



Trump's Season's Tweetings - no joy to the World

Dave Stockton Mon, 24/12/2018 - 15:29

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Donald Trump's foreign policy descends ever deeper into farce. Or so it could be described, were its consequences not likely to prove extremely tragic for many people in the Middle East. His decision to withdraw the 2,000 US troops from Syria and end air cover and arms supplies to the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) could soon open them to the long threatened attack by Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

He has also threatened to end humanitarian aid to the PYD Rojava statelet. For those socialists who have always opposed the intervention in Syria and Iraq by the US, other Nato powers and Russia, this 'betrayal' comes as no surprise.

On December 16, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, claimed that, at the G20 meeting in Buenos Aires, Trump had told Erdoğan that the United States 'was working on extraditing Fethullah Gulen and other people'. The Turkish President blames Gulen and his Hizmet organisation for the July 15, 2016 attempted coup, in whose wake some 100,000 people were dismissed from their jobs in the state service and 50,000, including many journalists, were arrested and detained.

Though Trump rapidly clarified that no such promise had been given he added; 'we're having a very good moment with Turkey?', referring to Erdoğan's release of American pastor Andrew Brunson last month, and said the U.S. is always looking for "whatever we can do for Turkey". Perhaps handing over the Rojava Kurds, who did the USA's ground fighting in the 'victory over IS', is what Trump means.

Erdoğan was already massing Turkish troops and those of his 'allies' amongst the so-called Syrian rebel forces, for an invasion across the border, in early December. Trump's 'surprise' decision came after a conversation with the Turkish President and without consulting his own advisors.

What the Kurds could expect from a Turkish occupation has been seen in the western enclave of Afrin, occupied by the Turks and their Syrian allies since March. The Israeli paper Haaretz reports 'a significant demographic shift' meaning that Syrian Arabs are moving into the homes of Kurds who fled Afrin. It reports that 'armed Syrian factions acting under Turkey's auspices have looted Afrin and are continuing to rob the residents, humiliate them at roadblocks and arrest anyone who is suspected of harboring opposition to the new rulers'.

On the other hand, Trump's troop withdrawal - if it goes through despite powerful opposition from the US security apparatus and the military, could open the way for a restoration of control by Bashar al-Assad's regime over the north east of the country, of course with Russian support. Negotiations between the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Assad broke down in November when the latter refused to grant any real autonomy to the Kurdish areas, insisting on a return to the situation before the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution. The forces of reaction and counterrevolution, in both Ankara and in Damascus, clearly feel they have the whip hand and intend to lay about their enemies with a vengeance.

Certainly, the hopes of an independent Kurdish democratic utopia will rapidly fade if US support is withdrawn. The PYD is now facing a choice between a rock and a hard place.

But all is not well for the US President after his latest trouble making. Trump's turnaround led to the resignation of his

Defense Secretary, James Mattis, who sarcastically wrote to the President that he had "the right to have a secretary of defense whose views are better aligned with yours". Who might be able to align with Trump's fallings in and out with foreign leaders, in a search for "tremendous deals"? Mattis' letter of resignation notes Trump's disruption of US strategic alliances in favor of sucking up to "malign actors and strategic competitors," in other words Russia's Vladimir Putin, North Korea's Kim Jong Un and China's Xi Jinping.

Mattis was the last of the former military men who the US elite hoped could control the presidential bull-in-a-china-shop. He follows national security advisers Mike Flynn and General H.R. McMaster, and chief of staff Marine Corps General, John Kelly.

Trump's Christmas present to Erdoğan has also upset the plans of his hard right advisors and family entourage. His latest national security advisor, the arch warmonger John Bolton, had only recently talked of increasing US troop deployments in Syria, to threaten the use of force against Iran and Hezbollah.

Iran and its allies across the region, not only the Lebanese Hezbollah, active in Syria, but also the Yemeni Houthi, were to be the targets of an adventure dreamed up by Trump, his son-in-law Jared Kushner, and the Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (a.k.a. MBS). Also involved was Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu.

Over recent months, however, a series of "accidents" have hit these protagonists; most dramatically MBS' involvement in the murder of Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul. Erdoğan probably has even more incriminating evidence he can use to blackmail MBS. In addition, the increasingly genocidal Saudi war in Yemen, climaxed over the humanitarian crisis over the port city of Houtheda. The disgraced MBS was unable to continue to refuse UN demands for a ceasefire and Trump was unable to continue to support him. The Saudi prince and Erdoğan were rivals for hegemony over the Sunni Islamic world.

Meanwhile, Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition was playing out another criminal conspiracy against the population of Gaza but this one came unstuck with his failure to go through with another major pulverising of Gaza, instead signing a truce with Hamas. This in turn triggered the walkout of extreme right winger Avigdor Lieberman from his coalition, threatening an early election, which "Bibi" narrowly escaped, for the time being.

As President and Commander in Chief, Trump wields quasi-monarchical powers, but only for as long as the Senate and the House do not combine to stop him. Certainly, the Syrian pull-out has alienated right wing hawks as well as the Democrats, who now control the House of Representatives. The power of what Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr, way back in 1973, called the "imperial presidency" is considerable, as is shown by Trump's use of executive orders to bypass Congress, impose a police regime on immigrants and punish cities and states that try to protect them, launch trade wars, and now to close down a big chunk of government in an attempt to force the House to pay for his obscene wall.

Disrupting the geostrategic foundations of US foreign policy in the Middle East is another matter altogether, however. It makes Nixon's 1970s outrageous spying on the Democratic national headquarters, his lying and foul mouthed "tapes" seem modest by comparison. Indeed, Nixon's foreign policy regarding China, safely in the hands of Henry Kissinger, was successfully modified for two generations. To call Trump's foreign policy short sighted would set a record for understatement. But this is not simply a personal foible.

It is a result of his populist playing to an electorate with whom he does not have any organised (party) relationship and so has to be thrown regular demagogic concessions. This has raised him temporarily above both the Republican Party and the permanent parts of the state machine, the secret services and the military. This could leave him dangerously exposed in 2019, especially if one takes into account the possible information that the likes of Putin and Erdoğan could reveal and that Special Counsel Mueller's investigation might reveal.

The background to these multiple backstabblings and betrayals, the big picture, is the new period of sharpening inter-imperialist rivalries, particularly intense in the Middle East, but also in Latin America, in Europe and in East Asia.

Under these conditions, if democratic or national liberation forces, like the activists of the Arab Spring, or the Rojava

Kurds, become politically dependent on one or another of the kaleidoscopic combinations of rival imperialist and regional powers, they are just asking to be 'betrayed' and handed over to their enemies like so much small change.

Instead, the working class and all progressive forces have, as Marx said in 1864, 'the duty to master themselves the mysteries of international politics; to watch the diplomatic acts of their respective governments; to counteract them, if necessary, by all means in their power'. Marx said this in the Inaugural Address of the First International. Today, to give a clear orientation to our struggles and to mobilise the forces of the working class and its allies to counteract the rotten manoeuvres of their class enemies, a new International is urgently needed - a Fifth International.

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