

## Pompeo's Fingerprints Are All Over Trump's New Syria Regime Change Policy

Mike Pompeo's fingerprints are all over Trump's new Syria policy, including the Washington Post's main source for details on the changes, James Jeffrey, Pompeo's "representative for Syria engagement."

By [Whitney Webb](#)

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*Despite his having expressed his desire [to get U.S. troops out](#) of Syria only months ago, [a report](#) published Friday in The Washington Post claims that President Donald Trump is allegedly "on board" with a new "indefinite military and diplomatic effort in Syria." That effort claims to seek the "establishment of a stable, non-threatening government acceptable to all Syrians and the international community," a government that would not have current Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as its leader.*

The reason given for the dramatic change in policy was the administration's recent decision to "redefine" its goals in the Syrian conflict, resulting in the emergence of "the exit of all Iranian military and proxy forces from Syria" as the administration's top priority, effectively overshadowing the U.S.' long-stated goal of rooting out terror groups like Daesh (ISIS). The shift is part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to target Iranian influence in the region while simultaneously attempting to provoke regime change in Iran through the use of aggressive sanctions and other covert means.

Trump seems to have officially embraced regime change in Syria at the behest of his now-closest advisors, National Security Adviser John Bolton and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. In July, Bolton [had foreshadowed](#) the shift of the administration's Syria policy when he stated during an interview on ABC's *Next Week with George Stephanopoulos* that the U.S. troops would remain in Syria indefinitely "as long as the Iranian menace continues throughout the Middle East."

Pompeo's fingerprints are also on the new official policy, as the *Post's* main source for details on the policy changes were James Jeffrey, a retired U.S. diplomat who was named Pompeo's "representative for Syria engagement" last month. Jeffrey told the *Post* that "the new policy is we're no longer pulling out [U.S. troops] by the end of the year" and that the plan would also include a "major diplomatic initiative" to install a new government in Syria.

Though Jeffrey claimed that "Assad must go" was no longer U.S. policy, he stated that "Assad has no future" while claiming that it was not the U.S.' "job to get rid of him." He further elaborated that Assad did not "meet the requirements of not just us, but the

international community” for a leader of a new, post-conflict Syrian government, as those requirements included not “threatening his neighbors” — an apparent reference to Israel, which has long sought Assad’s overthrow — and not providing “a platform for Iran.”

Jeffrey, also a member of the Council of Foreign Relations, went on to state that rebels in the Idlib province, where the Syrian army is expected to launch a major offensive in the coming weeks, were “not terrorists, but people fighting a civil war against a brutal dictator.” However, the *Post* article itself admits that 14,000 fighters in Idlib are linked to al-Qaeda, though the figure is likely [much higher](#).

Furthermore, just last year, Brett McGurk – the U.S. government’s Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL (Daesh, ISIS) – [called Syria’s Idlib province](#) “the largest Al Qaeda safe haven since 9/11, tied directly to Ayman al-Zawahiri [current leader of Al Qaeda].” Since McGurk made that claim, the presence of Al Qaeda in the Idlib province [has only grown](#).

The plan detailed by the *Post* is remarkably similar to a plan Jeffrey himself helped develop earlier this year. That plan, [published](#) by the Washington Institute in July, called for the Trump administration to pursue “a no-fly/no-drive zone and a small residual ground presence in the northeast with intensified sanctions against the Assad regime’s Iranian patron,” in order to “stabilize the area, encourage Gulf partners [Saudi Arabia, UAE] to ‘put skin in the game,’ drive a wedge between Moscow and Tehran, and help Israel avoid all-out war.”

Notably, in the past, Jeffrey [has promoted](#) U.S. military intervention in other conflicts provoked by U.S. regime-change efforts, such as his advocacy for sending U.S. troops into Ukraine in order “to send [Russian President Vladimir] Putin a tough message.”

However, Trump has yet to make a public statement regarding this new policy shift and it is unclear whether Trump has actually thrown his weight behind it, given that the *Post* quoted Jeffrey as saying only, “I am confident the president is on board with this.” Yet, given Trump’s willingness to place “[maximum pressure](#)” on Iran and his [recent warning](#) against the upcoming Syria offensive in Idlib, it seems likely that he would support the plan, especially as it is backed by his closest advisors, Bolton and Pompeo.

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