

Chomsky Among “Progressives” Calling for US Military Involvement in Syria

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By [Whitney Webb](#)

Global Research, April 28, 2018

[MintPress News](#) 26 April 2018

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [Military Militarization](#) and [WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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On Monday, the New York Review of Books [published](#) an open letter and petition aimed at securing Western support for putting pressure on Turkey to end its occupation of Afrin, opposing further Turkish incursions into Syria, and backing autonomy for Rojava — the region of Northern Syria that has functioned autonomously since 2012 after its administration was taken over by U.S.-allied Kurdish factions. Authored by the [Emergency Committee for Rojava](#), it has since been signed by well-known progressive figures such as Noam Chomsky and Judith Butler in its bid [to organize efforts](#) for the fulfillment of the group’s demands.

Those demands are entirely focused on U.S. government policy. The petition asks the government to “impose economic and political sanctions on Turkey’s leadership, . . . embargo sales and delivery of weapons from NATO countries to Turkey, . . . insist upon Rojava’s representation in Syrian peace negotiations,” and – most paradoxically of all — “continue military support for the SDF [Syrian Democratic Forces],” the Kurdish-majority group that has acted as a U.S. proxy and has been accused of ethnic cleansing in its bid to construct a Kurdish ethnostate in Northern Syria.

The group’s first three demands are reasonable, in the sense of seeking to punish Turkey for [its illegal invasion](#) of Syrian territory. However, they are also rather fanciful, in the sense that the U.S. government is highly [unlikely to stop weapons sales](#) or to sanction Turkey, which it needs to court in order to prevent Ankara from [pivoting towards Russia](#). Indeed, the U.S. — by [refusing to support](#) the Kurds during the battle for Afrin – made it clear that its “alliance” with Syrian Kurds is opportunistic and very much secondary to the U.S.’ relationship with Turkey.

The third demand is equally unlikely to come about, as Turkey has [previously called](#) the involvement of Syrian Kurds in peace talks unacceptable and has essentially issued an “it’s either us or them” ultimatum. In addition, past attempts to invite the Kurds to participate in the peace talks have [been rejected](#) by Western nations, including the United States, in order to please Turkey.

More recently, Kurds themselves [refused to attend](#) peace talks earlier this year over the Turkish occupation of Afrin in light of the lack of international response to that event.

However, even prior to the occupation of Afrin, Syrian Kurds [had declared](#) they were “not bound” by any decisions made during Syrian peace talks, thereby weakening the peace process.

Yet, beyond the impractical nature of the petition’s first three demands, the final demand – that the U.S. continue military support for the Syrian Democratic Forces – is by far the most unusual, in the sense that well-known progressive figures, in signing this petition, are asking for the continued U.S. occupation of Syria and for increased military and financial support for the U.S. proxy forces, the SDF.

While most progressive figures, likely including those who signed the petition, would never publicly call for extending a U.S.-led military occupation, this petition shows that the war propaganda in Syria – particularly as it relates to the Kurds – has been highly effective in subverting the progressive anti-war left as it relates to the Syrian conflict.

Indeed, the Kurds in Syria have long been romanticized by Western media for having built “[the world’s most progressive democracy](#)” and for [being trailblazers](#) for gender equality and gay rights. While the Kurds have incorporated some progressive policies, the realities on the ground are more nuanced. Furthermore, the U.S.’ “support” for Rojava, which the petition seeks to extend, is hardly helping progressive or even Kurdish causes.

Distinguishing the Kurds and the SDF

Since the rise of Daesh (ISIS) in the Syrian conflict, Western media has placed the Kurds on a pedestal and has long treated them as the only “effective” fighters against the terrorist group. However, praising the local Kurdish militias for their fighting prowess has since given way to praising the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), even though the two could not be more different.

While the SDF does boast a significant portion of Kurds among its ranks, it is not expressly Kurdish and is an umbrella group of several militias. Though this itself is not concerning, the identities of many of its Arab fighters do give cause for concern. For instance, one of the groups [operating under](#) the SDF’s banner is the Deir Ezzor Military Council (DMC) — a group whose fighters were former members of Daesh and al-Nusra (Syria’s Al-Qaeda affiliate), who [were “retrained”](#) by U.S. forces in Northern Syria after surrendering to the SDF and U.S.-backed forces in Raqqa. In addition, tribes that were formerly allied with Daesh [have joined](#) forces with the SDF over the past year.



The loosely-knit coalition of Syrian rebel groups, including Kurdish factions, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), are armed, trained and backed by the U.S. (SDF Photo)

In addition to hosting former members of Daesh and other terror organizations among its ranks, the SDF also [regularly collaborates](#) with Daesh in Northeastern Syria in targeting Syrian and Russian forces. Though the Kurds and Daesh are ostensible “enemies,” they have been shown to move amongst each other like allies, and Kurds have even worked alongside Daesh in coordination with U.S. special forces. Perhaps, then, it is little surprise that the SDF [allowed Daesh terrorists](#) to leave Raqqa peacefully last June as they took the city.

This collaboration with groups like Daesh, which the SDF has been praised in the West for fighting, has led to major defections of Kurds from the SDF — including SDF’s former spokesman Talal Silo, [who accused the group](#) of making secret deals with terrorists.

Along with their troubling ties and collaboration with Daesh, the SDF have participated in war crimes in Syria, in tandem with U.S. forces, and have been accused of ethnic cleansing in order to justify the establishment of a Kurdish ethnostate in Arab-majority areas of Northern Syria.

For instance, in the battle for Raqqa, the SDF — along with the U.S.-led coalition — committed war crimes, such as [using chemical weapons](#) and [cutting off water supplies](#) to Raqqa, which is still without water nearly a year after its “liberation.” The SDF also played a key role in the operation that left, by some estimates, as many as 8,000 dead and 160,000 more driven from their homes. The operation also left 80 percent of the city completely uninhabitable, and as many [as 6,000 bodies](#) are still believed to be buried in the rubble six months after the joint U.S-led coalition/SDF operation concluded.

Some journalists, such as [Andrew Korybko](#), asserted that Raqqa’s civilian population was directly targeted because it was highly unlikely that any Arab, or non-Kurd for that matter, living in Arab-majority Raqqa would freely choose to live in a “Kurdish-dominated statelet” as a second-class citizen instead of choosing to have equal standing within the Syrian Arab Republic. In other words, the operation was, in part, targeting civilians who could resist

Raqqa's annexation by the U.S.-backed Kurds instead of Daesh forces, who were allowed to escape and were later re-assimilated into the SDF. The UN, however, [has claimed](#) that the SDF's removal of Arab populations from Raqqa was done out of "military necessity" and thus did not constitute "ethnic cleansing."

Have progressives thought through what they're asking for?

Aside from the SDF, asking the U.S. to maintain its support of the group also means asking the U.S. to continue its illegal occupation of Syria. As [MintPress has previously reported](#), the U.S.' occupation of Syria is aimed at partitioning the country and preventing Syria's Northeast from again coming under the control of the Syrian government.

Though partition has also been a goal of some U.S.-allied Kurdish nationalists, who have sought to use the division of Syria as a launching pad for an independent "Kurdistan," the U.S. in recent months has made it clear that the partition of Northeastern Syria will not benefit the Kurds as much as Wahhabi Sunnis whose ideology is virtually indistinguishable from that of Daesh.

Early last week, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported that Trump's new National Security Advisor John Bolton was working with U.S.-allied Middle Eastern nations to form an "Islamic coalition" that would replace the U.S. troops currently present in Northeastern Syria with an army composed of soldiers from nations like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt. This coalition would be a *permanent* military "stabilizing force" in the region.

In addition to pushing for foreign Arab soldiers to police Rojava, the Trump administration has also sought Saudi commitment to funding the reconstruction of the region. Saudi Arabia — known for its deplorable treatment of religious and ethnic minorities, and funding terror groups like Daesh — and its Gulf allies are highly unlikely to support the Kurds' nationalist aims as well as their ["progressive" direct democracy](#) and promotion of gender equality and gay rights. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is the complete opposite of the Western progressive view of the Kurds, as it is a dictatorial monarchy well known for its repression of women and [minorities](#) and [execution](#) of members of the LGBT community. However, it is also the country that the U.S. is seeking to give [the leading role](#) in governing the area of Syria it currently occupies.

In effect, by asking for the continuation of U.S. military presence in Syria in order to aid the SDF, the Emergency Committee for Rojava is actually undermining the "progressive" Kurds they seek to support — and aiding yet another U.S. government attempt at nation-building, which is likely to result in a Wahhabist enclave that would differ little from a Daesh-led "caliphate."

The Emergency Committee for Rojava's efforts come amid [major attempts](#) aimed at [defending and extending](#) the U.S.' illegal involvement in Syria. However, this petition is aimed at Western progressives, the group that has historically opposed illegal U.S. military occupations and wars in the past. Given how it has enticed well-known members of the progressive community, the petition shows that the push for Western "humanitarian" intervention in Syria is stronger than ever.

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Whitney Webb is a staff writer for MintPress News and a contributor to Ben Swann's Truth in

Media. Her work has appeared on Global Research, the Ron Paul Institute and 21st Century Wire, among others. She has also made radio and TV appearances on RT and Sputnik. She currently lives with her family in southern Chile

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