

Will Joe Biden “Revise” U.S Agenda in Syria? Use Terrorism Pretext to “Keep Boots on the Ground”?

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The mayhem of the presidential elections left the American policy-makers locked in heated arguments about the future of the US domestic and foreign policy alike. One of the most pressing issues on the agenda is the Middle East developments, especially the U.S. role in Syria.

After his ultimate defeat in the national vote Donald Trump handed down his successor a controversial legacy of multiple unresolved issues coupled with the badly damaged image of the White House. This is true especially for Syria, where despite repeated claims of total victory over ISIS, the terrorists continue to carry out sporadic attacks throughout the eastern part of the country Syria. The activity of sleeper cells became a pretext for rejecting the idea of a complete U.S. military withdrawal from Syria.

It is widely believed that the Biden administration intends to make use of the terror threat to keep boots on the ground in Syria in order to ensure the security of oil and gas fields. Indeed, the fight against international terrorism constitutes the basis of Washington’s foreign policy in the Middle East. However, the U.S history in the region has shown that the White House primarily regards terror groups as an opportunity to benefit from seizing previously inaccessible resources.

In pursuit of economic and political goal human rights are sidelined, as is the case in Al-Hawl camp, where refugees suffer from miserable conditions living side by side with captured ISIS terrorists. The camp that was initially established in 1991 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for Iraqi citizens fleeing from the Persian Gulf War, started to host ISIS terrorists and their families in late 2018. The camp originally designed for 11,000 people currently counts about 70,000 – more than six times over of its capacity – the majority of whom are women and children of various nationalities. Camp dwellers blame the overcrowding and poor management for a shortage of water, lack of food and inadequate medical care.

The American leadership persistently ignores this humanitarian catastrophe, a byproduct of the neglectful approach to the civilian population applied by the U.S.-backed Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). By doing this Washington possibly violates the Geneva Convention of August 12, 1949, under which the U.S. is obliged to ensure the safety of civilians in northeast Syria.

Another worrying tendency is the increase in cases of riots and escapes from the SDF-controlled prisons that hold around 10,000 detainees. The most serious incidents of this kind took place in October 2019, when several hundred prisoners broke out of the Ain Issa jail.

The Americans did not pay sufficient attention to these developments and chose not to investigate human trafficking networks used to smuggle militants out of jail and ultimately out of Syria despite the risk of reappearance of armed groups and rise in subversive activities. This deliberate ignorance will persist until the armed groups pose a threat for U.S. military bases located in the energy-rich areas of Hasakah and Deir Ezzor provinces.

This is yet another reminder that the U.S. is not a reliable ally for the Kurdish autonomous administration. As Ankara continues to strengthen its positions in the region there has been growing speculation about Turkey planning another military operation in northern Syria. Earlier, the Turkish leadership had abused the buffer zone agreement with the SDF that was brokered by the U.S. to evict the Kurds from these areas. Back then the Turks faced no obstacles in implementing their plan as the American troops withdrew from the buffer zone on the very eve of the Turkish Peace Spring operation. During the Turkish offensive a number of massive escapes that let dozens of terrorists out of SDF jails took place. Keeping in mind the U.S. practical approach to its geopolitical interests, the new American administration will likely prefer not to obstruct its NATO ally and the Kurds will be again hit by the Turkish artillery and UAVs.

The U.S. foreign policy under the Donald Trump's presidency has been dominated by the pursuit of economic benefits under the pretext of promoting democracy and protecting civilians, a perfect representation of the "world leader's" disregard for the interests of any state, be it ally or enemy, whose resources fall in the White House's sphere of interests. Double standards have become a defining trait of the international relations with civilians whose interests are supposedly protected by the U.S. military reduced to a bargaining chip.

The upcoming transition of the U.S. leadership and the inauguration of President Joe Biden have to determine whether the United States is capable of being a guarantor of security and stability, or Washington's economic ambitions come first.

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