into Syria cannot be simply seen as a Turkish – Coalition issue, but has to be understood in the context of the wider problem set. Therefore, the following paper will address the current situation from the point of view of each of the actors affected (Syrian regime, Coalition vetted indigenous ground forces, the US and its coalition partners, Iran, the Kurds (collectively), Iraq, Russia, ISIL, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and Turkey), followed by a possible US/Coalition reaction to enhance the US/Coalition’s influence/advantage *vis a vis* that actor.

The Turkish incursion was primarily driven by an attempt to gain leverage as a stakeholder in the eventual post-conflict Syria. The Kurdish insurgency in Turkey is a perennial issue, and by attempting to limit Syrian Kurdish gains along their southern border, Turkey hopes to stymie any potential pan-Kurdish movement arising in post-ISIL Syria and Iraq if there arises a partitioning of Syria and/or a redrawing of Iraqi Kurdistan borders. The operational goal of building a buffer area outside of Turkey which will ostensibly draw ISIL/Kurdish attention away from Turkey proper is an understandable assumption, especially when viewed as a military action designed to draw attention away from the recent coup and the exceptional response by President Erdogan. The strategic goal of gaining credibility as a stakeholder in a post-ISIL Syria will most likely be successful, as there is little probability of Turkey returning to pre-incursion borders prior to an internationally recognized peace settlement.

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The US and Coalition members response should continue to be muted and to act as close, but ultimately uninvolved mediators in Turkish/Syrian Kurdish affairs. The reason is to ensure that outside groups do not reinforce the idea that Syrian Kurds are a separate state. A separate Syrian Kurdish autonomous region or proto-state would only serve to further fragment the region.

The Coalition had been expecting a Turkish action of this type for several years, and the timing was the only unknown. Operationally, the opening of a true “northern” front against ISIL is a welcome addition to the battlefield geometry which places a higher caliber threat against ISIL

than the YPG forces they were accustomed to fighting. Strategically, the difficulty will be in limiting Turkish gains to make them as temporary as possible. A worst case scenario would

be a deep Turkish incursion into Syria, and then Turkey retaining that land post-conflict as a permanent, if non-official addition to Turkey. The Coalition must attempt to ensure that this scenario does not occur, as it will be seen as a Turkish action against Arabs, Kurds, and Iran (Persians). That will lead to possible regional ethnic issues as Arabs, Kurds and Persians find a common enemy in Turks.

Coalition vetted indigenous ground forces should be kept as far from the Turkish offensive as possible, since battlefield command, control and coordination will become problematic with additional actors involved. Operationally, with Turkey being a credible threat to the northern ISIL-controlled area, Coalition vetted ground forces can be better utilized for small scale offensive actions thereby forcing ISIL to conduct wide area and rear area defense within ISIL-controlled southern areas, dispersing ISIL forces and allowing for large scale anti-ISIL offensive actions to be conducted by combined arms forces such as Turkey in the north, Syrian government forces (including Russian and Iranian elements) in the west, and the YPG (considered to be light motorized forces supported by Coalition enablers) to the north-east. Strategically, the Turkish offensive could be a major issue if the Coalition vetted ground forces are able to be coopted by Turkey for use post-conflict, or if the Coalition vetted ground forces are drawn from areas that fall within the Turkish occupied territories post-conflict.

The US and Coalition should again strive to ensure that the Turkish controlled areas are a temporary condition in order to ensure a post-conflict peace instead of a temporary ceasefire prior to a regional conflict occurring along more ethnic lines.

Russia most likely has no issues with the Turkish intervention, either operationally, or strategically. Operationally, the inclusion of another capable offensive element against ISIL is welcome, as the shorter the conflict can be made, the better off Russia will be with regard to blood and treasure, not to mention domestic and international prestige. Strategically, although Russia and Turkey have had a long history of discord, there is an opportunity for Russia and Turkey to find common ground. This common ground may be used to widen the gap between Turkey and NATO. The threat of Turkey leaning East presents a strategic choice to either support Turkey or some faction of Kurds, and regardless of which way the US and Europe decide, Russia has the ability to support the other side either overtly (Turkey) or covertly (a Kurdish faction).

Due to this, the US and the Coalition must find a way to publicly support Turkey, while at the same time limiting any permanent anti-Kurdish initiatives. This is essential in that the Kurds are the fourth largest stateless nation with 32 million people. It will take a concerted effort across the region to ensure a popular pan-Kurdish movement does not materialize if Iraqi Kurdistan increases in size and a partitioned Syria becomes a reality with an autonomous Kurdish region. If the US and the Coalition were to support the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, Turkey would move incrementally towards Russia, whereas if the Syrian Kurds are slighted, Russia would be in a position to surreptitiously aid the PKK and Syrian Kurds due to increasing Russian influence in Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Syria has the most to gain operationally, and the most to lose strategically due to the Turkish incursion. Operationally, the inclusion of Turkey into the conflict increases the threat against ISIL, and should posit a faster resolution to the conflict as ISIL controlled territory is eroded until Raqqah is liberated, and delivering a death knell to the idea of the ISIL caliphate in the near- to mid-term. Strategically, however, the Turkish incursion into

Syria shows the mid-term inability of Syria to maintain control of the entirety of their territory, and the relative strength of Turkey. This show of force, whether or not Turkey withdraws to pre-conflict borders will almost assuredly lead to an arms race between Syria (supported by Russia and Iran) and Turkey. Turkey will be emboldened by this intervention and the support of the US/NATO, and may feel the need to maintain this buffer zone in Syria which will lead to a difficult position for the US/NATO/Coalition as they will be tacitly supporting an action which is difficult to defend under international law.

The Coalition must not allow the Turkish incursion zone to become permanent and incur the wrath of the Syrian populace if there is a Syrian regime change. Due to the influence of both Russia and Iran, it would be difficult to imagine a pro-Western regime, but if the new regime is nationalist, or even Arabic, it would be a bitter pill to accept a Turkish owned disputed area in Syria.

ISIL views the Turkish incursion as an operational defeat as they were quickly displaced from their forward positions, and did so quickly without defending. This can be viewed as pragmatism, fear or advance warning. Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that the Turkish incursion was remarkably successful in gaining a large amount of territory relatively quickly. Strategically, the question of advance warning becomes much more pressing. If there was collusion between some element in Turkey and ISIL, that will make the campaign against ISIL more difficult if partnered operations with Turkish forces become a reality. If there is no collusion between these forces, then it makes ISIL much more desperate as they are increasingly pressured on all fronts, and their defeat becomes much more inevitable as they will not have the ability to defend against a concerted offensive against the forces arrayed against them. Their most likely strategic goal is simply to prolong the conflict until fatigue sets in for the Coalition forces, and then attempt to fracture the Coalition and other opposing forces while moving their upper echelons of leadership and as many forces as they save to another theater of operation in order to maintain the viability of the ISIL brand. Alternately, it is possible that ISIL could attempt to simply return to being the resilient insurgent network that they evolved from, returning to a phase I/phase II insurgency.

Iraq, due to the support given by Iran can view the Turkish incursion as operationally welcome, but strategically problematic. This is due to the Iranian view that Iraq, Syria and Lebanon are within their sphere of influence. If the Turkish incursion becomes permanent, it will be seen as direct attack on Iranian influence in the region, possibly causing an outbreak of violence as Iran seeks to use proxies to dissuade Turkey from retaining that area. The Iraqi government may have a different view but, due to the increasing Iranian influence, the minority view may be quickly vilified into acquiescence using the recent ISIL/Sunni collusion.

Iran most likely views the Turkish incursion as a setback, since Turkey is another element on the battlefield that they cannot control and is hostile to Iran. The biggest issue is that operationally, the Turkish incursion points to the fact that Iranian support to the Syrian regime was not sufficient to stop ISIL. This is a narrative defeat for Iran, since the narrative they were attempting to spin was that they were able to support the Assad regime and save Syria. With their inability to defeat the anti-Assad forces, the expansion of ISIL into Iraq, Coalition operations into Syria, Russian aid to Syria and finally the Turkish incursion, it will be difficult to spin the Syrian campaign into a victorious narrative.

The US and the Coalition should once again attempt to ensure that the Turkish incursion is only temporary, and build a narrative showing that it was global assistance that was necessary for the dissolution of ISIL in both Syria and Iraq, and that all who participated in the campaign were necessary. This will prevent a loss of face for Iran, Turkey, Iraq, the Kurds and Russia, which is necessary for a peaceful post-ISIL Syria.

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham views the Turkish incursion as an operational boon that will make their conflict against ISIL and the Syrian regime easier as both ISIL and Syria will have an existential threat to worry about. This makes the strategic victory over ISIL and Syria more probable, but the strategic context of the Turkish incursion depends upon the length of the occupation. If the occupation is temporary, that will allow Jabhat Fatah al-Sham to gather strength in the security vacuum of a post-conflict Syria. If the incursion results in a permanent Turkish presence in the country, then Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has to determine if they will continue to accept surreptitious Turkish assistance in exchange for becoming a loose proxy of Turkey, or if they will return to their ideological roots and conduct offensive actions against apostate and Western backed governments.

The US and Coalition governments should continue to urge all state actors to refrain from using forces that are unaccountable under international law as proxies in this conflict, since doing so will inevitably lead to further conflict as heavily armed, and trained proxy forces will be unwilling to cede power to another party that may or may not have been an enemy during the previous conflict. The desire to create proxy forces that are easily controllable is strong, but ultimately misplaced unless placed under effective command and control by the supporting nation. Barring that, these groups will be free to cause conflict until they are disbanded or destroyed.

In conclusion, the Turkish incursion into Syria affects multiple actors including the Syrian regime, Coalition vetted indigenous ground forces, the US and its coalition partners, Iran, the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, Iraq, Russia, ISIL, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, and Turkey. Each of these actors has an operational and strategic view of the Turkish intervention. Those that view the Turkish action as operationally beneficial are Turkey, the US, the Coalition, Russia, Iraq, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the Syrian regime, and Coalition vetted indigenous ground forces. The forces operationally hindered by the Turkish incursion are the Syrian Kurds, Iran and ISIL. Strategically, Turkey and Russia have a positive view of the Turkish operations, whereas the Syrian regime, Iran, Iraq, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, ISIL, the US and the Coalition, the Syrian Kurds and the Coalition vetted indigenous ground forces all will be negatively affected by the Turkish actions.

Comments on Turkish Incursion

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With regard to the implications of the Turkish intervention in Syria is primarily a maneuver by Erdogan to display an appearance of being in charge (of the army and foreign policy) in the wake of the attempted coup, but in reality what seems to be an offensive posture is a defensive one that seeks to mask the big challenges the Turkish president faces at home. These include: 1) his continuing confrontation with the PKK (which he resumed as an extension of his domestic political agenda), 2) his need to consolidate control over his own

party as well as the general public and the civil service (it's true that he has fired 80,000 civil servants and is going after opposition or independent media, academics, activists, which consolidates his personal grip, but Turkey is a diverse, complex, modern country and these measures will also inflict a high social, political, and economic cost too), and 3) his need to worry about the army (it's true he's defeated the coup, but the army will not regain its full cohesion and effectiveness for years, during which he's implicated it in a nasty domestic war with the country's Kurdish population, and he can't be absolutely sure that it is now wholly neutralized politically.)

So in my assessment, controlling a narrow strip of land inside Syria by Turkish units is more about show and PR, as are statements about being ready to work with the US to regain Raqqa. The Turkish army can't reach Raqqa without going either thru Syrian Kurdish areas (if going directly south from the border), which would be very problematic and disruptive for US military planning, or through or adjacent to Assad regime forces (if hooking via Aleppo East and then south of the Tabqa dam to Raqqa). The Turkish Defence Minister Isik has publicly said Turkey will "support" but not be part of the Euphrates Force.

The takeaway is that no single ground force operating in Syria today can take Raqqa on its own, no matter how much air support it gets: not the Assad regime, the Kurds/SDF, nor any combination of the "moderate" opposition (or non-moderate opposition for that matter). But I don't see a coalition of any two of these forces working together, either.

Author Biographies

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Dr. Denise Natali is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) where she specializes on the Middle East, trans-border Kurdish issue, regional energy security, and post-conflict state-building. Dr. Natali joined INSS in January 2011 as the Minerva Chair, following more than two decades of researching and working in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria.

Dr. Natali is the author of numerous publications on Kurdish politics, economy and energy, including *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse University Press, 2010) and *The Kurds and the State: Evolving National Identity in Iraq, Turkey and Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), which was the recipient of the Choice Award for Outstanding Academic Title (2006) (trans. to Turkish *Kurtler ve Devlet: Iraq, Turkiye ve Iran'da Ulusal Kimligin Gelismesi* (Istanbul: Avesta Press, 2009). Dr. Natali is currently writing a second edition of *The Kurds and the State* to include Syria.

Dr. Natali also specializes in post-conflict relief and reconstruction, having worked on the Gulf Relief Crisis Project for the American Red Cross International Division in Washington D.C., as director of cross-border operations for a non-governmental organization (INGO) in Peshawar Pakistan, and information officer for the U.S Agency for International Development's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in northern Iraq in support of Operation Provide Comfort II. Dr. Natali returned to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq from 2005-2010, where she engaged in research, teaching and university start-ups, including positions as the Head of the International Politics Department at the University of Kurdistan-Hawler (UKH) and Associate Professor, Dean of Students, and Director of International Exchanges at the American University of Iraq-Sulaimaniya (AUI-S).

Dr. Natali received a Ph.D in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, a Master of International Affairs (MIA) at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and a B.A. in government at Franklin&Marshall College. She also has studied at the L'Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris, the University of Tehran (Deh Khoda Language Program) and Tel Aviv University. Dr. Natali speaks French, Kurdish and conversational Farsi.

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A historian by training, Dr. Cagaptay wrote his doctoral dissertation at Yale University (2003) on Turkish nationalism. Dr. Cagaptay has taught courses at Yale, Princeton University, Georgetown University, and Smith College on the Middle East, Mediterranean, and Eastern Europe. His spring 2003 course on modern Turkish history was the first offered by Yale in three decades. From 2006-2007, he was Ertegun Professor at Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies.

Dr. Cagaptay is the recipient of numerous honors, grants, and chairs, among them the Smith-Richardson, Mellon, Rice, and Leylan fellowships, as well as the Ertegun chair at Princeton. He has also served on contract as chair of the Turkey Advanced Area Studies Program at the State Department's Foreign Service Institute. In 2012 he was named an American Turkish Society Young Society Leader.



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Bernard Carreau is the Deputy Director of the Center for Complex Operations (CCO) at the National Defense University. He established and currently supervises a lessons learned program focusing on the operational and strategic effectiveness of the military and interagency teams in overseas contingency operations. He has led numerous collection and analysis teams to Afghanistan and Iraq. Mr. Carreau is the author or supervisor of recent reports related to the strategic effectiveness of special operations forces, stability operations, transitional public security, civilian stabilization capabilities, and socio-cultural intelligence analysis. He is currently completing a study on behalf of the Joint Staff/J7 on the question of whether the national security decision-making and strategic planning processes were effective in achieving U.S. national objectives in Syria. Mr. Carreau was an advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Washington and Baghdad on private sector development and an advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Trade. He has a Master's degree from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).



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Alexis Everington is the Director of Research for Madison Springfield, Inc. His qualifications include 15 years program management experience leading large scale, cross-functional, multi-national research & analytical programs in challenging environments including Iraq, Libya, Mexico, Syria and Yemen. Alexis advised both the Libyan opposition government during the Libyan revolution of 2011 and its immediate aftermath and most recently, the Syrian opposition military. He has also helped train several other foreign militaries and has taught at the NATO School. In addition, Alexis developed the Target Audience Analysis methodology that is currently employed across the US national security community and has been applied most recently in Afghanistan, Jordan, and Lebanon. His educational credentials include a Master of Arts from Oxford University in European and Middle Eastern Studies and his language skills include a fluency in Arabic, Spanish, French and Italian as well as a proficiency in Mandarin. Alexis is currently leading large-scale qualitative and quantitative primary research studies in Libya, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.

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Prof. Hamit Bozarslan has obtained his PhD degrees in history at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in 1992 and in political sciences at the l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris in 1994. He is author of *La question kurde. Etats et minorités au Moyen-Orient* (1997), *Une histoire de la violence au Moyen-Orient: de la fin de l'Empire ottoman à al-Qaïda* (2008), *Conflit kurde* (2009), *Le luxe et la violence : domination et contestation chez Ibn Khaldûn* (2014), *Révolution et état de violence* :

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Major Aguero has a Master of Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University, an MBA from Webster University and a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from St. Edwards University.



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Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois is Executive Vice President at NSI, Inc. She has also served as co-chair of a National Academy of Sciences study on Strategic Deterrence Military Capabilities in the 21st Century, and as a primary author on a study of the Defense and Protection of US Space Assets. Dr. Astorino-Courtois has served as technical lead on a variety of rapid turn-around, Joint Staff-directed Strategic Multi-layer Assessment (SMA) projects in support of US forces and Combatant Commands. These include assessments of key drivers of political, economic and social instability and areas of resilience in South Asia; development of a methodology for conducting provincial assessments for the ISAF Joint Command; production of a "rich contextual understanding" (RCU) to supplement intelligence reporting for the ISAF J2 and Commander; and projects for USSTRATCOM on deterrence assessment methods.

Previously, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a Senior Analyst at SAIC (2004-2007) where she served as a STRATCOM liaison to U.S. and international academic and business communities. Prior to SAIC, Dr. Astorino-Courtois was a tenured Associate Professor of International Relations at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX (1994-2003) where her research focused on the cognitive aspects of foreign policy decision making. She has received a number of academic grants and awards and has published articles in multiple peer-reviewed journals. She has also taught at Creighton University and as a visiting instructor at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Dr. Astorino-Courtois earned her Ph.D. in International Relations and MA in and Research Methods from New York University. Her BA is in political science from Boston College.

Finally, Dr. Astorino-Courtois also has the distinction of having been awarded both a US Navy Meritorious Service Award and a US Army Commander's Award.