

Military brass denounce Trump's withdrawal of troops from Syria

Barry Grey**21 October 2019**

As Donald Trump responds to the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives' impeachment inquiry by seeking to whip up far-right and fascistic forces, the Democrats and their allies in the media are promoting dissident elements in the military command that are publicly denouncing the White House's decision to withdraw US troops from northern Syria.

The extraordinary intervention of high-ranking retired generals is a breach of the core constitutional principle of the subordination of the military to civilian authority. It highlights the right-wing and antidemocratic character of both factions in the political conflict in Washington and the immense dangers facing the working class if the resolution of the crisis is left in the hands of the warring factions of the ruling class.

The open intervention by sections of the military also underscores the issues of US imperialist foreign policy that are at the heart of the Democrats' opposition to Trump. Echoing the statements of the Democratic Party and its media mouthpieces such as the *New York Times*, military critics of Trump are focusing on Trump's abandonment of Washington's Syrian Kurdish allies and his green light for Turkey to invade Kurdish areas near the Syrian-Turkish border. They are accusing Trump of creating a security vacuum that is being filled by Russia and Iran, weakening US influence in the Middle East and undermining US credibility internationally.

Last week, retired Navy Admiral William H. McRaven published an op-ed column in the *New York Times* under the provocative headline "Our Republic Is Under Attack From the President." McRaven, who as a top commander of US Special Operations forces from 2006 to 2014 directed military death squads responsible for war crimes in Iraq and Syria, denounced Trump's attacks on the intelligence agencies, the FBI, the State Department and the corporate media and called for Trump's removal, "the sooner, the better."

On Sunday, retired US Army Gen. David Petraeus, the former commander of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq and director of the CIA in 2011-2012, characterized Trump's withdrawal of troops as a "betrayal" in an interview on the CNN News program "State of the Union."

Moderator Jake Tapper asked Petraeus, "Did the United States betray the Kurds?" to which the former commander and chief spy replied, "Well, I think we have abandoned our Syrian Kurdish partners."

He went on to warn, "Iran, Russia and Bashar Assad's forces are coming in. We give them a victory."

When Tapper pressed him, asking, "You called it an abandonment, but is it a betrayal?" Petraeus answered, "I do think it is, yes."

Another top military officer, Joseph Votel, who only last March retired from his post as commander of the US Central Command, which oversees US military operations in the Middle East and Central Asia, coauthored an article on October 8 in the *Atlantic* headlined "The Danger of Abandoning Our Partners." The article appeared only two days after Trump announced his decision to withdraw US forces from northeastern Syria.

Like McRaven, Votel is a veteran of US Special Operations, having headed the Special Operations Command from March of 2016 to March of this year. This period includes some of the bloodiest fighting in Iraq and Syria, including the US-led demolition of Mosul and Raqqa, which killed uncounted thousands of civilians.

In the article, Votel writes that the decision to "abandon our Kurdish partners" comes "at precisely the time we need them most, given the war-weariness of the American public coupled with ever more sophisticated enemies determined to come after us."

He concludes: "This policy abandonment threatens to undo five years' worth of fighting against ISIS and will severely damage American credibility and reliability in

any future fights where we need strong allies.”

In other words, the endless wars of the past 30 years must be continued into the indefinite future and expanded into new regions of the world, and the lies about fighting “terrorism” and defending “democracy” and “human rights” must be upheld to contain and defuse popular anti-war sentiment.

The corporate media is beginning to comment on the open intervention of the military into US politics and foreign policy. The *Washington Post* on Sunday published an article headlined “Trump’s abrupt withdrawal from Syria tests military’s ‘code of silence’.”

The *Post* cites a “senior official” as saying that “those serving in Syria” are “livid” over the cease-fire deal announced by the White House last Thursday, which they view as a “total capitulation” to Turkey. The article goes on to cite Peter Feaver, a scholar on civil-military relations at Duke University, who says the chorus of military denunciations of Trump’s policy “comes close to a litmus test of that principle.”

The *Atlantic* had its own piece on Sunday that is even blunter in describing dissension within the military brass. Under the headline “Top Military Officers Unload on Trump,” the author, Mark Bowden, writes, “In 20 years of writing about the military, I have never heard officers in high positions express such alarm about a president.” He adds that “those in command positions monitor the president’s Twitter feed like field officers scanning the horizon for enemy troop movements.”

Bowden specifically cites as a bone of contention both Trump’s order last June to carry out a military strike against Iran in response to the shootdown of a US drone, and Trump’s sudden reversal of the order a bare 10 minutes before it was to take effect. The article goes on to say that the “generals I spoke with didn’t agree on everything, but they shared the following five characterizations of Trump’s military leadership.” It then lists Trump’s “disdain of expertise,” the fact that he “trusts only his own instincts,” that he “resists coherent strategy,” is “reflexively contrary” and has a “simplistic and antiquated notion of soldiering.”

The political furor over Trump’s withdrawal of US troops from Syria (not to bring them home, as Trump promised, but to shift them to western Iraq) has become the central driver of the Democrats’ impeachment effort. Despite the mutual mudslinging between the Democrats and Republicans over the various investigations of the White House, the majority of Republicans have joined with the Democrats to condemn the withdrawal of troops

from Syria, demonstrating the fundamental agreement between the two parties on the use of military violence in the attempt to establish US hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East and the Eurasian continent.

Last week, the House passed a resolution condemning the withdrawal from northern Syria by the lopsided vote of 354 to 60, with a large majority of Republicans voting with the Democrats. A similar vote is expected in the Senate, and on Sunday the Republican majority leader, Senator Mitch McConnell, published an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* under the headline, “A grave mistake on Syria.”

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi headed up a surprise bipartisan visit to Jordan over the weekend to highlight congressional opposition to any pullback in Syria. The delegation included House Foreign Affairs Chairman Eliot Engel and the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff, who is heading up the impeachment inquiry. Also included was one Republican member of the House Armed Services Committee, Mac Thornberry, who has announced his retirement at the end of his current term.

Following a meeting with Jordanian King Abdullah II Saturday night, Pelosi said the delegation had discussed “the dangerous opening to ISIS, Iran and Russia” resulting from Trump’s decision to pull US troops from Syria.

These developments vindicate the warnings by the *World Socialist Web Site* against allowing the popular opposition to Trump to be channeled behind the Democratic Party, and the need to base the fight to bring down his fascistic administration by deepening and expanding the class struggle and directing it against both big-business parties and the capitalist system.



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