US must lead to pace peacekeeping efforts

By Peter Yeo
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G
en. Martin Dempsey hit it on the head this summer when — for the sake of global security — he called for our allies to bolster United Nations peacekeeping. “The complex array of the threats and, let’s call it geopolitical jockeying, requires all of us to contend with an unpredictable landscape, and our support to peacekeeping operations must keep pace with that unpredictability,” the Joint Chiefs chairman said. But with growing strains on our allies’ resources, such as the refugee crisis that has recently deluged borders, how can the U.S. ensure such a call will not fall on deaf — or at least distracted — ears, no matter how urgent?

When President Barack Obama convenes nations and chairs a U.N. peacekeeping summit next week, other U.N. member states will be asked to enhance, or in some cases commence, support for the growing number of missions the world has asked the U.N. to deploy. These 16 operations are acting manifestly in U.S. interests and bringing needed stability to hot spots in North Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere. If we expect allied nations to make and fulfill their promises, we must be willing to push, to criticize, and guide our own behaviors, the U.S. should show significant leadership as well.

The U.N. is, in fact, not complicated, request. Over the past 20 years, many Western nations have retreated from providing troops for U.N. peace operations. Currently, EU governments, for example, provide some 6,000 troops to peacekeeping missions. That’s less than 7 percent of the more than 80,000 troops contributed by Russia, 25,000 troops, or 40 percent, two decades ago. The United States provides 28 troops — and the rest of the world has growing ties with Iran. Second, the militia has close links with the Democratic Union Party, which is mistrusted by our ally, Turkey. The U.S. commanders have discussed with the YPG counterparts a move south that would squeeze the Raqqa region, while U.S. and coalition planes and drones attack the city from the air. Once Kurdish fighters had cordoned the areas near Raqqa, the final assault to clear the city and hold it would be left to a Sunni Arab force. Muslim said that about 3,000 members of the Shamar tribe are fighting alongside the YPG in Hasaka province, northeast of Raqqa, and over 1,000 more Sunnis are fighting closer to the city. But any such assault on Raqqa is probably months away.

The YPG has been the most reliable ally in the fight against the extremists. Air support wouldn’t risk the YPG in Hasaka province. Third, the Kurdish fighters get high marks from U.S. commanders. Backed by U.S. air support, they’ve swept west from their bases in a terrorist organization. which the Turkish government regards as a terrorist organization.

Syria has been a nightmare for U.S. policymakers partly because the order of battle there is so tangled. The rampaging YPG is backed by our adversary, Iran, but mistrusted by our ally, Turkey. The U.S. says it wants to work for a diplomatic settlement with help from Russia, which is now sending fighter jets and new military force into northern Syria. Meanwhile, progress on the so-called “southern front,” has been hampered by the Pentagon and the State Department, and President Bashar Assad until it’s clearer who will succeed him.

In this fog of policy, the only goal shared by the U.S., Russia, France, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Syrian regime itself — is to defeat the Islamic State. The best U.S.-backed fighters against the extremists have been the Syrian Kurds, who say they’re ready to do much more, with U.S. support.

The “truth is there between the YPG and American forces,” says Muslim. In Syria, where there often seem to be only bad options, helping the Syrian Kurds fight the Islamic State should be a no-brainer.