

British Special Forces in Syria retreat following the U.S. withdrawal



London, October 21 (RHC)-- British Special Forces in Syria have been forced to withdraw from their positions in the north of the country, following the sudden retreat of U.S. forces.

The development comes in the wake of U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper's announcement that the nearly-1000 strong U.S. force in Syria will be evacuated to Western Iraq shortly. Earlier this month, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that US forces will be withdrawing from their positions on the Syria-Turkey border.

Trump's decision paved the way for a Turkish military offensive in north-eastern Syria which has completely changed the balance of power in that part of Syria. The decision – and the resulting withdrawal of British Special Forces – has caused consternation in the higher reaches of the British armed forces.

The Independent reported on October 17 that a group of former senior commanders in the British military had “condemned” Trump's actions in northern Syria. The generals, most of whom reportedly served in the Middle East and Afghanistan, expressed their views directly to The Independent.

General Sir David Richards, the former head of the British military and former commander of international forces in Afghanistan, told The Independent that: “On an emotional level, and certainly from a tactical perspective, what is being done to the Kurds is plainly wrong”.

But Richards also expressed another – and perhaps far more important - reason for his disappointment. “At another level these decisions also mean that Russian and Iranian influence will grow. I really can’t see how any of this protects or enhances Western interests. It’s quite the opposite”, Richards complained.

The view of UK military chiefs sharply contrasts with the position of British defence secretary, Ben Wallace, who told Nato delegates at a meeting in London last week that: “Turkey needs to do what it sometimes has to do to defend itself”.

According to the The Times’ defence correspondent, Lucy Fisher, the number of British Special Forces in Syria at the beginning of the month stood in the “low hundreds”.

Fisher tweeted earlier this month that British special operators in Syria rely on US forces for “resources, transport, infrastructure, ISR [Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance]”.

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