

America's Fake "Reconstruction" Money to Syria

Trump's refusal to fund Syria's reconstruction is to Saudi Arabia's advantage

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Trump didn't pull \$230 million worth of reconstruction assistance for Syria just because he's stingy, but because he knew that American interests would be served better and more cost-effectively if he got Saudi Arabia and its partners to take the lead in doing this instead.

Most people saw the writing on the wall earlier this year when Trump froze the \$230 million that the US earmarked for Syria, but it was still a news event in and of itself when he [tweeted](#) over the weekend that:

"The United States has ended the ridiculous 230 Million Dollar yearly development payment to Syria. Saudi Arabia and other rich countries in the Middle East will start making payments instead of the U.S. I want to develop the U.S., our military and countries that help us!"

This was preceded by reports that Saudi Arabia committed [\\$100 million](#) to this project out of the total [\\$300 million](#) that the US said that it raised from its coalition allies for this effort.

On the surface, it might look like Trump was just being stingy and didn't want to continue funding this program, but there's actually a lot more to do it. The US has been advancing the "[Lead From Behind](#)" strategy in recent years whereby it seeks to have its regional partners take the lead in pertinent operations of shared interest while Washington assists them with logistics, advisory, and other forms of behind-the-scenes support. The guiding concept is for other countries to share the so-called "burden" of upholding the American-led international order, which has become increasingly expensive for the US in economic, military, and political terms to maintain.

The reprioritization of American military focus from West Asia (the Mideast) to East Asia in order to "contain" China could create a so-called "leadership void" that could be exploited by its Russian, Iranian, and increasingly, Turkish rivals if the US didn't encourage its regional partners like Saudi Arabia to replace its presence there. To be clear, the US isn't "withdrawing" from the Mideast, but is just scaling back its conventional footprint in this part of the world, opting instead for smaller but more strategic deployments that allow it to do more with less, such as in the case of Syria.

The US' estimated 2000 troops and 20 or so bases there have succeeded in drawing a

proverbial (and in a sense, almost literal) “line in the sand” that deterred Damascus from commencing a liberation operation in the Kurdish-controlled but nevertheless Arab-majority northeast corner of the country. It’s conceivable that the US might partially withdraw its forces in the coming future as part of a peace deal for politically ending the war, but only under the condition that this part of Syria receives “self-government” as one of the outcomes of the ongoing constitutional reform process that was originally mandated by UNSC Res. 2254.

Northeastern Syria is the most agriculturally, hydrologically, and energy-rich part of the Arab Republic, which thus makes it the key to controlling the rest of the rump state and explaining why the US won’t seriously consider decreasing its conventional military presence there unless Damascus caves in to Washington’s implied “decentralization” demands. Enticing other regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and its GCC allies to deepen their investment in this part of the country concurrent with the US decreasing its own is a clever calculation designed to make them stakeholders in the success of its “self-government” scheme during the ongoing constitutional reform negotiations.

Neither the US nor Saudi Arabia want to see Damascus reasserting its constitutional legitimacy over this strategic corner of Syria, though Washington is tired of paying the cost to keep the region de-facto independent, hence why it thought it better to convince Riyadh to invest here and obtain some “skin in the game”. Not only could the Kingdom immensely profit from rebuilding this resource-rich space, but it could also establish a strategic – and possibly eventually military – presence along the southern Turkish border as a symmetrical response to Turkey’s new base in neighboring Qatar. The self-interests driving this strategy are well-known to American decision makers and evidently exploited by them.

On its own, the US is more than capable of ensuring that Damascus doesn’t militarily liberate the northeast, but it would rather share the cost of doing so with Saudi Arabia and others. Moreover, granting Riyadh the opportunity to profit from this arrangement and simultaneously respond to Ankara’s military deal with its Qatari rival can contribute to keeping the Kingdom in the American sphere of influence despite its recent outreaches to Moscow and Beijing. As the saying goes, “why do for yourself what others can do for you?”, and Trump the businessman understands this much better than any of his predecessors, which is why he’s more than eager to get the Saudis involved in northeastern Syria.

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