



Afghanistan's Ripples: Can the US withdraw from Iraq?

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Between August 2nd and August 18, clashes erupted between the Syrian regime army and the armed opposition groups in Daraa province in southern Syria, after the Syrian regime threatened military action against the groups if they do not commit to a roadmap proposed by Russia, which eventually aims to help the Syrian army retake control on the southern parts of the country.

The crisis flared up on July 25 when the regime forces asked the inhabitants to give up light arms in implementation of a deal reached back in 2018. The inhabitants rejected the demands prompting the regime army to besiege the city to force the armed groups to surrender.

Stances of the Parties Involved

These can be outlined as follows:

1- Russia's roadmap: The roadmap proposed by Russia on August 15th involves all areas in Daraa that are not under the control of the regime. The plan demands the militants surrender their light and medium weapons, and provides for deportation of those who refuse to act in compliance and reject settlement. Additionally, it would allow the regime forces to search for weapons and ammunition in Daraa al-Balad district and retake control of all Daraa

province.

The Russian roadmap clearly sides with the Syrian regime, which means that any military operation launched by the regime army in this area will be supported by Russia's airpower, which improves its chances for success. Despite this, Moscow seeks to have military escalation as the last resort so as to avoid triggering a new wave of refugees and international criticism. Moreover, any military operations in the area will raise concerns in both Jordan and Israel, especially because the areas border the occupied Golan Heights.

2- Syrian regime's intolerance: The regime forces insist on removing figures accused of terrorism from Daraa, and attacking nine military installations and security checkpoints in the area, as well as retaking

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full control of the city. This caused the failure of several rounds of negotiations, held in August under Russian supervision, between the Central Committees of Daraa and representatives of the Syrian regime. It also caused the failure of several attempts to reach a ceasefire and a new agreement.

Daraa is a vital area for the Syrian regime because it is home to the Naseeb border crossing between Syria and Jordan, which was one of the most important routes for trade exchange between the two countries before the war broke out in Syria. Hence, regaining control of the crossing is a priority for the Syrian regime which is seeking to focus on reconstruction efforts after the war comes to an end.

3- Central committees' demand for modifying Russia's roadmap: The Central Committees, which represents the inhabitants of Daraa, seeks modification of numerous terms of the Russian roadmap. The most important of these is commitment to the old settlement deal signed back in 2018, which prevents the regime army from entering Daraa in exchange for allowing a civilian police force to deploy and operate unhampered in the city. The deal also states that Iranian militias should withdraw from southern Syria, hand over their heavy weaponry under the supervision of a committee set up by Russia and pull out military reinforcements besieging Daraa al-Balad.

The tribes of Horan issued a statement on August 5th denouncing the increasing military mobilization of combat forces. Later they issued another statement calling for decentralized administration for Daraa province. The Syrian regime rejected the demands and described them as an attempt for secession.

The armed groups in Daraa are accused of being affiliated with Turkey and Qatar which seek to encourage armed action against the Syrian regime and inflict the heaviest losses possible on the Syrian regime as possible, after the armed opposition failed to topple the Syrian regime.

4- Washington's Call on Damascus to Stop the Offensive: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on August 4th, called on the regime of Bashar

Assad to immediately stop the offensive on Daraa, but Washington has not taken any further steps or imposed sanctions on Damascus. It may be content with having US troops already deployed to Jordan and a possible intervention against any threats posed by Iran.

The United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the urgent evacuation operations it had to conduct after the Taliban took control of the capital Kabul, may further distracted the US Administration from following the developments in Daraa.

5- International Warnings Against a New Wave of Refugee: The United Nations documented the displacement of at least 18,000 civilians from Daraa al-Balad, since July 28th.

Due to the frequent shelling by the Syrian regime forces, as well the stricter measures imposed on the entrances and exits of Daraa al-Balad and other areas to force the opposition groups to surrender, give up their arms and move to northern Syria. Additionally, there are fears that the regime army would carry out its threats of storming Daraa al-Balad if the armed groups do not respond to the proposals for reconciliation set forth in the Russian roadmap.

Rising Regional Concerns

Israel and Jordan are monitoring the developments in Daraa and fear any impact on their internal security. These can be explained as follows:

1- Jordan's security concerns: Jordan fears that the fighting in Daraa, which is on its border with Syria, might cause a new wave of mass exodus of refugees to its territory, which would increase the burden of hosting more refugees, estimated at more than one million.

Jordan has concerns over the intense presence of Iranian troops and militias close to Jordan's border and inside Daraa city. Jordanian King Abdullah II recently noted that Jordan was attacked by Iranian-made drones. Such threats posed by Iran could be what promoted the signing of a joint defense agreement between Amman and Washington and



the installation of a US military base on Jordanian territory, especially because the 2018 US-Russian agreement, which provides for keeping any Iranian militia 60 kilometers away from Jordan's border, has not been implemented.

Jordan prefers deployment of the 8th Brigade, part of the 5th Corps, to keep the Iranian militias away from the border with Syria. The brigade was formed under Russian supervision from the inhabitants of Daraa and southern Syria where families and tribes have blood ties on the other side of the border.

2- Israel's caution: The situation in Daraa is raising concern in the Israeli security establishment not because it is close to the Israeli border, but because of Iran's endeavor to establish presence in southern Syria and have an outpost for attacking Israel. Although president Bashar Assad, according to Israeli views, is not defending Iranian troops' presence inside Syria, he nonetheless uses them to serve the regime's interests and retake control of areas that are not under the control of the regime.

There are views that there are no purely Iranian regular troops in Daraa. Rather it is hundreds of

militants from Hezbollah and other militias loyal to Tehran, armed with light and heavy weapons and drones, that worry Israel, especially because, previously, Iran attempted to attack Israel using drones launched from Syria.


According to previous understandings between Russia and Israel, Tel Aviv would not target any Iranian troops that provide support to the Assad regime. It will rather attack any forces that seek to establish permanent bases for Iran. Therefore, Israel will only monitor the situation in Daraa and wait for the outcome of the ongoing negotiations about the city.

3- Turkish concerns over Idlib: Ankara is aware of the fact that the Syrian regime's success in seizing control on southern Syria will embolden it to focus its efforts on northern Syria and Idlib province in particular where terror groups supported by Turkey are based. That is why it would be in the best interest of Turkey if the Syrian regime fails in Daraa even though Turkey practically lacks tools to change the military situation in southern Syria because of the Assad regime's siege of Daraa.


In conclusion, the Syrian regime may opt for seizing control of Daraa by military force, using in particular Iranian and Russian support for the potential military offensive, if no agreement is reached about the Russian roadmap, which seeks to remove militants, who refuse to surrender their arms, and later deport them to northern Syria.

ABOUT FARAS

Future for Advanced Research and Studies (FARAS) is an independent think tank founded on April 4, 2014 in Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. FARAS seeks to enrich public dialogue, support decision-making and enhance academic research pertaining to future trends that currently constitute a real problem in the Middle East region. In light of instability and unpredictability, the overarching goal of FARAS is to help ward off future shocks regarding these developments.

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