

Pentagon says U.S. poised to withdraw remaining troops from northeastern Syria



Washington, October 13 (RHC)-- The Pentagon has announced that the United States is set to withdraw the rest of its troops from northeastern Syria amid an ongoing Turkish offensive in the region.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said in an interview with the CBS News on Sunday that the U.S. would be pulling out around 1,000 troops from Syria's northeast as part of a "deliberate withdrawal" directed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

Describing the situation for American troops in the region as "untenable," Esper said the measure was taken to ensure that U.S. forces were not "put in harm's way." During the interview, the Pentagon chief claimed that Kurdish militants of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) were planning to negotiate a deal with the government in Damascus and Russia to withstand the Turkish attacks.

"In the last 24 hours, we learned that [the Turks] likely intend to extend their attack further south than originally planned, and to the west," Esper told the CBS News. "We also have learned in the last 24 hours that the SDF are looking to cut a deal with the Syrians and the Russians to counterattack against the Turks. And so we find ourselves, we have American forces likely caught between two opposing

advancing armies, and it's a very untenable situation," he added.

Turkish military forces and Turkish-backed militants of the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) on Wednesday launched a long-threatened cross-border invasion of northeast Syria in a declared attempt to eliminate Kurdish militants from the so-called People's Protection Units (YPG) to push them away from border areas.

The YPG, which itself is the military wing of the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), constitutes the backbone of the SDF, an anti-Damascus alliance of predominantly Kurdish militants. Ankara views the US-backed YPG as a terrorist organization tied to the homegrown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militant group, which has been involved in armed separatism in Turkey since 1984.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said over the weekend that Ankara will not stop its military operation against Kurdish militants in northeastern Syria "no matter what anyone says."

The Turkish Defense Ministry announced on Sunday that a total of 480 YPG militants had been "neutralized" since the operation began. The Turkish military generally uses the term neutralize to signify that the militants surrendered or were killed or captured.

The self-proclaimed Kurdish-led authority in northeastern Syria says more than 191,000 people have been displaced as a result of the Turkish invasion.

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