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Washington green lights Turkish attack on Kurdish forces in Syria

Sunday night, in a major shift in US war policy, the White House has given a green light for a Turkish invasion of northern Syria. It has abandoned to their fate Kurdish nationalist militias that have fought since 2015 as Washington's main proxy force in the NATO war in Syria, and which the Turkish government denounces as terrorists to be bloodily suppressed.

After Trump called Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the White House issued a statement at 11 p.m. Sunday declaring: "Turkey will soon be moving forward with its long-planned operation into Northern Syria. The United States Armed Forces will not support or be involved in the operation, and United States forces, having defeated the ISIS territorial 'Caliphate,' will no longer be in the immediate area."

Yesterday, as US troops withdrew from positions along the Turkish-Syrian border, Erdoğan said the Turkish attack could begin anytime: "We made a decision. We said, 'one night we could come suddenly.' We continue with our determination. ... It is absolutely out of the question for us to further tolerate the threats from these terrorist groups."



Turkish armored vehicles patrol as they conduct a joint ground patrol with American forces in the so-called "safe zone" on the Syrian side of the border with Turkey, near the town of Tal Abyad, northeastern Syria, Friday, Oct.4, 2019.

With US approval, the Turkish government is preparing a bloodbath against Kurdish forces in Syria. Washington and Ankara have agreed that Turkish troops would control a zone in northern Syria 30 kilometers deep, along 480 km of the Turkish-Syrian border (19 by 300 miles). Ankara plans to forcibly resettle in this zone 1 to 2 million of the 3.6 million Syrian refugees who fled to Turkey during the eight-year NATO proxy war in Syria, and has threatened to pursue its offensive outside this zone if necessary.

US troops are reportedly withdrawing from a 100 km stretch of the border from Tal Abyad to Ras al-Ain to allow Turkish troops to attack through this gap. However, the BBC reported that in light of Ankara's threats of a broader invasion, "British and American special forces have for months been making preparations for a partial or full withdrawal from the area if the situation escalates."

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) militia called on Kurds to "defend our homeland from Turkish aggression," pledging "all-out war along the entire border." SDF spokesman Kino Gabriel denounced the White House statement as a betrayal: "The statement was a surprise, and we can say that it is a stab in the back for the SDF."

The SDF, who have only 60,000 fighters against the Turkish army's 402,000 heavily-armed active personnel, added they had received "assurances from the US that it would not allow any Turkish military operations against the region."

In fact, having built up and armed the SDF for its regime change war in Syria, Washington is now coordinating closely with Ankara the crushing and massacring of its Kurdish

“allies.” In a barrage of tweets commenting on his decision yesterday, Trump made clear that he intended to have the final say on what Turkish troops attacking Kurdish militias could and could not do.

Trump wrote, “As I have stated strongly before, and just to reiterate, if Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey (I’ve done before!). They must, with Europe and others, watch over the captured ISIS fighters and families. The US has done far more than anyone could have ever expected, including the capture of 100 percent of the ISIS Caliphate.”

A US-backed Turkish invasion of Syria to massacre Kurdish forces would be a horrific crime, and a major escalation of violence in a region bled white by decades of imperialist occupations and proxy wars, from the first US-led war against Iraq in 1991 to the NATO wars in Libya and Syria launched in 2011. It comes only months after Trump called off air strikes on Iran 10 minutes before they were to proceed, to retaliate for Iranian forces downing a US drone in their airspace.

With Iran and Russia already involved in Syria to back President Bashar al-Assad’s regime against NATO-backed proxy militias, the longer-term danger of military escalation into direct conflict between major world powers is still posed. The Syrian government has repeatedly denounced Turkish plans to invade and occupy Syrian sovereign territory. Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif also criticized the Turkish plans, declaring: “Security cannot be created through military action against Syria’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.”

Moscow signaled, however, that for now it intends to collaborate with Ankara even if the Turkish army invades Syria to crush the Kurds. Claiming that Turkey and Russia have a common position on Syrian territorial integrity, Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov blandly declared: “We hope that our Turkish colleagues would stick to this position in all situations.”

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Washington’s double-cross of its Kurdish allies is another bitter lesson in the bankruptcy of Kurdish nationalism as a strategy to advance the democratic and cultural rights of Kurdish people in the Middle East. With a population spread across Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, the only viable means of advancing these rights lies in the international unification of the working class in a revolutionary struggle against imperialism.

Historically, however, the Kurdish bourgeois nationalist movement—while adopting “socialist” rhetoric—has repeatedly sought to advance its agenda by means of alliances with various imperialist and bourgeois nationalist powers, ranging from the CIA to the Shah of Iran and Israel, along with appeals to the Moscow Stalinist bureaucracy. The result has been a series of betrayals and debacles.

In the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Kurdish parties in northern Iraq backed the US occupation. After the Syrian regime, with aid from Russia and Iran, defeated NATO-backed Al Qaeda-linked militias, the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) became Washington’s main proxy force in its direct intervention in Syria in the name of a war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

This not only implicated the Kurdish militias in US war crimes in Iraq and Syria, but also provoked ever more bitter conflicts between Washington and the Turkish regime. Ankara has historically oppressed the Kurdish population and fought a bloody, decades-long civil war against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Terrified that the consolidation of a Kurdish state within Syria’s borders could inflame Kurdish separatist sentiment inside Turkey itself, Ankara clashed ever more bitterly with Washington over Syria policy.

Since Washington and Berlin backed a failed coup in 2016 in an attempt to topple the Turkish government and murder Erdoğan, these conflicts have reached extraordinary intensity.

Already last December, aware of deep anti-war sentiment in America and fearing a devastating collapse of relations with Turkey, Trump announced a withdrawal of the few thousand US troops working with the SDF in Syria. His decision was countermanded by the Pentagon, and provoked a firestorm of criticism from Republicans and Democrats alike in Washington. Ultimately, US troops remained in Syria, and conflicts between Ankara and Washington continued to escalate.

Trump has now worked out another deal with Erdoğan, as the war crisis and the internal crisis of his administration have reached new heights. After Trump called off strikes on Iran and fired a top proponent of war with Iran, National Security Advisor John Bolton, he was targeted for impeachment by powerful factions of the ruling class and foreign policy establishment, led by the Democratic Party.

The crisis over Trump’s latest withdrawal order from Syria reflects the reactionary conflict over foreign policy underlying the impeachment drive. The order provoked wide condemnation from Trump’s opponents, and even some of his Republican supporters, like

Senator Lindsey Graham. Brett McGurk, who resigned as coordinator of US policy on ISIS to protest Trump's withdrawal order of 2018, called today's order a "gift to Russia, Iran and ISIS."

As for Trump, he is endorsing the politically criminal policies of Ankara. This includes an attempt to forcibly populate the strip of Syrian territory it would occupy with millions of Syrian refugees, most of whom are Arab. This reactionary plan, aimed at preventing the consolidation of a Kurdish statelet within Syria, involves forcing millions of Arab civilians into a war zone and risks creating a lasting conflict between them and the local Kurdish population.

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