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1. Donald Trump's shift on Syria leaves allies scrambling

- What is the US presence in Syria?
- What are the security consequences of a U.S. withdrawal from Syria?
- Could a new war break out in Syria after the U.S. pulls out?

GS paper 2 (Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests)

In this video, you can find detailed answers for all the above questions.

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What is the context about?

- The withdrawal of US troops from Syria depends on certain conditions, US National Security Adviser John Bolton says, in a further indication that the process is being slowed down.
- President Donald Trump's shifting timetable for pulling US troops out of Syria has left allies and other players in the region confused and jockeying for influence over a

withdrawal strategy that appeared to be a work in progress.

What is the US presence in Syria?

- ❑ Some 2,000 US military personnel are reported to be in Syria although the real numbers could be higher.
- ❑ American ground troops first became involved in Syria in autumn 2015 when then-President Barack Obama sent in a small number of special forces to train and advise local Kurdish fighters who were fighting IS.
- ❑ The US did this reluctantly after several attempts at arming anti-IS groups had descended into chaos.
- ❑ Over the intervening years the number of US troops in Syria has increased, and a network of bases and airfields has been established in an arc across the north-eastern part of the country.

What are the security consequences of a U.S. withdrawal from Syria?

- ❑ Critics of Trump's decision to withdraw forces from Syria have cited several concerns, chief among them: the future of ISIS, the Syrian civil war and the Kurds.
- ❑ Though the U.S. and its partners have retaken most of ISIS-held territory and significant numbers of ISIS fighters have died in the fighting, the group is still estimated to have 2,000 fighters in Syria.

- ❑ Despite Trump's declaration that ISIS has been "defeated," State Department and Pentagon officials had cautioned -- as recently as last week -- that the fight is not over, as the coalition and SDF continues offensive operations against ISIS in the city of Hajin.

Could a new war break out in Syria after the U.S. pulls out?

- ❑ Syria has been ravaged by a seven-year civil war as rebel groups sought to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.
- ❑ Over half a million people have been killed and more than five million refugees have fled Syria since the conflict began with Assad at times using chemical weapons and barrel bombs against his own people.
- ❑ With Russian and Iranian support, Assad's regime has taken back control of much of western Syria from various rebel groups. Meanwhile in eastern Syria, the U.S. and its local partner forces have concentrated on fighting ISIS, in effect creating an autonomous area not under Assad's rule.
- ❑ If the U.S. pulls out, Assad and his allies could move to regain control of the country, igniting more violence in areas still working to rebuild.
- ❑ A graver concern is the strong possibility that once the U.S. pulls out, Turkey will send its military into

northeast Syria to target America's Kurdish SDF partners.

- ❑ While the U.S. has seen the SDF as valued partners in the fight against ISIS, Turkey considers them to be an element of a Kurdish group that has launched terror attacks inside Turkey for decades.
- ❑ The U.S. military presence in Syria has served as a buffer against Turkey and the Kurds along the border and in the city of Manbij.