

Syria: Americans Withdraw, Iranians Stay

Apart from defeating Daesh, the presence of American troops has had no critical role in the Syrian war. However, their withdrawal would make it easier for the Iranian regime to complete 'the final chapter' of its full takeover of Syria, and control over Iraq and Lebanon.

In a speech in Ohio on Thursday, US President Donald Trump surprised his audience when he said: "We will pull out our forces from Syria," and "We will leave if we eliminate the remaining Daesh enclaves."

Meanwhile, in his own assessment of the situation in Syria, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said that if Bashar Assad were to remain as president he should not be under the control of the Iranians, but has to get rid of them. The American presence blocks the establishment of a direct route from Iran to Lebanon, through Iraq and Syria, the crown prince said.

The situation in Syria today looks like a torn dress. Russia has bases in the areas under the regime's influence. The US has limited its presence in Syria to fighting Daesh, without interfering in the war between Syrians themselves. Israel is concerned that Iran and its militias might threaten its security.

Turkey is also interested in chasing the Kurds in Syria far from its borders. And despite the losses of the Free Syrian Army, some of its factions remain established in their regions, disappointing a lot of people who had declared its death. As for terrorist organizations such as Jabhat Fatah Al-Sham, i.e. the former Al-Qaeda-related Al-Nusra Front, they have been defeated and distracted but not completely eradicated.

Thus, Assad remains established, relying on two powers: Iranian ground forces and the Russian air force.

It is hard for most people with a conscience in the Arab world to accept that Bashar Assad should remain in power after all he has done.

Crown Prince Mohammed, however, talked about the situation as it really is to

Time magazine; Assad's presence is a reality, he said, but he called on him not to be a façade for Iran and its militias.

Here two essential questions come to mind. Is Assad truly capable of ridding Syria of the Iranians? And if he were to do so, would he be able to survive without their aid?

In order to control Syria, Iran has lost thousands of its fighters and its militias' fighters, and wasted billions of dollars. If Qassem Soleimani and his Iranian forces and militias were pulled out of Syria, that would reduce their influence in Lebanon and Iraq too.

Withdrawing from Syria would have repercussions on Iranian life, as the Tehran regime has been, for four years, justifying its war there as a necessary measure to protect the regime itself; indeed, that it was a matter of survival. That might not be untrue, especially, amid the recurring popular uprisings in the streets of Iran's main cities.

The second test for Assad is; if he ordered Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and its Lebanese, Iraqi, Afghan and other militias to leave Syria, and hid behind the UN and the major powers to implement such an order, could the Syrian regime survive without them?

I doubt that; the majority of those who fought the armed opposition in Eastern Ghouta, in greater Damascus, were either from Iran and/or Hezbollah in Lebanon and Iraq, with Russia handling the air attacks.

Hence, if Assad's forces were incapable on their own of managing and executing a battle raging in the capital's outskirts, how would they manage and protect a big state such as Syria, which has inherited hostilities and vengeance from the war of the past seven years?

Let us not forget that the majority of the other security and armed forces of the regime have been decimated in the war by internal divisions, human losses, and the escape abroad of many draft-age men.

Even if Assad wanted to turn a new page and everyone agreed to stop the bloodshed, no one would believe any promise of the withdrawal of Tehran's forces.

They would stall for ever, especially now that they have dug themselves trenches and bases, showing their intention to stay in Syria. For starters, the situation might require an international solution that officially regards the Iranian forces in Syria as an “occupation force,” and orders them out.

Source: <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1223691/abdulrahman-al-rashed/syria-americans-withdraw-iranians-stay>

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