




Joint Chiefs Chairman: Report That U.S. Will Keep 1,000 Troops in Syria “Factually Incorrect”

The *Wall Street Journal* on March 17 cited a  statement attributed to U.S. officials stating that the U.S. military is planning to keep almost 1,000 troops in Syria, several months after President Trump said he was removing all U.S. forces from the country.

The troop presence would be part of the Trump administration’s commitment to continue supporting Kurdish fighters in Syria.

However, in response to the *Journal’s* report, General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made a statement posted on the Joint Chiefs of Staff website on March 17:

A claim reported this evening by a major U.S. newspaper that the U.S. military is developing plans to keep nearly 1,000 U.S. troops in Syria is factually incorrect. There has been no change to the plan announced in February and we continue to implement the President’s direction to draw down U.S. forces to a residual presence. Further, we continue to conduct detailed military planning with the Turkish General Staff to address Turkish security concerns along the Turkey-Syria border. Planning to date has been productive and we have an initial concept that will be refined in the coming days.

CNN reported on March 17 that an unnamed U.S. official told the network that some projections listed 400 as the total number of U.S. forces to stay in Syria, but that no final decisions had been made and various figures given were just “potentials” at this point. The plan cited by CNN will have a combined force of about 1,500 troops overall to ensure the safe zone in northern Syria, with the number of U.S. troops contributed to the force to be based on how many troops other allies will have pledged. To date, there have been no firm pledges from allies, meaning the U.S. troop level would have to go up.

In an [article posted last December](#), we quoted Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who said that when he heard of President Trump’s decision to pull U.S. forces out of Syria he was “happy to see a President who can declare victory and bring our troops out of a war. It’s been a long time since that has happened.” The article cited an administration announcement that the entire force of more than 2,000 U.S. military personnel will be removed as quickly as possible.

The latest statement does not indicate that the United States will remove *all* troops from Syria, but it does indicate that the number will be reduced. While that is a step in the right direction, noninterventionists such as former Representative Ron Paul (R-Texas) will continue to call for a complete and total withdrawal

The elder Paul asked last April: “What gives us the right to ‘stabilize’ and ‘consolidate’ foreign territory we have no legal right to occupy? To keep us safe, Trump needs to tell our troops to ‘just come home.’”

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