

# PULLBACK AND CHAOS

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

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On October 15, US President Donald Trump tweeted that “after defeating 100% of the ISIS caliphate... I said to my generals, why should we be fighting for Syria and Assad to protect the land of our enemy? Anyone who wants to assist Syria in protecting the Kurds, whether it is Russia, China or [Napoleon Bonaparte](#). I hope they do great, we are 7,000 miles away”. The most charitable view of Trump’s withdrawal of US forces from north-east Syria, an area under Kurdish control with its capital in Rojava, is that he is attempting to fulfill his promise of extricating the US from the conflicts it has been embroiled in across the globe ahead of the 2020 US presidential elections. The manner of the troop withdrawal, though, has strengthened the Bashar al Assad regime, sharpened the conflict in the region, as well as increased the influence of Russia in West Asia. From a US foreign policy perspective, these outcomes are an unmitigated failure. For regional and global security, they augur a time of instability.

In the immediate aftermath of Trump’s decision, Turkey’s President Recep Erdogan ordered his troops into the region, and there are reports of civilian casualties. US troops had suffered minimal casualties and were a buffer protecting the Kurdish forces. Erdogan, who is facing a violent Kurdish-led insurgency in his own country, seems to be seeking a deeper strategic buffer through military control of Syria’s autonomous Kurdish region. In a corner, and abandoned by their US allies, Rojava has sought assistance from Assad, and Russia and Iran too are expected to back the Assad regime, filling the power vacuum left by the US. Erdogan, for his part, seems undeterred by the sporadic threats of sanctions and other diplomatic consequences by the US and NATO.

Trump’s sudden withdrawal, without getting security guarantees from Ankara, is likely to be counterproductive. First, the claim that the “ISIS caliphate” has been defeated may be technically true, but many IS fighters retreated into remote parts of Iraq and Syria. Since the conflict in Syria began in 2015, the Kurds, helped by their US allies, were instrumental in the fight against the Islamic State. The remnants of the IS, now, may be emboldened. Second, the Assad regime, which the US accused of war crimes, has consolidated and its influence is certainly waxing, along with that of Russia. Finally, an aggressive and expansionist Turkey could pose a long-term challenge to the regional balance of power. It has long been a NATO ally and even houses a US military base with nuclear capabilities. In the near term, what is required is well-thought out, firm diplomacy by the US and other world powers, that goes far beyond what President Trump’s tweets have hinted at.

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