

Confusion over Trump comment that U.S. has secured the oil in Syria



Washington, October 20 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that the United States has "secured the oil" in Syria has set Twitter on fire, from speculation he will keep troops there to accusations he was only ever interested in oil rather than fighting terrorism.

Praising the ceasefire negotiated with Turkey on Thursday, Trump tweeted that everything was going well, adding that captured Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS) terrorists were "double secured" by Turkish and Kurdish forces, but "the U.S. has secured the oil."

Journalists, pundits, think-tank experts and the president's critics in general have zeroed in on that "curious element" in the thread, wondering what it might mean.

Nicholas Heras of the liberal think-tank CNAS suggested this might mean the U.S. is keeping a "residual force" in the Middle Euphrates River Valley, contrary to earlier reports that all forces would be withdrawn except for a small garrison at At-Tanf on the border with Jordan.

Washington has kept a small number of special forces operators in Syria for the past several years -- against international law and violating U.S. legislation authorizing military action abroad -- with the supposed purpose of leading Kurdish militias against IS.

Territories liberated by these "Syrian Democratic Forces" included much of Syria's farmland and oil fields east of the Euphrates, which the U.S. refused to turn back over to the government in Damascus.

As Turkey invaded northern Syria last week to go after the Kurdish militias it has declared terrorists, the Kurds reportedly struck a deal with Damascus for government forces to move back in to the border. It stood to reason that this would apply to the oilfields and the rest of the territory in the interior as well, whether now or later.

Trump's tweet opens up the possibility that some U.S. troops will be staying behind to prevent this from happening, although that does not fit with the general withdrawal orders confirmed by the Pentagon earlier. Far more likely is that he was referring to oilfields previously used by IS to fund its "caliphate," that are now safely in the hands of local forces opposed to them. No one but Trump -- and perhaps his hairdresser -- knows for sure.

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