



**Dimensions**  
for Strategic Studies

Analytical Study



# The future of foreign forces in Syria

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## **Dimensions** for Strategic Studies

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# Preamble

Between 2011 and 2021, Syria had more than 514 military points for 4 foreign powers: the United States, Russia, Iran and Turkey.

Never before in Syria's modern history has this size of foreign military presence been recorded.

This reflects the extent of external influence, that deprived the local actors from playing their own roles in the country.

Until mid2021-, the number of foreign military bases in Syria was 108, operational bases 25, and there were 2 bases with security forces, whereas the number of the military posts was 313 in addition to 22 points for logistics support and 18 observation outposts.<sup>1</sup>

With 121 bases and points, the governorate of Aleppo has the largest number of foreign military bases spread in many areas of the governorate. Idlib comes next with 71 points, then Daraa with 57, Damascus Countryside 50, Deir ez-Zor 39, Homs 38, Hama 34, al-Hasakah 32, Raqqa 22, Quneitra 20, As-Suwayda 13, Latakia 12, Damascus 4 and Tartous with only one.

Iran was the first foreign force to intervene militarily in Syria, when Hezbollah officially announced its participation in the Qusair battle, west of Homs, in April 2013. It was followed by the United States, as a leading country in the international coalition; where it sent 50 personnel on advisory missions to support local armed groups in the first military operation against ISIS, southeast of al-Hasakah governorate in October 2015.

On August 2015 ,<sup>26</sup>, Russia signed an agreement with the Syrian regime granting its military forces the right to use the Hmeimim base southeast of Latakia, after the former had announced on September 30 its official intervention in Syria.

(1) Map of foreign power bases and points in Syria, Jusoor Center for Studies . 1/7/2021: <https://bit.ly/3qEUMeY>





Turkey did not intervene militarily in Syria until August 2017<sup>24</sup>, when it announced to launch the Euphrates Shield military operation, north of Aleppo.

The operation targeted each of ISIS and the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG).

The declared reasons for the presence In fact, each international power valley regardless of the legal justifications that are attached to the declaration for their intervention.

Of course, both Russia<sup>2</sup> and Iran<sup>3</sup> consider that their presence in Syria is based on a legal formula, given that it came at the request of the government of the Syrian regime in the context of combating terrorism.

Likewise, Turkey says that its presence in Syria is based on a legal formula; according to the Adana Agreement (1998), which gives it the right to intervene to a 5km depth in the event that Syria failed to take the necessary security measures, as stipulated in annexes II and IV of the Adana agreement.

As for the United States, which intervened to combat terrorism but not under the UN Security Council umbrella or a consent by the Syrian regime.

The US legally relies on some loopholes in United Nations charter, such as the principle of the right to self-defense stipulated in Article 51 of the Charter. The US instrumentlised, as well, General Assembly Resolution No.

(A/RES/1/60) of 2005, which recognizes the possibility of international cooperation to combat terrorism, provided that it takes place in accordance with the provisions of international law.

<sup>(2)</sup> A step that changed the course of the Syrian crisis, Russia Today. 30/9/2019: <https://cutt.us/5Lhkp>

<sup>(3)</sup> Tehran: We will remain in Syria as long as the Syrian government and people want it, Russia Today . 14/2/2021: <https://cutt.us/6WPzr>



## First: The reasons for foreign military presence in Syria



### 1. The United States

Until mid-2021, the United States had 28 military bases in Syria, scattered over 3 governorates: 17 in Al-Hasakah, 9 in Deir ez-Zor, and 2 in Homs.

The main mission under which the US-led International Coalition intervened in Syria is connected with "fighting terrorism."

The US forces were supposed to start withdrawing after announcing the elimination of ISIS at the end of February 2019, as former President Donald Trump expressed his determination to evacuate his country's forces from Syria on December 19, 2018, after the main goal they came for has been fulfilled.

The Trump administration retracted the withdrawal decision and set a new goal of staying, which is the protection of the vital oil facilities.

Such a justification was reframed by the President Joe Biden as preventing ISIS from accessing important resources and revenues.

This was stated by the International Coalition spokesman Wayne Maroto on June 15, 2021.

However, in reality, the US military presence was not only connected to combating terrorism and preventing a resurgence of "jihadist organizations", particularly ISIS, but also has had other directly declared goals.

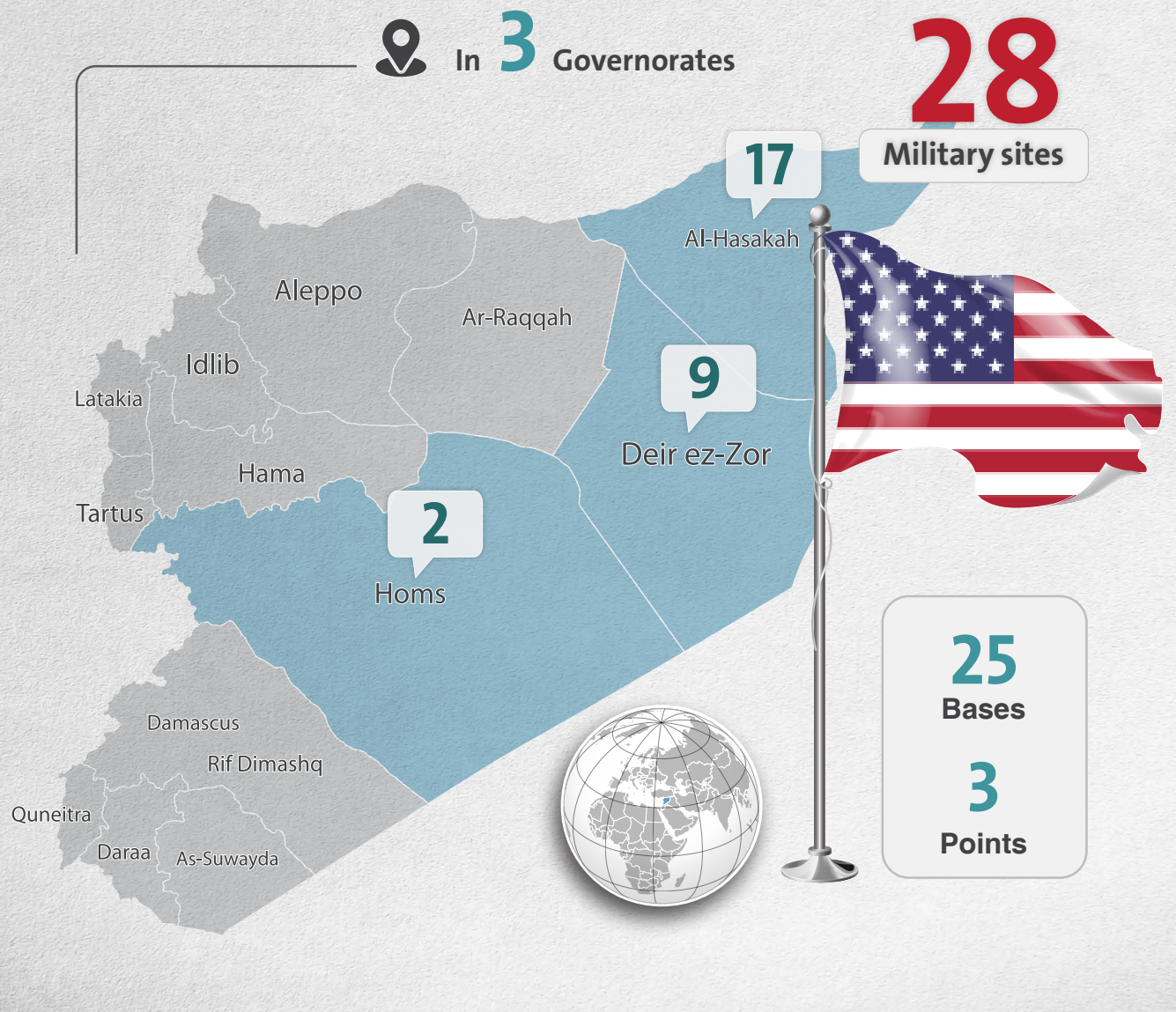
Putting pressure on Iran in Syria is among the tasks attached to the US military presence in Syria as well, as stated in a speech by former Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson at the Hoover Institution of Stanford University on January 17, 2018. Tillerson spoke about the danger of the spread of Iranian forces in attacking the interests of the United States and its allies in the region by Iran.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>(4)</sup> What are the two main objectives of Washington's strategy in Syria? BBC Arabic, 18/1/2018: <https://cutt.us/jzmEy>



Figure No. 1:

## US military sites in Syria mid-2021







Indeed, withdrawing Iranian military forces from Syria was one of the conditions put forward by former Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo to Iran on May 2018 ,21, in exchange for lifting US economic sanctions on the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, it is possible to understand the US military presence at Al-Tanf base on the border between Iraq and Syria, that is, to prevent Iran from establishing a land corridor stretching towards the Mediterranean Sea.

Moreover, protecting Israel's security is among the responsibilities associated with the presence of US troops in Syria, especially when former National Security Adviser, John Bolton, on January 6, linked the US withdrawal from Syria to the need to ensure defending Israel's security, which often depends greatly on the information provided by the United States about Iran's military activity in Syria. Such data helps in carrying out strikes against Iranian sites inside Syrian territories.



American patrol in Al-Hasakah, northeastern Syria

## 2. Russia

Until mid90 ,2021- Russian military sites in Syria are distributed as follows: 31 military and operational bases, 59 military and observation posts within 13 governorates: 6 in Idlib, 10 in Aleppo, 23 in Hama, 3 in Latakia, 1 in Tartus, 7 in Homs, 4 in Damascus, 4 in Damascus Countryside, 8 in Deir ez-Zor, 10 in al-Hasakah, 7 in Raqqa, 5 in As-Suwayda, and 2 in Quneitra.

The main mission under which Russia intervened in Syria is related to “fighting terrorism”.<sup>5</sup>

According to its claims, this includes most of the armed opposition factions and “jihadist organizations,” particularly ISIS and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham, formerly (Al-Nusra Front).



Putin observes the military operations in Syria- Moscow Times

(5) What are the two main objectives of Washington's strategy in Syria? BBC Arabic . 18/1/2018: <https://cutt.us/jzmEy>



In fact, Russian counterterrorism missions were a cover for the main goal which is preventing the collapse of the Syrian regime in addition to the consequences emanating from such a collapse that might pose risks to the Russia's military bases in Latakia and Tartus. Russia had real fears that the regime would fall without finding an alternative regime that would guarantee a Russian long-term presence in the warm waters, which it had been looking forward to since 1971 when it established the Tartus base.

The Russian military presence in Syria played a major role in the development of the Russian armed forces.

This could be clearly seen if we know that more than 300 types of weapons were tested in Syria, as it was stated by the Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoigu on May 23, which led to permanently removing about 15 types of weapons out of service and they consequently stopping their production.

On the 28th of the same month, President Vladimir Putin made it clear that the combat operations were carried out in Syria had played a key role in proving the excellence of Russian weapons.

In addition, the conflict was also an opportunity for Russia to test the effectiveness of the Russian military educational system, as all commanders of regiments, divisions, armies, military districts, chiefs of staff and services in the armed forces participated in military operations in Syria.

When Russia intervened in Syria, it quickly established the Fourth Corps - Iqtiham (Storming) Brigade in October 2015, then the Fifth Corps - Iqtiham (Storming) in November 2016. It restructured some military units such as the "25th Division - Special Tasks" and others.

This reflected a clear policy aimed at implementing a reform process in the military establishment.

Such a process would have led to an alternative model to the Western military intervention in the conflicts of the region, which often resulted in a fragile state and a fragmented army that made the state organs unable to tighten their grip on the whole security affairs.





Since the early days of its intervention in Syria, Russia has worked on gaining control over energy sector contracts, aiming at controlling global energy supplies that pass through Syria, which is a transit point for the region's oil and gas flowing towards Europe.

This goal can only be achieved through controlling a large part of pipelines, liquefaction facilities, refineries and ports in Syria.

This does not mean that Russia has ambitions to benefit from Syrian energy revenues; as it constitutes nothing of the global share.

Russia has benefited from its military presence in Syria **to promote mediation diplomacy within the Middle East**; this can be seen in the role it played in bringing the parties to the conflict together in Libya and in Yemen; as well as playing a mediation role between the Syrian regime and Israel.

Russia even serve as a mediator between Syrian whor are the parties to the conflict.

Figure No. 2:



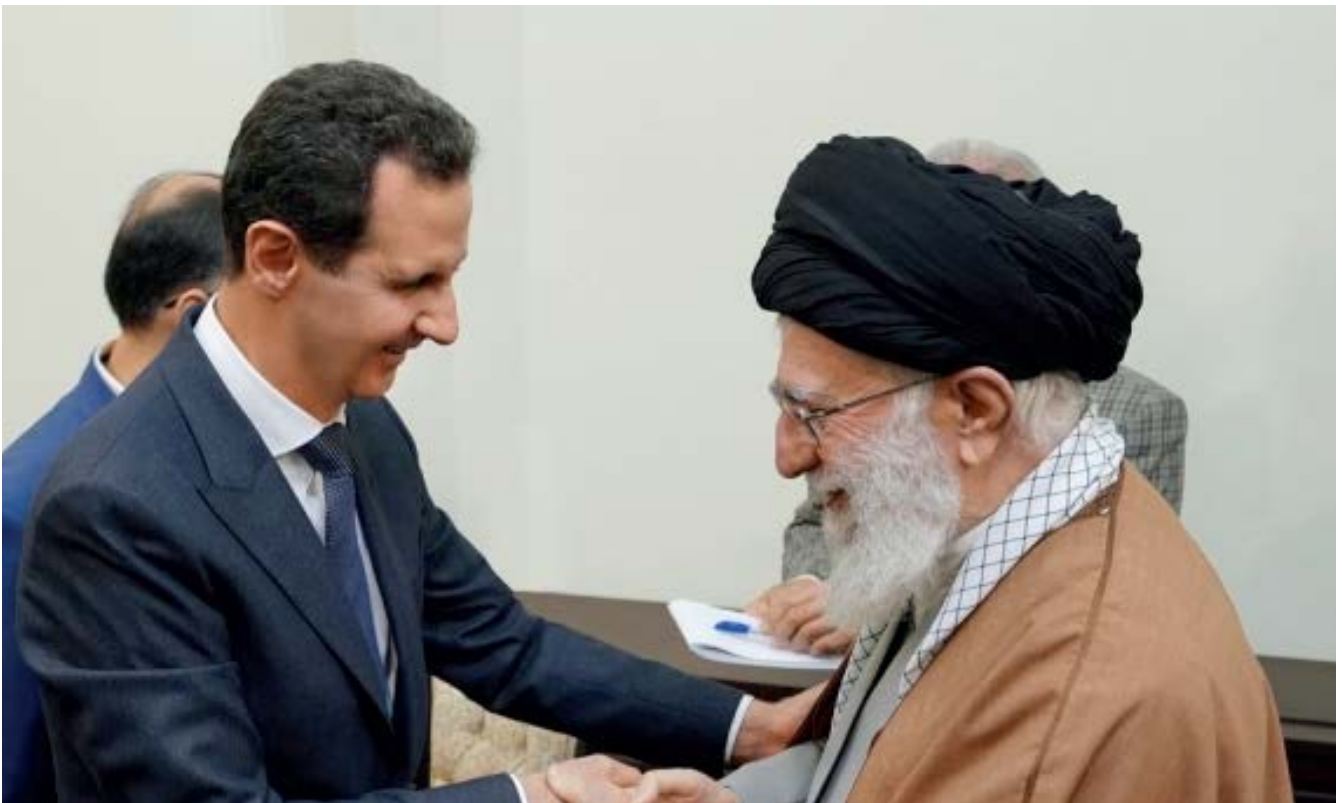


### 3. Iran

By July 2021, Iran has had 321 military posts in Syria.

(171) sites of them are run by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps IRGC and (79) ones run by Hezbollah, whereas (71) sites are jointly run by the IRGC and Hezbollah.

Iran's presence in Syria dates back to September 2012, when the commander of the IRGC announced that some militamen affiliated with the Corps were present in Syria to provide non-military assistance; referring to tasks of an advisory nature.



Khamenei with the Syrian regime's leader Bashar al-Assad





This came less than a month after a statement made by the Iranian Defense Minister, Ahmad Vahidi as he said that his country could intervene in order to provide support for the Syrian regime in the face of "terrorism" under the Mutual Defense Agreement (2006).<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, the main pretext under which Iran intervened in Syria was to combat terrorism, "a classification that mostly includes armed and civilian opposition groups", except for those who have been permitted officially by the government of the regime to engage in some activities.

In this way, the mission to combat terrorism was a cover under which Iran could make efforts to prevent the fall of the Syrian regime; given that it is one of the Iran's main proxies who help in implementing its plan in the region. For those who do not know about it, the Iranian project is based on redefining its role as the center of a regional axis, whose features began in 2006 with Bashar al-Assad's announcement in August of the establishment of the resistance axis, which includes Iran, Syria, Iraq, Hezbollah and factions of the Palestinian resistance against Israel.

On May 13 ,2021, former Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani inaugurated a railway project that has an **"access to the Mediterranean"** after linking his country with Iraq and Syria, a goal that Iran also aspires to implement via the international road linking Baghdad with Damascus and Beirut.

Having an access to the Mediterranean waters provides Iran with import and export channels from land and sea ports in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, and ensures its participation in the reconstruction of the region.

Since 2011, Iran has worked on establishing the "Iranian missile accuracy project" in Syria; under the supervision of advisers and experts, which aims to manufacture high-precision rockets and missiles in Syria to reduce the danger and difficulties of transferring missiles from Iran to Syria.

This includes other technologies such as the manufacture of warplanes and others.

(6) "Iran and Syria sign pact against common threats", The Daily Star, 16/6/2006: <https://cutt.us/JFx1d>



This means that Syria has turned to be an advanced base of Iranian operations against Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Such activities lead to strengthening Iran's position militarily in the event of a preemptive or proxy war against it.

Politically, this outcome would be an advantage the Islamic Republic could have if it goes to any negotiations with the international community; as happened during the (5+1) talks that led to the nuclear agreement in mid-2015.

(7) Experts: Israel seeks to prevent Iran from turning Syria into a nearby base, DW, 22/4/2021: <https://cutt.us/vtCR3>

Figure No. 3:







## 4. Turkey

Until mid-2021, Turkey had 119 military sites in Syria: 9 bases and 110 posts within 6 governorates distributed as follows: 45 in Idlib, 57 Aleppo, 1 Hama, 2 Latakia, 10 Raqqa, and 4 in al-Hasakah.

Turkey intervened in Syria through 4 lightning military operations: “Euphrates Shield” on August 24 ,2016, “Olive Branch” on January 20 ,2018, “Peace Spring” on October 9 ,2019, and “Spring Shield” on February 27 ,2020.

Turkey attributed the reason for its intervention in Syria in the first place to “compat terrorism”,<sup>8</sup> particularly “ISIS” and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Through fighting against terrorism, Turkey was keen to secure local stability and provide an appropriate environment to show its ability to play an advanced and effective role in this file at the international level.

By highlighting different mechanisms and models that encourage cooperation with other international powers such as the United States, Russia, Iran and others, Turkey kept working on showing itself as a key player in Syria's file.

Turkey looks forward to having its military presence in Syria as a tool that contributes to restoring security and stability to the region.<sup>9</sup>



Turkey wants to establish a 32 km-length safe zone inside Syrian territory

(8) Erdogan says Syria operation aimed at IS jihadists, Kurdish PYD, AFP, 24/8/2016: <https://cutt.us/ogzX4>

(9) Recep Tayyip Erdogan, “The West Should Help Turkey End Syria’s Civil War”, Bloomberg, 14/3/2021: <https://cutt.us/b3s8o>



This ultimately guarantees a better environment for Turkey that ensures its interests and makes its fears at a minimum.

Restoring security and stability to the region can also support Turkey's policies in redefining its role as a regional power.

The issue of border security must be among the main tasks of Turkey's intervention in Syria,<sup>10</sup> which ensures that there are no large waves of immigration; similar to those occurred between 2012 and 2015.

Also, the border security issue matters countries because it contributes to undermining smuggling and infiltration of hostile organizations and militias classified on local terrorist lists.

Furthermore, Turkey's presence in Syria contributed to the development of the Turkish armed forces in terms of equipment and military performance.

For example, Syria was the first country in which the readiness and effectiveness of the Bayraktar TB2 combat UAV was confirmed, after it was used for the first time in the Euphrates Shield Operation.

In practice, testing and developing Turkey's military capabilities and defense industries generally contributes to supporting the sales of the military sector.

(10) Erdogan: Turkey may advance further inside Syria, Anadolu Agency . 18/1/2020: <https://cutt.us/IJeu9>

Figure No. 4:







## Second: Determining factors of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Syria

### 1. Political settlement

The political process between the opposition and the Syrian regime in Geneva, since its inception in 2012, has not addressed the future of foreign forces in the country. The constitutional committee negotiations, however, was an exception as the participating delegations addressed this subject by referring to the principle of “sovereignty”, which started since the third round at the end of August 2020. Yet, they have not finalized an agreed-upon formula.

Nevertheless, the political settlement appears to be a major determiner of the fate of the foreign forces presence in Syria, as the principle of sovereignty must be present during negotiations between the regime and the opposition, whether in the track of the constitutional reform, Geneva, or any other track.

Theoretically, foreign forces are supposed to announce their readiness to withdraw from Syria as soon as a sustainable political settlement is reached, in compliance with the principle of sovereignty enshrined in international law and United Nations charter.

In any case, this does not prevent the Security Council from issuing a resolution that determines the fate of foreign forces presence in Syria, similar to Resolution 2005) 1559), according to which the Syrian forces left Lebanon, or at least one can call for the implementation of this step in compliance with the results of the political settlement; just as the Security Council urged foreign forces to leave Libya in mid-April 2021.

Likewise, any agreement must include the fate of the unofficial forces of foreign powers present in Syria. This primarily includes the fate of foreign fighters who came from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Iraq and others, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and agreements of 1977 ,1949 and 1989.



## 2. Completion of basic tasks

Theoretically, the end of combat missions is supposed to be a major determinant of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Syria, as former US President Donald Trump expressed on December 2018 ,19, his intention to withdraw his country's forces from Syria after the mission for which they came has ended.

Moreover, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on March 2016 ,14, and on December 2017 ,11, the withdrawal of a large portion of his country's forces from Syria after completing the task entrusted to them.

Regardless of the main reasons that prompted the leaders of both countries to announce the withdrawal from Syria and retracted the decisions later, the combat missions under which the foreign forces that intervened has come to an end. This is supposed to give the decision makers, if parliaments, governments, presidents, constituent bodies or transitional governing bodies in Syria, a legal justification for requesting a troops withdrawal from the country. Such a demand could be after reaching a political settlement, before and during the transitional phase, or even in case the conflict is frozen.

Declaring the end of the combat missions in Syria, leaves the intervening powers face-to-face with internal dissenting voices especially the opposition factions, which places restrictions before Parliament to extend any mandate for the forces' presence outside the borders.

## 3. Internal circumstances

The internal economic and political circumstances of the countries who sent forces to Syria may lead to a reduction in the number of their troops or might lead to a complete withdrawal, before any political settlement is reached or even before the end of the combat missions. For example, as a presidential candidate, Barack Obama promised to withdraw the US troops from Iraq after the deterioration of the economic situation as a result of the real estate sector crisis in the United States.



Taking the above into account, Turkey seems to be the best model that reflects internal conditions that are pressing towards withdrawal from Syria.

The Turkish opposition parties, such as the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the Good Party (İyi Parti) and the Republican People's Party (CHP), are demanding the withdrawal of the Turkish forces deployed in Syria; in view of immigration and economic policies in addition to the militarization impacts.

These parties constantly call for the return of refugees after having a kind of coordination with the Syrian regime and to reducing the burden on the economy as a result of military spending and so on.

Although internal conditions alone do not constitute a fundamental determining factor that pushes governments to pull out their forces from Syria, the availability of other factors, however, may enhance the impact of the conditions. If the opposition parties in Turkey gain a wider presence in political life after the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023, the aforementioned factor could be stronger.

## 4. Combat operations

Changes in the control map of local forces in Syria is determining the fate of the foreign forces presence within the country.

Accordingly, any expansion or contraction of the influence of each party to the conflict at the expense of the other will necessarily have its impact on the number of military sites belonging the backers from the foreign forces.

The military campaign that was launched by the Syrian regime against the de-escalation zone that includes Idlib and its vicinities in early 2020, for instance, drove Turkey to evacuate 16 sites, including 12 observation posts those had deployed under the Sochi Memorandum (2018).

This prompted it to strengthen its presence by establishing at least 40 military sites between March 2020 and June 2021.



It is noted that the Turkish forces changed the missions of their positions in the de-escalation zone to include the military and security ones after they were limited to observing tasks, and also focused on the deployment along the lines of contact with the Syrian regime, which are just defense ones.

The change in the missions of the Turkish forces in the de-escalation zone is considered a violation of the de-escalation memorandum signed with Russia on May 5, 2017.

It seems that Turkey strengthened its military presence in Idlib after negotiations at the level of experts with Russia during February 2020.

These negotiations dealt with withdrawing Turkish forces to the north of the M4 international road, which was rejected by Turkey.

Furthermore, the launch of Peace Spring operation against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) east of the Euphrates caused the US-led International Coalition to evacuate its positions in the governorates of Aleppo and Raqqa.

It also led to establishing a military presence in the region by Turkey and Russia under the Sochi Memorandum (2019).

## 5. International consensus

Any consensus reached by the international actors in Syria could lead to determining the fate of foreign forces and impose a timetable for withdrawal; if it is accepted.

It seems that being guided by bilateral understandings of the parties involved could set an example for that.

The size and future of the Turkish military presence has been present in the negotiations between Turkey and Russia since the signing of the Moscow Memorandum (2020).

The same thing happened also was with the negotiations held between the United States and Russia in 2016, according to which the airspace between the east and west of the Euphrates was shared. In such negotiations on the size and distribution of foreign forces in Syria were agreed upon.

Later on, the talks that were held between the two parties during 2018, had the same goal.

Washington then hoped that the Iranian forces would withdraw from Syria in exchange for a similar measure by the American troops.<sup>11</sup>

In any case, consensus among international powers to determine the fate of foreign forces in Syria requires preliminary understandings in the context of confidence building measures.

Some of that already exist; like establishing a deconfliction line and other disengagement understandings between ground and air forces.

## 6. Interests and risks

The presence of foreign forces in Syria is connected with achieving strategic interests and ensuring the protection of national security for potential dangers.

Unless there are security, military or political concerns, no country can take a decision to withdraw from Syria, since keeping forces means the protection of strategic interests, whether they are economic; especially in the field of reconstruction, security; such as establishing stability and ensuring the non-resurgence of ISIS, or political, such as establishing a system of government that is either compatible or at least inconsistent with that country.

Another motive would prevent external actors from withdrawing forces from Syria is a commitment to protect the security of allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia.

(11) Robert Ford, "Beyond America's Decision to Remain in Syria", Asharq AL-awsat , 19/8/2018: <https://cutt.us/1g60V>



## Third: The future of foreign forces in Syria



### 1. The United States

There is no reason to believe that the United States intends to remain in Syria in the long term, as main trend for Democrats and Republicans calls for reduction of the military presence in the Middle East, in order to devote the US military power to face the challenges being posed by China.

However, the future of US forces in Syria is linked to a number of determining factors such as protecting Syrian oil facilities to prevent ISIS from accessing resources, supporting local forces - SDF - to ensure non-resurgence of ISIS, and protecting Israel's security from Iranian threats.

Parallel to that however, if the United States reaches an agreement with Russia to guarantee the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Syria, US will not hesitate to evacuate the area east of the Euphrates while keeping some sites such as the Al-Tanf base.

The pattern in southern Syrian looks like a good example; when Moscow promised Washington that Iran would withdraw to an 80km depth away from the border of Israel in exchange for ending the support provided to the Syrian opposition there and limiting the presence of US forces within the Al-Tanf base with a circular diameter of up to 50 km from the center of the base.

In fact, part of the US troops may remain in the framework of new tasks related to providing military advice and training.

Such troops may remain to facilitate or ensure the integration of local forces into the military establishment during the transitional period in Syria.

However, this must be under an international agreement or as a result of a political settlement.





## 2. Russia

It is clear that Russia plans to stay for long in Syria ; especially since President Vladimir Putin ratified in October 2016 an agreement with the regime government for an indefinite deployment of a Russian Air Force group in the Hmeimim military base in the Latakia province for a period of 50 years, with the possibility of extending it for an additional 25 years.

It does not seem that other foreign forces in Syria have the ability to put an end to Russia's military presence, either directly or by proxy wars, with the exception of the American forces, which probably have no desire to do so.

This does not mean that Russia's military presence should not be reduced diplomatically or militarily.

Russia, in fact, had previously evacuated certain military positions prior to the launching of Olive Branch operation in Afrin; after coordinating with Turkey.

Add to that, the consequences of the combat operations against ISIS in the Badia which led to evacuating the Palmyra base at the end of 2016.

This might constitute a precedent or carrying out possible withdrawals as a result of battles with opposition factions or others.

Talk about maintaining Russian forces does not mean that their numbers will be the same if Russia reconsiders this presence for many reasons in terms of economic cost, arriving at an international consensus, or as an outcome of a political settlement.

Of course this does not include security companies which might expand their activities depending on the recommendations coming from the Russian Defense Ministry or the Kremlin.

Russia has a set of motives or justifications that it may put forth to maintain its military presence in Syria even after the completion of the basic tasks, like. ensuring political and security stability, whether through the institutional reform plan or according to the recommendations of a political settlement.

Russia could even claim that its forces are staying within the framework of guarding missions, training or advice.



### 3. Iran

Iran is preparing for a long-term military presence in Syria; this can be clearly seen in the large-scale naturalization processes for the families of fighters affiliated with Iran who are of various origins.

The establishment of local forces with loyalty to Iran.

Moreover, Iran is keen to establish military industries in Syria like the "Iranian missile accuracy project" as well as the production of combat drones, in addition to other activities.

However, the fate and size of the Iranian military presence is affected by a number of determining factors.

Reaching an American-Russian agreement or an American-Iranian agreement within the framework of the new nuclear agreement could be essential in this context.

Other factors include combat operations and political settlements are also important determinants.

For example, prior to Russia's military intervention in Syria in September 2015, the Iranian forces' presence in the face of the opposition factions declined to the minimum.

That posed a threat to the regime's strongholds in the capital and the coastal region as well.

Since the United States' withdrawal from the nuclear agreement in May 2018, considering the Iran's foreign policy, which includes its military presence outside its borders, including Syria, was one of the conditions for returning to the agreement. Joe Biden-led administration maintained these demands during the "Vienna" negotiations in 2021, regardless of the outcome that may be reached. Iran has always linked its presence in Syria to being advisory rather than military. This gives it flexibility in dealing with any demands for withdrawing its unofficial forces.

However, Iran keeps a security presence in Syria to protect economic and others facilities, in addition what it claims to be religious sites.



## 4. Turkey

Turkey may not have enough capacity to maintain a long-term military presence in Syria for many reasons, including combat operations, internal conditions, and a political settlement, in addition to other issues.

Nevertheless, Turkey hopes to maintain its forces in Syria to protect national and border security.

Demonstrating its ability to play an active role regionally depending on joint international efforts.

Turkey's main concentration is centered on establishing a safe zone along the border strip with Syria, with a depth ranging between 15 and 30 km.

Turkey may be obliged to retreat to this strip on condition that the military mission is changed to a security and logistic one.

This in turn is expected to be accompanied by a reduction in the number of forces to be made up for by opposition and joint forces.

There is no doubt that, Turkey will not hesitate to make a condition that no other military forces are allowed to be on its border with Syria.

The only allowed exception is participants in observation and reconnaissance mission. Another conditions would be ceasefire guarantees, the return of refugees, participation in reconstruction and protection International commercial traffic.

It seems that the Libyan model can be a guide in the Syrian case, as Turkey linked its continued presence to the main tasks under which it intervened with advisory and training services.

In Syria, Turkey may resort to signing a similar protocol to the Adana Agreement (1998) which included military and security tasks in the context of combating terrorism and ensuring stability.

# Conclusion

After all, foreign forces withdrawal from Syria looks difficult before the parties to the conflict reach a sustainable political settlement.

As such, the foreign military presence may be prolonged if the conflict is put to freez.

In such a case the countries involved will not hesitate to find excuses that would grant them a long-term presence in the country, even if in non-military shapes that might turn into soft power approaches.

The Iraqi and Afghani patterns might be examples for foreign powers to glue themselves into the place in the absence of a sustainable political settlement, or in the event of a high level of security threat from ISIS or other jihadist organizations.

Although a military confrontation between foreign powers in Syria is considered unlikely, but as soon as it occurs and the disengagement agreements are bypassed, this may lead to an increase in the presence of some countries' forces at the expense of others.

This is expected to overshadow the fate of other foreign and even local forces.

In general, the presence of foreign forces in Syria must affect the shape of the political settlement and the kind of governance in the country, as it will be definitely affected and dependant on the aforementioned factors.





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