

Donald Trump: Betraying the Kurds

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Donald Trump's treacherous sellout of the Syrian Kurds puts a new spin on the old saying that imperialism "has no permanent friends, only permanent interests." It's true that the ultimate betrayal of the Kurds was almost inevitable — as has happened so many times before. But the particular way Trump's done it — right after a phone call with his Turkish autocrat buddy Erdogan, without consulting the Pentagon, State Department, "national security" staff, major allies or anyone else except his own great and unmatched wisdom — is truly spectacular. And of course it feeds into the U.S. domestic tangle in ways still to unfold.

I think we can fairly suspect that the transcript record of the Trump-Erdogan phone call has been stored on that same "classified" server where the "quid pro quo" call to Ukrainian president Zelensky, and (as we've learned) those to other foreign leaders, are stashed to stay safe from the reach of whistleblowers and Congressional investigators. It might be inconvenient to reveal that Trump made sure Erdogan knew the coast was clear for his long-planned invasion of northern Syria.

In the present case, there wasn't even a material imperial interest in pulling out and leaving the Kurdish forces and civilian population hung out to dry. It was just Trump's whim. Keep in mind that the U.S. force in northeastern Syria is hardly a big strike force. It is (or was) a small presence as a tripwire against Turkish incursion and a logistical/intelligence support for the Kurdish forces fighting the "Islamic State" (ISIS). Pulling it out doesn't represent a U.S. withdrawal from "endless Middle East wars" as the big tweet boasts — those troops won't be coming home, they'll be re-deployed in Iraq or somewhere nearby.

After the fact, Trump blustered that he'll "destroy the Turkish economy" if its invasion crosses some unspecified "limits." No one takes that drivel seriously — not Erdogan, not the tens of thousands of fleeing civilians, not the United States' European allies, not the Syrian regime or Iran or Russia that are contemplating how they might move into the vacuum, and not ISIS whose potential revival is justifiably feared in global capitals.

In his post-facto blathering, Trump conceded that the Kurds did the fighting against ISIS in Syria, but said they did so to protect "their own land" (of course!) and "they didn't help us at Normandy" (say what??).

It's tragic that the international left has no capacity to provide material support or weapons to the Kurdish forces and people whose aspirations for freedom and self-determination, and the progressive Rojava project they've built amidst the Syrian carnage, are being crushed. All we have are our voices to demand that the United Nations and Europe impose emergency punitive sanctions on the Turkish regime.

The immediate prospect is a brutal conflict among multiple counterrevolutionary forces — Turkey, Iran and Russia, the Assad regime, ISIS. We can't predict the outcome or the magnitude of deaths or the new refugee crisis. One result may be that the United States and its promises are never trusted again. That in itself would be a good lesson, but the human cost is much too high.

David Finkel, October 11, 2019

P.S.

- <https://solidarity-us.org/betraying-the-kurds/>