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# **We, supporters of Rojava, should be worried about its partnership with the United States.**

Zaher Baher

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The political and military balance in Syria is constantly changing. Relations between the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), co-founded by People's Protection Units (YPG), and in turn Russia and US constantly ebb and flow. The dynamic behind these changes has very little to do with ISIS. In fact, it all depends on the respective interests of the great powers and their struggle against one another to establish predominant power there.

The past year has seen a steady erosion of the US position in Syria vis-à-vis Russia, who has since overtaken it. Russia's heavy involvement in Syria and becoming a major ally with Turkey has changed many things. The relative inactivity of the USA has given the opportunity to Russia, Turkey and Iran to play a significant role in making decisions there.

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Under Trump's new administration this has changed somewhat. He probably has a different approach to Syria. While US still is one of the major powers in the world, it cannot sit and do nothing in the region especially in Syria.

After a long pause, Trump has decided to ally with SDF against ISIS to defeat them in Raqqa regardless of Turkey's position and reaction. Trump has now approved a deal to supply arms including heavy weapons to SDF directly, seeing them as the most effective and reliable force especially after the SDF capture of Tabqa City from ISIS. The US administration is at present more than any other time determined in recapturing Raqqa, the ISIS de facto capital. It is now quite clear that the US administration and SDF and the People's Democratic Party (PYD) are getting very close to one another to the point that SDF strive to achieve what the US wants to achieve, even though this can be at the expenses of what have been achieved so far in Rojava.

We supporters of Rojava should be very worried about the current development in relation to Democratic Self-administration and the Movement of Society (Tev-Dem). We should be concerned because of the following consequences:

First: It is a matter of influence for the US while seeing that Russia almost controlled the situation and managed to take Turkey onto its own side. US wants to be very active before losing its power there. It wants to play the major role and achieve its own goal, this can be only done through SDF and PYD. There is no doubt that the US is more concerned about its own interests rather than Kurdish interests in Rojava.

Second: To contain SDF and PYD, to make them a tool by using them for their own interest. This is the best way to make PYD and SDF lose their credibility in Syria, the region, Europe and elsewhere.

Third: The current attitude of the US towards Rojava and arming SDF directly might be an effort to cut them off from PKK and decrease PKK influence over developments in Rojava.

Fourth: There is no doubt that whatever happens will now make Turkey more furious against both YPG and PKK. This could create a greater backlash from Turkey. It may repeat last month's military operations against YPG or even extend these military operations into Rojava and against YPG & PKK in Shengal, in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Fifth: With Russia's displeasure against the SDF and PYD, Assad could be influenced to change Syria's attitude towards them in the future if not now. If Rojava had chosen the Russian side instead of USA, it could have been much better because Russia is more reliable as an ally than the US. It looks like Assad will stay in power after the defeat of ISIS. Assad normally listens to Russia very diligently. In this case, there was a greater chance under pressure of Russia that Assad would have let Rojava pursue a better future than what US and Western countries may decide for them.

Sixth: Intensifying and prolonging the current war causing Rojava a great deal of dislocation. Continuation of the war costs SDF so many lives and makes them weaker and weaker. The stronger and the bigger the size of SDF in Rojava is, the more it must necessarily be dependent on one of the major power, in the meantime Rojava will be weaker. The more SDF achieves militarily, the more socially and economically can actually be lost in Rojava. The more powerful SDF and PYD become, the less power the local self-administration and Tev-Dem will have. The number of SDF fighters alone is estimated to be 50,000. Just imagine even 10,000 instead of working militarily, working in the fields and cooperatives or building school, hospitals, parks and houses, by now Rojava would have been somewhere else.

Seventh: Often I have mentioned in my articles that a successful Rojava – successful in the way we were hoping – depended on a couple of factors or as a minimum one to preserve the experiment. One was expanding Rojava's movement at least to a couple of more countries in the region. The

other factor was international solidarity. However, neither happened. If one thing can now preserve Rojava, it is ISIS and the opposition forces in Syria holding out against the odds. In short only a prolonged anti-ISIS military campaign can preserve Rojava.

In my opinion after defeating ISIS in Kobane's region, YPG should have suspended its military operations except in self-defence of its established perimeter. After defeating ISIS in Kobane region and the greater intervention of US and Russia, UPG and PYD should have withdrawn from the war. PYD should have dealt with the situation better and withdrawn from power for Tev-Dem and let the rest of the population to make their own decisions about peace and war. Clearly the current nature, direction and the potential course of the present war in Rojava has completely changed. It is a war of the major powers, European governments and the regional governments over securing interests and sharing domination.

The situation at the moment looks very grim. It appears that once ISIS has been defeated in Mosul and Raqqa then more than likely war will start involving Rojava and PKK in Qandil and Shangal. These calculations are being made by Barzani, head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkey and perhaps also Iran and Iraq with the blessing of the US, Russia and Germany. Such a war may start by the end of August or September after the military defeat of ISIS in Mosul and Raqqa.