

Troops Coming Home from Afghanistan? Depends on Who You Ask.

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Global Research, October 20, 2020

[Ron Paul Institute](#) 19 October 2020

Region: [Middle East & North Africa, USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

There is a lot to cheer about when it comes to most of President Trump's foreign policy statements. He regularly tells us he is ending foreign wars and bringing troops home. But do the people who work for him even listen? It seems as soon as the president makes a strong foreign policy statement, one of his appointees grabs a microphone to explain what the president "really meant."

Earlier this month, President Trump Tweeted that, "we should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas!"

It was a very encouraging statement. But almost immediately his statement was "clarified" - actually refuted - by two Administration officials.

First, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, directly contradicted his boss - who also happens to be his Commander-in-Chief - stating, "It's a conditions-based plan. We're continuing to monitor those conditions."

Then President Trump's National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien told us that the president's statement was merely an expression of his "desire." "All presidents, all GIs, want the troops home by Christmas," he said on Friday.

Then Milley and O'Brien launched a war of words against each other over troop withdrawal, with Milley attacking O'Brien's "clarification" that 2,500 troops would remain in Afghanistan until at least early next year. Milley called it "speculation."

O'Brien fought back, stating that it "has been suggested by some that that's speculation. I can guarantee you that's the plan of the President of the United States."

It's hard to follow!

While President Trump's statement on bringing the troops home is to be applauded, he has a real problem getting his policies implemented by the very people he has hired to do the implementing. It has long been said that "the personnel is the policy," and we have seen this very clearly in this administration.

President Trump ran on a sensible foreign policy, defining "America first" as getting the US out of endless and counterproductive wars. Many, me included, believe this position may have provided his margin of victory. The "peace candidate" nearly always wins.

But you cannot pursue an “America first” foreign policy if you put people like Mike Pompeo, John Bolton, Nikki Haley, Mark Milley, and others in charge of carrying it out. They simply won’t do it. We are seeing that again when it comes to withdrawing our troops from the long and foolish war in Afghanistan.

For a president once made famous for uttering the line “you’re fired,” Trump seems unwilling or perhaps unable to dismiss those who actively seek to undermine his policies.

There is no need for endless negotiations with the Taliban on what the country might look like or should look like when we get out. The only way to get out of Afghanistan is to just get out of Afghanistan. To just come home. Nineteen years fighting a losing battle to re-shape a country thousands of miles away about which the “experts” know nothing is more than enough.

But if there is ever a “danger” of a war coming to a close, Washington’s warmongers are right there trying to stir up another conflict. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said late last week that would like to see huge military spending increases to counter the “threat” of Russia and China.

Robbing Middle America to enrich the millionaires in the military-industrial complex seems to be the one issue universally supported in Washington. But it is not at all what the American people want. Will Trump have another chance to pursue an actual “America first” foreign policy? Soon we will know...

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