

# Trump: U.S. Troops will remain in the Middle East for Israel

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We have reached a point where we don’t have to stay in the Middle East. One reason to stay is Israel,” US president Donald Trump said on Tuesday evening in an exclusive interview with *The Washington Post*.

Trump made this comment when he spoke about the possibility of US forces withdrawing from the Middle East. He said that the lower price of oil would be a reason for US troops to withdraw from the Middle East region. “Oil is becoming less and less of a reason because we’re producing more oil now than we’ve ever produced,” he said. “So, you know, all of a sudden it gets to a point where you don’t have to stay there. One reason to stay is Israel.”

This isn’t the first time Trump has held Israel as an virtuous example in the Middle East. During a meeting with Putin in Helsinki in July, Trump said, “We’ve worked with Israel long and hard for many years,” adding that the US has never been closer to Israel than it is today. “President Putin also is helping Israel, and we both spoke with ‘Bibi’ Netanyahu and they would like to do certain things with respect to Syria, having to do with the safety of Israel.”

Trump said “we,” which apparently indicated that Moscow and Washington are both working with Israel and “Israel working with us.” He continued, “I think their working with Israel is a great thing - and creating safety for Israel is something both President Putin and I would like to see very much.”

The US president also addressed this week’s tension between Ukraine and Russia when three Ukrainian ships near Crimea were immobilized and taken over by Russian forces. Trump said he waiting for a “full report” from his national security team about the incident but is considering canceling his scheduled meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires, which convenes on Friday and Saturday.

“That will be very determinative,” Trump told *the Post*. “Maybe I won’t have the meeting. Maybe I won’t even have the meeting ... I don’t like that aggression. I don’t want that aggression at all,” he said. “Absolutely. And by the way, Europe shouldn’t like that aggression. And Germany shouldn’t like that aggression.”

Trump justified his support for Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman in light of the CIA assessment that bin Salman ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a contributor to the *The Washington Post* before his death. Trump questioned the reliability of the CIA assessment, saying that the CIA did not make a definite statement about Bin Salman’s guilt. Additionally, Trump said that the Crown Prince had denied responsibility.

“Maybe he did and maybe he didn’t,” Trump said. “But he denies it. And people around him deny it. And the CIA did not say affirmatively he did it, either, by the way. I’m not saying that they’re saying he didn’t do it, but they didn’t say it affirmatively.”

*Seth J. Frantzman contributed to this report.*

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