

The Zambakari Advisory Special Issue: The Kurdish Crisis?

An Introduction

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In light of President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria's border with Turkey, The Zambakari Advisory is pleased to publish a series of analyses on the crisis facing the Kurds in the Middle East by Louis Fisher, Visiting Scholar at the William and Mary Law School, former senior specialist in separation of powers with the Congressional Research Service, specialist in constitutional law with the Law Library of Congress; Andrew J. Bacevich, Professor Emeritus of International Relations and History at Boston University and president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft; Rajan Menon, the Anne and Bernard Spitzer Professor of International Relations at the Colin Powell School, City College of New York/City University of New York; Graham E. Fuller, former senior CIA official and former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council; and Jon Schwarz, senior writer for The Intercept, First Look Media.

The announcement on October 13, 2019, by Defense Secretary Mark Esper that the Trump Administration was going to bring home the 2,000 U.S. troops deployed in Syria, set in motion a bipartisan firestorm in Washington and around the world. Liberal and conservative analysts savaged President Trump's decision for deserting the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) (composed largely of Kurds who fought alongside the United States in the war against the Islamic State (IS)).

In the first article, constitutional scholar Louis Fisher offers a broad socio-historical analysis of the presidential military actions that violate the U.S. Constitution, tracing the history of executive power from the Founding Fathers to current U.S. presidents. He notes that from President Truman forward, presidents have unilaterally engaged in military actions abroad, including Eisenhower's covert operations in Iran and Guantanamo. Kennedy supported the invasion of Cuba and, in violation of statutory policy, Reagan became involved in the Iran-Contra affair. Trump bombed Syria after its use of nerve gas, and assisted Saudi Arabia with military operations in Yemen. These actions and initiatives — under the U.S. Constitution — require joint action by both elected branches.

In the second article, Andrew Bacevich and Rajan Menon place President Trump's announcement to bring home 2,000 U.S. troops deployed in Syria in a larger regional and historical context, arguing that the barrage of attacks that followed Trump's decision to reduce the U.S. military presence in Syria obscures the decades-long bankruptcy of the U.S. foreign policy establishment.

In the third article, Graham Fuller argues that how successfully Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran handle the challenges of integrating large minorities will be a key litmus test for their own

future democratic governance. But, it is safe to say that repression and violence will not solve the Kurdish problem; ultimately, they will only hasten and escalate Kurdish demands for maximum independence. Fuller situates his analysis within the larger geopolitical landscape of the region and its implications for the U.S. and the Greater Middle East.

In the fourth article, Jon Schwarz argues that though the withdrawal of U.S. troops and corresponding criticism may feel morally egregious, this is not the first time the U.S. has betrayed the Kurds. With this new withdrawal, the U.S. has now betrayed the Kurds a minimum of eight times over the past 100 years. Schwarz explains how this dynamic has unfolded and played out, over and over, since World War I.

In the fifth and final article, intelligence veteran Fuller notes that President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria's border with Turkey — as part of an ongoing process of bringing a gradual end to Washington's endless wars — is justified. He concludes that this war no longer serves any real purpose except to destabilize Syria, perpetuate its brutal civil conflict and provide an excuse to keep U.S. troops on the ground, strengthening Iranian and Russian involvement in the struggle.

These internationally respected authors make the case that to view developments in the Middle East simply as separate actions is to miss the striking relationship between events. According to Bacevich, a U.S. military historian and retired Army officer, U.S. military footprints in the Greater Middle East need to be historicized and placed within a larger archival context. This allows us, he says, to “appreciate not only how they relate to one another, but also the extent to which U.S. policy in what I call the Greater Middle East has produced an epic failure.”¹

In summation, the authors we present in this series of analyses agree that Congress' failure to limit military interventions and the unconstitutional usurpation of legislative power by the executive branch have granted U.S. presidents vast constitutional authority as commanders in chief and chief executives, as well as vast discretion to use lethal force in the national interest.

About the Author

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¹ Bacevich, Andrew J., and Stephen Kinzer. "Matters of Choice." *Boston Review*, <http://bostonreview.net/us/andrew-j-bacevich-interviewed-stephen-kinzer-war-greater-middle-east>