

# CONTROVERSIAL EXIT: U.S TROOPS WITHDRAWAL FROM SYRIA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed countries on India's interests

President [Donald Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Syria](#) has predictably upset both the Washington establishment and America's global allies. Within a day of the announcement, Secretary of Defense James Mattis quit, while allies say the move would affect the battle against the Islamic State in Syria. Mr. Trump, however, appears unfazed. Bringing soldiers back to the U.S. was a campaign promise. Earlier this year he had wanted to exit Syria, but delayed the decision amid resistance within his cabinet. Now he claims that the physical infrastructure of the IS caliphate is destroyed and the U.S. can leave the war against the remnants of the jihadist group to the Syrian government and its main backers, Russia and Iran. On the face of it, there is a strategic argument in Mr. Trump's decision. The caliphate is actually destroyed — the IS has lost 95% of the territory it once controlled and is now confined to narrow pockets on the Iraqi-Syrian border. The U.S. would also not like to get stuck in Syria forever. It is basically Russia's war. The U.S. is already stranded in Afghanistan (for 17 years) and Iraq (over 15 years) without a way out. After these interventions, Presidents have been wary of deploying "boots on the ground" in West Asia. Barack Obama had pulled back most U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Trump wants to get out of the Syrian theatre. But the ground reality is too complex and requires Mr. Trump to be more patient and strategic in his policymaking.

The U.S. has only 2,000 troops in Syria. They were not directly involved in the ground battle, and were supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces, a rebel group led by Kurdish rebels who were in the forefront of the fight against the IS. The U.S. support for the Kurdish rebels has irked Turkey, which sees them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, the rebels on the Turkish side who have been fighting Turkish troops for decades. Turkey considers the military consolidation of Kurds as a strategic threat. In the past, Turkey had attacked Kurds in some pockets on the Syrian side, but was prevented from launching a full-throttle attack because of the U.S. presence. When Mr. Trump pulls out American troops, he would in effect be leaving the Syrian Kurds at the mercy of Turkish troops. A second risk factor will emerge if Turkey launches an attack on the Kurdish militants, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoan has vowed to do. The Kurds will then have to re-channel their resources to fight Turkish soldiers. This will weaken the ground resistance against the remaining IS militants on the southern side of the border. Mr. Trump would have done better to wait before deciding to pull out of Syria. He could have considered waiting for the conflict to de-escalate even further; also, he could have gained assurances from Turkey that it would refrain from attacking Kurdish troops. The cost of being so abrupt is that it leaves a dangerous vacuum in northeastern Syria.

Maharashtra's proposal on reservation for Marathas is bound to invite judicial scrutiny

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