

Trump shifts from ending “forever wars” to sending tanks into Syria’s oil fields

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US Defense Secretary Mark Esper Friday confirmed that Washington would leave military forces in Syria to maintain control of the country’s principal oil and gas fields.

The Pentagon is “considering how we might reposition forces in the area in order to make sure that we secure the oil fields,” Esper said. His remarks came at the close of a meeting of NATO defense ministers that expressed bitter resentment within Europe over US President Donald Trump’s green lighting of a Turkish invasion of northeast Syria earlier this month along with his announcement that US troops would be pulled out of the region.

While refusing to “get into details,” Esper said the oil field deployment “would include some mechanized units.”

Newsweek magazine has reported that the plan drafted by the Pentagon calls for the deployment of “half of an Army armored brigade combat team battalion that includes as many as 30 Abrams tanks” along with roughly 500 US troops.

The Pentagon’s plan makes a mockery of Trump’s demagogic claim that his administration was putting an end to Washington’s “forever wars” and pulling US forces out of Syria.

The escalation of the US military presence in oil fields located in Syria’s eastern province of Deir al-Zour will also create a situation of extreme instability and the threat of a potentially catastrophic war under conditions in which Russia is deploying forces to the Turkish-Syrian border. Syrian government troops are also moving into areas that had previously been controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces—consisting primarily of the Kurdish YPG militia—which served as the Pentagon’s proxy ground troops in the so-called war on ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria).

Moscow announced on Friday that some 300 more Russian military police had arrived in northeastern Syria after having been transferred from Russia’s southern republic of Chechnya. They are to patrol most of the 273-mile Syrian-Turkish border, outside of the areas that were seized by Turkey’s armed forces during the invasion carried out earlier this month in the northeast, along with the northwestern Afrin district that was occupied by Turkey during a previous invasion last year.

Under an agreement reached earlier this week between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Black Sea resort city of Sochi, the Russian troops are also tasked with overseeing the pullback of Kurdish YPG militia units to positions 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of Syria’s border with Turkey. Erdogan has vowed that after next Tuesday, if the Kurdish units remain in the border area, Ankara will resume its military offensive.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stressed that if the Kurdish forces did not withdraw, they would be left “face to face with the Turkish military,” because the Russian troops “wouldn’t stand between them.”

Other Russian units, equipped with armored vehicles, have already taken up positions in the border area, as have columns of Syrian government soldiers. Moscow has declined to say precisely how many troops it has deployed in the area.

Trump signaled his shift over keeping US troops in northeast Syria after coming under a barrage of criticism directed at his pullout order by both the leadership of the Democratic Party, which is committed to continuing the Syrian intervention initiated under the Obama administration, and sections of the Republican Party. This was joined with an unprecedented wave of

denunciations by retired US military commanders, whose intervention expressed a near-mutinous reaction within sections of top brass.

According to NBC news, the US president was convinced to change his decision after a briefing by Jack Keane, a right-wing retired general who served as an adviser in the US “surge” in Iraq under President George W. Bush and has since become a multimillionaire as the chairman of the company that manufactures Humvee military vehicles as well as by sitting on the boards of other arms corporations. Keane is also a paid commentator on Fox News.

Keane was one of those who denounced Trump’s withdrawal order as a “betrayal” of the Kurds and a “strategic blunder”. The principal concern is that it would weaken the offensive against Iran and Russia, the powers that constitute the main impediment to the unfettered control over the oil-rich and strategically vital Middle East, sought by Washington through successive wars since 1991.

According to NBC, Keane pitched the proposal to maintain a US presence by showing Trump a map of the area being evacuated by US troops, highlighting the oil and gas fields. The US president, who previously suggested that Washington should have kept the oil fields in Iraq to “reimburse” itself for its invasion and destruction of that country, responded favorably.

Trump first signaled his about-face on Syria on Monday, when he announced at a cabinet meeting: “I always said if you’re going in, keep the oil. We’ll work something out with the Kurds so that they have some money, so that they have some cash flow. Maybe we’ll get one of our big oil companies to go in and do it properly.”

The idea that a major US oil company has an interest in going into Syria to illegally exploit its rather modest resources in a war zone is as absurd as the claim by Defense Secretary Esper that US troops are being deployed to the oil fields to prevent them falling into the hands of an already defeated ISIS.

The purpose of the US deployment is to deny these resources to the Syrian government and stymie any attempt to reunify and reconstruct the war-torn country. It is also aimed at confronting Russia and Iran, which have backed the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

From the outset of the CIA-orchestrated war for

regime change in Syria, Washington and its allies have sought to deny Damascus access to Syria’s domestic energy supplies. Initially, the oil and gas fields fell under control of Islamist militias led by the Al Nusra Front, the Syrian branch of Al Qaeda, which served as the main shock troops in the drive to overthrow Assad.

While Al Nusra controlled the fields, the European Union lifted sanctions on Syrian oil, allowing the Al Qaeda affiliate to finance itself by exporting Syrian oil at rock-bottom prices.

The fields subsequently fell under the control of ISIS and then were taken by Washington’s Kurdish proxies.

The movement of US tank units into the oil fields is the clearest demonstration that the Trump administration is committed to continuing the more than eight-year-old war for regime change that has claimed the lives of over half a million people, while forcing nearly half the population, some 11 million people, from their homes.

At the same time, the US deployment is directed at escalating US military aggression against Iran, pushing the Middle East further toward the brink of a region-wide war.

The threat of a direct confrontation with Russia under the conditions of destabilization created by the Turkish invasion and partial US withdrawal, along with the strengthened Russian presence in northeast Syria, will now be greater than ever.

In February of last year, an attempt by a column of Syrian government forces supported by Russian military contractors to move into the area of the oil fields was met with devastating US air strikes in which at least 100 were killed. Under the present conditions, a similar action could provoke a direct military conflict between the world’s two major nuclear powers.



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