

Syria Withdrawal Enrages the Chickenhawks

A Christmas present for the American and Syrian people

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***President Donald Trump's** order to withdraw from Syria has been greeted, predictably, with an avalanche of condemnation culminating in last Thursday's resignation by **Defense Secretary James Mattis**. The Mattis [resignation letter](#) focused on the betrayal of allies, though it was inevitably light on details, suggesting that the Marine Corps General was having some difficulty in discerning that American interests might be somewhat different than those of feckless and faux allies like Israel and Saudi Arabia that are adept at manipulating the levers of power in Washington and in the media. Mattis clearly appreciates that having allies is a force multiplier in wartime but fails to understand that it is a liability otherwise as the allies create an obligation to go to war on their behalf rather than in response to any actual national interest.*

The media was quick to line up behind Mattis. On Friday, *The New York Times* featured [a lead editorial](#) entitled "Jim Mattis was right" while neocon twitter accounts blazed with indignation. Prominent chickenhawk mouthpieces **David Frum** and **Bill Kristol**, among many others, [tweeted](#) that the end is nigh.

During the day preceding Mattis's dramatic announcement, the press went to war against the Administration over Syria and also regarding other reports that there would be troop reductions in Afghanistan. The following headline actually appeared [on a Reuters online article](#) the day after the announcement by the president: "In Syria retreat, Trump rebuffs top advisers and blindsides U.S. commanders." It would be difficult to imagine stuffing more bullshit into one relatively short sentence. "Retreat," "rebuffs" and "blindsides" are not words that are intended to convey any sort of even-handed assessment of what is occurring in U.S. policy towards the Middle East. They are instead meant to imply that "Hey, that moron in the White House has screwed up again!"

Consider for a moment the agenda that Reuters is apparently pushing. It is supporting an [illegal and unconstitutional](#) invasion of Syria by the United States that has a stated primary objective of removing a terrorist organization which is already mostly gone and a less frequently acknowledged goal of regime change for the legitimate government in Damascus and the expulsion of that government's principal allies. Reuters is asserting that staying in Syria would be a good thing for the United States and also for its "allies" in the region even though there is no way to "win" and no exit strategy.

Reuters is presumably basing its assessment on the collective judgments of a group of "top advisers" who are warmongers that the rest of the world as well as many Americans consider to be psychopaths or possibly even insane. And then there are the preferences of the "blindsided" generals, like Mattis, who have a personal interest in career terms for

maintaining a constant state of warfare. If you want to really know how what the military thinks about an ongoing war ask a sergeant or a private, never a general. They will tell you that they are sick of endless deployments that accomplish nothing.

The New York Times [lead story headline](#) on Thursday also let you know that its Editors were not please by Trump's move. It read "U.S. Exit Seen as a Betrayal of the Kurds, and a Boon for ISIS." They also [editorialized](#) "Trump's Decision to Withdraw From Syria Is Alarming. Just Ask His Advisers."

The Washington Post was not far behind. It immediately ran an op-ed by the redoubtable neocon chickenhawk **Max Boot**, whom Caitlin Johnstone [has dubbed](#) The Man Who Has Been Wrong About Everything. The piece was entitled [Trump's surprise Syria pullout is a giant Christmas gift to our enemies](#) making a twofer with an incredible "Fuck the EU" [Victoria Nuland's piece](#) entitled "In a single tweet Trump destroys U.S. policy in the Middle East," which appeared simultaneously. That anyone would regard Boot and Nuland as objective authorities on the Middle East given their ultimate and prevailing loyalty to Israel has to be wondered at, but then again Fred Hiatt is the editorial/opinion page editor and he is of the same persuasion, both ethnically and philosophically. They are all, of course, devoted Zionists and the big lie about what is going on in the region is apparently always worth repeating. As Joseph Goebbels [put it](#) in 1941 "...when one lies, one should lie big, and stick to it...even at the risk of looking ridiculous."

Comments relating to the articles, op-eds and editorials in the *Post* and *Times* bordered on the hysterical, sometimes suggesting that readers actually believe that Trump was following orders from Russian President Vladimir Putin. And what was stirring at Reuters, *The Times*, and the *Post* was only the tip of the iceberg. The mainstream television news providers united in condemning the audacity of a president who might actually try to end a war while the only favorable commentary on Trump's having taken a step that is long overdue came from the alternative media.

One might profitably recall how Trump has only been praised as "presidential" by the Establishment twice - when he staged cruise missile attacks on Syria based on faulty intelligence. The Deep State wants blood, make no mistake about it and it is not interested in "retreat." And Trump will also get almost no support from Congress, with only longtime critics of Syrian policy **Senators Rand Paul and Mike Lee** as well as **Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard** praising the move initially.

The arguments being made to criticize the Trump initiative were essentially cookie cutter neocon soundbites. The Reuters piece in its first few lines of text asserts that the reversal of policy "stunned lawmakers and allies with his order for U.S. troops to leave Syria, a decision that upends American policy in the Middle East. The result, said current and former officials and people briefed on the decision, will empower Russia and Iran and leave unfinished the goal of erasing the risk that Islamic State, or ISIS, which has lost all but a sliver territory, could rebuild." The article goes on to quote an anonymous Pentagon source who opined that "... Trump's decision was widely seen in the Pentagon as benefiting Russia as well as Iran, both of which have used their support for the Syrian government to bolster their regional influence. Iran also has improved its ability to ship arms to Lebanese Hezbollah for use against Israel. Asked who gained from the withdrawal, the defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, replied: 'Geopolitically Russia, regionally Iran.'"

Another so-called expert Charles Lister of the Middle East Institute was also cited in the article, saying

“It completely takes apart America’s broader strategy in Syria, but perhaps more importantly, the centerpiece of the Trump administration policy, which is containing Iran.”

Israel is also [turning up the heat](#) on Trump, claiming that the move will make it more insecure. **Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu** pledged to increase air attacks on Iranian targets in Syria as an added security measure to make up for the American betrayal. Normally liberal American Jews have joined the hue and cry against Trump on behalf of Israel. Filmmaker **Rob Reiner** [tweeted on Thursday](#) that the president is a “childish moronic mentally unstable malignant narcissist” who is “committing Treason” against the United States.

The real story, lost in the wailing and gnashing to teeth, is that even after conceding that Donald Trump’s hyperbolic claim that the United States had defeated ISIS as the motive for the withdrawal is nonsense, there is still no good reason for Washington to continue to keep troops in Syria. The U.S. in reality did far less in the war against the terrorist groups infesting the region than did the Russians, Iranians or the Syrians themselves and, as a result, it will have less say in what kind of Syria emerges from the carnage. That is almost certainly a good thing for the Syrian people.

But let’s assume for sake of argument that the U.S. invasion really was about ISIS. Well, ISIS continues to hold on to a small bit of territory near the Euphrates River and is reported to have between one and two thousand remaining fighters. There are other estimates suggesting that between 10,000 and 20,000 followers have dispersed and gone underground awaiting a possible resurgence by the group. The argument that ISIS will reorganize and re-emerge as a result of the American withdrawal assumes that it is the 2,000 strong U.S. armed forces that are keeping it down, which is ridiculous. The best remedy against an ISIS recovery is to support a restored and re-unified Syria, which will have more than enough resources available to eliminate the last bits of the terrorist groups remaining in its territory.

So we go to fallback argument B, which is “containing Iran.” “Containment” was a U.S. policy devised by George Kennan in 1947 to inhibit the expansion of a powerful and sometimes aggressive soon-to-be nuclear armed Soviet Union, which was rightly seen as a serious threat. Iran is a second world country with a small military and economy with no nuclear arsenal and it neither threatens the United States nor any of its neighbors. But Israel supported by Saudi Arabia does not like Iran and has induced Washington to follow its lead. Withdrawing from Syria recognizes that Iran is no threat in reality. Positioning American military forces to “counter” Iran does not reduce the threat against the United States because there was no threat there to begin with.

And then there is the argument that the U.S. departure empowers Iran and Russia. Staying in Syria is, on the contrary, a drain on both those countries’ limited resources. The more money and manpower they have to commit to Syria the less they have to become engaged elsewhere and it is hard to imagine how either country would exploit the “victory” in Syria to leverage their involvement in other parts of the world. Both would be delighted if a final settlement of the Syrian problem could be arrived at so they can get out.

And as for the United States, the military should only be deployed anywhere to defend the

U.S. itself or vital interests. There is nothing like that at stake in Syria. So, is American national security better or worse if the U.S. leaves? As Russian and American soldiers only confront each other directly in Syria, U.S. national security would in fact be greatly improved because the danger of igniting an accidental war with Russia would be dramatically reduced. There have reportedly already been a dozen incidents between U.S. and Russian troops, including some involving shooting. That has been a dozen too many. Even the possibility of starting an unintended war with Iran would potentially be disastrous for the United States as well as for everyone else in the region, so it is far better to put some distance between the two sides.

And finally, it is necessary to go to the argument for disengagement from Syria that is too little heard in the western media or from the usual bonehead politicians named Graham and Rubio who pronounce on foreign policy. How has American intervention in the Middle East and south and central Asia benefited the people in the countries that have been invaded or bombed? Not at all. By some estimates four million Muslims have been killed as a consequence of the wars since 2001 and millions more displaced. More than eight thousand U.S. military have died in the process in wars that had no purpose and no exit strategy. And the wars have been expensive - [\\$6 trillion](#) and counting, much of it borrowed. War without end means killing without end and it has to stop.

Withdrawing from Syria is the right thing to do, though one has to be concerned that there might be some secret side deals with Israel or Turkey that could actually result in more attacks on Syria and on the Kurds. Donald Trump is already under extreme pressure coming from all directions to reverse his decision to leave Syria and it is quite possible that he will either fold completely or bend at least a bit. It is to be hoped that he will not do so as a Christmas present to the American people. And he might want to think of a Christmas present for 2019. One might suggest a complete withdrawal from Afghanistan.

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