

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Trump tweets and chaos ensues

[HOW TRUMP TURNS FOREIGN POLICY OPPORTUNITIES INTO CRISES](#)

Afghanistan, North Korea, Syria. Over the past few weeks and months, Trump has had the opportunity to take new approaches to each of these three conflicts. Instead, he has turned them into nightmares. From abruptly reneging on a near-final deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan and failing to capitalize on favorable conditions for a deal with North Korea to impulsively commanding -- via Twitter -- a disastrous withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Turkish-Syrian border, chaos, self-dealing, and his own pitiful ignorance have become Trump's foreign policy hallmarks.

THE DISASTER THAT IS THE SYRIA TWEET WITHDRAWAL

To the surprise of nearly everyone, Trump repositioned U.S. troops away from the Turkish-Syrian border via a tweet on Sunday. He [did not and has not](#), as he claimed, withdraw U.S. troops from Syria, however. Many have rightly criticized the human cost of Trump's decision and questioned what promises were exchanged during his call with Turkish strongman President Recep Tayipp Erdogan prior to the abrupt announcement. Yet widespread bipartisan backlash has missed the bigger picture. Trump's failure is not in his (supposed) desire to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria but rather in the absence of any serious American diplomacy that could have avoided the assault now taking place in Northeastern Syria. Indeed, as CIA veteran Paul Pillar [notes](#),

"Critics of the decision to withdraw seldom address the long-term question of how their recommended course of action ends. The vision seems to be a permanent U.S. protectorate of a Kurdish-controlled part of a still-divided Syria, with a never-ending American troop presence that doesn't really leverage anyone but instead functions as a trip-wire that raises the risk of war with Russia, Iran, or even fellow NATO member Turkey. A secure future for Syrian Kurds requires an internationally supported resolution of the Syrian civil war. Those wishing to criticize Trump over Syria ought to focus not on the troop withdrawal but instead on failing to participate fully in the relevant multilateral diplomacy rather than leaving that function to Iran, Russia, and Turkey."

It's also important to remember that long-standing U.S. policy in Syria got us here. The Obama administration's decision to arm a faction of Syrian Kurds, the YPG or People's Protection Units, with ties to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – a group that has launched attacks in Turkey to secure broader

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political rights for Kurds in the country and is designated a terror organization by both the United States and Turkey – was always a [“ticking time bomb.”](#)

Moreover, with no congressional authorization, U.S. troops shouldn’t have been in Syria in the first place. Yet their withdrawal didn’t have to be this way. Instead of [green-lighting](#) Turkey’s invasion of eastern Syria and fueling further [civilian harm](#), Team Trump could have negotiated a deal with Turkey to prevent a violent incursion in Eastern Syria or [made clear](#) to the Syrian Democratic Forces last December that U.S. troops were leaving on a set timetable and the U.S. military would not indefinitely protect them. Instead, we are likely to see chaos and tragedy reign supreme for the near future.

Even as we write this, U.S. Special Forces have reportedly just [nearly escaped](#) Turkish bombing, civilians are fleeing in droves with nowhere to go, and the SDF can no longer afford to use their troops to fully guard Islamic State prisoners, with reports of jailbreaks on the rise.

Instead, Trump’s disinterest in diplomacy and penchant for hasty decisions divorced from any coherent policy-making process made the U.S. complicit in Turkey’s violence this week. **For more, see our [messaging guidance](#) and our [Syria issue backgrounder](#).**

NORTH KOREA REQUIRES MORE THAN ONE-OFF SUMMITRY

Syria isn’t the only country for which Trump botched diplomacy this week. Broken-down U.S.-North Korea talks came and went this week without making a blip on most people’s radars. The State Department indicated the talks went well while North Korea had a [different story](#) entirely. Considering Trump’s track record of pulling out of international agreements (looking at you Iran Nuclear Deal, Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Paris Climate Accords) and an absence of any meaningful working-level diplomacy between the sides for months, it comes as no surprise that Trump cannot secure the agreement he is so desperately seeking.

North Korea has now set a [year-end deadline](#) for the U.S. to change its negotiating strategy, but there is no indication of what the Trump administration is actually willing to concede to create a long-term deal that satisfies both sides and meets the needs of our allies in the region. This, coupled with Trump’s increasingly defensive crouch from impeachment, could risk a return to the [“fire and fury”](#) rhetoric that dominated the beginning of Trump’s tenure. Lest we all forget that it was Trump’s initial approach that led to the brink of war in 2017, a return to that approach could lead to a disastrous, highly unpopular, and deadly war with North Korea.

Team Trump’s seeming unwillingness or inability to make headway makes it all the more important for Congress to help create space for a more reasonable path by indicating support for confidence-building measures that could lay the groundwork for a deal. **For more, see our [messaging guidance](#) and our [North Korea issue backgrounder](#).**

DENYING CIVILIAN HARM IN AFGHANISTAN

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As we noted [last week](#), civilian harm in the United States' endless wars has [increased dramatically](#) under Trump's administration. Following the breakdown of talks with the Taliban in early September – reportedly in part thanks to Trump's attempts to claim credit for the [deal](#) through his idiotic proposal of bringing the Taliban to Camp David on 9/11 – the administration [ramped up](#) its air campaign in Afghanistan, dropping the highest number of munitions in a single month in nine years. This has resulted in a [steady stream](#) of civilian harm events.

Yet, as it [has](#) in other countries, the U.S. military continued [denying](#) its role in injuring and killing civilians, disputing the United Nations' findings that a U.S. airstrike in May killed 30 civilians (never mind that the U.S. [relies](#) on UN investigations when adversaries are involved). Meanwhile, Team Trump [kept up attacks](#) on the International Criminal Court's attempt to investigate civilian harm in Afghanistan that would look into such unlawful attacks by the United States, its partners, and groups like the Taliban.

As we commemorate the 18th anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan this week, it's important to remember that despite Trump's escalation of the conflict, there remains no military solution to the conflict and [continued attempts](#) to strike an initial deal with the Taliban should be supported. The first step to reckoning with the 18 years of endless war and massive human suffering in Afghanistan is ending our military role in the conflict and investing in sustained diplomacy and peacebuilding to help find a path toward inclusive, sustainable peace. **For more, see our [messaging guidance](#), our [infographic](#), and our [Afghanistan issue backgrounder](#).**

BURIED LEDES

A federal judge [blocked](#) Trump's **fake emergency to build his unnecessary and racist border wall, affirming presidents can't declare emergencies for political gain** because they disagree with Congress's decision not to authorize funds.

Democrats should [disabuse](#) themselves of the notion that passing Trump's anti-worker, anti-environment NAFTA 2.0 without fixing it would be politically-savvy.

In a strange move, Trump ([inaccurately](#)) [criticized](#) **Kurds for not helping in World War II.**

Once again, **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan played up xenophobic, far-right fears** and [threatened](#) to release millions of refugees into Europe over criticism of the Turkish military offensive into Syria.

Human Rights Watch [called](#) for an **investigation into Iraq** after over 100 protestors were killed in a week.

The U.S. is [transferring](#) **up to 50 so-called "high value" Islamic State fighters to Iraq**, though it remains unclear under what legal authority it is doing so.

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Not only did the U.S. commit genocide and steal homelands of indigenous peoples in the United States, but the after effects of U.S. government weapons mining continues to violate Navajo land, air, and water, **causing Navajo women and infants to have [radioactive metal](#) in their bodies.**

John Bolton's ghost lives on as Trump reportedly considers [ending](#) yet another arms control treaty that supports global security.

Nothing to see here: **the FBI [improperly conducted searches of American data](#) collected through NSA mass surveillance.**

Standing up for immigrants in the nation's Capital: the DC City Council [voted](#) to **end cooperation between DC agencies and Trump's deportation force.**

In honor of **Mental Health Awareness Day**, we can't [forget](#) the mental health burden of war and those working to ease that pain.

And finally, Hurricane, the dog that **stopped an intruder during the Obama administration**, was given [royal recognition](#) by the British government for his service.