Withdrawal of US Forces from Syria - II

Click here for Part - I.

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What is the issue?

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- US national security adviser John Bolton recently outlined conditions for a U.S. troop departure from Syria.
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- This has given way to the recent tussle between US and Turkey.
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What is the dispute?

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- The US national security adviser said the troops would leave the war-torn country after the Islamic State is beaten.
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- He also said Kurds, U.S. allies in the fight against the IS, should be protected.
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- This contradicts with Trump’s insistence that the withdrawal would be immediate and without any pre-conditions.
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- Turkish President Erdogan refused to John Bolton’s suggestions for an orderly exit and the plan to protect the Syrian Kurds.
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- Turkey considers the Syrian Democratic Forces, the official military wing of Syrian Kurdistan, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party.
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- The Kurdistan Workers’ Party is, indeed, deemed a terrorist group by Turkey and the U.S.
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- Turkey sees an autonomous, militarily powerful Kurdistan on the Syrian side

of the border as a threat to its territorial integrity.
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- But Turkey was limited by U.S. presence in the Kurdish-populated region in pursuing its own military options.
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- It is highly likely that Turkey could attack the Kurds as soon as the U.S. troops leave.
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What is the implication?

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- Tensions were so high that Mr. Erdogan refused to meet Mr. Bolton, who was in Turkey.
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- The U.S. is now in a dilemma.
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- Its President has announced the withdrawal. But it cannot just exit Syria without considering the existing geopolitical equations in the region.
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- Part of the problem is with the way Mr. Trump announced his decision to withdraw troops.
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- He should have held talks with the stakeholders, including Turkey, Russia and Kurds, before taking a decision.
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- He could have at least used his intent to pull out from Syria as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from other countries involved in the civil war.
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What could be done now?

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- The U.S. could go ahead with the unilateral pull-out irrespective of what

Turkey does.
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- This would leave the Kurds at the mercy of Mr. Erdogan and the Turkish troops.
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- Otherwise, Trump can wait on his decision and continue to station troops in Syria.
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- This can influence, at least partially, the outcome of the civil war.
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- But this is unlikely, given his aversion to keeping troops indefinitely in Syria (and other West Asian conflict zones).
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- In the third case, the U.S. can stagger the withdrawal and pursue talks with Turkey, Russia and the Syrian government.
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- It can try reaching an agreement to guarantee the protection of the Kurds and the defeat of the IS in Syria.
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- US should continue to keep diplomatic channels open to ensure that the pull-out is done in an orderly fashion.
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Source: The Hindu

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