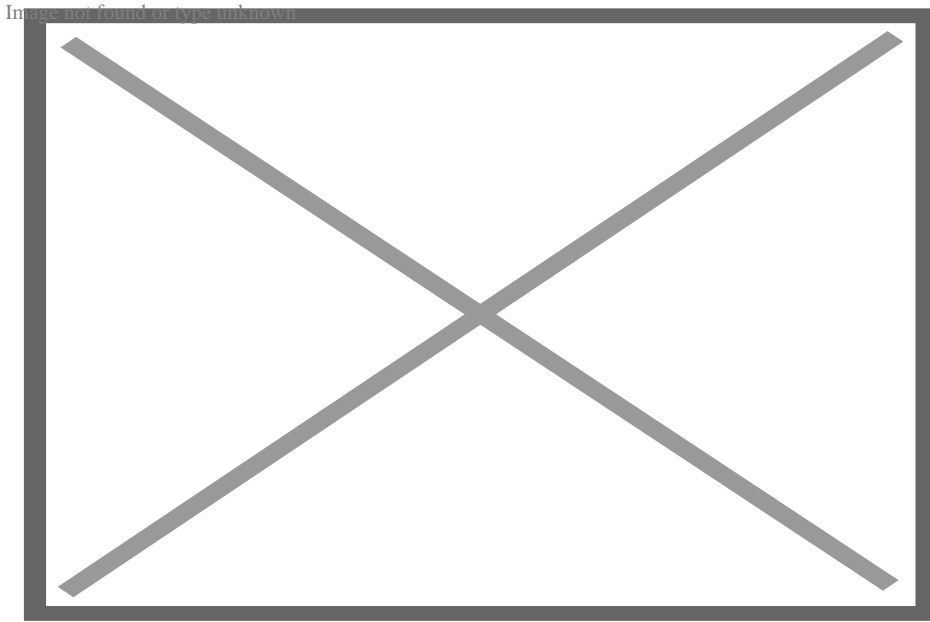

Endgame in Syria: Trump Signals Withdrawal of US Troops

Description



By Nauman Sadiq for VT

In a momentous announcement at an event in Ohio on Thursday, Donald Trump said, “We’re knocking the hell out of ISIS. We’ll be coming out of Syria, like, very soon. Let the other people take care of it now.”

What lends credence to the statement that the Trump administration will soon be pulling 2,000 US troops out of Syria – mostly Special Forces assisting the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces – is that President Trump had recently announced to sack the National Security Advisor Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster.

McMaster represented the institutional logic of the deep state in the Trump administration and was instrumental in advising Donald Trump to escalate the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria. He had advised President Trump to increase the number of US troops in Afghanistan from 8,400 to 15,000. And in Syria, he was in favor of the Pentagon’s policy of training and arming 30,000 Kurdish border guards to patrol Syria’s northern border with Turkey.

Both the decisions have spectacularly backfired on the Trump administration. The decision to train and arm 30,000 Kurdish border guards had annoyed the Erdogan administration to an extent that Turkey mounted Operation Olive Branch in the Kurdish-held enclave of Afrin in Syria’s northwest on January 20.

After capturing Afrin on March 18, the Turkish armed forces and their Free Syria Army proxies have now cast their eyes further east on Manbij where the US Special Forces are closely cooperating with

the Kurdish YPG militia, in line with the long-held Turkish military doctrine of denying the Kurds any Syrian territory west of River Euphrates.

More significantly, however, the US bombers and Apache helicopters struck a contingent of Syrian government troops and allied forces in Deir al-Zor on February 7 that reportedly killed and wounded dozens of Russian military contractors working for the private security firm, the Wagner group.

In order to understand the reason why the US brazenly attacked the Russian contractors, we need to keep the backdrop of seven-year-long Syrian conflict in mind. Washington has failed to topple the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. After the Russian intervention in September 2015, the momentum of the battle has shifted in favor of the Syrian government and Washington's proxies are on the receiving end in the conflict.

Washington's policy of nurturing militants against the Syrian government has given birth to the Islamic State and myriads of jihadist groups that have carried out audacious terror attacks in Europe during the last three years. Out of necessity, Washington had to make the Kurds the centerpiece of its policy in Syria. But on January 20, its NATO-ally Turkey mounted Operation Olive Branch against the Kurds in the northwestern Syrian canton of Afrin.

In order to save its reputation as a global power, Washington could have confronted Turkey and pressured it to desist from invading Afrin. But it chose the easier path and vented its frustration on the Syrian government forces in Deir al-Zor which led to the casualties of scores of Russian military contractors hired by the Syrian government.

Another reason why Washington struck Russian contractors working in Syria was that the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) – which are mainly comprised of Kurdish YPG militias – had reportedly handed over the control of some areas east of Euphrates River to Deir al-Zor Military Council (DMC), which is the Arab-led component of SDF, and had relocated several battalions of Kurdish YPG militias to Afrin and along Syria's northern border with Turkey in order to defend the Kurdish-held areas against the onslaught of Turkish armed forces and allied Free Syria Army (FSA) militias.

Syrian forces with the backing of Russian contractors took advantage of the opportunity and crossed the Euphrates River to capture an oil refinery located east of Euphrates River in the Kurdish-held area of Deir al-Zor. The US Air Force responded with full force, knowing well the ragtag Arab component of SDF – mainly comprised of local Arab tribesmen and mercenaries to make the Kurdish-led SDF appear more representative and inclusive – was simply not a match for the superior training and arms of Syrian troops and Russian military contractors, consequently causing a massacre in which scores of Russian citizens lost their lives.

It would be pertinent to note here that regarding the Syria policy, there is a schism between the White House and the American deep state led by the Pentagon. After Donald Trump's inauguration as the US president, he has delegated operational-level decisions in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria to the Pentagon.

The way the US officials are evading responsibility for the incident, it appears the decision to strike pro-government forces in Deir al-Zor that included Russian contractors was taken by the operational commander of the US forces in Syria and the White House was not informed until after the strike.

Notwithstanding, it bears mentioning that unlike dyed-in-the-wool globalists and “liberal interventionists,” like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, who cannot look past beyond the tunnel vision of political establishments, it appears that the protectionist Donald Trump not only follows news from conservative mainstream outlets, like the Fox News, but he has also been familiar with alternative news perspectives, such as Breitbart’s, no matter how racist and xenophobic.

Thus, Donald Trump is fully aware that the conflict in Syria is a proxy war initiated by the Western political establishments and their regional Middle Eastern allies against the Syrian government. He is also mindful of the fact that militants have been funded, trained and armed in the training camps located in Turkey’s border regions to the north of Syria and in Jordan’s border regions to the south of Syria.

According to the last year’s [March 31 article](#) [1] for the New York Times by Michael Gordon, the US ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley and the recently sacked Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had stated on the record that defeating the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq was the top priority of the Trump administration and the fate of Bashar al-Assad was of least concern to the new administration.

Under the previous Obama administration, the evident policy in Syria was regime change. The Trump administration, however, looks at the crisis in Syria from an entirely different perspective because Donald Trump regards Islamic jihadists as a much bigger threat to the security of the US.

In order to allay the concerns of Washington’s traditional allies in the Middle East, the Trump administration conducted a cruise missiles strike on al-Shayrat airfield in Homs governorate on April 6 last year after the chemical weapons strike in Khan Sheikhoun. But that isolated incident was nothing more than a show of force to bring home the point that the newly elected Donald Trump is an assertive and powerful president.

Finally, Karen De Young and Liz Sly made another startling revelation in the last year’s [March 4 article](#) [2] for the Washington Post: “Trump has said repeatedly that the US and Russia should cooperate against the Islamic State, and he has indicated that the future of Russia-backed Assad is of less concern to him.”

Thus, the interests of all the major players in Syria have evidently converged on defeating Islamic jihadists, and the Obama-era policy of regime change has been put on the back burner. And after the recent announcement of complete withdrawal of US troops from Syria by President Trump, it appears that we are approaching the endgame in Syria, an event as momentous as the Fall of Saigon in 1975, which will mark a stellar military victory for Vladimir Putin.

Sources and links:

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