The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Recruits Syrian Kurds to Replace U.S.-Led Forces – VOA

December 20, 2019

The new military force will accompany Russian troops on patrol missions in the region. **Baderkhan Ahmad / AP / TASS**

Russia has opened recruitment centers for a new military force in northeastern Syria aimed at replacing U.S.-backed Kurdish groups that neighboring Turkey views as terrorists, the Voice of America broadcaster reported Thursday.

Turkey and its Syrian rebel allies launched a cross-border offensive against the Kurdish militia after President Donald Trump pulled U.S. forces from the area in October. Kurdish forces invited the Syrian regime and its close ally Russia to areas they previously controlled to defend against Turkey's assault.

Related article: Russia Condemns Turkey for Floating Idea of New Syria Operation

Russia's military has established a land and air presence in key northeast Syrian positions previously held by the U.S.

“The Russians have already opened recruitment centers in two towns in our region, including Amuda and Tal Tamr,” an unnamed Kurdish journalist told VOA.

Russia is primarily “recruiting ethnic Kurds” for its allied military group, the unnamed journalist told the U.S.-funded broadcaster. VOA cited the journalist as saying he knows “several young people who have signed up to join this force.”

The new fighters will mainly accompany Russian troops on patrol missions in the region, the outlet cited Kurdish military officials as saying.

“We want to make sure that we have a close military relationship with Russia,” an unnamed commander with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was quoted as saying.

The SDF, which is made up of Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) fighters that Turkey views as an offshoot of its outlawed militant group PKK, helped defeat the Islamic State in Syria.

“Those joining the new force are our people,” the senior unnamed SDF commander told VOA.

Clashes are not expected between the Russian-led forces and the SDF because, the commander said, “we are essentially involved in the recruiting and vetting process of the new fighters.”

Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/12/20/russia-recruits-syrian-kurds-to-replace-us-led-forces-voa-a68701