



# Rethink the United States' Middle East Footprint

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Over [40,000](#) U.S. troops are deployed to the Middle East as part of an extensive basing network. Despite this, the region is becoming less strategically important to America over time as U.S. energy production increases. In previous decades, when the Middle East was more important for U.S. interests, we stationed fewer troops at fewer locations within the region. Policymakers should right-size our Middle East force posture, returning to our Cold War troop levels. Regional redeployments should start from Iraq and Syria, where our troops are regularly attacked and no longer have clear military missions.

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## THE ISSUE

The roughly 3,400 U.S. troops across Iraq and Syria have been under regular attack since last fall but do not have a clear military mission connected to our core security interests. ISIS' territorial caliphate was extinguished in 2019. Preventing ISIS' long-term resurgence is the responsibility of regional actors, who have a [shared interest](#) in doing so, regardless of their relations with the United States. Keeping U.S. forces in Iraq and Syria does not meaningfully deter Iranian proxy activity, but it allows these groups to easily target our forces. Training and equipping Iraqi security forces with [documented ties](#) to the very Iran-aligned militias regularly attacking our troops is a nonsensical disgrace that should end.

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## POLICY SOLUTIONS

**STRATEGICALLY REDPLOY FROM IRAQ AND SYRIA** Policymakers should redeploy U.S. troops under near-constant attack to securer locations outside either country. Redeployment would reduce the [risk of mass casualty events](#) that could escalate to a regional Middle Eastern war that the United States cannot afford to fight.

**RETURN TO COLD WAR-ERA REGIONAL FORCE POSTURE** During the Cold War, when Middle Eastern energy was far more important for the United States, America maintained a [limited basing footprint](#), concentrating air and naval assets in Turkey and Bahrain. As the Indo-Pacific grows in importance, the United States should adopt a more sustainable Middle Eastern force posture, freeing up limited resources for higher strategic priorities. America has repeatedly shown it can strike credible threats to its homeland located in areas without permanent U.S. ground deployments via over-the-horizon operations. We can continue to do so as needed with a right-sized Cold War-level regional footprint.

**POWER OF THE PURSE** In the FY 2025 appropriations cycle, Congress should embrace the same constitutional prerogative it used to help end the Vietnam War by zeroing out funding for future U.S. deployments in Iraq and Syria.