

## Turkey opens a new chapter in the Syrian crisis

The Turkish invasion of Rojava marks the opening of a new chapter in the long-running Syrian civil war. A conflict that has been dragging on unresolved since 2011 and which is capable of inflaming the whole Levant and even the entire Middle Eastern region with its cyclical upsurges. Turkey intervenes again in Syria in accordance with its primary desire to reclaim the imperial status lost in 1918. Today, that means knocking out the Kurdish armed groups settled east of the Euphrates following their campaign against the so-called Islamic State, which culminated in the conquest of Raqqa (2017) and the expulsion of the al-Baghdadi militias in the southern deserts. Seen from Ankara, the Kurds represent an existential threat: the "people without State" has always dreamed of establishing their own statehood authority in the territories in which they're majority, including parts of today's Turkey, where Kurds constitute at least 20 percent of population. If the Kurdish "menace" embodies the potential to shake the foundations of the Turkish state, at the same time it offers the Erdogan government the perfect opportunity to pursue its neo-Ottoman dream. The Turkish president is inspired by the charter of the National Pact, designed by the last Ottoman parliament in 1920: a Greater Turkey comprising lands now formally Syrian and Iraqi, from Aleppo to Kirkuk via Mosul and Arbil. Hence the armed intervention in Syria of the last hours, to deprive the Syrian Kurds of their territorial continuity and above all to expand the Turkish sphere of influence in disputed and coveted lands. The launch of "Peace Spring" offensive

is a huge internal success for Erdogan, given its official goal of resettling south a part of the Arab refugees who fled from Syria to be hosted in Turkey (amid growing discontent), as well as its covert one of favouring the Arabization of the Syrian lands today ethnically Kurdish. There is no lack of unknowns, since the Turkish military expansion east of the Euphrates may exacerbate the confrontation with Ankara's geopolitical structural rivals. The Iranian government launched surprise military drills along the border with Turkey on the first day of the invasion, while Russia suggested moderation to Erdogan given Moscow's iron relationship with the regime in Damascus. The events of the last week also demonstrate the breadth of the divergence between Americans and Turks. Washington has long pursued a double Middle Eastern objective: the reduction of Iranian influence and the weakening of Turkish imperial ambitions. For this reason, it is legitimate to suspect that the technical go-ahead for Turkey's attack was part of some kind of expedient aimed at getting Ankara's ambitions bogged down on a land that is fatally hostile. However, the friction between the White House and the more ideologized component of US Congress - which accuses Trump of giving away the Middle East to Russians and Persians and to abandon the Kurds to their fate - risks revealing Washington's anti-Turkish bluff. Europe will have no other option than to pick up the fragments of yet another middle eastern crisis: whether it be a new influx of refugees or the return of foreign fighters who have fled Kurdish prisons.