

# Report: Trump Freezes Syria Recovery Funds



The White House has instructed the State Department to freeze over \$200 million in funds earmarked for “recovery efforts” in Syria, The Wall Street Journal reported Friday.

The report — which came a day after Trump declared in a speech that the U.S. would be quitting Syria “very soon” — is another indication the president wants to disengage from the country.

Officials told AFP that Trump’s aside in his speech was not a slip, but that for several weeks he had been pushing back against the idea of a long or medium term U.S. commitment to stabilizing eastern Syria.

According to The Wall Street Journal, Trump called for the spending freeze after reading a news report that said the U.S. had committed the funds for recovery efforts in Syria, which has been wracked by a more than seven-year civil war.

The U.S. has more than 2,000 military personnel in eastern Syria as part of international efforts to defeat the Islamic State group, an extremist organization that once controlled swathes of Syria and neighboring Iraq.

Speaking in Ohio on Thursday, Trump indicated that with the war against IS

winding down, he wants American involvement in Syria to do likewise.

“We’ll be coming out of Syria, like, very soon. Let the other people take care of it now,” he promised.

Trump did not say who the others were who might take care of Syria, but Russia and Iran have sizable forces in the country to support President Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

His eagerness to quit the conflict flies in the face of a new U.S. Syria strategy announced in January by then secretary of state Rex Tillerson — who has since been sacked.

Tillerson argued that U.S. forces must remain engaged in Syria to prevent IS and al-Qaida from returning and to deny Iran a chance “to further strengthen its position in Syria.”

In a speech at Stanford University, he also warned that “a total withdrawal of American personnel at this time would restore Assad and continue his brutal treatment against his own people.”

But Tillerson has gone after being dismissed in a tweet. And Trump, who increasingly makes foreign policy announcements without seeking the advice of U.S. generals or diplomats, wants out.

“We spent \$7 trillion in the Middle East. And you know what we have for it? Nothing,” Trump declared, promising to focus future U.S. spending on building jobs and infrastructure at home.

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