

TRUMP DECISION ON SYRIA – A CLARION CALL FOR A NEW AGE IN AMERICAN GEO-STRATEGY

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Some folks in the military establishment, all of the neocons, a handful of conservatives and even most of the (hypocritical) Dem Libs are up in arms over POTUS Trump’s decision to withdraw 2000 troops from Syria and another 7000 from Afghanistan. My POV is aligned with Trump who seems to be signaling a new “smarter” era of US foreign policy- and here is why:
Syria first;

We were NEVER really there in any serious capacity to begin with. For decades Syria and Lebanon have been in the Iranian, Russian (and to a lesser degree French) spheres of influence. President Reagan sent our Marines into Lebanon in 1983 only to realize that we had no strategic interests there and no place in an ethnic and proxy civil war that included Iran (and to a lesser degree Syria) on one side and Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States on the other. That lesson cost us the lives of 241 Americans and Reagan to his credit-decided that the region was not worth the lives and treasure of America. Instead he played the game by ME rules—our own version of "Hama Rules" if you will- where we encouraged a war between Iraq and Iran and supported Iraq while using covert ops and subversion tactics to cripple Iran and Syria.

More than 500,000 Iranians and Iraqis died in that war—and the tribes in that part of the world remained too occupied fighting each other to think about attacking western interests. After the rise of ISIS in Syria (precipitated in great part by Obama Administration pro-Arab Spring strategies and support for a KSA funded radical Islamist insurgency in

Syria and Iraq)-we eventually sent some small units into Syria in 2015 to support and train primarily Kurdish rebels -the YPG-who were not radical Muslims and were the most effective fighters against ISIS and the Assad regime. That presence grew over the last 3 years to a 2000 troop contingent that supports the rebel forces logistically while trying to stay out of direct conflict with Assad regime, Russian and Iranian or Turkish forces. 2000 men in Syria is an insignificant amount from a strategic or even tactical point of view as they are more concerned about defending their own than effecting a difference in the battle field. Similar results could be accomplished with a handful of special forces teams –an “unacknowledged” covert presence-and air support from our bases in Northern Iraq.

The Russians have ALWAYS been there—at least for the last 75 years or so. *Diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Syria were established in July 1944, and an agreement was signed in February 1946 ensuring Soviet support for Syrian independence ahead of the evacuation of French troops in April 1946.^[3] In 1971, under an agreement with President Hafez al-Assad, the Soviet Union was allowed to open its naval military base in Tartus,^{[4][5]} a facility the former Soviet republic continues to use to this day. On 8 October 1980, Syria and the Soviet Union signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.^[6] The treaty runs for twenty years and has automatic five-year extensions, unless one of the parties terminates the agreement. It provides for regular consultations on bilateral and multilateral issues of interest, coordination of responses in the event of a crisis, and military cooperation.^[7] The treaty remains in force to this day.^[8] In January 1992, the Syrian government recognized the Russian Federation as the legal successor to the Soviet Union. (Wilk.) Russia came to Syria’s rescue (again) after the start of the Arab Spring inspired civil war.*

The Assad regime would have fallen if not for Russian support and to a lesser degree-Iranian. Russia sees Syria as being in its sphere of influence and as a critical strategic ally that offers it a warm weather port and aircraft facilities in the Med. and ME. The only such facilities available to it in the region. So the US is not “abandoning” Syria to the Russians – Syria was always in their sphere and our ill conceived Arab Spring strategy and backing of a (terrorist led-initially) war against Assad forced Assad even deeper into the Russian den.

The Russian Orthodox Church and Putin are also seen as big supporters of the Christian population in Syria-(the earliest organized Christian presence outside of Jerusalem was in Antioch (ancient Syria -present day

Turkey)- having started at the time of St. Paul. Antioch is also the first place where the terms Christian was used—as a result Syria is the home base of Orthodox and Catholic Patriarchates and Bishops (in Damascus)- and has a strong and prosperous Christian minority . Christians are more secure in Syria than anywhere in the ME outside of Israel. When the French envoy was asked after the start of the Arab Spring uprising and civil war “what will happen to the Christians in Syria if the Islamists win” he answered—“Let them leave and come to Europe”. That was the wrong answer for the Syrian and Lebanese Christians and a major point as to why the French and Western strategy failed.

Given the way Christians were persecuted in Iraq and Syria by ISIS and various AQ affiliates and even some of the Shiite militias there, as well as in the rest of the ME—the Russian presence provided for a safe haven for Christians in one of the oldest and holiest places for Christians. That cannot be underestimated and Assad and the Russians have the support of the Christian populations in the country (and in Lebanon and ME) as a result. No amount of US troops—much less 2000—is about to change that historical dynamic.

Iran too has been there for decades-*The relationship between Iranian and Syrian governments has sometimes been described as the [Axis of Resistance](#).^[7] Syria was the first Arab state and the third in general, after [the Soviet Union](#) and [Pakistan](#), to recognize the Islamic Republic, founded in February 1979.^[7] Specifically Syria officially recognized the Islamic Republic on 12 February 1979.*

Syria was allied with Iran and against the Arab coalition during the Iran-Iraq war and looks at Iran as a strategic partner and counterbalance to Israel and an Israeli/Egyptian/Saudi alliance that has been developing. Assad recognized that the civil war was started with KSA and other Sunni Arab support against him and this forced his hand to strengthen ties with Iran-ties that had started to waver after the USA had sought closer ties after 2009 (*In early 2009, the United States began to review its Syria policy in light of changes in the country and the region, leading to an effort to engage with Syria to find areas of mutual interest, reduce regional tensions, and promote Middle East peace.*-DOS.)

Furthermore-Syria and Iran have always aligned with regards to Lebanon -a country Syria considers in its sphere of influence and where it supports Iranian backed Hezbollah and various Christian factions in order to counter the Sunni -KSA backed factions there.

Afghanistan Next

We have been there 17 years in an endless and useless war (after the first 2 years or so) and we have ZERO strategic interests there. Much of what applies to Syria—support from afar and with airpower and economics, letting tribal factions fight and figure it out amongst themselves, letting other regional powers play a role, etc. apply here as they apply to the ME. Enough said.

In the final analysis POTUS is responsible for the national security and the military and people of the USA. These moves help that security and alleviate some of the pressures the military has experienced for the last 17 years since 2001. It's a great move if done right-even if its only symbolic in nature-signaling a new era of US geopolitical strategy.

While many oppose the decision-including Sec Def Mattis who resigned over it-Trump is right.

Mattis is a patriot and a great man and he has done an excellent job as Sec Def. However as a Cold War era military man-and a Marine at that-every problem becomes a nail with the US as the hammer. Trump on the other hand was elected-on -and is responsible for the entire picture including our economy at home, our trade policies, our national debt, our too many open ended commitments around the world and of course our national security including the morale of the forces tasked with protecting it and for building critical public support for our military and our international policies.

He is one who believes in a more nuanced foreign policy, one where we exert power and protect strategic interests through a multitude of strategies and tactics including use of diplomacy, allies and proxies, building our economy to be an engine for global growth with us as the centerpiece, conserving our troops and our treasure for major strategic threats to the homeland or key allies, (see the Chinese), and by getting the American people 100% behind major actions or conflicts that involve our military. Nothing about Syria meets the critical tests required to keep our troops engaged there (and Afghanistan is much the same) and everything about these moves becomes a clarion call announcing a new era in US strategy. I would call it a GHW Bush and Baker sort of strategy that balances interests, allies and resources rather than a belligerent neocon Bush Jr. or a defeatist Obama one.

If the strategy includes continued air cover and logistical support for the Syrian Kurds (and not selling them out to Turks), something I think Trump will do regardless of what the Erdogan propaganda machine puts out, while providing ongoing support for the Iraqi KRG Kurds including possibly maintaining a base there, using their resources to maintain a deterrent to the Iranians and Russians in the region (and a base where we could quickly come back in if needed) and allowing/encouraging KSA and the Sunni Gulf Arabs to continue to support a Sunni opposition in Iraq and Syria, Lebanon and Iraq—then this will be a highly successful and cost effective strategy that will put pressure on Russia and Iran and embroil them in a long drawn out insurgency like conflict that will tax their resources. In other words we can turn the tables on Iran and Russia and rather than us spending countless treasures and manpower there—let them get embroiled in that quagmire that is the ME.

We can do that effectively by using proxies and spec ops and do it while keeping our powder dry to address more critical threats. Freeing up resources from Syria and Afghanistan and other less critical areas around the world would allow us to strengthen our NATO and Pacific alliances and readiness, strengthen our presence in our own hemisphere (with China in Panama and Russia in Venezuela and Cuba it badly needs strengthening) and retool, rest and re-motivate our military to get them ready for future potential conflicts and defense of the homeland and key allies.

After all we have been continually engaged in conflicts around the globe for 17 years and much of our military (and our people at home) are worn out by the seemingly endless conflicts. “Time for a respite and a new smarter strategy” is what Trump is telling us with his moves. We also save billions (maybe trillions) by following such a strategy and we work to get closer to and empower allies like India, Japan and South Korea (and maybe even Vietnam) in the Pacific and NATO in Europe, to have them carry some of the defense burden resulting from major potential threats and or competition from China and Russia.

The Obama Administration and their backers and much of the US media have been all-for such a policy shift in the recent past. It was Obama after all who wanted to “shift our focus to the Pacific”, get out of Afghanistan and Iraq and consolidate US military power. Now that Trump is beginning to implement a similar strategy, albeit in a much more thought out and planned manner –after major victories, from a position of strength-not weakness-after major improvements and budget increases to our military-and without telegraphing strategy or tactics like Obama

did—the libs and the media elites (and of course the neocons and even some real conservatives) are going nuts over it.

The rest of us—Americans from all walks of life, Dems and Reps., Conservatives and Independents, Libertarians, blue collar middle class people and rich and poor alike of all colors, races and religions will support Trump with this strategy if it's done in a way that will preserve American influence and security around the globe but most importantly provide for prosperity and peace here at home. That s why we voted for him and that is why he is a real change agent. He does not follow the status quo or what the establishment, Liberal, Conservative, Military Industrial ,K Street or any other factions wants—he follows his instincts and the interests of the American People and for that we are grateful.