



The US Plans Endless Occupation and the Partition of Syria

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Since the liberation of Aleppo in December 2016, report after report of military victories by the Syrian government and its allies over the foreign jihadist mercenaries led some in the Western media to suppose that the war was all but over.

For a time, the Syrian war, which had claimed more than 400,000 lives and made refugees of millions of Syrians, moved out of the headlines. Some in the U.S. antiwar movement may have also allowed themselves to hope the war in Syria was winding down.

Unfortunately, the war in Syria is back in the headlines. Events are now moving fast.

- The US-led coalition fighting ISIS in Syria conducted air and artillery strikes against the Syrian Army recently, killing an estimated 100 "pro-regime fighters," according to a coalition statement. Some were Russians according to reports. Thus, two nuclear-armed great powers are in direct conflict now in Syria.
- Syrian jihadist "rebels" shot down a Russian warplane for the first time on February 3rd, and Russia's defense ministry said the pilot was killed as he resisted capture by jihadists.
- A third nuclear-armed state, Israel, is now fully in the war, primarily, it would seem, for anti-Iran reasons. On February 10, an Israeli F-16 warplane returning from a bombing raid on Iran-backed positions in Syria was shot down over central Syria by anti-aircraft fire. Israel is boasting its raids took out half the Syrian government's air defenses.
- The ideological offensive against Syria has resumed. Fresh "reports" from dubious sources such as "The White Helmets" and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights — observing from England! — on the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government appear in the U.S. corporate media and some "alternative" media. Such slanders can spread across the world in a heartbeat, while it takes months to disprove them — as they all have been disproved.[1]

During his campaign and in the early days of his Administration, Trump seemingly narrowed the US goal to the defeat of one terrorist group, ISIS (or ISIL), which since 2014 had won substantial territory in Syria and Iraq. He downplayed the goal of "regime change." But the failure of the U.S., its NATO allies, and their proxies for seven years to overthrow the Syrian government forced Trump to switch from Obama's direct attempts to oust the current Syrian government to Plan B, i.e.,

Trump administration's attempt to adopt an indirect way to force a regime change in Syria.

The Obama Administration policy was clear enough: "regime-change," i.e. ousting Syrian President Assad by means of proxies, the so-called "moderate rebels" — actually well-paid terrorist mercenaries recruited by means of social media from all over the Muslim world and bankrolled by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Their terrorism against the Syrian people was aided by Israel, Jordan and Turkey, with overall military coordination of the war by the U.S.

However, at his Stanford University speech on January 17, 2018, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson announced the main points of Trump Administration's new version of U.S. policy toward Syria:

1. Long-term presence of U.S. military forces engaged in combat operations;
2. Expansion of the military mission from defeat of ISIS to also preventing Iranian influence in the post-ISIS Syria;
3. "Stabilization" (that is, provision of humanitarian, economic, and political assistance) to areas under rebels' control;
4. National elections under United Nations supervision; and
5. "[Rallying] the Syrian people and individuals within the regime to compel Assad to step down."

In less convoluted terms, the Trump Administration's Plan B seeks to achieve the U.S. goal of forced regime change through the following three consecutive steps:

1. **Step One:** Partitioning of Syria and establishing permanent U.S. military bases in northern Syria, where the oil is;
2. **Step Two:** Arming and training the rebel forces in the secured Kurdish areas; and,
3. **Step Three:** Using the captured territories and the trained rebel forces under the command of Syria-based U.S. forces to impose a regime change in Damascus.

These are important facts about the new U.S. plan for Syria and the Middle East:

- The U.S. is now directly engaged in illegally occupying Syrian territory, claiming rights to Syrian oil and attacking the Syrian army in the name of "self-defense."
- Officially, U.S. forces inside Syria number at least 2,000. The real count may be far higher. There are also many thousands of U.S. forces on ships in the Mediterranean or in nearby countries.
- The 2,000 U.S. troops in Syria are arming and organizing the 30,000-strong the so-called "Syrian Democratic Forces," a mix of Kurdish and Arab fighters who have been the primarily fighting on the U.S. side in Syria.
- Turkey has recently invaded northern Syria to attack the Syrian Kurds who live in northern border areas contiguous to Turkey. The Turkish government fears its own large, Kurdish minority's rightful aspirations for national self-determination. Turkey fears that Syria's north can become a staging area for a liberation struggle inside Turkey.
- Normally, subservient Turkey was the conduit for most of the foreign mercenaries entering Syria. Now, the Turkish invasion, wholly illegal and unjustified, complicates U.S. occupation plans, which are also wholly illegal and unjustified.

- The invasion has created an intra-NATO problem. Turkey is in NATO but has been drifting away from the U.S.-dominated war alliance with its recent major arms purchases from Russia.
- Trump has done everything possible to strengthen the U.S.-Israel-Saudi axis, which since 2011 has been the core support of the terrorist mercenaries in Syria.
- In nearby Afghanistan, it is clear the U.S. has not won the 17-year war against the Taliban insurgency, so Trump is sending more U.S. troops to shore up the government in Kabul and forestall a humiliating U.S. defeat.

Trump's overall military budget in 2018 will come to \$716 billion. Under Trump, there is no turning away from interventionist wars that begun or continued by his predecessors, despite his campaign rhetoric to the contrary.

Tom Paine once wrote "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered...." Neither is US imperialism easily conquered, even though its power is waning.

Urgent action by U.S. peace movement is needed. We must urgently re-energize the work of the whole U.S. peace movement on Syria. At the upcoming, long overdue national antiwar actions for April 2018, the demand "Hands off Syria!" must be front and center.

[1] See, "Now Mattis Admits There Was No Evidence Assad Used Poison Gas on His People," *Newsweek*:

<http://www.newsweek.com/now-mattis-admits-there-was-no-evidence-assad-using-poison-gas-his-people-801542>