

# US Will Retain Several Hundred Troops in Syria Despite Withdrawal

By [Nauman Sadiq](#)

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

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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*White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said in a statement on Thursday, February 21, "A small peace keeping group of about 200 US troops will remain in Syria for a period of time," as [reported by the CNN](#) [1] on Friday. According to the report: "The 200 troops who will remain will be divided between al-Tanf, an area near the Iraq-Jordan border, and northeast Syria."*

The report further adds:

*"The troops in northeast Syria currently advise the Syrian Democratic Forces. The idea would be that these 200 remaining US troops would be able to provide unique high-end capabilities – such as logistics, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and calling in airstrikes – that would help encourage coalition countries like France and the United Kingdom to also keep their troops in Syria to help ensure the safe zone with a force of some 1,500 international troops."*

The al-Tanf military base is strategically located in southeastern Syria on the border between Syria, Iraq and Jordan, and it sits on a critically important Damascus-Baghdad highway, which serves as a lifeline for Damascus. Washington has illegally occupied 55-kilometer area around al-Tanf since 2016, and several hundred US Marines have trained Syrian militant groups, including Maghawir al-Thawra, there.

The news doesn't come as a surprise, though, as in an [exclusive report](#) [2] by the Middle East Eye's Turkey correspondent, Ragip Soylu, on January 10, he mentioned that the US delegation presented a five-point document to the Turkish officials during National Security Advisor John Bolton's recent visit to Turkey.

A senior Trump administration official briefed on objectives outlined at the meeting said on January 10,

*"As the president has stated, the US will maintain whatever capability is necessary for operations needed to prevent the Islamic State's resurgence."*

The official further said:

*"The US is not withdrawing from the base at al-Tanf at this time."*

Moreover, National Security Advisor John Bolton also alluded to maintaining long-term US military presence at the al-Tanf base during his visit to Jerusalem on January 6.

Furthermore, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also delivered contradictory messages in a speech in Cairo on January 10. On the one hand, he said Washington would withdraw American troops from Syria in line with Donald Trump's momentous announcement of withdrawal of US troops from Syria on December 19, and on the other, he emphasized the US would continue fighting the Islamic State and would also contain the influence of Iran in the Middle East region. Obviously, both those divergent goals were impossible to achieve, unless Washington was planning to maintain some sort of long-term military presence in Syria.

It's worth noting, moreover, that rather than fighting the Islamic State, the condition of continued presence of the US forces at al-Tanf military base has been acceded to by the Trump administration in order to address Israel's concerns regarding the expansion of Iran's influence in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Furthermore, the exact number of the US troops stationed at al-Tanf and in northeast Syria in the Kurdish towns of Hasakah and Qamishli wouldn't be just 200, as claimed by the CNN report, because whenever the US military deploys its forces in a foreign country, it simply mentions the number of service members in its official reports and elides over the number of private military contractors, which quite often outnumber service members by a ratio of three to one. Thus, the number of the US troops that would still be deployed in Syria despite the official "withdrawal" would amount to several hundred American troops.

Thus, for all practical purposes, it appears the withdrawal of American troops from Syria will be limited to Kurdish-occupied Arab-majority towns of Manbij and Kobani in northern Syria in order to address the concerns of Washington's NATO-ally Turkey pertaining to the presence of Kurdish militias in northern Syria along Turkey's southern borders, and the US will maintain continued military presence in the Kurdish-majority towns of Hasakah and Qamishli in northeast Syria and at al-Tanf military base in southeast Syria along the border between Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

Regarding the evacuation of American troops from the Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria, clearly an understanding has been reached between Washington and Ankara. According to the terms of the agreement, the Erdogan administration released the US pastor Andrew Brunson on October 12, which had been a longstanding demand of the Trump administration, and has also decided not to make public the audio recordings of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, which could have implicated another American-ally the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in the assassination.

In return, the Trump administration has complied with Erdogan's longstanding demand to evacuate American forces from the Kurdish-held areas in northern Syria. Another demand Erdogan must have made to Washington is to pressure Saudi Arabia to lift the Saudi-UAE blockade imposed in June 2017 against Qatar, which is ideologically aligned to Erdogan's AKP party since both follow the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, in return for not making public the audio recordings of the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

It bears mentioning that after the Khashoggi assassination and the international outrage it

generated against the Saudi royal family, Saudi Arabia is already trying to assuage Qatar as it invited Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani to attend the Gulf Cooperation Council summit in Riyadh on December 10, though Doha snubbed the goodwill gesture by sending a low-ranking official to the meeting.

Regarding the murder of the Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on October 2, a question would naturally arise in the minds of astute readers of alternative media that why did the mainstream media, Washington Post and New York Times in particular, take the lead in publicizing the assassination?

One apparent reason could be that Khashoggi was an opinion columnist for The Washington Post, which is owned by Jeff Bezos, the owner of Amazon. The Washington Post has a history of working in close collaboration with the CIA as Bezos won a [\\$600 million contract](#) [3] in 2013 to host the CIA's database on the Amazon's web-hosting service.

It bears mentioning that despite the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman being primarily responsible for the war in Yemen that has claimed tens of thousands of lives and created a famine in Yemen, the mainstream media hailed him as a "moderate reformer" who brought radical reforms in the conservative Saudi society by permitting women to drive and by allowing cinemas to screen Hollywood movies.

So what prompted the sudden change of heart in the mainstream media that the purported "moderate reformer" was all of a sudden reviled as a brutal murderer? More than anything, it was the timing of the assassination and the political mileage that could be obtained from Khashoggi's murder in the domestic politics of the United States that prompted the mainstream media to take advantage of the opportunity and mount a smear campaign against the Trump administration by publicizing the assassination.

Jamal Khashoggi was murdered on October 2, when the US midterm elections were only a few weeks away. Donald Trump and his son-in-law Jared Kushner in particular have known to have forged close business relations with the Saudi royal family. It doesn't come as a surprise that Donald Trump chose Saudi Arabia and Israel for his maiden overseas visit in May 2017.

Thus, the corporate media's campaign to seek justice for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi was actually a smear campaign against Donald Trump and his conservative political base, which is now obvious after the US midterm election results have been tallied. Even though the Republicans have retained their 51-seat majority in the Senate, the Democrats now control the House of Representatives by gaining 39 additional seats.

Clearly, two factors were responsible for the surprising defeat of the Republicans in the US midterm elections. Firstly, the Khashoggi murder and the smear campaign unleashed against the Trump administration by the neoliberal media, which Donald Trump often pejoratively mentions as "Fake News" on Twitter.

Secondly, and more importantly, the parcel bombs sent to the residences of George Soros, a dozen other Democratic Congressmen and The New York Times New York office by Cesar Sayoc on the eve of the elections. Although the suspect turned out to be a Trump supporter, he was likely instigated by shady hands in the US deep state, which is wary of the anti-establishment rhetoric and pro-Russia tendencies of the so-called "alt-right" administration.

Finally, after losing the midterm elections and the consequent decision of withdrawal of American forces from Syria on December 19, it appeared the non-interventionist “alt-right” Trump administration had decided to take a hardline with the American deep state, but after the policy reversal and the decision to maintain continued American military presence in Syria, it’s obvious that Donald Trump is too inexperienced to confront the American deep state, comprising the State and Defense department bureaucracies, foreign policy think tanks, advocacy groups, such as AIPAC and the mainstream media.

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*Nauman Sadiq is an Islamabad-based attorney, columnist and geopolitical analyst focused on the politics of Af-Pak and Middle East regions, neocolonialism and petro-imperialism. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

#### Notes

[1] About 200 US troops to stay in Syria:

<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/21/politics/200-troops-syria/index.html>

[2] The US five-point ‘non-paper’ for Syria delivered by Bolton to Turkey:

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-us-five-point-non-paper-syria-delivered-bolton-turkey-1769325167>

[3] Jeff Bezos Is Doing Huge Business with the CIA:

<http://www.alternet.org/media/owner-washington-post-doing-business-cia-while-keeping-his-readers-dark>

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