Better Late Than Never: The Case For Withdrawing From Syria

By Kirstin Erickson

***Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.***

Since 2014, the United States has been conducting military operations in Syria. This was originally limited to airstrikes against the Islamic State, but the military commitment only escalated, with new and increasing objectives and missions. In 2019, President Trump declared ISIS to be defeated in Syria and ordered a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria. This decision was met with serious backlash for a variety of reasons: concerns that terrorism still remained, that the U.S. would be abandoning their allies, that this would mean victory for Russia. As a result, Trump initially reduced, but did not completely withdraw, US troops in Syria and just recently (Sept 2020) started increasing it again. This case argues that Trump was right the first time. The justifications for withdrawing from Syria are that there is no achievable beneficial objective to US troops in Syria, and the downside is horrific: escalation of conflict into World War 3 with Russia. The 2A brief has an extended section of disadvantage responses, since this is going to be the majority of the negative strategy.

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Better Late Than Never: The Case For Withdrawing From Syria

At the end of 2018, President Trump ordered a complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria. Unfortunately, it was only a partial and temporary withdrawal, and today the policy is being reversed, with more forces being sent in. But the military presence in Syria is all risk and no benefit, and that’s why it’s time to affirm that: The United States Federal Government should considerably reduce its military commitments.

OBSERVATION 1. DEFINITIONS

Considerable

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/considerably>

1**:**worth [consideration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/consideration) **:**[SIGNIFICANT](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/significant)

Military

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/military>

b**:**of or relating to armed forces

Commitment

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commitment>

c**:**the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally [impelled](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impel)

OBSERVATION 2. INHERENCY, the structure of the Status Quo. 3 important FACTS

Fact 1: Background of US involvement in the Syrian civil war

The Associated Press 2018 (The Associated Press is an American not-for-profit news agency headquartered in New York City) “A look at US involvement in Syria’s civil war” <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2018/12/19/a-look-at-us-involvement-in-syrias-civil-war/>

In September 2014, then-President Barack Obama launched a U.S. air campaign against the Islamic State in Syria, one month after starting airstrikes in neighboring Iraq. The Islamic State had built substantial military firepower in Syria, which it used to sweep across western and northern Iraq earlier in 2014. In late 2015 the first American ground troops entered Syria — initially 50, growing to the current official total of about 2,000. They recruited, organized and advised thousands of Syrian Kurdish and Arab fighters, dubbed the Syrian Democratic Forces, and pushed IS out of most of its strongholds.

Fact 2: Withdrawal, then reversal

NEW YORK TIMES 2020 (journalist Eric Schmitt) 14 Feb 2020 “Russians Pressure U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/world/middleeast/russia-northeast-syria.html>

Last October, Mr. Trump abruptly ordered a complete withdrawal of the 1,000 American troops helping Syrian Kurdish forces combat pockets of Islamic State fighters, opening the way to a bloody Turkish cross-border offensive. Mr. Trump then, just as abruptly, [reversed himself and allowed about 500 troops](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/world/middleeast/esper-troops-syria.html) to remain in a much smaller operating zone.

Fact 3: More forces are being sent

NEW YORK TIMES 2020. (journalist Eric Schmitt) “U.S. Sending More Troops to Syria to Counter the Russians” 18 Sept 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/18/us/politics/us-troops-syria-russia.html>

The military said on Friday that it was sending Bradley fighting vehicles, advanced radar and more fighter jet patrols to northeast Syria, three weeks after [a Russian armored vehicle rammed](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/world/middleeast/pentagon-russia-syria.html) an American ground patrol and injured seven American soldiers. The reinforcements, which add about 100 troops to the more than 500 U.S. forces already there, represent a show of force in response to the clash last month that caught American commanders off guard.

OBSERVATION 3. We offer the following PLAN implemented by Congress and the President

1. The President orders a full withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria.

2. Enforcement through the military chain of command.  
3. Timeline: Plan will take effect over a 90-day period, beginning immediately after an affirmative ballot.   
4. Funding is general federal revenues and Congress cancels all funding for US operations in Syria after 90 days.  
5. All Affirmative speeches may clarify

OBSERVATION 4. JUSTIFICATIONS

JUSTIFICATION 1. Impossible Goals and Wasted Resources

A. The Link: US goals in Syria were impossible

Benjamin H. Friedman 2019 (Benjamin H. Friedman is policy director at Defense Priorities and adjunct lecturer at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs. He previously worked as a Defense Analyst at the Cato Institute and a Researcher at the Center for Defense Information) “Get out of Syria, but give the Kurds fair warning” <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/10/08/get-out-syria-but-give-kurds-fair-warning-editorials-debates/3913258002/>

And Washington saddled the small U.S. military force in Syria with impossible aims: Evict Iran, reconstruct to prevent extremism and keep pressure on Syrian dictator Bashar Assad by aligning with the Kurds, while also pacifying Turkey, somehow. U.S. policy ignored the ugly reality that the Assad regime will win. Helping create a durable peace requires dealing with it.

B. The Impact: Lost money, lost lives and lost opportunities to improve US national security

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (a senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army who retired in 2015 after 21 years, including four combat deployments) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

Rather than force the countries most directly threatened by ISIS to defend their own territory while using our intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to guard against any threat to U.S. personnel or interests, Washington expended precious resources that could have otherwise been spent on improved readiness, modernization, or other higher-valued purposes. Billions of dollars and the lives of numerous American service members could have been saved had we never deployed there without risking the safety of Americans.

JUSTIFICATION 2. All Risk and No Benefit

A. No Benefit. Even if we could attain the unattainable goals in Syria, they would have no benefit or even be counterproductive

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (a senior fellow for Defense Priorities and retired Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

First, we must disabuse ourselves of the notion that a handful of U.S. troops in the vast domain of the fragmented Syria—still racked by a multi-sided civil war with regional and major powers backing various groups—has even the theoretical possibility of preventing any faction, from doing anything, over any time frame. **[END QUOTE**]

I observed firsthand in 2011 how 140,000 US and NATO troops, backed up by 300,000 Afghan security forces, proved incapable of denying the Taliban access to vast tracts of the country. [**HE GOES ON LATER TO SAY QUOTE:**] Aside from the fact it is militarily impossible to accomplish the laundry-list of goals in Syria—"countering" Iran (which can't even be defined), opposing Assad (which isn't necessary for U.S. security), and stopping Turkey from attacking Syrian Kurds (risking confrontation with our NATO ally).

B. The Risk. Things can only get worse the longer we stay.

Simon Jenkins 2019 (Guardian columnist, author and BBC broadcaster) “Trump is right to take troops out of Syria. Now they must leave Iraq and Afghanistan” <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/14/trump-troops-syria-leave-iraq-afghanistan-us>

Donald Trump is right to extricate the US from Syria. American troops have no strategic reason to be in that country. If they stayed any longer they would only be sucked in deeper – if they tried to impose a sort of peace, they would be attacked by all sides. The outside world has no dog in the Turkish-Kurd fight.

C. The Conclusion: The costs of staying in Syria outweigh the benefits

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (a senior fellow for Defense Priorities; retired Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

It is not in America's interests to stay in Syria for objectives so disconnected from our security and prosperity. Contrary to conventional wisdom in Washington, the strategic benefit doesn't come anywhere close to justifying the cost. Syria remains embroiled in a civil war with scores of groups and militias trying to attain various and competing objectives. The remaining fight there belongs to them, not the United States.

JUSTIFICATION 3. Conflict with Russia

A. Link: US and Russian forces in conflict

Lara Seligman and Betsy W. Swan 2020 (journalists) written 26 Aug and updated 27 Aug 2020 “U.S. service members injured in Syria after skirmish with Russian forces” POLITICO <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/08/26/us-troops-injured-russian-forces-syria-402347>

The draft statement POLITICO reviewed, written by U.S. Central Command, said a Russian vehicle intentionally rammed a coalition vehicle, and that four U.S. troops were injured. The Russian vehicles unsafely pursued U.S. forces, according to the statement. [END QUOTE] The U.S. has roughly 500 troops in Syria, primarily in the northeastern part of the country. The American troops are fighting alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces to destroy the remnants of the Islamic State militant group. [THEY GO ON LATER TO SAY QUOTE:] The Russian and U.S. militaries have operated in close proximity in Syria throughout the country’s long-running civil war and commanders have maintained a communication line to avoid hitting each other. However, in recent months Russian forces have increasingly encroached on U.S. troop-controlled territory in eastern Syria, part of what officials say is a deliberate campaign to squeeze the U.S. military out of the region, [POLITICO reported](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/06/30/russians-us-troops-syria-uproar-trump-345584) in June. Although there have been several instances of close calls over the years, including between U.S. and Russian jets operating in the skies over Syria, the clashes have rarely turned violent. One notable exception was a bloody, four-hour battle in 2018, when American commandos killed 200 to 300 pro-Syrian government forces, including Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group.

B. The Impact: Escalation with Russia over Syria can ignite World War III

Prof. Colin H. Kahl 2017 (**associate professor in the security studies programme at Georgetown University's school of foreign service. He served as US vice-president Joe Biden's national security adviser**) 11 Apr 2017 What could go wrong for the US in Syria? War with Russia <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/what-could-go-wrong-for-the-us-in-syria-war-with-russia>

In this context, the danger of miscalculation is real. The Syrian dictator (perhaps prodded by Russia or Iran) may attempt to test Mr Trump again, hoping to prove him a "paper tiger". And Mr Trump, having invested his personal credibility in standing firm, may find himself psychologically or politically compelled to respond, despite the very real risks that it could result in a direct military clash with Russia.  
  
**[END QUOTE. HE GOES ON LATER IN THE SAME CONTEXT TO CONCLUDE QUOTE:]**

As the afterglow and applause of the missile strikes fade, finding a way to advance American interests in Syria while avoiding a war with Russia is the urgent task at hand. After all, sinking into a Syrian quagmire would be bad enough. World War III would be far worse.

2A Evidence: Withdraw From Syria

OPENING QUOTES / AFF PHILOSOPHY

Withdrawing US troops from Syria improves our national security

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army who retired in 2015 after 21 years, including four combat deployments) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

While Washington elites recoil from such a suggestion, a careful analysis confirms Trump is right: Withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria improves our national security.

INHERENCY

Background: First American assault on Syrian government in 2017

The Associated Press 2019 (news agency) “A timeline of the US involvement in Syria's conflict” <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/timeline-us-involvement-syrias-conflict-60314701>

April 4, 2017: More than 90 people are killed in a suspected nerve gas attack on the town of Khan Sheikhoun in the rebel-held Idlib province. Moscow and Damascus deny responsibility.

April 5, 2017: Trump says Assad's government has "crossed a lot of lines" with the suspected chemical attack in Syria and a day later, the U.S. fires 59 cruise missiles into Syria in retaliation — the first direct American assault on the Syrian government.

US involvement has gone from behind-the-scenes to overt displays of force

The Associated Press 2019 (international news agency) “A timeline of the US involvement in Syria's conflict” <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/timeline-us-involvement-syrias-conflict-60314701>

The U.S. involvement in the war-torn country has shifted from working quietly behind the scenes to support rebels to overt displays of U.S. force and a gradually widening footprint in an attempt to shape the fight.

Trump walked back his decision to remove troops

Shawn Snow 2019 (senior reporter for Marine Corps Times and a Marine Corps veteran) “New in 2020: Will Trump pull the US military out of Iraq and Syria?” <https://www.militarytimes.com/flashpoints/2019/12/29/new-in-2020-will-trump-pull-the-us-military-out-of-iraq-and-syria/>

Trump ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria following a Turkish incursion into the country. Trump argued he did not want American forces caught in the crossfire between combative Kurdish and Turkish allies.

The American armor and some American commandos are left in Syria on a new mission to keep Syrian oil wells from falling into the hands of a resurgent ISIS. Analysts have argued that Trump simply walked back his decision to remove American troops from Syria.

JUSTIFICATIONS

Impossible objectives

Completely eradicating ISIS is impossible

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019. (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Department adviser and Middle East negotiator. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying”* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

The Trump administration — like its predecessor — talks loosely about defeating or destroying the Islamic State. By intensifying the anti-ISIS campaign of the Obama administration, the Trump administration has indeed decimated the proto terror state that considers itself a caliphate, leaving it with less than 1 percent of the area it once controlled in Iraq and Syria. ISIS isn't Germany or Japan, where the U.S. and its allies broke those regimes' will to fight, destroyed all their war-making capacity, eradicated their fascist state ideologies and helped reshape a new environment for two democratic countries. For the U.S. to achieve that goal in Syria is mission impossible.

ISIS cannot be completely extinguished by military force. Turn: US involvement could make it worse

John Glaser 2019 (director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute) “The Trump Administration’s Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field” <https://www.cato.org/publications/testimony/trump-administrations-syria-policy-perspectives-field>

But if total, complete, irreversible destruction of ISIS was ever a US objective, it was a profoundly unwise one. ISIS represents an ideology that cannot be completely extinguished by the application of military force. Actually, there is reason to believe that a foreign military presence can actually aid in recruitment for these groups. Recall that ISIS is an outgrowth of the Sunni insurgency that rose up to fight US forces in Iraq. Without the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, we very likely would never have seen ISIS emerge. This should serve as a useful lesson for the unintended consequences of US military action, which then often justify further military action.

US goals in Syria are militarily unattainable

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” 4 Apr 2018 <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

Following the president's comments last week, The Hill reported "some of Trump's national security advisers have recommended keeping U.S. troops in Syria for at least a couple years to ensure that militants do not regain territory and to keep Iranian involvement at bay." However much any official may desire the accomplishment of these two goals, based on my four combat deployments in the region, I can confirm they are utterly unattainable militarily. More important, even if it were militarily attainable, we should still avoid another open-ended military commitment disconnected from U.S. security.

Only Syrians can ultimately defeat ISIS

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Dept adviser. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying” 19 Jan 2019* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

Indeed, only Syrians can ultimately defeat ISIS and the al-Qaida-linked groups that feed on the sectarian grievances, corruption and poor governance that continue to power the jihadis. This would require a new Syrian state, which is clearly beyond America's capacity to produce, particularly as the Alawite Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian backers continue to alienate Sunni Arabs. Defeating ISIS is by and large a political, governance issue. Keeping U.S. forces in Syria with the expectation of crushing the ISIS insurgency makes little sense.

No net benefits to US involvement in Syria

U.S. policy in Syria is not worth the costs

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Dept adviser. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying” 19 Jan 2019* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

One reality is obvious after surveying the wreckage of a decade of U.S. policy in Syria. The Obama and Trump administrations, Congress and the American public, particularly in the wake of endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have not seen fit to elevate Syria to the level of a vital national interest worth expending the lives and resources commensurate with that kind of commitment, on part with Russia and Iran. [**END QUOTE**]

Faced with a powerful humanitarian and security disaster as the Syrian civil war hemorrhaged refugees and terrorists, Washington could not sit still, so it adopted half measures that exceeded its capacity to deliver. These included humanitarian assistance, support for a United Nations political process, modest troop deployments and air and drone strikes, and bravado — such as Assad must go, expel every last Iranian boot, ISIS will be defeated.

[**THEY GO ON LATER TO SAY QUOTE**] With no political support at home, outmaneuvered by Iran and Russia, and no real will to make a major commitment, Washington stood little chance of altering the political or battlefield balance. What seems to have finally dawned on an already risk-averse Trump administration is the painful but necessary realization that the standard for success in Syria has never been could we win, but when could we leave.

Other countries have greater interests and influence in Syria

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Dept adviser. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying” 19 Jan 2019* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

The U.S. military likes to talk about shaping the battlefield to achieve a victory. Yet the Syrian battlefield is not at all level. The U.S. lacks the interest, the will, the capacity and resolve to even the odds with Russia and Iran with a major U.S. commitment of military assets and economic resources there. Syria's future means far more to these two other countries than it does to the United States. They both have major allies and assets on the ground that outmatch what the U.S. would deploy there, and Moscow and Tehran are willing to absorb much higher costs to achieve their preferred outcomes. The influence, interests and their decades-long relationships with the Assad family give them skin in the game. Add Turkey, which shares a contiguous border with Syria and an existential stake in controlling the Kurds, and you can see why Washington is the junior partner in the game of influence in Syria.

We should not confuse foreign interests with our own, and complete pullout is the right policy

Benjamin H. Friedman 2019 (policy director at Defense Priorities and adjunct lecturer at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs. He previously worked as a Defense Analyst at the Cato Institute and a Researcher at the Center for Defense Information) “Get out of Syria, but give the Kurds fair warning” 8 Oct 2019 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/10/08/get-out-syria-but-give-kurds-fair-warning-editorials-debates/3913258002/>

President Donald Trump’s failure in Syria was not his goal of leaving; it was failing to implement a full withdrawal. Even now, the U.S. forces there are just moving out of Turkey’s way, not exiting. At this point, there is no pretty way out. But a decent one would set a certain date for U.S. withdrawal, giving the Kurds time to prepare and then implement it swiftly. No foreign interest should be confused with our own and used to keep U.S. forces in Syria forever.

The US experienced unjustified mission creep in Syria

John Glaser 2019 (director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute) “The Trump Administration’s Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field” 23 Oct 2019 <https://www.cato.org/publications/testimony/trump-administrations-syria-policy-perspectives-field>

Unfortunately, as conditions changed, the Trump administration adopted new objectives to justify a continued, and perhaps indefinite, US military presence there. The number of missions the US military has been tasked with in Syria have proliferated in recent years. It went from defeating ISIS to securing oil fields, protecting the Kurds, pushing back against Russian and Iranian influence in the country, serving as a buffer to protect Israel from regional enemies, and helping usher in a post‐​Assad Syria. This is a classic case of mission creep. It’s very easy for us to intervene in a given situation, but getting out is always much harder. In this case, it is a very dangerous trend. It amounts to letting the United States slip further into another Middle East war without clear objectives, without serious scrutiny about what is actually achievable and without a public debate that includes a vote in Congress authorizing the mission. This last point is critical: outside of preempting an imminent attack, it is Congress’s responsibility to determine this nation’s involvement in hostilities abroad. It should startle both Congress and the public that the US military presence in Syria, which both parties have largely supported, has never had any legal sanction.

Conflict with Russia

Russian and US personnel more frequently coming into confrontations

Congressional Research Service 2020 (non-partisan research agency of US Congress) March 2020 Security of U.S. Forces in Syria <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33487.html>

In early 2020, media reports highlighted increasingly frequent “standoffs” between U.S. and Russian personnel along highways in northeast Syria. U.S. officials have described these incidents as occurring along a road that is shared by U.S., Russian, and Syrian forces operating in adjacent areas of the northeast, particularly around Qamishli. In March, CJTF-OIR reported that Russian ground and air incursions into areas of U.S. operations in Syria continued to occur on a regular basis.

US/Russia conflicts in Syria are escalating

NEW YORK TIMES 2020 (journalist Eric Schmitt) 14 Feb 2020 “Russians Pressure U.S. Forces in Northeast Syria” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/14/world/middleeast/russia-northeast-syria.html>

Russian military personnel have increasingly had run-ins with U.S. troops on highways in the region, breaking agreements between the two countries to steer clear of each other. Russian helicopters are flying closer to American troops. And on Wednesday, a U.S.-led convoy returned fire after it came under attack near a checkpoint manned by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, who are backed by Russia. American officials say these actions by Russian personnel and their Syrian allies are devised to present a constant set of challenges, probes and encroachments to slowly create new facts on the ground and make the U.S. military presence there more tenuous. About 500 American troops remain deployed in Syria with a mission to protect oil fields and help fight remnants of the Islamic State. “These are not daily occurrences but they have been increasing in number, and thus is troubling,” James F. Jeffrey, the top American diplomat overseeing Syria issues, told reporters last week.

US/Russia conflict over Syria can lead to horrific consequences

Doug Bandow 2020 (JD from Stanford Univ. and former Special Assistant to Pres. Reagan) 7 Mar 2020 “The Brutal Tragedy of Idlib: Why the U.S. Should Stay out of Syria and Dump NATO” <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/brutal-tragedy-idlib-why-us-should-stay-out-syria-dump-nato?queryID=2c71a2deab1d4360f5159799eac8a32f>

But there already have been clashes between U.S. troops and Russian mercenaries and American and Russian forces engaged in a stand‐​off over Syrian oil illegally seized by the United States. Moreover, there were proposals for Washington to intervene in the Russo‐​Georgia war and later impose a no‐​fly zone over all of Syria, made applicable to Moscow as well. In these ways American officials have demonstrated an extraordinary recklessness which, if acted on in the midst of a real military confrontation, could have horrific consequences.

SOLVENCY / ADVOCACY

Full pull-out from Syria is the best policy: would make US world position stronger and avoid future disaster

*Dr. Christopher Mott 2020 (PhD in international relations) 4 Sept 2020 “*Keeping US troops in Syria to counter Russia has the opposite effect” <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-troops-in-syria-to-counter-russia-has-opposite-effect-2020-9>

The US's position in the world would be stronger without all these apparent low-stakes, high-danger deployments. The ability of the US to adapt its grand strategy to a changing world would be increased, rather than decreased, by keeping US forces out of quagmires far away from the country's vital national interests. US forces should be withdrawn from Syria immediately before an unexpected yet foreseeable disaster distorts the long-term view of its policymakers and plunges us into further undesirable interventions.

The decision to leave Syria is the right one

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Dept adviser. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying” 19 Jan 2019* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

The decision to leave Syria is the right one, and the withdrawal should proceed in a safe, orderly and coordinated fashion. Leaving 2,000 troops there without clear and coherent objectives, and the means to achieve them, is a prescription for continued trouble — and for more unnecessary American casualties.

No justification, but grave risk

Benjamin H. Friedman 2019 (policy director at Defense Priorities and adjunct lecturer at George Washington University’s Elliott School of International Affairs. He previously worked as a Defense Analyst at the Cato Institute and a Researcher at the Center for Defense Information) “Get out of Syria, but give the Kurds fair warning” 8 Oct 2019 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/10/08/get-out-syria-but-give-kurds-fair-warning-editorials-debates/3913258002/>

U.S. forces should have left Syria already. With the Islamic State caliphate destroyed and local forces eager to attack its remnants, there was no justification for the U.S. forces to stay. And there was grave risk of the U.S. troops — whose presence Congress never authorized — being pulled into a major war or sparking terrorism rather than suppressing it.

The U.S. should have withdrawn from Syria long ago

Daniel L. Davis 2019 (*senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army who retired in 2015 after 21 years, including four combat deployments) “Withdrawal of all US troops from Syria — not a partial repositioning — should be American policy” 8 Oct 2019* <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/464902-withdrawal-of-all-us-troops-from-syria-not-a-partial-repositioning>

Setting off a diplomatic, military, and political firestorm last Sunday night, Trump initially green-light a long-sought Turkish military operation to sweep Kurds of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) out of northern Syria. After receiving criticism from many of his most stalwart Republican defenders, Trump seemed to walk back that permission. This entire episode, however, graphically highlights why the United States should have long ago withdrawn all troops from Syria — and why Trump should do so now.

DISAD RESPONSES

A/T Abandoning the Kurds

Partnering with the Kurds was a mistake in the first place

John Glaser 2019 (director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute) “The Trump Administration’s Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field” 23 Oct 2019 <https://www.cato.org/publications/testimony/trump-administrations-syria-policy-perspectives-field>

Turkey is a NATO ally who sees the Kurdish population along the Turkish‐​Syrian border as a serious security threat, and yet we pursued a tactical alliance of convenience with the Kurds to battle ISIS. Aiding, arming, and allying with two adversarial entities is not only a contradiction of sorts, but seemed destined for an inevitable and bitter transition away from it. It was a mistake to have offered or even implied any promises to the Kurds that we weren’t fully prepared to deliver. A fully autonomous Kurdish state in northern Syria was never a plausible scenario and to the extent that we led anyone to believe that was our objective, it was a grave mistake that actually put the Kurds into more danger.

US relationship with the Kurds was merely pragmatic

*Aaron David Miller and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller is vice president at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and a former State Dept adviser. Sokolsky is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former a member of the secretary of state's Office of Policy Planning) 19 Jan 2019 “Opinion: Leaving Syria Is Far Less Risky Than Staying” 19 Jan 2019* <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/19/686489841/opinion-leaving-syria-is-far-less-risky-than-staying>

The relationship between U.S. troops and the Kurdish forces in northeastern Syria was always a transactional and tactical marriage of convenience. America had no other reliable local partners to destroy ISIS and has used Kurdish fighters for this purpose. The Kurds were using U.S. military and diplomatic support to strengthen their self-defense capabilities against their foes and to gain leverage over the Assad regime to secure a more favorable position. The U.S. has never committed to help the Kurds establish an autonomous zone in northeastern Syria. This contested area is a witch's brew of Syrian, Turkish, Iranian, local Arab tribes and the remnants of ISIS. The longer the U.S. maintains its military cooperation with the Kurds, the greater the risk that U.S. forces get sucked into these feuds and potentially come to blows with NATO ally Turkey.

The Kurds did not have loyalty to the US

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

The SDF did not sacrifice its fighters out of love for America; rather, it hoped to harness U.S. power to help protect Kurdish territory and guarantee autonomy in a future Syria. Washington and the Kurds formed a marriage of convenience to defeat ISIS, but over the longer term there would have been a reckoning over divergent goals. The territory the SDF controlled was roughly the size of West Virginia and it is sandwiched between a deeply suspicious Turkey and an Assad regime equally resolved to bring all of Syria under its control. Consequently, survival of the SDF would have depended on Washington’s willingness to help protect the Kurds from Turkey and likely a long-term U.S. presence and security guarantees as well as support for Syria’s stabilization and reconstruction.

The US does not “owe” the Kurds our support

Daniel L. Davis 2019 (*senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army who retired in 2015 after 21 years, including four combat deployments) “Withdrawal of all US troops from Syria — not a partial repositioning — should be American policy” 8 Oct 2019* <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/464902-withdrawal-of-all-us-troops-from-syria-not-a-partial-repositioning>

Conventional wisdom says that our Kurdish partners in Syria did America a huge favor in routing ISIS from their so-called capital of Raqqa, and without their help, we would still be at risk from ISIS. Therefore, the thought goes, the Kurds deserve — and we owe them — our continued support. The premise, however, is flawed from the start, and thus the conclusion that we “owe them” is also wrong.

The US did not use and then abandon the Kurds

Daniel L. Davis 2019 (*senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army who retired in 2015 after 21 years, including four combat deployments) “Withdrawal of all US troops from Syria — not a partial repositioning — should be American policy” 8 Oct 2019* <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/464902-withdrawal-of-all-us-troops-from-syria-not-a-partial-repositioning>

Many accuse Washington of using the Kurds for our own benefit and then abandoning them. To the contrary, the Syrian Kurds were the greatest benefactors of our military excursion into Syria (along with, perversely, the Assad regime and the Iraqi government in Baghdad), as we effectively loaned the U.S. Air Force to the Kurds to level Raqqa and drive ISIS out of their cities and villages. ISIS represented a direct and lethal threat to the Kurds but none to America. We therefore do not “owe” the SDF permanent use of the American Armed Forces to defend them against the Syrian government.

A/T Handing a victory to Russia

Russia would gain nothing but a bunch of problems for themselves with US pullout

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” 4 Apr 2018 <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

Many fear that a U.S. withdrawal from Syria would hand a victory to Russia. That concern is also misplaced. Russia has an enduring interest in Syria in holding on to their sole Middle East warm water port at [Tartus](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/world/europe/russian-warships-said-to-be-going-to-naval-base-in-syria.html). So long as Assad stays in power, they will continue to hold it, quite irrespective of whether the U.S. remains or withdraws. What Russia "wins" by the departure of U.S. troops, however, is becoming the primary owner of the Syrian disaster and all the strategic costs that come with it. American power throughout the Middle East remains robust and undiminished, and will continue to dwarf that of Russia even after the small contingent of U.S. troops has returned home.

A setback for the US does not mean an automatic gain for Russia

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

The notion that Syria is a zero-sum game where any setback for the U.S. is an automatic gain for our adversaries invites both bad analysis and bad policy. Deeper Russian involvement in the middle of the Turkish/Kurdish/Syrian regime imbroglio—at best a situation that can be managed but not resolved—will not harm core U.S. interests: securing the free flow of oil; countering nuclear proliferation; and preventing an attack on the homeland. Israel has managed to constrain Iran’s more expansionist designs in Syria, and Russian and Iranian goals do not always coincide.

Russia and Iran don’t gain from US withdrawal

John Glaser 2019 (director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute) “The Trump Administration’s Syria Policy: Perspectives from the Field” 23 Oct 2019 <https://www.cato.org/publications/testimony/trump-administrations-syria-policy-perspectives-field>

There is a claim that by withdrawing from Syria we have handed both Russia and Iran a huge geo‐​political victory, which alone should be enough to dissuade us from leaving. This is confused thinking. Russia and Iran do have interests in Syria, but those interests are limited and it is not clear they have gained anything tangible from our decision to withdraw. Syria is still engulfed in a simmering civil war and Damascus is now a much weaker ally, and thus a dwindling strategic asset, than it was in 2011. Both Moscow and Tehran are likely to continue to be on the hook for mediating a political settlement, funding reconstruction efforts, and backing a disgraced war criminal that is now more of an international pariah than he ever was before. Those are costly burdens for our rivals. Both Russia and Iran have finite resources and many competing priorities. To depict them as clear winners here is dubious.

No impact to letting Russia intervene or gain influence in Syria

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

Russian President Vladimir Putin did what the Obama and Trump administrations would not—intervene in the Syrian civil war. Instead of fighting that war by proxy, Putin and his generals stepped in with air power, boots on the ground, and unexpected skill, determination—and yes, unspeakable brutality—and changed the course of the civil war. Putin saved Assad and by doing so reemerged as a major power broker in the Middle East. Putin won the Syrian civil war, and he deserves its spoils. And what spoils they are—a war-torn society, a ruined economy, bombed-out cities, and millions of refugees. If Putin wants to take on the burden of rebuilding Syria, fixing what his air force destroyed, brokering peace among Syria’s many factions, and propping up Assad—in addition to balancing the interests of Russia’s regional partners Turkey, Iran and Israel—then we should let him. If there’s a downside to letting Russia manage the Syrian mess, it has more to do with U.S. pride and the understandable animus toward Putin that exists in Washington these days. But the idea that Putin’s Syria gambit will allow him to take over the Middle East is just silly. Frankly, he can’t do much worse than three U.S. presidents have done since the Iraq invasion and few, if any core U.S. interests—halting nuclear proliferation, preserving Israel’s security, preventing terrorist attacks against the homeland and maintaining the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf—are likely to suffer.

Trying to stop Russia is not worth escalating the confrontation

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

Some will argue that giving Russia free rein in the region is an unacceptable risk. But at this point the United States is not giving anything to Russia, Moscow is taking what it wants and the United States is not in a position to stop it unless it is prepared to escalate the confrontation with Russia, Iran, Turkey and the Assad regime, which even the most committed advocates of a more vigorous U.S. posture in Syria don’t want. Why not try harness Russian power and diplomatic skills to achieve something that will fall short of our aspirations for Syria, but will be better than the nightmare it has been through?

A/T Decreased national security

American security is not affected by the outcome of the Syrian war

Daniel L. Davis 2018 (senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “President Trump is right: Withdrawing from Syria strengthens US security” 4 Apr 2018 <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/trump-right-about-syria-withdrawing-troops-will-strengthen-security.html>

American security is neither enhanced nor placed at increased risk regardless of how the Syrian war is eventually resolved. Our government's obligation to defend U.S. interests and citizens remains the same either way, and we will continue to successfully protect our vital national interests. Leaving a residual military force indefinitely on the ground in Syria will not accomplish even partial success, and that's okay, as long as we get out and stop risking precious blood and treasure. President Trump is right to order the withdrawal of American troops from Syria.

ISIS attacks in Syria should not be conflated with a threat to American national security

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

Finally, the ability of ISIS and its affiliates to wreak further havoc in Syria and Iraq and carry out terror attacks in the region and in Europe is unquestionable. Indeed, the ISIS insurgency was gaining ground even before Trump’s retreat from Syria. ISIS fighters could take over some towns and villages and put pressure on others, but another caliphate is probably not in the cards if the U.S. and the other anti-ISIS actors in Syria take military action against it. More importantly, attacks by ISIS, while horrific for the people of Syria, should not be conflated with a heightened threat to the American homeland, which is exactly what Joe Biden did in the Democratic debate earlier this week with his semihysterical assertion that ISIS “is going to come here!”

America does not face a major threat from foreign jihadists in Syria

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

Since 9/11, America has spent $2.8 trillion on homeland security. If at this point America is a sitting duck for ISIS, a ton of taxpayer money has been wasted. It has been 18 years since this country suffered a terrorist attack that was planned and executed by foreign jihadists. At one time there were thousands of jihadists rampaging around Iraq and Syria and there are jihadists all over the Middle East, Africa, south Asia, and Southeast Asia. If the U.S. has not been attacked in almost two decades, why would we be more vulnerable by the scattered remnants of ISIS in Syria? Attacks on the U.S. homeland may well continue to be committed by radicalized U.S. citizens or permanent legal residents inspired by jihadi propaganda and narratives. But that problem won’t be solved by maintaining American troops in Syria.

ISIS was not a major threat to the US and further military involvement won’t make us safer

Daniel L. Davis 2019 (*senior fellow for Defense Priorities and a former Lt. Col. in the U.S. Army) “Withdrawal of all US troops from Syria — not a partial repositioning — should be American policy” 8 Oct 2019* <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/464902-withdrawal-of-all-us-troops-from-syria-not-a-partial-repositioning>

While these radical Islamic terrorists did represent a threat to Middle Eastern regimes, they did not, however, pose a risk to American security. The safety of our homeland has been ensured, for the better part of two decades, by a robust global intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance strike capability (ISR-Strike), coupled with an increasingly effective cooperation between federal, state, and local law enforcement. ISIS was entirely consumed with its daily survival and overwhelmed with the Herculean task of trying to administer the territories they seized; they never had the capacity to attack America from their bunkers in Syria and Iraq. Obama, then, should have continued to focus our ISR-Strike capabilities on the region to safeguard against threats emanating from any actors or groups, and preserved American military power by refusing to entrench us in a conflict from which we gained nothing.

A/T Must help our allies against Bashar al-Assad

Turkey does not need U.S. help in Syrian war

Steven A. Cook 2020 (Eni Enrico Mattei senior fellow for Middle East and Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations) “Syria Is Turkey’s Problem, Not America’s” 6 Mar 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/06/syria-turkey-us-problem-idlib-crisis/>

Second, and more importantly, the Turkish armed forces do not seem to need much help. Since launching Operation Spring Shield, the Turks have done significant damage to Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad’s forces. The Turkish military has sliced through much of Syria’s front-line forces, shooting down planes and helicopters, destroying artillery, and killing large numbers of personnel while suffering only modest losses of their own. The United States may have unique military capabilities that could be helpful to Turkey, but the Turks do not seem to need them. **[END QUOTE**] The same is true of Europe: While Erdogan has proved he can impose pain on the continent by encouraging refugees to head for its borders, it’s unclear why he would expect any military contribution from Europe’s under-resourced militaries to benefit Turkey’s war in Syria. [**HE GOES ON TO CONCLUDE QUOTE:**] Rather than whining about lack of U.S. and European support, Turkish officials could easily simply say, “We got this.”

Moral outrage is not a substitute for policy

Aaron David Miller, Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky 2019 (Miller served as a State Department Middle East analyst, adviser and negotiator in Republican and Democratic Administrations. Rumer is a senior associate and the director of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace’s Russia and Eurasia Program. Sokolsky is a non-resident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and former member of the Secretary of State’s Policy Planning Office) “What Trump Actually Gets Right About Syria” 18 Oct 2019 <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/10/18/trump-syria-turkey-kurds-news-analysis-229858>

America’s abhorrence at dealing with Syrian President Bashar Assad is understandable. He is a mass murderer and has committed war crimes, including using chemical weapons on his own people. But moral outrage, however justified and emotionally satisfying, is not a substitute for policy. It has been apparent for some time, except for those in denial, that Assad isn’t going anywhere—Russia and Iran have assured that.

Turkey is doing fine in Syrian war without U.S. involvement

Steven A. Cook 2020 (Eni Enrico Mattei senior fellow for Middle East and Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations) “Syria Is Turkey’s Problem, Not America’s” 6 Mar 2020 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/06/syria-turkey-us-problem-idlib-crisis/>

Last week, Turkey went to war with Russia—sort of. Ankara’s present military operations are in response to a Feb. 27 attack in Syria that killed 36 Turkish soldiers and wounded another 30. (Turkish authorities in Hatay province, which is closest to the area where the attack occurred, initially blamed Russia, but in Ankara officials placed responsibility with Syrian regime forces.) Since then, the Turks have deployed the firepower of an advanced NATO military machine against Syrian targets, while the Russians have been forced to stand aside. [**END QUOTE]** Both Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have said they want to de-escalate, which is precisely what they did in Moscow on Thursday when they agreed to a cease-fire. With all the talk in Washington these days about “great-power competition,” events in Syria have taken place without much in the way of U.S. involvement. And, guess what? The sun rose over the Potomac River in Washington anyway. [**HE GOES ON TO SAY QUOTE:]** Throughout the post-World War II era, American officials and commentators have created the expectation—mostly among themselves—that the United States was a necessary presence in places near and far, because everything was important to the strategic interests of a global power. Yet this new Turkish phase of the conflict in Syria is just the latest example that undermines this idea. At least in the Syrian case, Turkey seems to be doing just fine on its own.

A/T “Oil”

Don’t need US forces in Syria for oil

*Dr. Christopher Mott 2020 (PhD in international relations) 4 Sept 2020 “*Keeping US troops in Syria to counter Russia has the opposite effect” <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-troops-in-syria-to-counter-russia-has-opposite-effect-2020-9>

Already, the long-term US presence in eastern Syria wobbles on unsteady foundations. It's certainly not worth a military mission for access to oil reserves [that are not particularly impressive](https://www.worldometers.info/oil/syria-oil/) nor a significant percentage of the global or even regional market. Even the strategic necessity of the Middle East for energy production is [increasingly questionable these days](https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/07/18/the-end-of-the-arab-worlds-oil-age-is-nigh).

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