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Kurdish struggle

Trump's "stab in the back" to the Kurdish national movement

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In one more blatant display of his erratic character, political irresponsibility and human carelessness, US President Donald J. Trump abruptly announced on the night of Sunday 6 October, following a phone call with Turkish President Recep T. Erdogan, that he had ordered the withdrawal of US troops stationed in North-East Syria (numbering close to one thousand). These troops had been there to support the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a multi-ethnic coalition led by the Kurdish forces of the People's Protection Units (aka YPG), in their fight against the so-called Islamic State (IS, aka ISIS).

The Syrian Kurds and their allies have paid a heavy tribute to this fight, incurring more than ten thousand casualties. They were instrumental in the containment and rollback of IS in Syrian territory. They are also unquestionably the most progressive, if not the only progressive, of all armed forces active on Syrian territory, especially with regard to the status and role of women. And yet they have been consistently labelled by the Turkish government as "terrorists" due to their close relation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (aka PKK), the main force active in Turkish-dominated Kurdish territory.

The Turkish government, which is known to have turned a blind eye to the build-up of IS in Syria (it is even suspected of having facilitated this build-up), regards the Kurdish national movement as the main threat. It has invaded part of northern Syria (Afrin) in 2016 to bring down the YPG control of that area, and still occupies it. It has also been threatening since then to invade North-East Syria (Western Kurdistan, aka Rojava), only deterred from doing so by the presence of US troops along the SDF.

The 6 October phone call between the American and Turkish presidents is not the first one during which Erdogan pressed Trump to withdraw US troops and thus clear the way for Turkish troops to invade the rest of Syrian Kurdish territory, nor is Trump's announcement that he has decided to oblige. The previous time was a year ago and led to the dramatic resignation of former defence secretary, Jim Mattis, reflecting the reluctance of the US military to execute what amounts very obviously to a "stab in the back" of allies (that's how the SDF's spokesperson aptly called it) and the Pentagon's justified fear that a Turkish incursion would revitalise IS, and create a chaos of which Iran will seek to take advantage in order to complete its control of the vast territory that stretches from its territory through Iraq to coastal Syria and Lebanon.

Assailed even by fellow Republicans, Trump backtracked at the end of last year. This time however he carried on his promise to Erdogan, replying to his critics, who blame him for betraying precious allies in the fight against IS, by asserting that, in his self-attributed "great and unmatched wisdom", he would "obliterate" Turkey's economy if the Turkish forces overstepped some vague undefined limits in their invasion of North-East Syria.

There should be no mistake whatsoever about Donald Trump's motivations. The US president is no pacifist opposed to military adventures waged by his country abroad. He is a staunch supporter of the murderous war waged in Yemen by the coalition led by the Saudi Crown Prince, his murderer friend. And he stated his great admiration for the US military base in Iraq, which he visited last December, explaining how important it is for the US.

From a man who declared during his previous presidential campaign that the US should take control of Iraqi oil fields and exploit them to its benefit, the rationale is clear enough: Trump believes that the US military should only be engaged in territories where there is an obvious economic interest for his country (and for his own interests, one might add, knowing that this presidency has gone the furthest in US history in mixing private business with public affairs). Iraq, the Saudi kingdom and other Gulf oil monarchies are perfectly fine places for US military deployment in

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Trump's view, unlike poor countries such as Afghanistan and Syria.

From a truly anti-imperialist perspective predicated upon the peoples' right to self-determination, all imperialist and predatory troops should be withdrawn from Syria, whether Israeli troops occupying the Syrian Golan since 1967, or the more recently deployed forces of Iran and its regional proxies, Russia, the U.S. and Turkey, to name only the main protagonists. A unilateral US withdrawal paired with an invitation to Turkey to step in, giving it thus a free hand to crush the Kurdish national movement, has nothing progressive or pacifist about it: it is all the contrary.

The two progressive front runners in next year's US presidential election have rightly understood what is at stake and have reacted in similar terms on 7 October to Donald Trump's announcement.

Senator Bernie Sanders tweeted: "I have long believed the U.S. must responsibly end our military interventions in the Middle East. But Trump's abrupt announcement to withdraw from northern Syria and endorse Turkey's incursion is extremely irresponsible. It is likely to result in more suffering and instability."

Senator Elizabeth Warren tweeted: "I support bringing our troops home from Syria. But President Trump's reckless and unplanned withdrawal undermines both our partners and our security. We need a strategy to end this conflict, not a president who can be swayed by one phone call."

The murderous Turkish invasion of North-East Syria must be stopped. NATO allies of the Turkish government share the responsibility of this onslaught. They must stop their military support to Ankara, impose economic sanctions on the Turkish government until it withdraws its troops from Syria, and provide the Kurdish movement with the weapons it needs in fighting Turkey's invasion of its territory.

This article was first published on the [Kingston and Surbiton LP website](#).

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