

Contention One is a Power Vacuum

US Military presence makes allies feel comfortable and avoids conflict.

Nissenbaum 20 of The Wall Street Journal finds:

Nissenbaum et al. 20 [Dion Nissenbaum (BA in Peace Studies from Berkeley) Benoit Faucon (OPEN and oil industry specialist) Felicia Schwartz (BA in History, Geography from Dartmouth) "U.S. Looks to Maintain Pressure on Iran as Tensions Cool" *Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2020 (<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-looks-to-maintain-pressure-on-iran-as-tensions-cool-11579516201>) // CZ

With open hostilities between Iran and the U.S. subsiding for now, the Trump administration is seeking to keep pressure on Iran without pushing the region into a volatile new confrontation, U.S. and regional officials said. U.S. officials said they are increasingly confident Iran and its Mideast allies are looking to avoid a head-on fight with America, even as Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, delivered a firebrand message during prayers on Friday in Tehran. Key members of President Trump's national-security team view Tehran as weakened by the confrontation and struggling to regain its footing domestically after its military mistakenly shot down a commercial airliner in Iran, triggering days of protests across the country following its admission of the missile strike that killed 176 people. Senior U.S. officials are urging Mr. Trump to stand firm, keep imposing economic sanctions and wait to see if European leaders move to reimpose United Nations sanctions on Iran for violating a nuclear-containment deal. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, center, led prayers over the caskets of Gen. Soleimani and Iraqi paramilitary chief Abu Mahdi al-Mohandes in Tehran on Jan. 6. PHOTO: ABACA PRESS/ZUMA PRESS Some of those who backed the decision to kill Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani on Jan. 3 argue that continuing to squeeze Iran could weaken the government or even bring about a collapse in the near to short term, officials involved in the discussions said. Trump administration officials say they aren't seeking regime change, just a dramatic shift in Tehran's approach to military and foreign affairs. But some U.S. officials also believe a collapse could pave the way for a more moderate government. "The combination of maximum economic pressure and **restoring deterrence by credible threat** of military force, if attacked, **is going to do more to advance peace and stability in the region than** a policy of **accommodation** with the regime," said Brian Hook, who oversees Trump administration policy toward Iran at the State Department. Other administration officials, including some who harbored misgivings about the strike on Mr. Soleimani, believe that direct, back-channel talks between Tehran and Washington would be a more effective way to avert open conflict. Those officials appear to be in the minority. Related Video How Iran's Unique Strengths Can Frustrate Its Enemies YOU MAY ALSO LIKE UP NEXT How Iran's Unique Strengths Can Frustrate Its Enemies While both the U.S. and Iran appear to have pulled back from further military strikes, Carnegie Endowment's Karim Sadjadpour highlights Iran's regional strengths and explains how they can be used to put geopolitical stress onto the Western world. Photo: Getty Images Mr. Trump has offered to take part in direct talks—as he has with North Korea—and said he is willing to listen to anyone who can help make that happen, but Iran has refused to come to the table unless the U.S. eases some sanctions. For now, administration officials believe the Iranians don't have immediate plans to attack U.S. forces or diplomats. "It seems that **everyone is standing down**," a senior U.S. administration official said. "The question now is what can we do to advance the president's agenda?" Meanwhile, **U.S. allies in the Middle East are recalibrating policies**, with Israel urging continued U.S. military pressure against Iran's allies in the region and Arab Gulf states urging the U.S. to de-escalate the military confrontation with Iran. Mr. Rouhani received Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the emir of Qatar, in Tehran on Jan. 12. Sheikh Tamim has offered to mediate with the U.S. PHOTO: IRANIAN PRESIDENCY/ZUMA PRESS Twice this month, U.S. officials said, Mr. Trump has talked by phone with Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, the emir of Qatar with close ties to Tehran. Sheikh Tamim offered to serve as a mediator between Washington and Tehran in hopes of averting a dangerous conflict, current and former U.S. officials briefed on the calls said. But many Trump administration officials are skeptical that Qatar's mediation efforts would be more successful than those of France, Japan, Oman or Pakistan, all of which failed to secure a diplomatic breakthrough. "Qatar is engaging busily and at high levels, of its own accord and without a mandate," one U.S. official said. The White House has disclosed just one of the two calls. Saudi Arabia also sent its vice defense minister, Prince Khaled bin Salman, to Washington, where he urged Mr. Trump to look for ways to avoid a regional war. Saudi officials were concerned that Iran-backed Houthi fighters in Yemen might, at Tehran's urging, step up their attacks on the neighboring kingdom, which has reduced cross-border attacks and laid the groundwork for a potential peace deal. Those fears were realized over the weekend when Houthi forces launched a missile strike that killed more than 110 Yemeni troops backed by the Saudi government, according to the Yemeni health ministry. The attack comes amid a sharp uptick in clashes that threatens to undermine fragile peace talks. While Qatar and other Arab nations are trying to defuse tensions, Israel appears to be resuming its airstrikes on Iranian forces aiding Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. As Sheikh Tamim launched his back-channel diplomatic campaign, a suspected Israeli airstrike killed three people at a Syrian base used by Iranian forces and their allies. Last week's strike sent a message that Tehran would continue to face military pressure. Much of the U.S. focus following the airstrike in Baghdad that killed Gen. Suleimani has been on containing the damage in Iraq, where lawmakers pushed through a nonbinding measure calling for America to withdraw all its troops. **American allies around the region have been heartened by** Mr. **Trump's rejection** **of** the demands, which led Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi to temper his calls for **a U.S. troop pullout**. Now he is allowing the next government to decide, a victory for Washington and its allies who want to limit Iranian influence. "The most important consideration here is that Iraq is not absorbed into a Shiite axis led by Iran," said Dore Gold, a former director-general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who is now president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. That is also why Qatar and other Arab allies of the U.S. are focusing their efforts on defusing tensions in Iraq. "We are also emphasizing that Iraq should not turn into an arena for regional or international conflicts and, due to Qatar's geopolitical positioning, the different stakeholders are placing many hopes on these efforts of the Qatari diplomacy," a Qatari diplomat said.

Affirming upsets this balance. Cohen 19 of The Hill finds:

Cohen 19 [Ariel Cohen (PHD) "After al-Baghdadi: Strategic vacuum threatens the US and allies in the Middle East" *The Hill*, November 01, 2019

(<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/468458-after-al-baghdadi-strategic-vacuum-threatens-the-us-and-allies-in-the>) // CZ

Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is dead following a U.S. Special Operation Forces raid. This is a huge blow to violent Sunni extremist groups in the Middle East, one that reconfirms the importance of an American presence in the region. However, by authorizing the **pullout** of some 1,000 U.S. military troops from Northern Syria, President Donald Trump **risks triggering a geopolitical domino effect that is highly likely to hurt American** and allied **interests** in the long run — even with the Syrian oil fields in U.S. hands, for now. The withdrawal leaves our long-standing, reliable Kurdish YPG partners alone to defend themselves against the Turkish military, their Islamist allied militias, remnants of ISIS, the Assad military and their Iranian allies, and the Russian expeditionary forces. Perhaps more importantly, the **American withdrawal will be creating a power vacuum** in the region **to be filled by** America's **rivals**, **from** Sunni and Shia **extremist groups to Iran and Russia.**

There are 2 impacts. Cropsey 19 of Foreign Policy finds:

Cropsey and Roughead '19 Cropsey, Seth (senior fellow and director of the Center for American Seapower at Hudson Institute) and Roughead, Gary (former United States Navy officer who served as the 29th Chief of Naval Operations). "A U.S. Withdrawal Will Cause a Power Struggle in the Middle East." *Foreign Policy*, 17 December 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/17/us-withdrawal-power-struggle-middle-east-china-russia-iran>. // CZ

The unique mix of political forces in the Middle East suggests three possibilities in the event of U.S. naval withdrawal from the region, and none favor U.S. interests. **First**, **Russia may broker a political arrangement among Turkey, Israel, and Iran, or** alternatively, **support a coalition pitting some of those states against another** in an effort to manufacture a manageable regional balance of power and allowing it to shift its attention back to Europe. The final shape of this strategy would depend on several variables: Turkey's approach to Syria, Israel's posture against Iran (and its proxies), the outcome of Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, the Kurdish question, and the possibility of the Islamic State's resurgence. Regardless of these factors, Russia will still bid for control of the Mediterranean Sea, which the United States will be hard-pressed to counter, particularly if China can manipulate its European economic partners into limiting or expelling the U.S. Navy from its Mediterranean bases. **If that happens, Washington will have to fight its way back into the region** for the first time since World War II. In the **second** scenario, Iran defeats Saudi Arabia in a regional confrontation, thereby taking the top leadership spot in the Islamic world, making it a great power in its own right. Control of Middle Eastern oil exports would give Iran the ability to coerce and bully the United States' European and Pacific allies, and it would deny the United States any peaceful access to the Levantine Basin. The balancing dynamics against this new great power are difficult to project, but regardless, the United States' ability to control the strategic environment would be hampered markedly. Third, **a long-term regional war between Tehran and a** fluctuating **anti-Iran coalition** composed of Saudi Arabia, other Sunni Gulf states, and Israel **would cause widespread bloodshed.** As the 1980s Iran-Iraq War demonstrated, both Iran and Saudi Arabia would be likely to attempt nuclear breakout. With Iran, this would mean closing the small technological gap that now exists between its low-enriched uranium to the higher level of enrichment needed for a nuclear weapon. The Saudis could pay scientists from a sympathetic Sunni nuclear state—such as Pakistan—or simply buy nuclear weapons from Islamabad. An increasingly fractured and war-ravaged Middle East would spawn more jihadist organizations, and the West would be their primary target. Absent a reliable U.S. presence, Saudi Arabia and perhaps even Israel would increasingly turn to Russia and China as great-power guarantors, leaving U.S. officials in the unfortunate position of hoping polar ice will melt quickly enough to allow unrestricted year-round access over the Arctic, diminishing the importance of the Mediterranean. Absent a reliable U.S. presence, Saudi Arabia and perhaps even Israel would increasingly turn to Russia and China as great-power guarantors. But hope can only go so far, and the United States needs a more concrete, long-term approach to the Middle East. Despite modest increases in U.S. defense spending in recent years, peer and near-peer competition increasingly puts the predominance of the U.S. military at risk. In testimony before the Senate last year, Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, noted that China is "approaching military parity" with the United States "in a number of critical areas," and that "there is no guarantee that the United States would win a future conflict with China." The strength of hegemonic powers waxes and wanes, and allies respond accordingly. In 2018, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made the first visit to China by a Japanese leader in seven years. There, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to elevate bilateral relations. Although Benjamin Netanyahu was first elected prime minister of Israel in 1996, he only visited Russia for the first time during his third term, in 2013. (He did not serve as prime minister during the decade from 1999 to 2009.) Since then he has been to the country 11 times, indicating that staunch allies that had previously relied on the United States for security now sense the need to open lines of communication with its adversaries. The United States should reexamine its global commitments, especially those in the eastern Mediterranean, with a view to Russia's expanding power. The Trump administration's foreign and security policies in the region have included several bright spots: the strengthening of U.S.-Israel relations, an aggressive military campaign against the Islamic State, economic sanctions against Iran, and denial of F-35 fighter jet sales to Turkey following its purchase of Russian S-400 surface-to-air missiles. But these have yet to be linked in a coherent strategic policy. Questions that need answers include: What is America's goal in the region? Is growing Russian military and diplomatic presence consistent with U.S. regional goals? Should Washington leave the blossoming relations between Moscow and Ankara to run their course, and what is to be done if a true alliance between Russia and Turkey emerges? If regime change in Iran is not an option for U.S. policy, what should the goal be? Is it sufficient to assist Israel and Saudi Arabia and hope that they will manage regional tensions that could lead to war with Iran? An examination of the global commitments recommended here should include the possibility of a comprehensive U.S.-Israel treaty that would gather together all the existing nontreaty agreements between the two nations on such matters as military aid, intelligence sharing, defense industrial cooperation, and free trade—to name a few. The United States still retains strong interests in the Middle East. These include the untrammelled flow of oil to allies in Europe and Asia, the defense of democratic Israel, the security of NATO allies bordering the Mediterranean, and preventing conflict between regional powers. **If the United States**

withdraws from the region and hands the responsibility of those issues to another power (or set of powers), **it will** certainly **give rise to** **another** hegemonic **power** in the region **that is hostile** to U.S. interests. Such a change would copper-fasten the United States' loss of great-power status.

Contention Two is Israel

Israel is scared of a US withdraw – empirics prove. Horowitz 19 of the Time of Israel finds:

(David Horowitz, founding editor of The Times of Israel, October 9, 2019, “Trump’s new actions, inactions on Kurds, Syria, Iran have Israel deeply worried.” Times of Israel, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trumps-new-actions-inactions-on-kurds-syria-iran-have-israel-deeply-worried/>) ABJ

President Donald **Trump’s withdrawal** of US troops **from** a crucial area of the Turkey **Syria** border, widely seen as an abandonment of America’s Kurdish allies there **has reinforced** the resonance of **a series of “emergency” warnings issued by Israel** leaders in the days leading up to Wednesday’s solemn Yom Kippur. **Israel’s concern**, as Channel 13’s military analyst Or Heller put it on Wednesday night, **is that “Trump’s isolationism” will encourage Iran to** do what it did to Saudi Arabia’s oil facilities last month: **attack**. When the new Knesset was sworn in last Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Israel was facing a dire challenge from an increasingly emboldened Iran. “This isn’t spin, it’s not a whim, this is not ‘Netanyahu trying to scare us,’” he insisted. “Anyone who knows the situation knows that Iran is getting stronger and is attacking around the world, saying clearly, ‘Israel will disappear.’ They believe it, they are working toward it, we need to take them seriously. That reality obligates us to act. Remember my words and heed them.”the Middle East.

US presence removes the need for Israel to act independently. Thompson 12 of Forbes finds:

(Loren Thompson, Chief Operating Officer of the non-profit Lexington Institute and Chief Executive Officer of Source Associates, December 3, 2012, “What Happens When America No Longer Needs Middle East Oil?” Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lorenthompson/2012/12/03/what-happens-when-america-no-longer-needs-middle-east-oil/#2e9c04e43a77>) ABJ

Israel too would likely be a big loser. Washington spends billions of dollars each year subsidizing the security of the Jewish state. The reason that isn’t controversial even though Americans usually want to cut foreign aid ahead of every other type of federal spending is because it is hard to separate securing Israel from securing Middle East oil. **The same U.S. military forces** and programs **that help protect Israel from Iran**ian missiles and Islamist terror groups **also protect Arab oil-producing states. But if America’s role in securing** the **oil were to wane, it** would be harder to ignore the cost of defending Israel, and that **might force Jerusalem to become more self-sufficient.**

Israel thinks a withdraw would create a power vacuum for Iran to fill. Keinon 19 of The Jerusalem Post finds:

(Herb Keinon, BA in political science from the University of Colorado and an MA in Journalism from the University of Illinois, Oct 11 2019, “The message for Israel after the US withdrawal from Syria”, The Jerusalem Post, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/diplomatic-affairs-unhappy-and-fearful-604303>, DOA 4/12/20) EQ

No, **Israel is** unhappy – even **fearful** – of this move for other reasons. First, it is fearful because **of the vacuum** that is **created when the US pulls out**. **Vacuums in the Middle East are always filled, and** generally – as was the case when Russia became militarily involved in the Syrian civil war in 2015, a move facilitated by Washington’s own hesitance to get involved – **not by actors for whom Israel’s interests are their concerns.**

This forces Israel to escalate in an effort to counterbalance Iran, causing a war. Aronheim 20 of the Jerusalem Post finds:

(Anna Ahronheim, military reporter for 'The Jerusalem Post.', January 8, 2020, “If US leaves the region, Israel will eventually go to war with Iran/” Jerusalem Post,

<https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/If-US-leaves-from-the-region-Israel-will-eventually-go-to-war-with-Iran-613446>) ABJ

Should the United States withdraw its forces and Iran continue on its path through Iraq and Syria, **Israel will eventually find itself in a war along its entire northern border**, Brig.-Gen. (res.) Ilan Lavi has warned. **"The United States is the main brakes in the region and its withdrawal would lead to an escalation, since the Iranians will continue to apply gas"** to their aspirations of regional hegemony, Lavi said during a conference held by the Alma Research and Education Center in Northern Israel. On Monday evening, a letter sent from the head of the US military's task force in Iraq to Abdul Amir, deputy director of Combined Joint Operations, sparked concern the US was removing its forces from Iraq after its parliament voted to oust American troops from the country following the assassination of top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani. While Washington later clarified that it was a "mistake" and no troops were being withdrawn, Lavi, who served as deputy head of the Northern Command, said that no one is able to predict what the American president might later decide to do. And if Trump does decide to withdraw, "I'm not optimistic," he said. "Eventually, and I don't mean tomorrow or next year, we will have to go to war. The Iranians will continue." Echoing Lavi, former commander of the IDF's Strategic Planning Division Brig.-Gen.(res.) Ram Yavne said that "it's hard to predict American policies." With the assassination of Soleimani, who was the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force, and who Yavne said was "central to Iran's domestic arena," America currently has the upper hand. "But if they withdraw, the killing of Soleimani won't be good because there won't be any deterrence – and the Iranians will see and understand that. According to Lavi, Soleimani was the architect behind the fact that when a war breaks out in Israel's North, the IDF will be at war across the entire northern border rather than fighting on one front. Under Soleimani's command, Iran has been trying to establish a land bridge from Tehran to the Mediterranean, a major concern for Israel which, since 2013, has been carrying out a "war-between-wars" campaign aimed at preventing Tehran from reaching its goal. According to data released by Alma, there are Iranian corridors to the Mediterranean, the shortest being 1,710 km., and taking 20 hours through Tehran, Baghdad, Ramadi, al-Tanf and Damascus. Along with connecting the two fronts to one main arena, the thousands of pro-Iranian militias and proxies – like Lebanese Hezbollah and the mainly Afghani Fatemiyoun Brigades, who are not far from Israel's borders – are a major threat. "Soleimani changed the reality and created a force to challenge our capabilities," Lavi said. "He knew how to take the strong points of Iranian capabilities and bring them here. He knew how to build a new conceptual way of fighting with what he had, like a strong fighting force that could inflict high damage against modern maneuvering forces." However, he continued, saying, "The IDF understands that, and IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Aviv Kochavi's new five-year plan will contend with that." Soleimani's replacement, his deputy Esmail Qaani, was appointed by Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei shortly after his death. He has vowed to continue his path "with the same force," and will work to remove the American presence from the Middle East.

Israel would strike. Cropsey 19 of The Hill finds:

(Seth Cropsey, senior fellow and director of the Center for American Seapower at Hudson Institute, October 22, 2019, "For the US and Israel, a strike against Iran seems inevitable." The Hill, <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/466842-for-the-us-and-israel-a-strike-against-iran-seems-inevitable>)

While American military and economic power consistently shackle Iranian ambitions, Israel's military capabilities pose the most credible threat to Iran's strategic gains on the ground. **Israel operates the region's most sophisticated military force**. Its fleet of F-15s and F-16s could achieve air parity even with Russian forces, let alone Iran's. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is known for its operational creativity, so Iran must expect an unpredictable response to every one of its defensive redundancies. Israel couples its conventional capabilities with a world-class intelligence service that has already penetrated Iranian defenses, neutralized Iranian nuclear scientists, obtained sensitive information on its nuclear program and potentially engineered the Stuxnet virus that targeted Iranian centrifuges. Israel's probable nuclear capabilities make it the greater strategic threat. Even with weapons of mass destruction, Iran cannot simply blackmail Israel to achieve its goals. **Critically, Israel is willing to use these capabilities to counter Iranian expansion**. It has conducted airstrikes against Iranian targets in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq – the latter with Russian consent – and used force twice to eliminate hostile nuclear programs. So long as Israel exists, Iranian ambitions cannot be fulfilled.

Iran would retaliate and the resulting war would be devastating. Oren 19 of The Atlantic finds:

(Michael Oren, Former Israeli Ambassador to the United States, November 4, 2019, "The Coming Middle East Conflagration." The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/11/israel-preparing-open-war/601285/>) ABJ

And it's not hard to imagine how it might arrive. The conflagration, like so many in the Middle East, could be ignited by a single spark. Israeli fighter jets have already conducted hundreds of bombing raids against Iranian targets in Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Preferring to deter rather than embarrass Tehran, Israel rarely comments on such actions. But perhaps Israel miscalculates, hitting a particularly sensitive target; or perhaps politicians cannot resist taking credit. The result could be a counterstrike by Iran, using cruise missiles that penetrate Israel's air defenses and smash into targets like the Kiryah, Tel Aviv's equivalent of the Pentagon. Israel would retaliate massively against Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut as well as dozens of its emplacements along the Lebanese border. And

then, after a day of large-scale exchanges, the real war would begin. **Rockets**, many carrying tons of TNT, **would rain on Israel; drones armed with payloads would crash into crucial facilities, military and civilian.** During the Second Lebanon War, in 2006, the rate of such fire reached between 200 and 300 projectiles a day. Today, it might reach as high as 4,000. The majority of the weapons in Hezbollah's arsenal are standoff missiles with fixed trajectories that can be tracked and intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome system. But Iron Dome is 90 percent effective on average, meaning that for every 100 rockets, 10 get through, and the seven operational batteries are incapable of covering the entire country. All of Israel, from Metulla in the north to the southern port city of Eilat, would be in range of enemy fire. But precision-guided missiles, growing numbers of which are in Iranian arsenals, pose a far deadlier threat. Directed by joysticks, many can change destinations mid-flight. The David's Sling system, developed in conjunction with the United States, can stop them—in theory, because it has never been tested in combat. And each of its interceptors costs \$1 million. Even if it is not physically razed, Israel can be bled economically. First, though, it would be paralyzed. If rockets fall near Ben-Gurion Airport, as during Israel's 2014 war with Hamas in Gaza, it will close to international traffic. Israel's ports, through which a major portion of its food and essential supplies are imported, may also shut down, and its electrical grids could be severed. Iran has honed its hacking tools in recent years and Israel, though a world leader in cyberdefense, cannot entirely protect its vital utilities. Millions of Israelis would huddle in bomb shelters. Hundreds of thousands would be evacuated from border areas that terrorists are trying to infiltrate. The restaurants and hotels would empty, along with the offices of the high-tech companies of the start-up nation. The hospitals, many of them resorting to underground facilities, would quickly be overwhelmed, even before the skies darken with the toxic fumes of blazing chemical factories and oil refineries. **Israel would**, of course, respond. Its planes and artillery would **return fire, and** the IDF would mobilize. More than twice the size of the French and British armies combined—at least on paper—the IDF can call up, equip, and deploy tens of thousands of seasoned reservists in less than 24 hours. But where would it send them? Most of the rockets would be launched from southern Lebanon, where the launchers are embedded in some 200 villages. Others would be fired from Gaza, where Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both backed by Iran, have at least 10,000 rockets. But longer-range missiles, including the deadly Shahab-3, would reach Israel from Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran itself. This presents a daunting challenge to the Israeli Air Force, which does not possess strategic bombers capable of reaching Iran and must grapple with the advanced Russian anti-aircraft weapons situated in Syria. Israeli ground troops would be forced to move into Lebanon and Gaza, house-to-house, while special forces would be dispatched deep within Syria and Iraq. Israel's own conventional missiles could devastate Iranian targets. But even if these countermeasures could succeed in curtailing much of the missile fire, they would also **inflict** many **thousands of civilian casualties.**

Contention Three is ISIS

ISIS has suffered major losses. The Wilson Center finds in 19:

(The Islamists, November 15, 2019, "After the Caliphate: U.S. Strategy on ISIS." Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/after-the-caliphate-us-strategy-isis>) ABJ

On November 14, 2019, representatives from 31 members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS met in Washington to discuss a new phase in the fight. **ISIS was dealt serious blows with the loss of its territorial caliphate** in March 2019 **and death of its leader**, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, in October 2019. But ministers from coalition partners warned that the group continued to pose a threat. "The fight against ISIS is a long-term test of will, a test of civilization against barbarism," said Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. He said the United States would continue to take a leading role both in military operations and in stabilization efforts to ensure that ISIS does not have space to reconstitute itself. The ministers emphasized that the continued detention of thousands of ISIS-related individuals, including foreign fighters, in northeast Syria was a pressing security and humanitarian issue. Senior ISIS operatives were reportedly planning mass prison breaks in fall 2019. The ministers also noted that no ISIS branches had renounced their allegiance to the core group. The following are statements by U.S. and coalition officials on the fight against ISIS since Baghdadi's death.

This is due to US involvement. Ottaway of The Wilson Center finds in 17:

(Mariana Ottaway, Former Senior Research Associate and Head of the Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2017, The War on ISIS: U.S. Success without a Payoff, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/116_war_on_isis_-_ottaway.pdf)

The United States has played a central role in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but even as the organization rapidly loses control of its remaining territory, the United States has little to show for its efforts. On the contrary, the success is mostly benefiting the United States' adversaries. **The defeat of ISIS** as a territory-controlling organization **could not have taken place without U.S. intervention. In Iraq, the United States helped rebuild effective units in a military that was demoralized** after ISIS' victories in 2014 and in disarray after years of political maneuvering at the expense of military preparedness. To be sure, it was the Iraqi military, the Kurdish pesh merga, the Shiite Popular Mobilization Units, including those financed and supported by Iran, that did the fighting **and** took the casualties in Iraq, but it was the United States that **provided weapons and training** and bombed ISIS **positions**. In Syria, it was the United States that stood up Kurdish units, under the thin umbrella of the Syrian Democratic Forces, and unleashed them on the Islamic State

US presence is key. Mansoor of NPR finds in 20:

(Peter Mansoor, retired Army colonel, January 7, 2020, "Why U.S. Troops Should Stay Even Though Iraq's Parliament Voted Them Out." NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/07/794163542/why-u-s-troops-should-stay-even-though-iraqs-parliament-voted-them-out>) ABJ

MANSOOR: Well, there is a vital interest in containing the war against ISIS. **Iraq is a key player** in that conflict. **U.S. forces** in Syria really **could not be supported from** bases **elsewhere in the region**. And Iraq is centrally located in the Middle East. It's going to be a determining country in how that region progresses going forward. And it's vital for the United States have a relationship with Iraq.

Affirming lets ISIS resurge. Pollock of the Washington Institute finds in 20:

David Pollock, Bernstein Fellow at The Washington Institute, focusing on regional political dynamics and related issues, January 9, 2020, "Eight Reasons Why the United States and Iraq Still Need Each Other." Washington Institute, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/eight-reasons-why-the-united-states-and-iraq-still-need-each-other>) ABJ

A continued U.S. military presence in Iraq, modest as it may be, is essential to ensure the enduring defeat of the Islamic State. Conversely, if Soleimani's death leads to the **withdrawal** of U.S. troops involved in local operations against the group, it **would constitute a major blow to the fight against terrorism.** Even after the Islamic State lost the last vestige of its territorial caliphate in March 2019, it was still able to conduct 867 terrorist operations in Iraq alone during the remainder of the year. The quantity and severity of such attacks would surely rise in the absence of U.S. and allied military pressure. Ongoing operations against the group's equally active vestiges in Syria would be fatally undermined as well. The UN estimates that **the Islamic State still has up to \$300 million in reserves to sustain its terrorist campaign, and** Kurdish officials note that **the group** is now **reorganized underground** in Iraq **with "better techniques and better tactics."**

The US needs must physically be there. Saab of Foreign Policy finds in 20:

(Bilal Y. Saab, senior fellow and director of the Defense and Security Program at the Middle East Institute, January 9th, 2020, "For Now, U.S. Troops Are Likely in Iraq to Stay." Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/09/for-now-u-s-troops-are-likely-in-iraq-to-stay/>) ABJ

Certainly, the United States won't be able to help the Iraqis build a strong military remotely, as efforts would necessarily be limited to transferring yet more trucks and weapons to the country. Instead, for Iraq to have an effective military, it needs help building defense institutional capacity. As recent defense modernization plans suggest, the Iraqi military wants to become self-sufficient and capable of both defending its country and participating in coalition operations. But without the institutional infrastructure that glues the basic elements of defense together, such goals will be difficult to attain. After all, without coherence among Iraq's national security institutions, **Baghdad is** largely unable to develop true national defense strategies and policies, build joint capabilities and doctrine, and address human resource management issues. In turn, it is **unable to effectively staff and operate** the vast amount of **defense systems the United States sells it.**

The same applies to the whole region. DeYoung of the Washington Post finds in 20:

(Karen DeYoung, Associate editor and senior national security correspondent, January 10, 2020, "Trump administration refuses to heed Iraq's call for troop withdrawal." Washington Post, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/iraq-asks-united-states-to-set-up-mechanism-for-troop-withdrawal/2020/01/10/794058ea-32f8-11ea-971b-43bec3ff9860_story.html) ABJ

Although the troops are part of an 81-nation coalition set up to fight the militants, **the United States has by far the largest contingent, and other troops** — including those sent by NATO members — **would find it difficult to operate without U.S. capabilities.** Trump said last week that he wants NATO to take a bigger role in the region, and an alliance delegation met in Washington with administration officials on Friday. But some of the countries with the most forces — Britain has about 400 troops in Iraq, and Germany about 120 — remain unsure of what kind of arrangement the president has in mind. Despite losing their self-declared caliphate, Islamic State fighters are regrouping and digging in for the long haul. U.S. military commanders say that a hasty coalition retreat could imperil efforts to contain the threat and risks seeing the group become more active. "If there is another military escalation, it will be very hard to do what's needed to get this on the right track, which is taking some time away from this to create space for diplomats on both sides to figure out a path forward, creatively, to suit both sides' interests," said Slim. European countries are looking at what an alternative type of coalition presence might look like "to make sure that the gains against [the Islamic State] are not lost and that we continue to support the Iraqi security forces in their efforts," the Western diplomat said. Ideas on the table include a smaller force with a slightly different focus, in an attempt to restore trust damaged by the U.S. decision to launch unilateral airstrikes on Iraqi soil.

Ultimately, Kheel of The Hill concludes in 20:

(Rebecca Kheel, staff writer for the Hill, February 4, 2020, "Pentagon watchdog: US withdrawal from Iraq would 'likely' mean ISIS resurgence." The Hill, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/481451-pentagon-watchdog-us-withdrawal-from-iraq-would-likely-mean-isis-resurgence>) ABJ

A U.S. military withdrawal from Iraq would "likely" lead to an ISIS resurgence, according to an intelligence assessment revealed in an inspector general report Tuesday. "The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)'s analysis for the DoD OIG

[Department of Defense Office of Inspector General] indicates that without a U.S. troop presence in Iraq, ISIS would likely resurge in Iraq,” Pentagon Inspector General Glenn Fine wrote in an introduction to the report. The latest quarterly report from the lead inspector general for Operation Inherent Resolve comes as U.S.-Iraqi relations continue to reel from the fallout over the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani at the Baghdad International Airport. Following the strike, Iraq’s parliament passed a nonbinding resolution calling for the removal of U.S. military forces from the country, where about 5,000 U.S. troops are leading the coalition fighting ISIS. Still, Iraq has not initiated a formal process to kick U.S. troops out, and Trump administration officials have said they have no plans to leave Iraq. Meanwhile, joint U.S.-Iraqi military operations against ISIS paused after the Soleimani strike. Iraq announced last week the joint operations had resumed. Tuesday’s report, which was largely completed before the Soleimani strike, said it remains unclear whether the pause has affected ISIS’s ability to regroup in Iraq. “The Combined Joint Task Force—Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR) stated to the DoD OIG that it was too soon to be able to assess the effects of the pause in operations and that due to operational priorities it declined to answer questions from the DoD Office of Inspector General (DoD OIG) about the late-breaking developments in January 2020,” the report said. During the quarter, Iraqi forces conducted “many operations” against ISIS independently, while some other operations were “minimally enabled” the U.S.-led coalition’s air support and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, the report said. “Large-scale operations” were conducted by coalition forces in conjunction with Iraqi forces, the report added. Meanwhile, in Syria, officials disputed the extent to which ISIS took advantage of Turkey’s offensive against the Kurds. The Defense Intelligence Agency, citing claims on ISIS websites, said the terrorist group “probably increased its attacks in northeast Syria by at least 20 percent” after the Turkish invasion in northeast Syria, according to the report. But the anti-ISIS coalition disputed that finding, telling the inspector general that “ISIS-claimed attacks are ‘most likely propaganda,’ and that CJTF-OIR’s determination that the Turkish incursion did not result in any significant ISIS resurgence is based on ‘known facts.’ ” One point of agreement was that the October death of leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during a U.S. raid in Syria has not affected the group’s capabilities. U.S. Central Command and the Defense Intelligence Agency both assessed that al-Baghdadi’s death “has not resulted in any immediate degradation to ISIS’ capabilities,” the report said.

A resurgence of an ISIS-level threat would be devastating. Jamieson of NBC finds in 16:

(Alastair Jamieson, a journalist based in London, England. He is an editor and reporter at NBC News, January 19th, 2016, “ISIS Death Toll: 18,800 Killed in Iraq in 2 Years, U.N. Says.” NBC, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-death-toll-18-800-killed-iraq-2-years-u-n499426>)

LONDON — At least **18,802 civilians have been killed in Iraq in ISIS-linked violence in under two years**, a United Nations report said Tuesday — **with millions of others forced from their homes and thousands more held as slaves.** “The violence suffered by civilians in Iraq remains staggering,” said the report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [PDF link here]. **ISIS continues to commit “systematic and widespread violence** and abuses of international human rights law and humanitarian law,” it said, adding that some of those act amount “crimes against humanity, and possibly genocide. U.N. monitors recorded at least 55,047 civilian casualties as a result of the conflict between Jan. 1, 2014 and Oct. 31, 2015, with 18,802 people killed and 36,245 wounded, it said. Over the same period, 3.2 million people became “internally displaced” including over one million school-age girls and boys. “The persistent violence and scale of the displacement” limit their access to housing, clean water and education, the report said. It also documented human rights abuses, saying **some 3,500** people are believed to be held as captives, mostly **women and children** from the Yazidi religious minority who **have been forced into sexual slavery.** U.N. human rights chief Zeid Raad al-Hussein said the civilian death toll may be considerably higher.”