
US SEEKS TO ADDRESS TURKEY WORRIES OVER IRAQ, SYRIA PUSHES: OFFICIAL

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Washington is making progress in addressing Turkey's concerns that the US plans to use Kurdish militia to help dislodge jihadists from Iraq and Syria, a senior US diplomat said in an interview broadcast Wednesday.

US Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken told NTV that Washington had plans to help local forces push Islamic State (IS) jihadists out of their strongholds in Raqa and Dabiq in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

But he vowed Washington would not undermine its NATO ally Turkey's security in any operation, amid concern in Ankara the United States planned to use Kurdish militia as its main allies.

US support for Kurdish militia forces in Syria is a source of friction in the two countries' relationship, as Ankara sees both the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its People's Protection Units (YPG) militia as terror groups.

Meanwhile, the paramilitary headquarters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which has waged a three decade insurgency against the Turkish state is in northern Iraq.

"What we're doing now is working on the plans to take back Mosul, take back Dabiq, take back Raqa," Blinken said, saying that these cities were "all that's left" for IS.

He said the plan for the capture of Mosul took into account Turkish concerns and had been "got a very positive reaction" in the Ankara talks, according to an English transcript of his comments.

On taking Raqa and Dabiq in Syria, he said: "We're in the process of talking through what the most

effective plan would be, who would be involved, how we would do it".

He acknowledged that the Syrian allies of the US on the ground in Syria contained a "Kurdish component" but said everything would be done in "full consultation" with Turkey.

"And we want to make sure that... Turkey's security is actually enhanced by these operations."

Blinken, along with US envoy for the coalition against IS, Brett McGurk, held two days of talks with Turkish officials.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had said Turkey could only join a US-led operation in Syria to retake Raqa if Kurdish fighters were excluded.

Washington sees Kurdish groups are the most effective forces on the ground to fight the jihadists.

Turkey's army has launched an ambitious operation inside Syria to cleanse its border from IS group and Kurdish militia, with the support of Syrian rebels.

Blinken praised the operation saying "thanks to extraordinary work by Turkey" IS no longer has access to the Turkish-Syrian border.

Kaynak/Source: