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U.S. Withdrawal from Syria Makes Countering ISIS More Difficult

[Charles Thépaut](#)

The Hill

October 16, 2019

A French diplomat weighs in on the high costs of removing the low-cost U.S. presence, from strengthening Iran's regional position to demolishing the infrastructure that enables European partners to contribute.

European efforts in northeastern Syria were increasing before President Trump's decision to fully withdraw U.S. troops, and America's enabling role was singular and indispensable. No European burden-sharing can be possible without a U.S. military presence on the ground. European contributions to counterterrorism operations against ISIS cells in the region will be difficult without a U.S. presence. Nor can European NGOs operate without U.S. security guarantees. European officials cannot visit prisons and camps where ISIS members are detained without the security that only the U.S. military can provide. Europeans are not asking for a free pass. They seek U.S. leadership to address the still-significant terrorist threats emanating from Syria. This requires keeping a small number of U.S. troops in Syria and committing to a political solution...

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Charles Thepaut, a resident visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, has served as a French diplomat in Syria, Iraq, and other posts. The views expressed in this piece are strictly personal.