

All Is Not Quiet on the Syrian Front: US to Launch Another War

By [Alex Gorka](#)

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This is a classic example of flip-flop policy. In November, the US [promised](#) Turkey to stop arming Kurdish militias in Syria after the Islamic State was routed. Brett McGurk, the US Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat Islamic State, explained that after the urban fighting in Raqqa was over “adjustments in the level of military support” would be made. “We had to give some equipment – and it’s limited, extremely limited – all of which was very transparent to our NATO ally, Turkey,” he [said](#) during a special briefing on December 21. In June, the US [told](#) Turkey it would take back weapons supplied to the Kurdish the People’s Protection Units (YPG) militia in northern Syria after the defeat of Islamic State.

But sophisticated weapons will continue to be sent to Syria in 2018, including thousands of anti-tank rocket launchers, heat seeking missiles and rocket launchers. The list of weaponry and equipment was prepared by US Department of Defense as part of the 2018 defense budget and signed by Trump of Dec. 12. It includes more than 300 non-tactical vehicles, 60 nonstandard vehicles, and 30 earth-moving vehicles to assist with the construction of outposts or operations staging areas. The US defense spending bill for 2018 (“Justification for FY 2018 Overseas Contingency Operations / Counter-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria Train and Equip Fund”) includes providing weapons worth \$393 million to US partners in Syria. Overall, \$500 million, roughly \$70 million more than last year, are to be spent on Syria Train and Equip requirements. The partners are the Kurds-dominated Syria Democratic Forces (SDF). The YPG – the group that is a major concern of Turkey – is the backbone of this force.

The budget does not refer to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) but instead says “Vetted Syrian Opposition”. According to the budget list, there are 25,000 opposition forces supported as a part of the train and equip program in Syria. That number is planned to be increased to 30,000 in 2018. The arming of Kurdish militants with [anti-tank rockets](#) is a sensitive topic because of Turkey’s reliance on its armored Leopard tanks in northern Syria.

Talal Sillo, a former high-ranking commander and spokesperson of the US-backed SDF, who defected from the group last month to go to Turkey, [divulged](#) details of the US arming the Kurdish group.

The list does not detail which vetted Syrian groups will receive certain pieces of equipment. In northern Syria, there is the SDF, including the YPG, and the Syria Arab Coalition — a group of Arab fighters incorporated into the SDF. The Maghawir al-Thawra and Shohada al-Quartayn groups are operating in the southeastern part of Syria. They are being trained by

US and British instructors at the al-Tanf border crossing between Syria and Iraq.

Besides the SDF and the groups trained at al-Tanf, the US is in the process of [creating](#) the New Syria Army to fight the Syrian government forces. The training is taking place at the Syrian Hasakah refugee camp located 70 kilometers from the border of Turkey and 50 kilometers from the border of Iraq.

Around 40 Syria opposition groups on Dec. 25 rejected to attend the planned [Sochi conference on Syria](#) scheduled to take place in January. They said Moscow, which organizes the conference, was seeking to bypass the UN-based Geneva peace process, despite the fact that UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura said that Russia's plan to convene the congress should be assessed by its ability to contribute to and support the UN-led Geneva talks on ending the war in Syria. If fighting starts, these groups are likely to join the formations created by the US.

So, the United States not only maintains its [illegal](#) military presence in Syria and creates new forces to fight against the Syrian government, it appears to be preparing for a new war to follow the Islamic State's defeat. The continuation of arming and training Kurdish militias will hardly improve Washington's relations with Ankara, while saying one thing and doing another undermines the credibility of the United States as a partner.

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