

# Whose Interests Are Served by the US Occupation of East Syria: America's or Israel's?

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*What is Israel's stake in east Syria? Has Israel influenced Washington's decision to maintain a long-term military presence in Syria? How does Israel benefit from the splintering of Syria into smaller statelets and from undermining the power of the central government in Damascus? Did Israel's regional ambitions factor into Trump's decision to shrug off Turkey's national security concerns and create an independent Kurdish state on Syrian sovereign territory? What is the connection between the Kurdish independence movement and the state of Israel?*

The Pentagon does everything in its power to conceal the number and location of US military bases in a war zone. That rule applies to east Syria as well, which means we cannot confirm with absolute certainty how many bases really exist. Even so, in 2017, a Turkish news agency, "Anadolu Agency published an infographic on Tuesday showing 10 locations in which US troops were stationed. Two airbases, eight military points in PKK/PYD-controlled areas."

According to a report in Orient.Net:

"The 8 military sites, according to the agency, host military personnel involved in coordinating the aerial and artillery bombardments of US forces, training Kurdish military personnel, planning special operations and participating in intensive combat operations." (["AA's map of US bases in Syria infuriates Pentagon"](#), orient.net)

The location of these bases is unimportant, what is important is that there has been no indication that Washington has any plan to close these bases down or to withdraw American troops. In fact, as the New York Times reported just weeks ago, the number of US troops has actually increased by roughly 1,000 since Trump made his withdrawal announcement in mid-December.

We think that is especially significant in view of Trump's surprising comments last week, that he now agrees "100%" with maintaining a military presence in Syria. His sudden reversal shows that the opponents of the "withdrawal plan" have prevailed and the US is not going to leave Syria after all. It's also worth noting that Trump administration has made no effort to implement the "Manbij Roadmap" which requires the US to coordinate its withdrawal with the Turkish military in order to maintain security and avoid a vacuum that could be filled by hostile elements. Ankara and Washington agreed to this arrangement long

ago in order to expel Kurdish militants (who Turkey identifies as “terrorists”) from the area along the border. It appears now that Trump will not honor that deal, mainly because Trump intends to be in Syria for the long-haul.

But, why? Why would Trump risk a confrontation with a critical NATO ally (Turkey) merely to hold a 20 mile-deep stretch of land that has no strategic value to the United States? It doesn't make sense, does it?

Now in earlier articles we have argued that influential think tanks, like the Brookings Institute, have played a critical role in shaping Washington's Syria policy, and that indeed is true. Just take a look at this short excerpt from a piece by Brookings Michael E. O'Hanlon titled “Deconstructing Syria: A new strategy for America's most hopeless war”. Here's an excerpt:

“...the only realistic path forward may be a plan that in effect deconstructs Syria....the international community should work to create pockets with more viable security and governance within Syria over time... The idea would be to help moderate elements establish reliable safe zones within Syria once they were able....Creation of these sanctuaries would produce autonomous zones that would never again have to face the prospect of rule by either Assad or ISIL....

The interim goal might be a confederal Syria, with several highly autonomous zones... The confederation would likely require support from an international peacekeeping force... to help provide relief for populations within them, and to train and equip more recruits so that the zones could be stabilized and then gradually expanded.” ([“Deconstructing Syria: A new strategy for America's most hopeless war”](#), Michael E. O'Hanlon, Brookings Institute)

Strategic planners and think-tank pundits have long sought to break up Syria, that's old news. What's new is the emergence of powerful neocons operating in the White House and State Department (John Bolton, Jared Kushner, Mike Pompeo) who, we suspect, are using their influence to shape policy in a way that is sympathetic to Israel's regional ambitions. It's worth noting, that Zionist plans to dismember surrounding Arab states to ensure Israeli superiority, date back more than 30 years.

The so called Yinon plan was a fairly straightforward strategy to balkanize the Middle East's geopolitical environment to enhance Israeli regional hegemony while “A Clean Break” was a more recent adaptation which emphasized “weakening, containing or even rolling back Syria” and “removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.” In any event, many right-wing Israelis seem to think that chopping up sovereign Arab states into smaller bite-sized pieces, governed by tribal leaders or Washington's puppets, will unavoidably boost Tel Aviv's power across the Middle East.

But how does the US military occupation of east Syria fit in with all this?

Well, the US occupation effectively creates an independent Kurdish state in the heart of the Arab world which helps to weaken Israel's rivals. That's why some have referred to emerging Kurdistan as a “second Israel”. Here's how Seth Frantzman, a research associate at the Rubin Center for Research in International Affairs in Herzliya, explains it:

“Israel would welcome another state in the region that shares its concerns

about the rising power of Iran, including the threat of Iranian-backed Shia militias in Iraq,” says Frantzman. “Reports have also indicated that oil from Kurdistan is purchased by Israel.” ([“Why Israel supports an independent Iraqi Kurdistan”](#), CNN)

While its true that Kurdish oil may provide an added incentive for long-term occupation, the real goal is to block a “land corridor” from opening (that would connect Beirut, to Damascus, to Baghdad to Tehran) and to further undermine Iran’s growing influence in the region. Those are the real objectives. In fact, US military operations in Syria are actually part of a broader campaign directed at Iran, a campaign that undoubtedly has the full support of neocons Pompeo and Bolton.

Check out this lengthy quote from a piece by Rauf Baker at The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies which helps to put the whole Israel-Kurdistan issue into perspective:

“Since declaring “Rojava” in northern and northeastern Syria in 2013, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military arm, the People’s Protection Units (YPG), both of which are linked to the PKK, have built a uniquely viable entity amid the surrounding bedlam. (Note: The PKK, is on the State Departments list of terrorist organizations and has been conducting a war on Turkey for more than 3 decades.)

The ancient proverb “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” could be useful to Israel in this grim scenario. The Syrian regime continues to uphold its traditional anti-Israel stance, and is in any case largely dependent on Iran, Hezbollah, and the other Shiite militias, all of which want Israel destroyed....

The Syrian Kurdish parties opposing PYD are openly linked to Ankara, which is ruled by a president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is obsessed with power and whose ideology considers the entire State of Israel to be illegitimately occupied by Jews. Moreover, he has recently established a rapprochement with Tehran - a worrying development...

**Iran is now closer than ever to securing a land corridor that will connect it to the Mediterranean through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. This corridor will expand its sphere of influence from the Strait of Hormuz in the east to the Mediterranean in the west, and will ensure that Israel is surrounded by land and sea...**

**Should Israel strengthen its relationship with the Syrian Kurds, its gains would extend beyond strategic, political, and security benefits. Rojava’s natural resources, especially its oil, can contribute to Israel’s energy supply and be invested in projects such as an oil pipeline through Jordan to Israel. US troops are stationed at several military bases in Rojava, which could offer an alternative to Incirlik Air Base in Turkey...**

**It appears abundantly clear that the Kurds are the most qualified, if not the only, candidate in Syria on which Israel can count for support... Israel should act swiftly to support the emerging Kurdish region in Syria...**

**It is very much in Israel’s interest to have a reliable and trustworthy friend in the new Syria.** If Jerusalem hopes, together with its ally in Washington, to prevent Tehran from establishing its long-sought land corridor, it will need to strengthen its influence in the Syrian Kurdish region to serve as a wall blocking Iran’s ambitions.” ([“The Syrian Kurds: Israel’s Forgotten Ally”](#),

Rauf Baker, BESA Center)

So, the question is: Whose interests are really served by the US occupation of east Syria: America's or Israel's?

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