
Turkey's Erdogan plans to expand Syrian military op, wants 'safe zones'

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Ankara may continue its operation against Islamic State deeper into Syria – to within just 50km of Aleppo, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says the Turkish military plans to create a 5,000-sq-km safe zone within the country.

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Erdogan says Turkey's operation in Syria, Euphrates Shield, which started on August 24, has cleared border regions from Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL).

"As part of the Euphrates Shield operation, an area of 900 sq km has been cleared of terror so far. This area is pushing south," Erdogan said, as cited by Reuters.

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However, the Turkish president wants to increase the area of this safe zone, which is also aimed at stopping the advance of Syrian Kurdish forces. *"We may extend this area to 5,000 sq km as part of a safe zone,"* he added.

President Erdogan also stated that the Turkish military would continue its push further into Syria and its troops would look to capture the IS-held town of Al-Bab, which is some 50km north-east of Aleppo.

"Jarablus and Al-Rai have been cleansed, now we are moving towards Al-Bab... We will go there and stop [IS] from being a threat to us," he said.

However, Turkey's plans for a safe zone or a no fly zone have been questioned by its allies, who are unsure how

feasible the plan is due to the number of ground troops and planes needed to patrol the area.

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Turkey's goal *"is likely to require the deployment of thousands of Turkish soldiers in Syria for years and increase risks of a possible military confrontation with the Syrian forces,"* Nihat Ali Ozcan, a strategist at the Economic Policy Research Foundation in Ankara, told Bloomberg.

Turkey has been supporting the Free Syrian Army (FSA) on the ground, which is a loose conglomeration of forces opposed to Syrian President Bashar Assad. However, Erdogan says he does not want the US military interfering in Ankara's affairs and has blamed Washington for increasing tensions with the rebels.

The Turkish president was referring to a small number of US special forces who had entered Al-Rai to help coordinate airstrike against IS. However, the FSA, considered to be American allies, kicked the US military out, calling them *"infidels"* and *"crusaders."*

"If you had rational people making rational policy – perhaps, but here is no evidence of that so far," Jim Jatras, a former US diplomat, told RT when asked if the reports about Syrian rebels threatening American soldiers could be a turning point in the country's conflict.

"The Obama administration's policy up to this point has been totally confused and contradictory, and now it is just reaching the point of bizarre," Jatras added.
