

US claims new guarantees for Northeast Syria as regional authorities negotiate

by Meghan Bodette - 06/01/2019 18:50



U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton told reporters that the United States would not withdraw its forces from northeast Syria until an agreement is reached to prevent Turkey from attacking Syrian Kurds, NBC News [reported](#) on Sunday.

Bolton made the comments as he travels between Israel and Turkey, meeting with officials in both countries to discuss the plan to withdraw all American military personnel from Syria.

"There are objectives that we want to accomplish that condition the withdrawal," Bolton said, while adding that "the primary point is we are going to withdraw from northeastern Syria."

Just days before, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the United States hoped to prevent the 'slaughter' of Syrian Kurds at the hands of Turkish forces. In December, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar [threatened](#) that Kurdish fighters would be "buried in their ditches when the time comes," and Turkish president Recep

Tayyip Erdogan claimed that majority-Kurdish cities along the Syrian-Turkish border would be "returned to their original owners"— the same threat that preceded massive campaigns of ethnic cleansing in Afrin.

The claim comes after weeks of clarifications and rushed statements that followed U.S. President Donald Trump's sudden announcement. While Trump first claimed that the withdrawal would take place within 30 days, later U.S. statements clarified that the withdrawal would take 60 to 100 days, and other U.S. officials claimed that there was no set timetable at all. Recently, the Wall Street Journal reported that shifting the burden of the remaining fight against ISIS to Turkey— as Trump plans to do— would likely [increase](#), not decrease, American involvement in the conflict.

Despite the Turkish threats and unpredictable U.S. policy, the SDF continue to fight ISIS in Hajin [with Coalition air support](#). Today, it was [announced](#) that the SDF had captured several foreign ISIS fighters, including two American citizens. Many Syrian Kurds believe that the SDF should finish the fight against ISIS alongside the Coalition as soon as possible, to remove any pretext for Turkish involvement.

In the meantime, members of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria have met with other countries to discuss a potential settlement with the Syrian government. Bedran Ciya Kurd, a representative of the Autonomous Administration, said that a meeting with the Russian Foreign Ministry had taken place in December, discussing Russia's role in guaranteeing a possible deal.

"The Foreign Ministry...has affirmed its readiness to work together to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria...It is very important that it plays a role in dialogue between Damascus and Democratic Autonomous Administration, and take this very seriously," he [told ANHA](#).

Negotiations between various authorities in Northeast Syria and the Syrian government have already taken place, with one agreement inviting the Syrian Arab Army to take positions around Manbij.

It is unlikely that Bolton's comments make Turkey's threats any less serious on the ground. Bolton warned Turkish officials against taking "any military action that is not fully coordinated with and agreed to by the United States," leaving the door open for an operation approved by U.S. authorities. As recently as September, Pompeo claimed that Northeast Syria would have a 'seat at the table' in any resolution to the Syrian conflict— but now, U.S. officials oppose the region's efforts to negotiate with the Syrian state.