

PROVIDE FOR A STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE WITH PRUDENT FOREIGN POLICY

# Rethink the United States' Middle East Footprint

After two decades of war in the Middle East, the United States needs to reduce its military commitments in the region. America can pursue its regional interests through alternative means at lower cost, reducing the risks of strategic overstretch.

## THE ISSUE

Today, over 40,000 U.S. troops are deployed in the Middle East across over a dozen countries.<sup>1</sup> Growing domestic energy production has made the region less strategically important over time, and mature American over-the-horizon counterterrorism strike capabilities enable the United States to protect its limited regional interests without a substantial permanent military presence. The United States has greater challenges elsewhere, such as the Indo-Pacific, and should decrease, not increase, its Middle East force posture.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

### WITHDRAW FROM IRAQ AND SYRIA

October 2025 polling showed over 60% of U.S. adults support bringing our troops home from Iraq and Syria.<sup>2</sup> The United States is partially drawing down its roughly 4,500 troops in Iraq and Syria, but should go further and fully withdraw.<sup>3</sup> Both deployments lack coherent objectives tied to core American security interests. Our troops in both countries are more vulnerable to our adversaries than they would otherwise be and have faced regular attack for years.

### RETURN TO COLD WAR-ERA REGIONAL FORCE POSTURE

During the Cold War, when Middle Eastern energy resources were more strategically important for the United States, America protected this interest with a much more limited regional basing footprint focused on air assets in Turkey and naval forces in Bahrain.<sup>4</sup> America's improved long-range strike capabilities give it the flexibility to safely return to this largely offshore posture for the Middle East. America can protect trade flows and counter credible terror threats without large-scale permanent ground deployments.

### NO NEW SECURITY GUARANTEES

The United States should avoid extending permanent, NATO Article 5-style security commitments in the Middle East. Such guarantees risk entangling America in another costly conflict. Our \$38 trillion national debt and competing strategic priorities require policymakers to avoid overextension. America should primarily pursue regional interests through diplomatic and economic means. Finite defense resources should be focused on theaters most important to core U.S. national interests.

### POWER OF THE PURSE

In the FY 2027 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.

## CONTACT

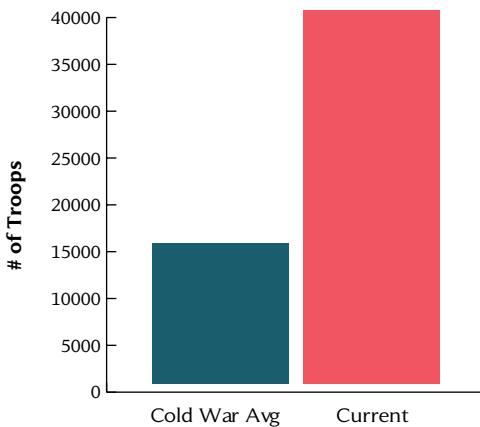
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**U.S. Troop Levels in the Middle East:  
Cold War vs. Today**



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<sup>1</sup> Mariel Ferragamo, et. al, [“U.S. Forces in the Middle East: Mapping the Military Presence,”](#) Council on Foreign Relations, June 23, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Filip Timotija, [“Most support bringing US troops home from Iraq, Syria: Survey,”](#) The Hill, October 9, 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Qassim Abdul-Zahra, [“US Military starts drawing down mission in Iraq, officials say,”](#) Military Times, October 1, 2025; [“The U.S. military will cut 7 out of 8 bases in Syria, Trump administration envoy says,”](#) NBC News, June 4, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Sweeney, [“A Plan for Withdrawal from the Middle East,”](#) Defense Priorities, December 21, 2020, p. 8.