Negative: Withdraw From Syria

By Kirstin Erickson

**Resolved: The United States Federal Government should considerably reduce its military commitments**

The case against withdrawing U.S. troops from Syria will argue that when Trump walked back his decision to withdraw, he made the right choice. It would be dangerous and unwise to make the mistake of his original order again, because it will trigger substantial disadvantages. Not only would we jeopardize US interests and national security, but we would also betray our allies and the millions of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire of war. An important note – many of the pieces of evidence are from 2018 and 2019, after Trump’s announcement of the original withdrawal. Although outdated (because he revised that decision) they are still applicable because AFF is advocating the same policy as was proposed back then. These experts predicted major disadvantages to a retreat from Syria, and those disadvantages would happen again under the affirmative plan.

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NEGATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Do no harm

Prof. Alan Blinder 2016 (Professor of Economics and codirector of Center for Economic Policy Studies at Princeton Univ.; former vice chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and was a member of Pres. Clinton's Council of Economic Advisers ) 25 Oct 2016 “Message to the candidates: Hands off the Federal Reserve” <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/message-to-the-candidates-hands-off-the-federal-reserve/>

The presidential campaign may not be missing much by skipping a debate over monetary policy and the Federal Reserve — especially if that debate would resemble Donald Trump’s ignorant potshots at its chair, Janet Yellen. Instead, the nation would do well to remember Hippocrates’s wise counsel: “First, do no harm.”

U.S. involvement can make a difference in Syria

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning; expert on Syria, the Middle East, and jihadism) “Time to Recommit to Syria”18 Feb 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

The United States must recognize that the conflict in Syria is unlikely to end in the near future. The prospect of more war is devastating, but it means that Syria’s fate is far from decided. Leveraging American diplomatic, economic, and military capabilities, which dwarf those of every other actor in Syria, could change the trajectory of the conflict, help contain the humanitarian crisis, and lay important groundwork for an eventual political transition. With so much still at stake, even limited U.S. involvement could make a difference.

MINOR REPAIR / COUNTERPLAN – Increase commitment, not decrease

Problems are due to insufficient forces. They should be increased.

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning) “Time to Recommit to Syria”18 Feb 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

The United States does not need a massive military force in Syria to shape the war’s trajectory, but its current presence is insufficient. U.S. troops continue to help Kurdish forces to disrupt ISIS networks, and U.S. strikes continue to disrupt al Qaeda attack cells. But current troop levels won’t be enough to defeat the ISIS insurgency or reverse al Qaeda’s rise in Syria, much less accomplish wider goals, such as stabilizing the Kurdish-dominated northeast or supporting Turkish efforts to contain the humanitarian crisis in the northwest.

Reason for not accomplishing goals is because we haven’t been committed enough

Kathy Gilsinan 2019 (staff writer at The Atlantic, covering national security and global affairs) “Trump Is Killing a Fatally Flawed Syria Policy” 8 Oct 2019 (brackets in original) <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/10/trumps-confusing-syria-policy/599629/>

“I do think [U.S. Syria policy] is collapsing under the weight of its contradictions,” Jennifer Cafarella, the research director at the Institute for the Study of War, told me. “We’ve decided to become involved enough [in Syria] to be accountable for what happens, but not enough to actually determine the outcome,” said Cafarella, who thinks the U.S. should be giving more support to the Kurds.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

US deployment in Syria (when it was 1000 – it’s less now!) is “quite small” and the benefits outweigh the small cost

**[In this context, the “strategy Trump jettisoned” was the Obama administration’s military commitment in Syria, which Trump proposed withdrawing. Trump later reversed that decision. This card is critiquing Trump’s original decision to withdraw, which is now the AFF plan.]**

Prof. Peter Feaver and Prof. Will Inboden 2019 (Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University, where he directs the Program in American Grand Strategy. Inboden is the executive director of the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas-Austin. He also serves as an associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and as a distinguished scholar at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law.) “The Realists Are Wrong About Syria” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/04/the-realists-are-wrong-about-syria/>

The current debate over the Syria policy presents this problem in its purest form. The cost of the strategy Trump jettisoned was not nothing, but it was, in policy terms, quite small. The 1,000 or so U.S. special operations forces deployed as enablers and trainers throughout Syria represented a very modest investment in the much larger Syrian Democratic Forces, giving the United States political leverage in a crucial region. In exchange, the United States realized benefits such as inflicting severe losses on the Islamic State, protecting Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities, creating a partial safe haven for Syrian refugees, and preventing Russia and Iran from having a free hand to operate.

Small military presence in Syria – benefits outweigh the costs

Prof. Peter Feaver and Prof. Will Inboden 2019 (Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University. Inboden is the executive director of the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas-Austin. He also serves as an associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and as a distinguished scholar at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law.) “The Realists Are Wrong About Syria” 4 Nov 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/04/the-realists-are-wrong-about-syria/>

Trump’s futile appeals ironically illustrate an important point that has been neglected in much of the current debate: the diplomatic benefits of military leverage. A small, calibrated deployment can bring outsized political gains. This is often the case even when the military does not take a leading combat role but rather trains and equips missions, presents as peacekeepers, or serves only to deter aggression. The presence of U.S. forces in strategic locations can reassure allies and partners, deepen diplomatic ties through training and assistance, preserve fragile peace agreements, support democratic transitions, deter adversaries from aggression, and enable allied forces to fight and win. In various ways, such are the roles that the U.S. military plays or has played in nations as diverse as Kosovo, Djibouti, South Korea, the Philippines, Colombia—and Syria, until last week. Of course, restraint advocates in the academy could quickly counter that these entanglements belong on the “cost” side of the equation, but once the benefits are also factored in, we are confident the net assessment is a positive one for U.S. interests. In short, when aligned with diplomatic efforts and political goals, the U.S. military can be at its most effective without firing a shot.

A/T “Mission creep / no end strategy” – Not a problem for US deployment in Syria

Prof. Peter Feaver and Prof. Will Inboden 2019 (Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University, where he directs the Program in American Grand Strategy. Inboden is the executive director of the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas-Austin. He also serves as an associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and as a distinguished scholar at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law.) “The Realists Are Wrong About Syria” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/04/the-realists-are-wrong-about-syria/>

It was by no means a perfect policy, and Trump supporters were correct in saying that it was itself a lesser-of-two-evils choice driven in part by mistakes the Obama administration made five years ago. But most realists simply avoid wrestling with these facts and prefer instead to speak in vague terms about the undesirability of a commitment without an obvious endgame or exit strategy already in place. They likewise warn about mission creep—the idea that a minimal investment can, over time, grow out of all proportion to the interests at stake. These dangers are real, but they are not the trump cards realists believe them to be—especially not in the case of Syria.

A/T “Impossible to achieve goals” – Don’t have to achieve ambitious goals, just stop problems from getting worse

Prof. Peter Feaver and Prof. Will Inboden 2019 (Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University, where he directs the Program in American Grand Strategy. Inboden is the executive director of the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas-Austin. He also serves as an associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and as a distinguished scholar at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law.) “The Realists Are Wrong About Syria” 4 Nov 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/04/the-realists-are-wrong-about-syria/>

There is another irony in the restraint position, which often gets disguised under the moniker of realism: its implicit utopianism. When restraint advocates critique U.S. internationalism for not achieving ambitious goals of peace, stability, and freedom, they counsel instead a military retrenchment beyond the country’s borders. But in truth, internationalism often offers more restrained goals. Sometimes the U.S. presence in the Middle East is only meant to manage problems, not solve them. Sometimes it is not to produce grand outcomes but merely to prevent worse outcomes. In contrast, realists seem to be the true optimists when they argue that the United States can retreat at minimal risk, with few threats from abroad and little harm to its interests. It is more pragmatic to deal with the world as it really is, not as we wish it would be. This means that policymakers have to confront the geopolitical problems they inherited.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Tips the Syrian civil war in favor of Assad

**[Background: The civil war in Syria started in 2011 with a widespread armed revolt against the regime of evil dictator Bashar al-Assad. It’s been dragging on for over 9 years now, and millions of Syrian citizens have been harmed or forced into exile as refugees. Outside actors like ISIS, Hezbollah, Iran, the Kurds, Turkey, Russia and the U.S. have been intervening, making it even more chaotic and confusing. Right now Assad seems to be winning the civil war, but it’s not over, and further intervention could still make a difference. Negative’s position in the round is that allowing Assad to win would be bad and that US military presence could make the difference and tip the balance against him.]**

Link: Syria’s fate is far from decided

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning) “Time to Recommit to Syria”18 Feb 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

Assad may have gained territory, but his regime remains deeply fragile, and the regions under its control are unstable and growing more so. This war is not one that Assad can decisively win, even with help from Iran and Russia. The United States must recognize that the conflict in Syria is unlikely to end in the near future. The prospect of more war is devastating, but it means that Syria’s fate is far from decided.

Link: US intervention is key to containing Assad and avoiding greater chaos down the road

Jennifer Cafarella 2018 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning) “Don’t Get Out of Syria” 11 July 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2018-07-11/dont-get-out-syria>

The United States must accept that ignoring Syria will lead not to a clean victory for Assad that establishes a stable peace but to more chaos down the road. To avoid that, the United States should invest now in building leverage for future decisive action by strengthening the military and governance capabilities of its partners on the ground, regaining the trust of Syria’s rebelling population, rebuilding rebel forces, and denying Assad the international legitimacy he so desperately craves. The United States still has options to constrain Assad and his backers—all it needs is the will to use them.

Link: Withdrawing forces from Syria would forfeit U.S. leverage and risk destabilizing the region

**John Holland-McCowan 2019 (Research Fellow at the Belfer Center's International Security Program. He is completing a doctoral dissertation analyzing the Syrian Kurds and the fight against ISIS through the lens of insurgency studies in the War Studies Department at King's College London) “Impacts of U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Syria”** <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/impacts-us-troop-withdrawal-syria>

A U.S. withdrawal from Syria risks irreparably undermining the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - the U.S-led coalition’s principal ally against ISIS. Even a limited withdrawal of coalition forces from key positions in Northeastern Syria provides strategic openings that both Ankara and Damascus can dangerously exploit to further destabilize the region. ISIS’s potent underground insurgency will take advantage of the ensuing power vacuum to gain renewed strength. Finally, a U.S. withdrawal forfeits most of the leverage the U.S. and our allies have in the Syrian civil war as it enters a crucial, uncertain period.

Impact: Lost opportunity for safety, prosperity and peace for Syria.

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning) “Time to Recommit to Syria”18 Feb 2020 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

In close coordination with its allies, the United States should work to stabilize the region and to assist reconstruction, development, and resettlement efforts. Syria’s northeast has a relatively strong economy compared with economic conditions in regime-controlled areas, and focused investment will help establish it as a model of safety, prosperity, and good governance—a credible alternative to Assad that could help pave the way for a political transition. The United States has a real opportunity to change the course of the brutal Syrian war and, potentially, to shape its endgame.

2. Russia & Iran gain influence and undermine US hegemony

Link: Empirical evidence. Last time we scaled back in Syria, it led to an increase in Russian military presence

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning.) 18 Feb 2020 “Time to Recommit to Syria” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

The United States scaled back its forces in the area in October 2019, allowing Turkey to surge over the Syrian border. In order to gain leverage over Turkey, Russian and Syrian regime forces moved in and established a new military presence in the northeast, further stretching pro-regime resources.

Link: Iran and Russia will use Syria as a springboard for international aggression, erode NATO and undermine US hegemony

Jennifer Cafarella 2018 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning. She is an established expert on Syria, the Middle East, and jihadism) “Don’t Get Out of Syria” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2018-07-11/dont-get-out-syria>

The first problem is that Iran and Russia will now be able to use Syria as a springboard for their international aggression. Russia has reportedly already begun to use its Syrian air base to support the operations of Kremlin-backed mercenaries in the Central African Republic and Sudan. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s ability to project force from Syria will aid his efforts to erode the NATO alliance and undermine the U.S.-led world order, allowing him to exploit the seams between the United States and its allies and partners. Iran, meanwhile, is establishing bases and creating Syrian proxies in order to open a second front against Israel in a future war. Israel will not tolerate this and could escalate to a ground operation in southern Syria to prevent it.

Link: Russia would take advantage of a U.S. retreat from Syria

Paul D. Shinkman 2019 (senior writer and national security correspondent for U.S. News & World Report) “U.S. Retreat From Syria Strengthens Russia’s Hand” <https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2019-10-15/us-retreat-from-syria-strengthens-russias-hand>

Following Trump's retreat and crushing pressure from Turkey, the only powers to offer some form of support to the Kurds are forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar Assad – the Kurdish fighters' prior foe – and a bolstered presence in the region from Moscow, with which Turkey has increasingly cooperated in recent months. "Russia has opportunistically stepped in, declaring that the Kurds' only way out is to strike a deal with the Assad regime," Sajjan Gohel, international security director at the Asia-Pacific Foundation, wrote in a Tuesday analysis note. "Moscow could potentially now be the only sole foreign power influencing events in Syria." Indeed, Russian officials have expressed their eagerness in recent days for the U.S. to withdraw. "There is a glimmer of hope that U.S. troops will eventually leave Syria," Russian envoy to Syria Alexander Lavrentyev told reporters Tuesday**. [END QUOTE]** He acknowledged Moscow does not yet understand whether the U.S. withdrawal simply applies to northern Syria or to Trump's direction for a full withdrawal within weeks. Another administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, declined to respond Monday night to questions about whether the latest troop movements precede a full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria and when that might take place. The official cited the need to maintain operational security.

The U.S. presence there, first designed to help dismantle the Islamic State's so-called caliphate, subsequently took on the additional role of curbing the influence in Syria of Iran, another ally of Russia's. **[HE GOES ON TO SAY LATER IN THE SAME CONTEXT QUOTE:]** Trump's withdrawal allows Russia and its partners now to have greater influence throughout the region.

Link: Iran and Russia will step in and fill the vacuum left by the United States

Dr. C. Anthony Pfaff 2019 (*Dr. C. Anthony Pfaff is a Nonresident Senior Fellow with the Atlantic Council’s Iraq Initiative and Research Professor for Strategy, the Military Profession and Ethic at the US Army War College) “The true costs of withdrawing forces from Syria”* <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-true-costs-of-withdrawing-forces-from-syria/>

That small military presence gave the United States a vote, one that it has now apparently lost. That point brings us to the last concern. The loss of that vote entails a loss of US leadership. It will not take long before Iran and Russia step in to fill any vacuum left by the United States and its SDF partners. The removal of US presence gives Iran greater access to Syrian oil fields as well as a larger “land bridge” to the Mediterranean than it currently enjoys. It also strengthens Russia’s hand in Syria. Without US troops there, there is little stopping the Russians from supporting Syrian forces to take back all of Syria. And while the Russians would not likely confront Turkish forces, they would be in a position to broker any settlement and exclude US interests in doing so.

Link: Russian influence and prestige worldwide grows as they succeed in the Middle East

Public Radio International 2017. “Russia’s influence in the Middle East is growing” 14 Dec 2017 <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-12-14/russia-s-influence-middle-east-growing>

Russia now has a naval base in the Mediterranean in Tartus, a warm-weather port in Syria. It also has an airbase nearby. Now there’s talk of the Russian air force securing basing rights in Egypt. It already has access to an Iranian base. But this Russian effort in the Middle East is not so much about hard power, says Tharoor. “For Putin,” he explains, “it’s all about domestic optics more than anything else. He has staked his political legitimacy on being this world-historic figure who’s returning Russia to prominence on the world stage.”

Link: Blocking Russia in the Middle East is key to maintaining US leadership as a great power

Steven A. Cook 2018 (senior fellow for Middle East and Africa studies at the Council on Foreign Relations) 16 March 2018 FOREIGN POLICY “Russia Is in the Middle East to Stay” <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/16/the-middle-east-needs-a-steady-boyfriend/>

If the United States is, as Secretary of Defense James Mattis averred in January, in a new era of great power competition, it is time the United States treated the situation as seriously as it is. Putin must be disabused of the notion that the Middle East is the most propitious place to begin weakening the West and the United States. Americans once before contained and rolled back Moscow’s influence in the region; there is no reason to believe that they cannot do it again — but only if they have the wisdom to recognize what is important in the world right now and the collective stomach to meet the challenge.

Impact: Apocalyptic consequences if we lose US hegemony

Brook Manville 2018 (principal of Brook Manville LLC, consulting on strategy and organization) 14 Oct 2018 “Why A Crumbling World Order Urgently Needs U.S. Leadership” FORBES https://www.forbes.com/sites/brookmanville/2018/10/14/why-a-crumbling-world-order-urgently-needs-u-s-leadership/#2bb8912f2e61 (brackets added)

The botanical metaphor in [Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Robert] Kagan’s book title began our recent conversation. “We’ve been living in a tranquil garden of largely peaceful practices and liberal expectations across much of the world, ignoring the dark forces of jungle multiplying under the rocks. If we don’t defend civilization’s cultivation—especially American’s guarantee of peace and economic integration across the world—the toxic creatures and weeds will roar back.” Thus China’s determined military rise, Russia’s continuing aggressions, fiery authoritarians on the march in so many once democratic countries. [**END QUOTE]** As [Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Robert] Kagan continued, “Trump has been damaging the system—he too seems to have forgotten what good it has delivered—but actually America’s desire for maintaining the global order has been diminishing for years. After the dissolution of the Soviet empire in the 1990s, people talked about ‘the end of history”—that America didn’t have to worry anymore about war or aggression. History doesn’t end, it simply paused. [**He goes on later in the same context to say QUOTE:]** The ugliest aspects of human nature are surging again.”
**Vanishing Leadership, Vanishing Peace**
Kagan’s apocalyptic message, repeated in other recent writings, is lucid and terrifying, all the more devastating for its relentless use of history. It’s a footnoted plea that “we’ve seen this movie before.” He reminds us that Americans have frequently turned away from defending world order, with regrettably familiar outcomes: to be dragged in later at greater cost (e.g. helping to stop Hitler earlier might have prevented World War II); or, simply hoping that “the problem would go away,” to watch it get ten times worse (e.g. Obama’s policy in Syria). Kagan acknowledges that America has sometimes misstepped (e.g. Viet Nam, Iraq), but he still argues that overall our foreign engagement has produced more peace and prosperity than not. “History shows,” he summarized, “that world order has never been achieved without some constructive force to keep the peace. The relative harmony and fair play we’ve created in the modern world will vanish if the U.S. forsakes international leadership.”

3. ISIS and increased terrorism

Link: ISIS is experiencing a resurgence in Syria

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning.) 18 Feb 2020 “Time to Recommit to Syria” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

In the southern province of Daraa, where Syria’s original 2011 revolution was born, a new uprising has begun. Sustained protests have sent a clear message that Assad has failed to break his opponents’ will. Insurgents have resumed attacking positions held by Assad, Iran, and Russia at levels approaching those of 2011. For the first time in years, the attacks have spread to the Syrian capital in Damascus and to parts of the surrounding Rif Damascus region. Meanwhile, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) is quickly resurging in regime-held central Syria. The group has assaulted vital oil infrastructure and temporarily seized facilities. Such activity suggests major ISIS attacks are still to come.

Link: ISIS and al-Qaeda remain powerful and are expanding

Jennifer Cafarella 2020 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning.) 18 Feb 2020 “Time to Recommit to Syria” <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-18/time-recommit-syria>

ISIS and al Qaeda are also well positioned to exploit Assad’s weakness. ISIS is already surging in regime-held Syria and expanding its campaign in Kurdish-held areas, where the U.S. drawdown has weakened security. Meanwhile, al Qaeda-linked groups have an army of approximately 20,000 fighters in Idlib, where they are making a substantial profit. Al Qaeda will remain a powerful insurgency even if Idlib falls.

Link: The U.S. must have a presence in Syria to keep ISIS from expanding

Rebecca Klar 2019 (news reporter at The Hill) “Joint chiefs chair: Fewer than 1,000 troops will remain in Syria” 10 Nov 2019 <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/469781-joint-chiefs-chair-less-than-1000-troops-will-remain-in-syria> (brackets added)

It’s important for a U.S. presence to remain to ensure there is not a reemergence of ISIS after a U.S. raid last month led to former ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s death, he [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley] said. “There are still ISIS fighters in the region and unless pressure is maintained, unless attention is maintained on that group, then there's a very real possibility that conditions can be set for reemergence of ISIS,” Milley said.

Link: U.S. withdrawal provides ISIS an opening to rebuild itself

Tom Vanden Brook 2019 (Pentagon correspondent for USA TODAY) “Pentagon: President Trump's order to withdraw troops from Syria allows ISIS to rebuild” 19 Nov 2019 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/11/19/isis-terror-group-rebuilds-after-trump-pulls-us-troops-out-syria/4237528002/>

President Donald Trump's order to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria in October provided the Islamic State an opening to rebuild itself, giving the terrorist group "time and space" to target the West, according to a Pentagon report released Tuesday. The Defense Intelligence Agency told the Pentagon's inspector general that the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, has taken advantage of the U.S. withdrawal and Turkey's subsequent incursion into Syria. Trump's decision prompted strong bipartisan criticism for removing military pressure on the Islamic State and leaving Kurdish forces that had worked with U.S. troops to roll back gains made by the terrorists. "ISIS exploited the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. troops to reconstitute capabilities and resources within Syria and strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad," the Pentagon's inspector general said in the report.

Link: Full U.S. withdrawal could pave the way for ISIS’s resurgence

Ishaan Tharoor 2019 (Columnist covering foreign affairs, geopolitics and history for The Washington Post. He previously was a senior editor and correspondent at Time magazine) 8 Oct 2019 “Trump sells out the Kurds in his own unique way” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/10/08/trump-sells-out-kurds-his-own-unique-way/>

A definitive U.S. withdrawal from northern Syria — or whatever it is that Trump championed in tweets Monday morning calling for an end to America’s “endless wars” — could have serious ramifications. If Turkey pursues a significant ground invasion, it would overrun SDF defenses, fracture their fighting forces, compel a possible exodus of Syrian Kurdish refugees toward Iraq (a country that’s hardly stable itself), and, as many security analysts fear, create enough of a security vacuum to pave the way for the Islamic State’s resurgence.

Link: A U.S. retreat from Syria would create a security vacuum for terrorists to fill

Jennifer Cafarella 2018 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning. She is an established expert on Syria, the Middle East, and jihadism) “Don’t Get Out of Syria” 11 July 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2018-07-11/dont-get-out-syria>

A U.S. retreat from eastern Syria, where it currently has some [2,000 troops](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/04/04/u-s-troops-syria-and-what-they-doing-there/486763002/), would create a vacuum that various belligerents would compete to fill. Assad and his backers, Turkey, and jihadist groups such as al Qaeda and ISIS all hope to gain control of the areas that the U.S.-SDF alliance seized from ISIS. A U.S. withdrawal will only accelerate this conflict.

Impact: ISIS attacks against the West

Tom Vanden Brook 2019 (Tom Vanden Brook is the Pentagon correspondent for USA TODAY) “Pentagon: President Trump's order to withdraw troops from Syria allows ISIS to rebuild” 19 Nov 2019 <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/11/19/isis-terror-group-rebuilds-after-trump-pulls-us-troops-out-syria/4237528002/>

Glenn Fine, the inspector general, warned that "ISIS will likely have the 'time and space' to target the West and provide support to its global branches and networks, and in the longer term, ISIS will probably seek to regain control of some Syrian population centers and expand its global footprint."

Impact: ISIS terrorism against the United States

Bruce Hoffman and Jacob Ware 2020 (Hoffman is Shelby Cullom and Kathryn W. Davis senior fellow for counterterrorism and homeland security at the Council on Foreign Relations. Ware is a research associate in the Counterterrorism and Studies Program at the Council on Foreign Relations) “Top Conflicts to Watch in 2020: A Mass-Casualty Terrorist Attack on the United States or a Treaty Ally” 16 Jan 2020 <https://www.cfr.org/blog/top-conflicts-watch-2020-mass-casualty-terrorist-attack-united-states-or-treaty-ally>

Despite the killing of the self-proclaimed Islamic State’s founder and leader last October, the United States still faces a determined and resilient adversary, eager to retaliate for the deaths of several high-level commanders and the dismantling of its caliphate. Violence could take the form of a command-driven attack, where the Islamic State’s leadership directly orders an attack against a specific target, or an inspired attack whereby there is no command-and-control relationship between the terrorist group and the perpetrator. In the latter case, the perpetrator is simply inspired to commit a violent act on his or her own. Al-Qaeda, meanwhile, is actively attempting to fill the vacuum in Syria created by the Islamic State’s defeat, as it also patiently awaits the outcome of U.S. peace talks with the Taliban and America’s eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Impact: Withdrawal from Syria could bring more terrorism in Europe and the U.S.

Prof. Peter Feaver and Prof. Will Inboden 2019 (Feaver is a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University, where he directs the Program in American Grand Strategy. Inboden is the executive director of the William P. Clements, Jr. Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft at the University of Texas-Austin. He also serves as an associate professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and as a distinguished scholar at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law.) “The Realists Are Wrong About Syria” 4 Nov 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/04/the-realists-are-wrong-about-syria/>

The benefits of the Syria mission were considerable and the costs not too onerous. But the costs of Trump’s abrupt withdrawal form a painful tally. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Islamic State adherents have escaped detainment. This could potentially lead to a resurgence of terrorist attacks in Europe and even the United States. The potential slaughter of Kurdish soldiers and civilians, untold numbers of whom have already been killed, is an ongoing risk. A new round of displacement has begun in a country that has already endured the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Some 176,000 people, 70,000 of them children, have been forced from their homes since Trump’s withdrawal, according to the United Nations.

4. Humanitarian crisis

Link: US force withdrawal brings growing humanitarian crisis

Ian Pannell, Matt McGarry, and Allie Yang 2019 (Pannell - foreign correspondent for ABC News and worked at the BBC for 20 years. McGarry is the global news producer in the Middle East for ABC News. Yang is a digital producer for ABC news) 17 Oct 2019 “Life and death in Syria as US troops withdraw: 'We don't trust America anymore'” <https://abcnews.go.com/International/life-death-syria-us-troops-withdraw-trust-america/story?id=66322917>

In Qamishli, an 8-year-old named Sara was lying in a hospital bed, enduring unimaginable pain after losing her leg in an artillery shell explosion. "My daughter is hurting and in pain in front of me," her mother told ABC News. "I can't bear to hear her cry." This family's country of Syria has been engulfed by eight years of bloody conflict -- but this part of the country had been largely spared until last week, when U.S. troops departed, leaving a growing humanitarian crisis in their wake.

Link: Former US ambassador to Syria agrees - US intervention is key to preventing worsening humanitarian crisis

Conor Finnegan and Mel Madarang 2020 (Conor Finnegan is the State Department reporter/producer at ABC News) “As fighting in Syria intensifies, pressure is rising for US intervention amid the crisis” <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/fighting-syria-intensifies-pressure-rising-us-intervention-amid/story?id=69105438>

As fighting over Syria's last rebel-held stronghold intensifies and puts U.S. ally Turkey in direct conflict with Russia, there is a growing chorus for the U.S. to do something about the dire humanitarian crisis.

Nearly one million people have been displaced since December by Syrian President Bashar al Assad's offensive into the Idlib province, backed by Russian air power and Iranian-commanded forces. Relief organizations are struggling to respond to the overwhelming need amid freezing temperatures and a lack of basic resources -- like tents. But for the four million civilians in Idlib, there is no where to go as Assad's forces back them closer to the border with Turkey, which remains shut as Turkey struggles to host nearly four million Syrian refugees already.

Turkey and the Syrian forces it arms and backs have been pushing to hold Assad's offensive at bay, with direct clashes on Thursday. But while the Trump administration has condemned the offensive and vocalized support to Turkey, advocates -- including, the last U.S. ambassador to Syria -- are urging for U.S. intervention.

Link: Syrian and Russian forces have been targeting medical facilities and schools

Amnesty International 2020 (international non-governmental human rights advocacy organization) “Syria: UN must not cut vital aid lifeline to north-west amid Russian and Syrian war crimes” 11 May 2020 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/syria-un-must-not-cut-vital-aid-lifeline-to-north-west-amid-russian-and-syrian-war-crimes/>

A new Amnesty International report, 'Nowhere is safe for us': Unlawful attacks and mass displacement in north-west Syria, details 18 cases – the majority in January and February 2020 – where Syrian and/or Russian government forces targeted medical facilities and schools in Idlib, western Aleppo and north-western Hama governorates. As a result, before the 5 March ceasefire almost 1 million people in Idlib – many of whom had been displaced repeatedly – were forced to flee again and languished in dire conditions in recent months.

****Syrian and Russian forces target civilians deliberately****

Amnesty International 2020 (international non-governmental human rights advocacy organization) “Syria: UN must not cut vital aid lifeline to north-west amid Russian and Syrian war crimes” 11 May 2020 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/syria-un-must-not-cut-vital-aid-lifeline-to-north-west-amid-russian-and-syrian-war-crimes/>

The incidents documented in the report exemplify how Syrian and Russian forces continue to deliberately target civilians and civilian objects. These are serious violations of international humanitarian law, which requires warring parties to distinguish between military targets and fighters, and civilian objects and civilians, and to direct their attacks only at the former. They are also war crimes and those who order or commit such acts are criminally liable. In addition to the immunity from attack deriving from their status as civilian objects or civilians, hospitals and other medical facilities, health workers and children are also subject to special protections during armed conflict.

Syria has a massive list of human rights violations

Alexandra Svokos 2019 (Senior News Editor at ABC news) “What to know about potential war crimes in Syria by Turkish-backed fighters” 17 Oct 2019 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/potential-war-crimes-syria-turkish-backed-fighters/story?id=66283753>

But for [Sarah] Cleveland, [faculty co-director of the Human Rights Institute] of Columbia Law School, focusing only on Turkey's actions has the possibility of missing an even broader range of potential war crimes and human rights violations committed in the region over the last decade. "Basically every form of violation of international, humanitarian law possible has been committed in Syria, from the use of chemical weapons to intentional targeting of civilians and hospitals and schools, to indiscriminate bombing of heavily occupied civilian areas," she said. "The list goes on and on."

****Impact: Staggering displacement and dire conditions****

Amnesty International 2020 (international non-governmental human rights advocacy organization) “Syria: UN must not cut vital aid lifeline to north-west amid Russian and Syrian war crimes” 11 May 2020 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/syria-un-must-not-cut-vital-aid-lifeline-to-north-west-amid-russian-and-syrian-war-crimes/>

The latest onslaught on Idlib forced close to a million people – more than 80% of them women and children – to flee towards areas close to the Turkish border between December 2019 and March 2020. **[END QUOTE]**
A woman who has three children and whose family was displaced twice in the past eight months told Amnesty International: “My daughter, who’s in first grade, is always afraid… She asked me [after we were displaced]: ‘Why doesn’t God kill us?... Nowhere is safe for us.’” **[THEY GO ON TO CONCLUDE LATER QUOTE:]**

Cornered in an ever-shrinking space, these civilians continue to suffer intolerable living conditions amid a massively overstretched humanitarian response. Timely and sustained aid is needed more than ever.

Impact: Massive humanitarian crisis

Dallas Morning News 2019 (Dallas Morning News editorials are written by the paper's Editorial Board and serve as the voice and view of paper) 13 Oct 2019 “Why Trump’s withdrawal from Syria matters to national security” <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/13/why-trumps-withdrawal-from-syria-matters-to-national-security/>

All of this is exacerbating the already unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the region. Tragically, after eight years of civil war that’s claimed as many as 570,000 lives, 5.6 million Syrians are living as refugees, according to the UNHCR, which is calling on both Turkish and Kurdish military forces to adhere to International Humanitarian Law and provide access for aid agencies. Turkey has borne the brunt of the Syrian refugee crisis, hosting an estimated 3.6 million Syrian refugees along with 40,000 of other nationalities. Sadly, however, the Turkish invasion is intensifying the refugee crisis it purportedly aims to ameliorate. Meanwhile, the U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters who just a few days ago were targeting Islamic State terrorists have abandoned that mission to defend themselves against a full-scale military assault by Turkey, which we would remind readers is a NATO ally.

Impact: Huge numbers of refugees destabilize neighboring states and prolong the war

Jennifer Cafarella 2018 (National Security Fellow at the Institute for the Study of War and former Research Director and Director of Intelligence Planning) “Don’t Get Out of Syria” 11 July 2018 <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2018-07-11/dont-get-out-syria>

A further problem is that Assad’s depopulation of rebel communities is destabilizing neighboring states and driving regional instability in a way that will prolong the war. Jordan is possibly on the brink of collapse owing to the unsustainable number of Syrian refugees it has absorbed and has closed its border to 59,000 Syrians that fled Assad’s latest offensive in mid-2018. These populations may now be forced to live under a regime they sought to escape, creating a ripe environment for terrorists to exploit. Refugee flows are also incentivizing Turkish escalation. Ankara’s 2016 invasion of northern Syria was meant in part to check the Kurds but had the additional goal of relieving Turkey’s refugee burden by force. Turkey is now resettling refugees in northern Syria and building a rebel proxy force to govern them. But by sustaining anti-regime forces and populations, it is likely to prolong the war.

5. Abandoning the Kurds

The U.S. withdrawal allows Turkey to launch a campaign against the Kurds

Ian Pannell, Matt McGarry, and Allie Yang 2019 (Pannell - foreign correspondent for ABC News and worked at the BBC for 20 years. McGarry is the global news producer in the Middle East for ABC News. Yang is a digital producer for ABC news) 17 Oct 2019 “Life and death in Syria as US troops withdraw: 'We don't trust America anymore'” <https://abcnews.go.com/International/life-death-syria-us-troops-withdraw-trust-america/story?id=66322917>

It's only been 10 days since President [Donald Trump](https://abcnews.go.com/alerts/donald-trump) made the sudden decision to withdraw Americans from the Northern Syrian border. Trump later revealed that it was just 28 U.S. troops holding the line between peace and war. The decision to withdraw opened the door for Turkey to launch a military campaign against Kurdish forces in Syria, known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF.

Trump’s order to withdraw was immediately followed by Turkey targeting Kurdish forces

Dallas Morning News 2019 (Dallas Morning News editorials are written by the paper's Editorial Board and serve as the voice and view of paper) 13 Oct 2019 “Why Trump’s withdrawal from Syria matters to national security” <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/13/why-trumps-withdrawal-from-syria-matters-to-national-security/>

President Donald Trump’s order Tuesday to pull U.S. forces out of northern Syria, given just hours after a phone call with Turkish strongman Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was predictably followed by a Turkish military invasion of Syrian territory and the targeting of Kurdish forces that have been trusted U.S. allies in the war against Islamic State terrorists in the region and Syrian President Bashar Assad’s murderous dictatorship.

Withdrawing all troops fails to uphold our duty to our allies

Dallas Morning News 2019 (Dallas Morning News editorials are written by the paper's Editorial Board and serve as the voice and view of paper) 13 Oct 2019 “Why Trump’s withdrawal from Syria matters to national security” <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/13/why-trumps-withdrawal-from-syria-matters-to-national-security/>

But by abandoning the SDF and effectively greenlighting a Turkish aerial and ground assault on an invaluable U.S. ally, this president has lost the trust our strategic allies place in us every minute of every day, whether they be in the Middle East, Europe or elsewhere around the globe. It was for this very reason that, as we wrote earlier this year, the Senate in January rebuked the president over earlier threats to pull all U.S. troops from Syria, and Jim Mattis, a decorated Marine Corps general, resigned as Secretary of Defense. In his resignation letter, Mattis made clear that “our strength as a nation is inextricably linked to the strength of our unique and comprehensive system of alliances and partnerships.” While the U.S. “remains the indispensable nation in the free world,” he continued, “we cannot protect our interests or serve that role effectively without maintaining strong alliances and showing respect to those allies.” By abandoning the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, who have fought bravely and equally against the evils of Islamic State and the dictator Bashar Assad’s ruthless assault on his own people, Donald Trump has disrespected a key U.S. ally in one of the world’s most dangerous regions, and put the rest of our allies on notice: The United States is neither an honest broker or a stalwart ally. It is for these reasons that this president has, rightly, come under serious fire by some of his staunchest supporters in his party. As Texas Sen. Ted Cruz tweeted this week, it would be “DISGRACEFUL” if the U.S. “sat idly by while Turkey slaughters the Kurds.” We agree with the senator, and would remind the president, as Cruz also did, that “Honorable nations stand by their friends.”

Link: Abandoning the Kurds = loss of US influence and allies

Gary Grappo 2019 (former US ambassador and a distinguished fellow at the Center for Middle East Studies at the Korbel School for International Studies, University of Denver) 25 Oct 2019 “Facing the Consequences of Trump’s Decision to Abandon the Kurds” <https://www.fairobserver.com/politics/arab-world/us-abandons-kurds-syria-donald-trump-russia-turkey-middle-east-news-76540/>

But abruptly abandoning an ally that had fought valiantly alongside Americans will not quickly be forgotten by the Syrian Kurds or any of America’s allies. Surely, Israel, Jordan, South Korea, Poland, the Baltic States or any of America’s dozens of allies and friends around the world that have staked their security on the US alliance must now be asking themselves if the same fate could befall them.

Link: Retreating from Syria would further diminish America’s credibility with our allies

**Nicholas Burns 2019 (Roy and Barbara Goodman Family Professor of the Practice of Diplomacy and International Relations at Harvard Kennedy School)“Impacts of U.S. Troop Withdrawal from Syria” 10 Oct 2019** <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/impacts-us-troop-withdrawal-syria>

President Trump’s disastrous decision to retreat from the U.S. position in Syria will diminish America's credibility with allies and friends around the world. Trump has already earned a global reputation for unreliability. He is viewed as a leader without core convictions with no lasting allegiances to our allies and partners such as the Syrian Kurds. Trump’s folly will lead to renewed fighting in northern Syria and will expose the Syrian Kurd population to direct attacks by the Turkish armed forces.

Link & Brink: US should be increasing, not decreasing, its commitment to allies right now. It's essential to maintaining US hegemony

Ashley Tellis 2020 (Tata Chair for Strategic Affairs and a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is also a counselor at the National Bureau of Asian Research and the research director of the Strategic Asia Program) 4 May 2020 "COVID-19 Knocks on American Hegemony" <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/04/covid-19-knocks-on-american-hegemony-pub-81719>

But even as it attends to the business of internal regeneration, Washington must double down on its alliances and partnerships. Only this U.S.-led confederation contains the preponderance of the global product that will durably immunize the “strategic West” against any future challenges emanating from China or other rivals. Preserving American hegemony over the long term thus must begin with consolidating Washington’s leadership within the largest single bloc of material power in order that it may be effective beyond. Ensuring this outcome requires the United States to take seriously—and deepen meaningfully—the special geopolitical ties it has nurtured throughout the postwar period, which would among other things enable it to better shape the world’s engagement with China to advance its own interests.

Impact: World peace & prosperity at risk without US influence. US hegemony is key to global peace & prosperity

Capt. M. V. Prato 2009 (United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Marine Corps University) “The Need for American Hegemony” <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a508040.pdf>

The world witnessed a vast shift in the polarity of geopolitics after the Cold War. The United States became the world’s greatest hegemon with an unequalled ability to globally project cultural, political, economic, and military power in a manner not seen since the days of the Roman Empire. **[END QUOTE]** Coined the “unipolar moment” by syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer, the disparity of power between the U.S. and all other nations allows the U.S. to influence the world for the mutual benefit of all responsible states. Unfortunately, the United States is increasingly forced to act unilaterally as a result of both foreign and domestic resentment to U.S. dominance and the rise of liberal internationalism. [**He goes on to conclude later in the same context QUOTE**:] The United States must exercise benevolent global hegemony, unilaterally if necessary, to ensure its security and maintain global peace and prosperity.

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