



# drishti

## The Big Picture: Syria Crisis - US Backs out

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Recently, the US announced to withdraw from Syria (in order to fulfil the US president's electoral promise). However, this will lead to **abandoning of Kurdish fighters in Syria**, who were an **American ally in the war against ISIS**. This may lead to a decline in America's credibility amongst its allies.

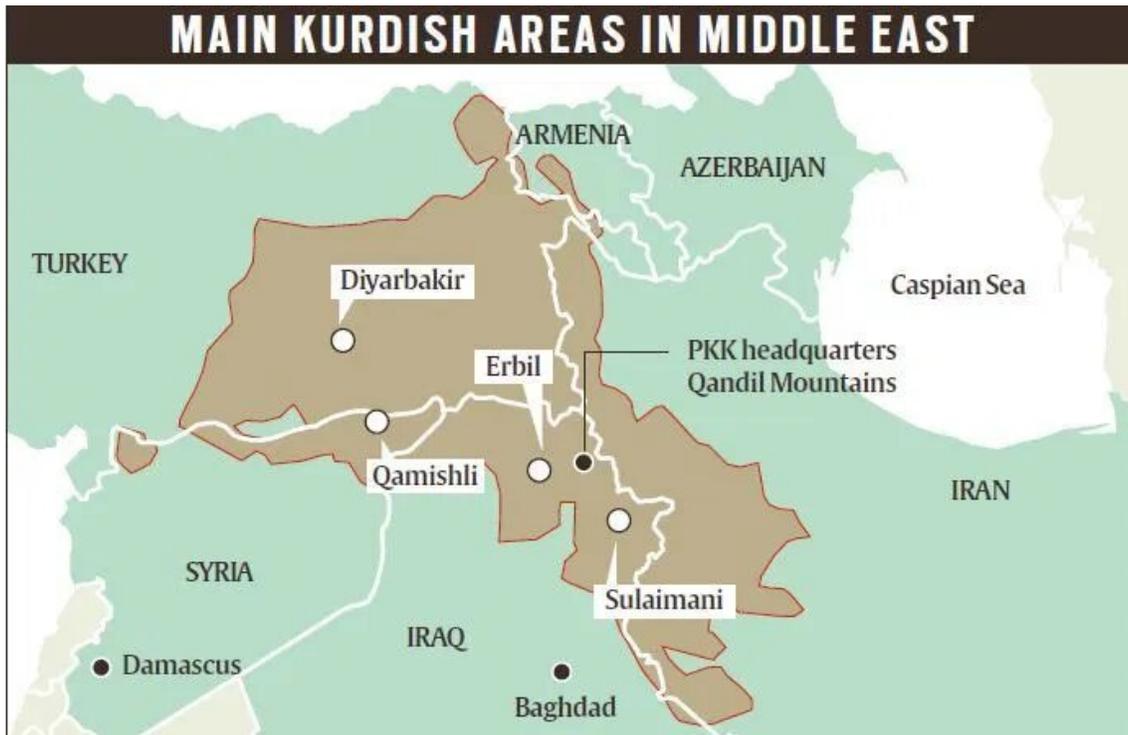
With the US planning to leave Syria, **Turkey has threatened to attack a part in Syria** (northern Syria touching borders of Turkey) which was under the **de-facto control of Kurds**. The US has threatened to punish Turkey economically if it goes 'too far' against Kurds. However, what is 'too far' has not been clarified by the US.

**Thus, US withdrawal from Syria may have deep implications for the region.**

## Who are Kurds?

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- The Kurds are the **world's largest stateless ethnic group**. There are an estimated 25 million to 35 million of them.
- They live in the highlands of southern and eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, northwestern Iran, and parts of south Armenia, and are a minority in each of these countries.



- Kurdish nationalists claim a history going back 2,500 years, but they became identifiable as a distinct community only in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, when most tribes in the area adopted Islam.
- The **Treaty of Sèvres (1920)**, which **partitioned the old Ottoman dominions**, marked out a much smaller territory as Kurdistan. However, Turkey negotiated with the Allied powers and, in 1923, the **Treaty of Lausanne**, that overtook Treaty of Sèvres and **ended the idea of a self-governing Kurdistan**.
- Over the decades, the Kurds made repeated attempts at establishing a Kurdistan with defined national borders (within the territory of Turkey), and in this process, **Turkey retaliated with massive repression of Kurds**.

## Turkey-Kurds-US Triangle

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- In 1978, the Marxist revolutionary Abdullah Öcalan formed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê or PKK in Kurdish) with the aim of setting up an independent Kurdistan.

- PKK guerrillas fought the Turkish army from 1984 to 2013, when the PKK declared a ceasefire.
- After the Islamic State (ISIS) swept across Syria and Iraq, the only fighters who were able to resist the onslaught were the **Syrian Kurdish militias**.
- In 2014, **the Kurds joined the US in the war against ISIS**, and become a helpful regional ally of the US.
- Once the Kurds, backed by the Americans, had forced ISIS out of northern Syria, they took over the **re-captured land along the Syria-Turkey border**, home mainly to ethnic Kurds, Arabs, and some other groups.
- Turkey sees it as a **serious threat to its territorial integrity, Therefore** Turkey plans to launch an assault on **Kurdish-held territory in Syria**.

## Why Turkey is invading Syria now?

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- By invading northern Syria, Turkey seeks to **create a peace zone**, where it can deport **Syrian refugees that fled the country during the Civil war in Syria**.
- However, experts believe in the name of the creation of a peace zone, Turkey wants to **land grab the strategic area**.

### **Geopolitical Importance of northern Syria.**

- It holds 30% of Syrian oil & gas.
- This area harbours a fertile agricultural land.
- Also, the region is drained by water from river Euphrates.
- Apart from this, the area is under control of Kurds, which Turkey recognizes as a threat to its territorial integrity.

## Implications of the US's withdrawal from Syria

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- **Rise of Russia**
  - Syrian crisis was used by Russia to **re-establish its credibility and legitimacy as a superpower** in the region.
  - This withdrawal of the US and Turkey's attack on Syria will lead to further **deterioration of relations between the US and Turkey and revision of ties between Turkey and Russia**.
  - With the US out of the picture, countries in the Middle East are looking towards Russia for bringing peace and stability in the region.
  - Also, **Russia, Iran and Syria axis will strengthen** from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean sea.

- **Change in US's Policy in the region**

- The US pursued the policy of **regime change in Syria** (through Arab Spring or post Arab spring Civil War).
- However, the US is **changing its policy within the region-**
  - The US only **seeks partial troops withdrawal** (not full withdrawal, similar to Afghanistan), as it wanted to **establish military bases in the countries.**
  - Thus, it is in the interest of the **US to fragment Syria into small parts,** that's why the US has abandoned Kurds.

- **Resurgence of ISIS**

- Many of the **ISIS terrorists were captured by Kurds** after they defeated ISIS.
- However, Turkey's attack on Kurds may lead to freeing up of ISIS prisoners, that are held captive by the Kurds.
- Turkish annexation will be met with Kurdish Resistance which will **further destabilize the region.**

In the middle of all this chaos, **India can act as a credible mediator,** as India is a unique country having stable relations with all the countries engaged in middle east conflict.

### **Drishti input:**

#### **Arab Spring and the Syrian Crisis**

- **Arab Spring**

- The Arab Spring was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that enveloped several largely Muslim countries, including Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain.
- The Arab Spring began in December 2010 when Tunisian street vendor **Mohammed Bouazizi** set himself on fire to protest the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stands by police over failure to obtain a permit.

- **Syrian Crisis**

- In 2011, successful uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt gave hope to Syrian pro-democracy activists.
- The Syrian government, led by President Bashar al-Assad, responded to the protests by killing hundreds of demonstrators and imprisoning many more.
- In July 2011, defectors from the military announced the formation of the Free Syrian Army(FSA), a rebel group aiming to overthrow the government, and Syria began to slide into civil war.
- Foreign backing and open intervention have played a large role in Syria's civil war. Russia entered the conflict in 2015 and has been the Syrian government's main ally since then.
- In September 2015, Russia launched a bombing campaign against what is referred to as "terrorist groups" in Syria, which included ISIS as well as FSA backed by the USA.
- Due to this Syrian civil war has turned into a regional proxy war.  
Syria + Iran + Russia vs Saudi Arabia + Israel + US.