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## Balance sheet in Syria

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Following the Turkish army's entry to Jarablus on Aug. 24, it took about two weeks for it to control the 98-kilometer Azaz-Jarablus line, which was controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) for almost two years.

We do not yet know to what extent this operation will prevent ISIL from using this border. However, Americans have started using the phrase "buffer zone" for this belt, which has a width of about 10 kilometers. Of course, how this zone will be maintained and who will protect it are not yet known. However, I will try to discuss the consequences of this military operation in the light of what we know today.

1.First of all, this is an operation with heavy consequences. Before full three weeks, six Turkish tanks were destroyed, two by the People's Protection Units (YPG) and four by ISIL. More importantly, in 17 days seven soldiers in these tanks died.

2.It is difficult for Free Syrian Army (FSA) elements, who now move together with the Turkish army, to protect those areas vacated by ISIL. Earlier this week, I asked Pentagon Spokesman Maj. John Dorrian about this. He answered, "I don't know." I met with one of the commanders

of the warring groups. While it was mentioned last week that they would move to Manbij, controlled by Syrian Democratic Forces (SDG), he said, “We have seized too much land. We don’t have enough forces to hold onto them; for this reason we have stopped advancing.” As a matter of fact, they stopped advancing because Washington opposed it, but what he said was also a strong justification.

3. We will see how huge a difficulty this justification will create now in Al-Bab, because now Washington does not have an objection. For the Turkish army to enter a ISIL-held 40 kilometers south of the border is a development that would please the Americans. According to the FSA commanders I met in the field, a 2,000-man FSA unit was ready 7 kilometers south of the Çobanbey border post. They said they had not received any instructions yet but were ready to walk to Al-Bab. Well, what about the rest of the belt? They told me they would leave 1,000 people behind for defense. They all have phrases like brigade and division in their names but this is actually a coalition made up of 13 different groups. Eight of them are CIA-supported MOM units; there are two working with the Pentagon, the Hamza division and the 51st Division. There are three independent groups: Ahrar Suriye, Ahrar Şarkiye and Zengi.

4. Well, let’s say the protection of the buffer zone is achieved. The Turkish army reinforced the region. Is it possible for a 2,000-man FSA force to capture Al-Bab? It is possible, but there are two issues here. The first is that the Turkish army, which lost six people and four tanks even in this low-density war against ISIL, may suffer more losses in a clash with ISIL which would be different than at the border zone, a place where ISIL would not want to withdraw. The second is lack of motivation. Why did Turkey enter Jarablus? The official explanation is ISIL. However, after taking Manbij on Aug. 12, the clashes that they were involved in with YPG/SDG are another reason. Well, since the Americans are saying now that the SDG will not proceed to Al-Bab and concentrate on Al-Raqqa, will there be a strong wish of Turkey for Al-Bab? I’m not sure.

5. What about Al-Raqqa, the operation President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said Turkey was ready to support? This statement does not have a translation in the field at this stage because this was said by the new American commander Gen. Stephen Townsend conducting the war against ISIL: He said the liberation of Al-Raqqa was suspended. Why? It is because of the tension experienced by the Turkish army with the YPG/SDG after its Jarablus operation. They are saying it is in the planning stage, but, they are waiting because of the risks of an operation to Al-Raqqa before ISIL’s access to Turkey’s border is closed.

The conclusion is that because this is all too new, we have not seen any consequences. However, everybody will test it in September. Will Turkey’s Jarablus operation fully prevent ISIL’s access to the Turkish border?

Will the Syrian-Turkish border, which now serves as a passage of 200 to 500 foreign fighters to join ISIL monthly, be closed? Will FSA forces and the Turkish army prevent ISIL from infiltrating the buffer zone? If these happen, then it means the operation has reached a successful point. If not, despite the losses Turkey already has, the Americans will set the table again.