

Trump makes a lunge for the exit in Syria



A collective howl of rage from the liberal establishment greeted Trump's announcement, but whether or not they manage to put the brakes on, the war in Syria is lost.

US President [Donald Trump](#)'s 19 December announcement ordering the withdrawal of the (officially acknowledged) 2,000-odd US troops from Syria was greeted with shock and horror by all wings of Washington's political establishment, and likewise sent a chill through all the forces on the ground that had been expecting favours and protection in exchange for [acting as tools of imperialism](#). Ever since the plan to pull the troops out in a period of between 60 and 100 days [was revealed](#), prominent figures within his own administration have been desperate to 'reinterpret' the president's (perfectly clear) words. Mr Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, hastened to declare that the US will continue to carry out airstrikes in Syria as the need arises and to reassure Israel that the US effort to "counter Iranian aggression" would carry on along with the "protection of Israel". Similarly, Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, tried to introduce a new precondition to the proposed withdrawal: namely, that first of all the US, along with its allies, must have in place a contingency plan to protect Kurdish militias in Syria from attack by the Turkish army. How far such attempts to take the rough edges off Trump's blunt statement of intent may succeed in slowing down the wholesale retreat remains to be seen. However, it is hard to read the resignation of Jim Mattis, his defence secretary, as anything other than a major blow against the Russophobic and neoliberal establishment. The Guardian cited diplomatic sources reporting that before his resignation Mattis had tried to pressure Trump into slowing the Syria withdrawal down and leaving behind a residual force of several hundred, and also expressed his disagreement with Trump's plan to halve the number of US troops in [Afghanistan](#). ([Trump slows Syria pull-out but claims 'hero' status](#), The Guardian, 31 December 2018) His subsequent resignation suggests that he hit a brick wall, and that the president was, for the moment and in this respect at least, sticking to his [campaign promise](#) to get the US out of foreign wars. Mattis's resignation letter amounts to one long cry of pain at the confusion and damage being done to monopoly capitalism's warmongering neoliberal agenda by Trump's crass America First economic nationalism. "One core belief I have always held is that our

strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships. While the US remains the indispensable nation in the free world, we cannot protect our interests or serve that role effectively without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to those allies. "Similarly, I believe we must be resolute and unambiguous in our approach to those countries whose strategic interests are increasingly in tension with ours. My views on treating allies with respect and also being clear-eyed about both malign actors and strategic competitors [ie, Russia and China!] are strongly held and informed by over four decades of immersion in these issues." ([Defence secretary James Mattis resigns and points to differences with Trump](#) by Julian Borger, The Guardian, 21 December 2018) The message is clear: get behind the warmongering [Nato](#) alliance, get ready for [war with Russia and China](#), and don't retreat from the [middle east](#).

Trump washes his hands of his Kurdish 'allies'

It seems that Trump's lunge for the exit was indeed executed with scant 'respect for allies', with European allies fielding troops in Syria not informed in advance of the move. Most galling of all, the Kurdish forces of the SDF (Syrian Democratic Forces) were not warned of what was to come. The US has relied very heavily upon the SDF to be its proxy land army, bearing the brunt of the fighting whilst US coalition fighter jets provided 'air cover', raining indiscriminate death and destruction from the relative safety of high altitudes. Whilst the ostensible enemy was *proclaimed* to be Daesh (aka Islamic State or Isis), *in practice* the SDF was more concerned with acting as a proxy army working to an agenda set by imperialism, in the process hampering the genuine liberation forces that rallied around the Syrian Arab Army (SAA). The US kept the Kurdish militias onside by exploiting their national aspirations, encouraging them to pursue the will 'o the wisp of a Kurdish canton carved out of Syria. Now the US retreat from Syria unceremoniously pulls the rug out from under the SDF,

leaving the Kurds to face the Turkish army on their own. Already in the weeks preceding Trump's statement, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was demanding in ever more strident tones that the US should uproot and expel the SDF from Manbij and its environs on the Turkish border, telling a judiciary conference: "Manbij is a place where Arabs live, but they have surrendered the area to the terror organisation. Now we are saying that you should cleanse, remove them, or else we will enter Manbij. I am speaking very clearly." (['Cleanse them': Turkey threatens to send troops to Syria's Manbij unless US removes Kurdish militias](#), RT, 14 December 2018) Washington's abrupt withdrawal spurred wiser heads among the Kurdish militia to appeal to the government in Damascus to send the Syrian army into Manbij to take control. In response, the SAA general staff pointed out that in fact its troops were already arriving in Manbij, had hoisted the Syrian flag over the city, and were ready to fight "any invader and occupier", making it plain that the future for Manbij is neither as Kurdish statelet nor as Ottoman annex but as an integral part of the Syrian homeland. ([Moscow welcomes Syrian Army entry to Manbij, will 'synchronise expectations' with Ankara](#), RT, 28 December 2018) Whilst the situation on the border with Turkey remains combustible, President Erdogan's avowed willingness to coordinate its actions over Syria alongside Russia and Iran within the Astana peace framework encourages optimism. Turkey's foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, noting drily that the US has "been facing certain difficulties with the process of the troops' withdrawal from Syria", stated: "We want to coordinate this process with Russia and Iran, with which we had arranged work in the framework of the Astana process," adding that a Russia/Turkey/Iran summit is being prepared in Moscow. ([Turkey calls for joint control with Russia and Iran over US troop pull-out from Syria](#), RT, 10 January 2019) Less diplomatic was Erdogan's response to John Bolton's bald assertion that "We don't think the Turks ought to undertake military action that's not fully coordinated and agreed to by the United States, at a minimum." This statement Erdogan denounced as "unacceptable" and a "huge mistake". ([Bolton made a 'serious mistake', Ankara won't 'swallow' his comments on Syria's Kurds - Erdogan](#), RT, 8 January 2019) It is in truth a little late for the US to pose as the noble defender of the Kurds, when it is the US that has treated the Kurdish militias as an imperialist rent-an-army, incurring the Ottoman wrath, only to hang them out to dry when the wind changed. And in response to US hawking over the timetable for departure, Foreign Minister Cavusoglu warned that

whether or not the US troops leave, "we will still do everything necessary to ensure our national security and protection from terrorist organisations", adding ominously: "Our operation does not depend on the US troops' withdrawal," a not-so-veiled threat against yankee boots on the ground. ([Turkey says its new operation in Syria not depending on US troops withdrawal](#), TASS, 10 January 2019) Whether Trump's retreat plans manage to survive the storm of domestic criticism is a moot point, but either way the cat is now well and truly out of the bag: the war of subversion against the legitimate Syrian government has failed, and a severe blow has been struck against US hegemony in the middle east.

Friendly fire

The collapse of the west's oppressive war plans likewise threatens to leave exposed the tissue of lies by which it sought to justify that war in the first place. For example, it will be that much harder to explain now to the families of British soldiers serving in Syria why their boys are being killed or maimed by missiles that have been manufactured in the US and fired by Daesh. According to Syrian media, at least five British soldiers were killed and a number of others wounded in early January in a Daesh missile attack in the east Syrian province of Deir Ezzor. According to a former British ambassador to Syria, Peter Ford, the type of missile employed could only have originated in the USA. Said Ford: "The only 'smart missiles' in the hands of Isis are the US TOW anti-tank missiles, which in 2015 the US supplied to moderate rebels, who promptly sold them to Isis. The lethality of these weapons had [Syrian President] Assad on the ropes, forcing Russia to intervene. And now we see the results. What geniuses these American strategists are ... "Don't wait for the mainstream media to point up the awkward fact that our commandos are being killed with US weapons carrying out missions for the US-led coalition with no legal authority and when Syrian forces are just a few miles away being prevented by the US and the UK from going in hot pursuit of Isis." ([Did US build Isis missiles that hit British soldiers in Syria?](#) by Steven Sweeney, Morning Star, 7 January 2019) Ford is right to despise the self-blinded mainstream media for [concealing the truth](#). But even those bought-and-paid-for media will find it harder and harder to lie convincingly about a war that imperialism is so disastrously losing, thanks to the steadfast resistance of the Syrian government, army and people. **Victory to the Syrian president, government, army and people!**

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