

US says will not abandon Kurdish-led SDF, refutes Turkish claims

kurdishdailynews.org/2017/02/16/us-says-will-not-abandon-kurdish-led-sdf-refutes-turkish-claims/



SDF spokespersons Talal Silo and Jiyan Ahmed



WASHINGTON – The US State Department has dismissed claims by Turkish Defence Minister Fikri Isik that the Trump administration is not adamant on carrying out the Raqqa operation with Kurdish forces.

“The new US administration has a different approach to the issue. They are not insisting anymore that the operation should definitely be carried out with the YPG. They haven’t yet made up their minds,” Isik told reporters in Brussels on Thursday.

Speaking to the [Middle East Eye](#), a US State Department spokesperson referred to a press briefing given on Wednesday by Major General Rupert Jones, a deputy commander in the coalition fighting against the Islamic State and said their position had not changed from that.

At the press briefing Jones had responded to a question saying, “the force that looks most likely capable to conduct the liberation of Raqqa remains the SDF,” referring to the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a majority Kurdish-Arab force of which the YPG are the main component.

“Are we confident in the SDF? Absolutely we are,” Jones continued. “We’ve seen their fighting spirit, we’ve seen what they’re capable of doing. They re-took Manbij, a very tough fight, and they prevailed in the face of a tough, tough opposition.”

“The Arabs and the Kurds actually work hand-in-glove, and my expectation is if the SDF lead the assault into Raqqa, that is how they’ll operate. They’ll work together in concert with each other, but the majority of the fighters will be Arabs. We, the coalition, will be there to support them,” Jones said.

Turkish officials, including the President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have recently said the Turkish army and rebel groups they are backing will target SDF-held Manbij and Raqqa following victory over IS in al-Bab.

However conflicting reports have emerged from the northern Syrian town, an IS stronghold since 2014, about whether Turkish forces are indeed taking the town or whether the battle is ongoing.