

The US administration's policy in Syria, a parody of incompetence and failure

By Rick Moran, American Thinker, 22 February 201

The administration's policy in Syria has now become a parody of incompetence and failure as "moderate" rebel forces backed by the CIA are at war with Kurdish rebel forces backed by the Pentagon.

And to make matters even more ridiculous, Turkey is now shelling Kurdish positions across the border, putting the US at odds with a member of NATO.

Yes, really.

Officials with Syrian rebel battalions that receive covert backing from one arm of the U.S. government told BuzzFeed News that they recently began fighting rival rebels supported by another arm of the U.S. government.

The infighting between American proxies is the latest setback for the Obama administration's Syria policy and lays bare its contradictions as violence in the country gets worse.

The confusion is playing out on the battlefield — with the U.S. effectively engaged in a proxy war with itself. "It's very strange, and I cannot understand it," said Ahmed Othman, the commander of the U.S.-backed rebel battalion Furqa al-Sultan Murad, who said he had come under attack from U.S.-backed Kurdish militants in Aleppo this week.

Furqa al-Sultan Murad receives weapons from the U.S. and its allies as part of a covert program, overseen by the CIA, that aids rebel groups struggling to overthrow the government of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, according to rebel officials and analysts tracking the conflict.

The Kurdish militants, on the other hand, receive weapons and support from the Pentagon as part of U.S. efforts to fight ISIS. Known as the People's Protection Units, or YPG, they are [the centerpiece](#) of the Obama administration's strategy against the extremists in Syria and coordinate regularly with U.S. airstrikes.

Yet as Assad and his Russian allies have routed rebels around Aleppo in recent weeks — rolling back Islamist factions and moderate U.S. allies alike, as aid groups warn of [a humanitarian catastrophe](#) — the YPG has seized the opportunity to take ground from these groups, too.

In the face of public objections from U.S. officials and reportedly backed by Russian airstrikes, the YPG has overrun key villages in the northern provinces of Aleppo and Idlib. It now threatens the town of Azaz, on the border with Turkey, through which rebel groups have long received crucial supplies. Over the weekend, Turkey began shelling YPG positions around Azaz in response, raising another difficult scenario for the U.S. in which its proxy is under assault from its NATO ally.

It may not seem possible, but it gets worse

Yet as America has looked on while Russia and Syria [target](#) its moderate rebel partners, it has failed to stop the YPG from attacking them too. “That is a major problem,” said Andrew Tabler, a Syria specialist at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. “It’s not just that it’s a nonsense policy. It’s that we’re losing influence so rapidly to the Russians that people just aren’t listening to us anymore.”

Secretary of State John Kerry announced a “provisional agreement” on a cease fire that is supposed to start in the next few days. But President Assad has made it clear there will only be a cease fire if the rebels stop fighting and the rebels have said that they will only stop fighting if Russia stops bombing them.

But Kerry continues to act as if the US is still the [big boy in the room](#):

“The modalities for a cessation of hostilities are now being completed,” Kerry said. “In fact, we are closer to a cease-fire today than we have been. A cessation of hostilities ... is possible over the course of these next hours.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry seemed to stop short of Kerry’s announcement. The ministry said Lavrov and Kerry spoke on the phone Sunday for a second day in a row and discussed “the modality and conditions” for a cease-fire in Syria that would exclude groups that the U.N. [Security Council](#) considers terrorist organizations.

Fighting has intensified in Syria

Fighting has intensified in Syria during recent weeks and an earlier deadline to cease military activities was not observed. The United States, Russia and other world powers agreed Feb. 12 on a deal calling for the ceasing of hostilities within a week, the delivery of urgently needed aid to besieged areas of Syria and a return to peace talks in Geneva.

U.N. envoy Staffan De Mistura halted the latest Syria talks on Feb. 3, because of major differences between the two sides, exacerbated by increased aerial bombings and a wide military offensive by Syrian troops and their allies under the cover of Russian airstrikes. The humanitarian situation has only gotten worse, with an estimated 13.5 million Syrians in need of aid, including 6 million children.

“Peace is better than more war,” Kerry said, standing next to Nasser Judeh, the foreign minister of Jordan, which hosts 635,000 Syrian refugees. “A political solution is better than then a futile attempt to try to find a military one that could result in so many more refugees, so many more jihadists, so much more destruction, and possibly even the complete destruction of Syria itself.”

This is a fantasy cease fire, as the Russians have made clear. They are not listening to us, and neither is anyone else. The United States of America has become a footnote in a region of the world where we used to dominate. But Obama and Kerry, besotted with the notion of “soft power” and that losing our dominant position will clear the path to peace, have entered an alternate reality where it is painful to watch their naive ideas crumble into nothing.

The world is laughing at us and Obama and Kerry can't hear it.