

Trump's Midterm Electoral Defeat and Syria Withdrawal

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Donald Trump's abrupt decision to withdraw American troops from Syria was reportedly made during a telephonic conversation with Turkish President Erdogan on December 14, before President Trump made the momentous announcement in a Tweet on December 19. The decision was so sudden that even Turkish president was caught off guard, according to a December 22 [Associated Press report](#) [1] by Matthew Lee and Susannah George.

Clearly, an understanding has been reached between Washington and Ankara. According to the terms of the agreement, the Erdogan administration released the US pastor Andrew Brunson on October 12, which had been a longstanding demand of the Trump administration, and has also decided not to make public the audio recordings of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, which could have implicated another American-ally the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in the assassination.

In return, the Trump administration has complied with Erdogan's longstanding demand to evacuate American forces from the Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria. Another demand Erdogan must have made to Washington is to pressure Saudi Arabia to lift the Saudi-UAE blockade imposed in June 2017 against Qatar, which is ideologically aligned to Erdogan's AKP party since both follow the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, in return for not making public the audio recordings of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

It bears mentioning that after the Khashoggi assassination and the international outrage it generated against the Saudi royal family, Saudi Arabia is already trying to assuage Qatar as it invited Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh on December 10, though Doha snubbed the goodwill gesture by sending a low-ranking official to the meeting.

Notwithstanding, the reason why the Trump administration is bending over backwards to appease Ankara is that President Erdogan has been drifting away from Washington's orbit into the Kremlin's sphere of influence. Turkey, which has the second largest army in NATO, has been cooperating with Moscow in Syria against Washington's interests for the last couple of years and has also placed an order for the Russian-made S-400 missile system, though that deal, too, has been thrown into jeopardy after Washington's recent announcement of selling \$3.5 billion worth of Patriot missile systems to Ankara.

In order to understand the significance of relationship between Washington and Ankara, it's worth noting that the United States has been conducting airstrikes against targets in Syria from the Incirlik airbase and around fifty American B-61 hydrogen bombs have also been

deployed there, whose safety became a matter of real concern during the foiled July 2016 coup plot against the Erdogan administration; when the commander of the Incirlik airbase, General Bekir Ercan Van, along with nine other officers were arrested for supporting the coup; movement in and out of the base was denied, power supply was cut off and the security threat level was raised to the highest state of alert, according to [a report](#) [2] by Eric Schlosser for the New Yorker.

Regarding the murder of the Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, a question would naturally arise in the minds of astute readers of alternative media that why did the mainstream media, Washington Post and New York Times in particular, take the lead in publicizing the assassination?

One apparent reason could be that Khashoggi was an opinion columnist for The Washington Post, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon. The Washington Post has a history of working in close collaboration with the CIA as Bezos won a [\\$600 million contract](#) [3] in 2013 to host the CIA's database on the Amazon's web-hosting service.

It bears mentioning that despite the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman being primarily responsible for the war in Yemen that has claimed tens of thousands of lives and created a famine in Yemen, the mainstream media hailed him as a "moderate reformer" who brought radical reforms in the conservative Saudi society by permitting women to drive and by allowing cinemas to screen Hollywood movies.

So what prompted the sudden change of heart in the mainstream media that the purported "moderate reformer" was all of a sudden reviled as a brutal murderer? More than anything, it was the timing of the assassination and the political mileage that could be obtained from Khashoggi's murder in the domestic politics of the United States that prompted the mainstream media to take advantage of the opportunity and mount a smear campaign against the Trump administration by publicizing the assassination.

Jamal Khashoggi was murdered on October 2, when the US midterm elections were only a few weeks away. Donald Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner in particular have known to have forged close business relations with the Saudi royal family. It doesn't come as a surprise that Donald Trump chose Saudi Arabia and Israel for his maiden overseas visit in May 2017.

Thus, the corporate media's campaign to seek justice for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi was actually a smear campaign against Donald Trump and his conservative political base, which is now obvious after the US midterm election results have been tallied. Even though the Republicans have retained their 51-seat majority in the Senate, the Democrats now control the House of Representatives by gaining 39 additional seats.

Clearly, two factors were responsible for the surprising defeat of the Republicans in the US midterm elections. Firstly, the Khashoggi murder and the smear campaign unleashed against the Trump administration by the neoliberal media, which Donald Trump often pejoratively mentions as "Fake News" on Twitter.

Secondly, and more importantly, the parcel bombs sent to the residences of George Soros, a dozen other Democratic Congressmen and The New York Times New York office by Cesar Sayoc on the eve of the elections. Although the suspect turned out to be a Trump supporter, he was likely instigated by shady hands in the US deep state, which is wary of the anti-

establishment rhetoric and pro-Russia tendencies of the so-called “alt-right” administration.

Notwithstanding, it would be pertinent to note here that regarding the Syria policy, there is a schism between the White House and the American deep state led by the Pentagon. After Donald Trump’s inauguration as the US president in January 2017, he has delegated operational-level decisions in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria to the Pentagon.

Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis and previous National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster represented the institutional logic of the deep state in the Trump administration and were instrumental in advising Donald Trump to escalate the conflicts in Afghanistan and Syria.

They advised President Trump to increase the number of American troops in Afghanistan from 8,400 to 14,000. And in Syria, they were in favor of the Pentagon’s policy of training and arming 30,000 Kurdish border guards to patrol Syria’s northern border with Turkey.

Both the decisions have spectacularly backfired on the Trump administration. The decision to train and arm 30,000 Kurdish border guards infuriated the Erdogan administration to the extent that Turkey mounted Operation Olive Branch in the Kurdish-held enclave of Afrin in northwestern Syria from January to March 2018.

Remember that it was the second military operation conducted by the Turkish armed forces and their Syrian militant proxies against the Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria. The first Operation Euphrates Shield in Jarabulus and Azaz lasted from August 2016 to March 2017, immediately after the foiled coup plot against the Erdogan administration in July 2016.

Nevertheless, after capturing Afrin on March 18, the Turkish armed forces and their Syrian jihadist proxies have now set their sights further east on Manbij, where the US Special Forces are closely cooperating with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces.

The regions currently being administered by the Kurds in Syria include the Kurdish-majority Qamishli and al-Hasakah in northeastern Syria along the border with Iraq, and the Arab-majority towns of Manbij to the west of the Euphrates River in northern Syria and Kobani to the east of the Euphrates River along the Turkish border.

The oil- and natural gas-rich Deir al-Zor governorate in eastern Syria has been contested between the Syrian government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, and it also contains a few pockets of the remnants of the Islamic State militants alongside both eastern and western banks of the Euphrates River.

The Turkish “east of Euphrates” military doctrine basically means that the Turkish armed forces would not tolerate the presence of the Syrian PYD/YPG Kurds – which the Turks regard as “terrorists” allied to the PKK Kurdish separatist group in Turkey – in Manbij and Kobani, in line with the longstanding Turkish policy of denying the Kurds any territory in the traditionally Arab-majority areas of northern Syria along Turkey’s southern border.

Thus, it doesn’t come as a surprise that President Trump replaced H.R. McMaster with John Bolton in April last year; and in a predictable development on December 20, James Mattis offered his resignation over President Trump’s announcement of withdrawal of American troops from Syria.

It bears mentioning that unlike dyed-in-the-wool globalists and “liberal interventionist” hawks, like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, who cannot look past beyond the tunnel vision of political establishments, it appears that the pacifist isolationist Donald Trump not only follows news from conservative mainstream outlets, like the Fox News, but he has also been familiar with alternative news perspectives, such as Breitbart’s, no matter how racist and xenophobic.

Thus, Donald Trump is fully aware that the conflict in Syria is a proxy war initiated by the Western political establishments and their regional Middle Eastern allies against the Syrian government. He is also mindful of the fact that militants were funded, trained and armed in the training camps located in Turkey’s border regions to the north of Syria and in Jordan’s border regions to the south of Syria.

Quoting the retired US Brigadier General Anthony Tata on December 21, Donald Trump tweeted: “General Anthony Tata, author, ‘Dark Winter.’ ‘I think the President is making the exact right move in Syria. All the geniuses who are protesting the withdrawal of troops from Syria are the same geniuses who cooked the books on ISIS intelligence and gave rise to ISIS.’”

Under the previous Obama administration, the evident policy in Syria was “regime change.” The Trump administration, however, looks at the crisis in Syria from an entirely different perspective because Donald Trump regards Islamic jihadists as a much graver threat to the security of the United States than Barack Obama.

In order to allay the concerns of Washington’s traditional allies in the Middle East, Israel in particular, the Trump administration conducted a few cruise missile strikes in Syria, but those isolated strikes were nothing more than a show of force to bring home the point that the newly elected President Donald Trump is an assertive and powerful president, but behind the scenes, President Trump has been willing to cooperate with Russia to some extent, in order to defeat the Islamic jihadists in Syria who were portrayed as “moderate rebels” by the mainstream media.

Finally, up until now, Donald Trump was trying to appease the State and Defense department bureaucracies, but after the humiliating defeat in the US midterm elections and the clear hand of the American deep state and corporate media in it, Trump has apparently decided to play hardball. This is the reason why he has announced the withdrawal of 2,000 American troops from Syria, and the decision to substantially scale back the number of US troops in Afghanistan is reportedly also in the offing.

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Notes

[1] [Trump call with Turkish leader led to US pullout from Syria](#)

[2] [The H Bombs in Turkey by Eric Schlosser](#)

[3] [Jeff Bezos Is Doing Huge Business with the CIA, While Keeping His Washington Post Readers in the Dark](#)

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