

*The United States must end drone and other airstrikes and withdraw military forces from Syria, replacing them with a diplomatic and humanitarian surge that encourages international accountability and depoliticizes post-conflict reconstruction.*

Since 2015, the U.S. military presence in Syria has entrenched the battle lines and perpetuated the war. Trump left U.S. troops on a mission to hold Syrian oil reserves in the east indefinitely, and Biden has continued deadly airstrikes in Syria. A new approach focused on ending this illegal military occupation and investing in diplomacy and peacebuilding is essential:

- The U.S. must stop using Syria as a site for proxy war with Iran. It must fulfill its commitment to withdraw all military forces from Syria, and end bilateral policies that harm civilians, including drone strikes, arming non-state actors, military occupation, and sectoral sanctions.
- The U.S. must support an inclusive peace process, the creation of accountability mechanisms for all local and international parties' abuses in the conflict, and help lead the establishment of an international trust fund for post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction to help depoliticize foreign assistance.

## ENDING THE WAR

Since 2011, an estimated 400,000 to 593,000 Syrians have died as a civil war evolved into a conflict involving multiple countries, militant groups, and widespread human rights atrocities. Increased attacks by the government and its international backers on health care facilities since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this suffering. **The longer the war goes on, the more difficult post-conflict recovery and reconstruction will be for everyday Syrians.** The U.S. should prioritize ending the war by:



- Working multilaterally to establish a reconstruction and stabilization fund to help decrease the politicization of aid and incentivize Syrian government concessions.
- Pressing Russia diplomatically to halt their military operations in exchange for U.S. support for broadening the UN-led peace process to include regional powers like Iran and Turkey, in addition to civil society, SDF forces, and youth.
- Lobbying for an international accountability mechanism to conduct investigations and bring justice for forced disappearance, torture, and mass human rights abuses perpetrated over the course of the war.

## WITHDRAWING U.S. FORCES

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria is necessary and must be accompanied by long overdue diplomatic negotiations.



- The U.S. should remove all forces, close all bases, end all drone and other airstrikes, and end the Syrian Train and Equip Program as expeditiously but responsibly as possible by providing a transparent timetable for withdrawal to local partners.
- The U.S. must engage diplomatically with Russia, Iran, and Turkey, as well as reopen diplomatic channels with the Syrian government, to de-escalate the conflict and reinvigorate negotiations.

## INVEST IN STABILIZATION AND PEACEBUILDING, NOT COUNTERTERRORISM

U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Syria have actually undermined the campaign to eliminate the so-called "Islamic State" (IS).



- Civilian casualties and widespread destruction resulting from the U.S.-led coalition's campaign to defeat IS, coupled with allegations of forced displacement and abuse by U.S.-supported rebel forces and partner forces, continue to contribute to the resurgence of IS in Syria. U.S. airstrikes in Syria, including the recent February 25, 2021 airstrike, feed into this escalation.
- While disclosure of civilian harm and U.S. military operation data are important, the U.S. must proactively investigate allegations of abuse, offer reparations to victims, and reorient its counterterrorism strategy toward addressing local drivers of conflict.

## THE WAR IN SYRIA



**13.1 MILLION**

Syrians require humanitarian assistance, with almost 3 million people in hard-to-reach or besieged areas.

**6.6 MILLION**

Syrians are internally displaced. 5.6 million have fled the country since 2011.

**60%**

of Syrians now live in extreme poverty, as compared to just 12.3% in 2007.





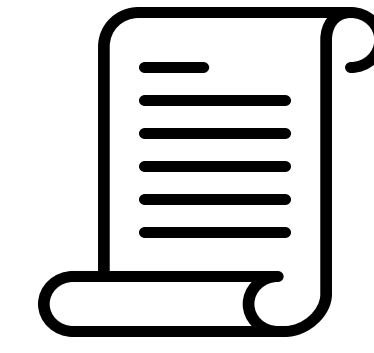
## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGRESS

The U.S. must end its military involvement in Syria and seek to empower a peace process that includes accountability for abuses. Members of Congress can take positive action to help bring an end to the war and address the humanitarian crisis by advocating for and enacting the following policy recommendations:



### END U.S. MILITARY INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA

Push the Biden administration to withdraw U.S. forces responsibly and prevent a reversal by defunding military operations in Syria. Oppose the use of military force in Syria, including drone strikes, and demand congressional authorization for any such actions.



### INTRODUCE OR SUPPORT LEGISLATION THAT REPEALS THE 2001 & 2002 AUMFS

The outdated and expansive 2001 and 2002 AUMFs have been used to justify military actions in Syria never intended by Congress and contribute to mission creep across the region.



### INCREASE HUMANITARIAN AID & SUPPORT SYRIA'S RECONSTRUCTION

Release the funds previously earmarked for Syria's stabilization and increase funding for humanitarian assistance, especially for vital humanitarian medical aid. End sectoral sanctions that harm the wider population and support multilateral efforts to establish a pooled fund for reconstruction.



### SPEAK PUBLICLY ABOUT REASSESSING U.S. COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY

In interviews and town halls, speak out about the ineffectiveness of years of attempting to counter "ideology" with bombs, and the need for investments in local communities.



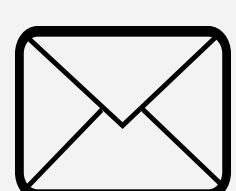
### SYRIA'S REFUGEE CRISIS

The war in Syria has forced 6.6 million people to flee the country and exacerbated the global refugee crisis. The U.S. should increase and better allocate funds to UN agencies working to aid Syrian refugees. On the domestic front, we applaud the Biden administration for rescinding the Muslim and African Ban on Day 1 and extending Temporary Protected Status for Syria. Next, Biden should fully fund and increase annual refugee resettlements to rebuild the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

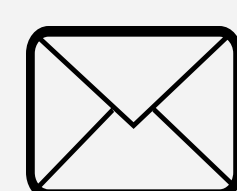
### SELECT PAST LEGISLATIVE ACTION ON SYRIA

- **2014:** The executive branch dubiously claims that the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) (passed in the wake of 9/11 to invade Afghanistan) and 2002 AUMF (passed for the U.S. invasion of Iraq) provides legal authority for ongoing military operations in Syria, in addition to other locations.
- **FY2015:** Congress authorizes the Syrian Train and Equip Program that has helped to proliferate U.S.-sold weapons throughout the conflict and continues today.
- **2019:** S. 2625 and H.R. 4873 are introduced to authorize special immigrant status to Syrian nationals or stateless people who worked for the U.S. government in Syria.
- **FY2020:** The State and Foreign Operations Appropriation Act includes provisions authorizing funding for non-lethal stabilization initiatives in Syria, including:
  - No less than \$40 million for chemical weapons use investigations and emergency medical and rescue response; and
  - No less than \$10 million for programs promoting accountability for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.
- **2020:** Trump's "Muslim Ban 3.0" (or Muslim and African Ban) goes into effect, indefinitely banning individuals from several countries, Syria included, from entering the U.S.
- **2021:** President Biden repeals the Muslim and African Ban through an executive order. DHS Secretary extends Temporary Protected Status for Syria for 18 months.

For further questions and additional resources:



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