

CONFERENCE REPORT

# Demystifying Turkey's Operation Peace Spring





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# Speakers



## Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu is the Minister of Foreign Affairs, a position he has held for the 62nd, 64th and 65th Governments of the Republic of Turkey. From December 2013 to August 2014, he served as the Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator. From 2010 to 2012, he served as the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and following this, he became the PACE representative at the Venice Commission, a position he held from 2012 to 2014. Prior to these roles, he served as Chairman of the Turkish Delegation to the European Security and Defence Assembly from 2007 to 2010.

# Summary

**T**he session 'Demystifying Turkey's Operation Peace Spring' discussed Turkey's recent military operation to eliminate the terrorist threat from the PKK/YPG in

Northeast Syria.

The keynote speaker, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, explained Turkey's policy towards Syria and what Turkey wants in the country. FM Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey believes that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and strongly supports the political process. Çavuşoğlu also added that as one of the guarantors of the Astana peace talks, Turkey will continue its commitment to reach a political settlement in Syria.

FM Çavuşoğlu discussed all the aspects of the Operation Peace Spring including why the operation was launched and what Turkey is trying to achieve through the operation. Çavuşoğlu stressed that the PKK/YPG terrorist

organisation has been trying to establish a de facto state in North-eastern Syria. As a result, the PKK/YPG has increased its attacks on Turkey and in Syria. It is in this context that Turkey launched 'Operation Peace Spring' to eliminate the threat of PKK/YPG, to guarantee Syria's territorial integrity and ensure the safe return of Syrian refugees who escaped not only Daesh and the Syrian Regime, but also the PKK/YPG in Northeast Syria.

FM Çavuşoğlu lastly talked about the planned safe zone agreed with the US and its importance for peace and stability in Syria. FM Çavuşoğlu explained that as a result of the agreement with the US, Turkey agreed to pause its operation until the PKK/YPG fully completes its withdrawal from Northeast Syria and abandons the heavy weapons supplied by the US. Çavuşoğlu explained that following the withdrawal, Turkey plans to establish a safe zone in northern Syria so the displaced Syrians can return to their country if they choose.

# Report

## Turkey's Objectives in Syria

Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu opened his speech by highlighting the threat of terrorism as one of the most difficult threats of our age. He stated that today no individual country can address the threat of terrorism alone and that we face two important obstacles to addressing the threat of terrorism.

FM Çavuşoğlu stated that the first problem is certain political groups or politicians end up supporting terrorist organisations just because they subscribe to a

similar ideology. Today, many far-left political groups, particularly in Europe, are trying to reclassify the PKK out from the list of designated terrorist organisations just because they sympathise with their Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The second problem is the tendency of states to use terrorists as proxies. FM gave the example of the tactical decision taken by the US to use YPG/PKK to fight against Daesh.

## Turkey's Objectives in Syria

FM Çavuşoğlu stated that, first and foremost, Turkey supports the political process in Syria and believes that there is no military solution to the conflict and that it can only be resolved politically.

He recalled Turkey's role in the Astana process as a guarantor state and reiterated Turkey's commitment to continue its efforts to reach a political settlement in Syria. He also warned that for a political settlement to be attained, a ceasefire on the ground is a must. To ensure the success of any political settlement, Turkey played a crucial role in confidence-building measures

between the regime and the opposition and has helped secure numerous prisoner exchanges.

FM Çavuşoğlu also explained Turkey's contribution to fighting terrorism in Syria. He emphasised that through 'Operation Euphrates Shield' launched in August 2016, Turkey eliminated many Daesh terrorists and secured over 2000 square kilometres from the group. Similarly, through 'Operation Olive Branch', which was directed against the YPG/PKK, another 2000 square kilometres were secured.

## 'Operation Peace Spring'

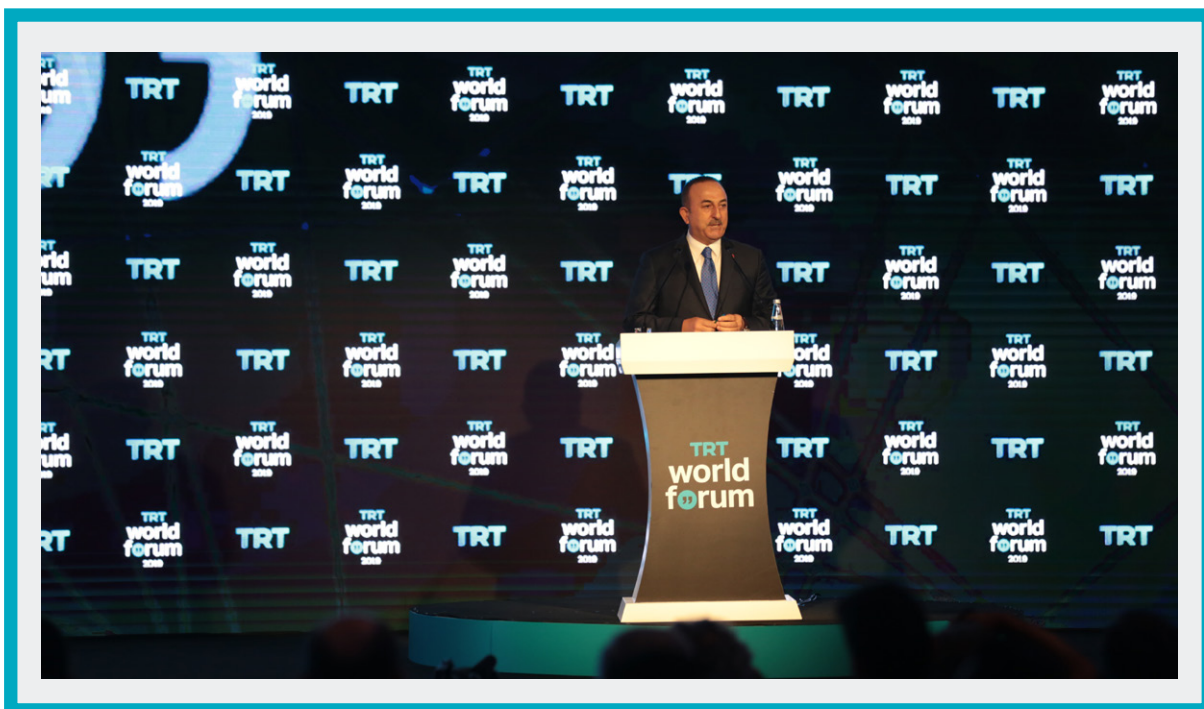
FM Çavuşoğlu explained that with the support of the US, the YPG/PKK established a de facto 'terror state' in the northeastern part of Syria and increased its attacks against Turkey.

FM Çavuşoğlu stated that despite repeated calls from Turkey to the US to stop providing weapons to the YPG/PKK, the US continued to provide arms to the terrorist organisation even after the main threat from Daesh had been eliminated. FM Çavuşoğlu also said that the YPG/PKK terrorist organisation oppressed local people without any discrimination including

Kurds, Arabs, Christian minorities and Turkmens in the territory under their control in Syria.

As a result, Turkey launched its third operation in Syria, 'Operation Peace Spring', to eliminate the YPG/PKK threat, to establish a safe zone along its border, and to ensure the territorial integrity of Syria.

The justification for 'Operation Peace Spring' was based on Article 51 of the UN Charter and UN Security Council resolutions on terrorism, as well as the Adana Agreement between Turkey and Syria.



FM Çavuşoğlu declared that the primary aim of the operation is to eliminate the terrorist threat on the Turkish-Syrian border, which poses a threat to both Turkey's national security and Syria's territorial integrity. Çavuşoğlu stated that YPG/PKK aims to divide Syria and to create a de facto state along the Turkey-Syria border.

FM Çavuşoğlu also touched upon the prevalent 'Turks versus Kurds' narrative propagated by much of the

international media. Çavuşoğlu reiterated that Turkey's operation does not target Kurds. He said that the YPG/PKK terrorist organisation does not represent the Kurds in Syria and that many Syrian Kurds have been oppressed by the group and subsequently sought refuge in Turkey. Turkey currently hosts 350,000 Syrian Kurds. Most of them were forced by the YPG to leave after the group confiscated their properties, and they are now living in Turkey.

## Turkey and the US in Syria

FM Çavuşoğlu also touched upon the deal between Turkey and the US related to North East Syria. He explained that following the US delegation's visit to Ankara, which included Vice President Pence, Secretary Pompeo and National Security Adviser O'Brien, as well as Syria's Special Representative Jim Jeffrey, Turkey and the US agreed on 13 points.

According to the joint statement, the US acknowledged Turkey's legitimate security concerns and accepted the legitimate grounds for undertaking 'Operation Peace Spring', its objective and that the proposed safe zone will be secured by the Turkish army. According

*Turkey currently hosts 350,000 Syrian Kurds. Most of them were forced by the YPG to leave after the group confiscated their properties.*

to the agreement, the US agreed on the withdrawal of YPG elements and the operation would be paused until PKK/YPG completely withdraws from the areas in question. Once the withdrawal is complete, Turkey will halt the operation and collect the heavy weapons that were supposed to be left behind by the YPG. Lastly, the US agreed to lift all the sanctions that have been placed on Turkey.

FM Çavuşoğlu said that Turkey and Russia would also work towards the full elimination of YPG/PKK elements from its border with Syria. FM Çavuşoğlu

ended his speech by reiterating Turkey's strong will to end terrorism in Syria and assured that Turkey is keen to work with the international community, the Astana guarantors and the UN to reach a political settlement in Syria.

## Key Takeaways

- Turkey supports the political process and believes that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis and should be resolved politically.
- Turkey wants to secure its border with Syria from terrorist elements and want to create a safe zone in Syria so some refugees can return to their country.
- The YPG/PKK terrorist organisation aims to divide Syria and create a de facto state along the Turkish border.
- The YPG/PKK continues to launch indiscriminate attacks against Turkey. Since the operation, Turkey has been hit with more than 1081 rockets and mortars in communities near Syrian border, which have led to the deaths of 20 civilians.
- The goal of 'Operation Peace Spring' is to eliminate the threat of the YPG/PKK along Turkey's border with Syria, guarantee Syria's territorial integrity and secure a safe zone for the voluntary return of refugees.
- The deal between Turkey and the US entails US accepting the legitimacy of operation and its objective, the withdrawal of YPG elements from the area under consideration and a recollection of heavy weapons and demolitions of fortifications, which were given to YPG by the US.



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