

# The Kurds, Turkey and U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria

written by Scott Scheffer  
December 31, 2018



A U.S. military convoy in Syria.

Donald Trump's recent announcement that he is withdrawing 2,000 troops from Syria and half of the 14,000 troops currently in Afghanistan has opened a fissure in

the imperialist ruling class.

Secretary of Defense Gen. James “Mad Dog” Mattis resigned over the issue. Brett McGurk, the presidential special envoy for the global coalition to counter ISIS, also resigned. [Reuters news agency reports](#) that U.S. military commanders planning the withdrawal are now recommending that Kurdish fighters be allowed to keep their U.S.-supplied weapons and equipment after the withdrawal from Syria — another rebuke to the U.S. president.

To a lesser or greater degree, all the major media and a significant portion of the political establishment have been calling Trump’s plan an abandonment of U.S. allies and a surrender to the Syrian Arab Army.

The allies that they are referring to are not only the armies of other countries and the mercenaries that they’ve hired. They are also referring to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), at the center of which is the People’s Protection Units (YPG) — the primarily Kurdish fighters that have been one of the main U.S. proxies in the war to overthrow the elected Syrian government.

Trump’s erratic presidency has frayed the nerves of many in the ruling class, but the military seemed to have been more comfortable with him. After all, he stacked his administration with military figures. And within a couple of months of moving into the White House, he fired Tomahawk missiles at Syria and dropped the largest non-nuclear weapon in existence in Afghanistan, as if to prove his imperialist warmaker chops.

But the uproar from the military is significant. Whether or not their differences will be patched up remains to be seen, but it’s clear that their squabble is based on a crisis for imperialism — the fact that the Syrian Arab Army, with assistance from allies Iran, Russia and Hezbollah of Lebanon, have regained much of their country. Signs are emerging of international recognition that Syria has won.

## **ISIS a convenient cover for U.S. intervention**

The stated reason for the multiple ongoing U.S. wars in the Middle East and Africa is to fight the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, popularly known as ISIS, which had taken over huge portions of the Middle East. But even as the U.S. coalesced with other countries' armies to drive ISIS out of the areas they'd taken over, the U.S. military at times aided ISIS's operations. The war against ISIS has been a convenient cover for Washington's real goal of destroying Syria.

The use of the YPG as a proxy army has been a balancing act in Washington's relationship with fellow NATO member Turkey. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey has been fighting against the Turkish regime for self-determination since the 1980s and has faced brutal repression, assassinations, massacres and prison sentences in that struggle. Turkey says that the YPG in Syria is an extension of the PKK in Turkey.

The U.S., Turkey and the European Union all consider the PKK a terrorist organization, but, in order to justify using the YPG against Syria, Washington distinguishes between the PKK and the YPG.

The U.S. has ignored Turkish attacks on the Kurdish fighters for the duration of the war. During the fighting to retake Raqqa in northern Syria, Turkey focused more on fighting the YPG than fighting ISIS. From January to June 2018, a Turkish invasion of Syria drove the Kurdish fighters out of the city of Afrin. In both cases, Syrian anti-Assad rebels backed by the U.S. helped in the attacks on the YPG, even as the U.S. was arming the YPG.

Turkey is now massing troops and equipment preparing to move on Manbij, which is still held by the YPG. Manbij is on the western bank of the Euphrates near the area of Deir ez-Zor, where most of Syria's oil reserves are located.

But alliances are shifting fast. The YPG has appealed to the Syrian government to defend it against the Turkish military. [According to the December 28 Guardian](#), the Syrian Arab Army has already sent forces to the outskirts of Manbij. Additionally, Hezbollah, the progressive fighting force in Lebanon, has offered more military assistance.

Struggle-La Lucha recently published a [1991 article by Marxist leader Sam Marcy](#) in which he wrote about the first attempt at a Kurdish state that came about in 1945 in northern Iran when the strength of the Soviet Union emboldened revolutionary movements in Asia and throughout the world.

“The Kurdish Republic of Mahabad existed from December 1945 to December 1946 in the northern part of Iran. ... What happened to it?” asked Marcy. “The Truman administration, in collaboration with the British, gave notice to the Soviet Union that its troops had to evacuate Iran. It was one of the first salvos of the Cold War. After their withdrawal, the Shah, armed by U.S. imperialism, opened a military struggle to destroy the Kurdish republic.”

The Kurdish people have been used and betrayed by imperialist forces in the past. Trump’s plan to throw the Kurdish fighters under the bus again should come as no shock. The outcry from military leaders isn’t genuine concern about the safety of Kurds at all. Former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger famously said, “America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests.”

Kurdish people and all those fighting for self-determination will win by joining in solidarity with their natural allies — revolutionary, working-class and progressive forces, in the struggle to end U.S. imperialism.

