

10-March-17 – As more US troops enter Syria, the endgame becomes fuzzier

Description

By John Xenakis

We now have American, Russian, al-Assad regime, Free Syrian Army (FSA) Sunni insurgent, Turkish, Kurdish YPG, Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah soldiers all fighting in Syria. These forces are all united in their fight against their common enemy, ISIS, with absolutely no clarity whatsoever about what will happen if and when ISIS is defeated.

Furthermore, while the al-Assad regime still controls an area in western Syria along the Mediterranean coast, there are still large regions controlled by Sunni insurgents. Furthermore, the Kurdish YPG controls a large strip, almost 100 miles deep, along the entire northern border with Syria — except for a small region still controlled by Turkish forces and FSA insurgents.

Of the above forces, the Turks and the YPG Kurds are bitter enemies. The al-Assad regime and the FSA Sunni insurgents are bitter enemies. The Turks and the al-Assad regime are bitter enemies. They're all getting along now, more or less, because the common enemy is ISIS.

The Kurds would like to control the entire northern border with Turkey, and form an independent state called Rojava. The Turks are bitterly opposed to this, and will not give up the small region they control along the border. Bashar al-Assad will never tolerate even peaceful opposition from the Sunni insurgents. The Sunni insurgents will never stop fighting as long as Bashar al-Assad is president. Iran will not tolerate anyone else as president. Russia couldn't care less who's president, as long as they're controlling Syria. Iran will not tolerate Russia controlling Syria.

Those are all "big picture" issues. Even the current "small picture" issues are unresolved. There are Kurdish, Russian, American and Turkish in or around Manbij, all with different agendas. Who will end up controlling the city?

And who's going to be fighting ISIS in Raqqa? The US considers the YPG Kurds to be the best and most reliable force fighting ISIS, but Kurdish control of Raqqa will be intolerable to both Turkey and the al-Assad regime.

There actually is a kind of precedent in the fight to recapture Mosul Iraq from ISIS. The Iraqi army is entering the city from the east and doing the fighting. The Kurds are blocking ISIS from fleeing to the north. The Iran-backed Shia militias are blocking ISIS from fleeing to the west or south. They seem to have coordinated the attack, at least for the time being.

So in Syria it's a little different. Apparently, the Russians and the Kurds are joining forces in Raqqa, backed by American artillery. The battle hasn't yet begun, so we won't know for a while whether this will work.

So we have two "small picture" issues and a dozen "big picture" issues. Up until the last couple of

months, all of these forces were able to keep separate. The al-Assad regime was fighting in Aleppo, Turkey was fighting in northern Syria, Russia and the US-led coalition were coordinating airstrikes. But those simple solutions are no longer possible.

I read many media sources from many countries every day, and I have not read any article or analysis or white paper that convinces me that anyone has the vaguest clue what's going to happen in the endgame, if and when ISIS is defeated.

And this is why many people are concerned about the new deployment of American forces to Manbij and Raqqa. The concern is that once ISIS is defeated, all these forces will start fighting each other, and US troops will be drawn in and be part of a major new war.

As I've been writing for many years, Generational Dynamics predicts that the Mideast is headed for a major regional war, pitting Jews against Arabs, Sunnis against Shias, and various ethnic groups against each other. We may be seeing the start of that major regional war in Manbij and Raqqa. [Gulf News](#) and [Hurriyet \(Ankara\)](#) and [Arab News](#) and [The National \(UAE\)](#) and [Guardian \(London\)](#)