

U.S. has slowed down pace of Syria troop withdrawal, says Senator Marco Rubio

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U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, who sits on the Foreign Relations Committee and the Committee on Intelligence, said Friday (December 28) that the U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria has been slowed down, which he said was important to protect U.S., Israeli and Kurdish interests in the region.

At a news conference in Miami, Rubio said that the presence of U.S. troops in southern Syria provides a counterbalance for Hezbollah working in the region and withdrawal could cause a war to break out between Israel and Hezbollah.

He also said that the U.S. and Turkey had different priorities regarding ISIS and the Kurdish forces and feared that U.S. Kurdish allies fighting ISIS in the region could be targeted by Turkey and that ISIS would emerge as an insurgency.

"In the northeast part, we are outsourcing the fight against ISIS to the Turks, whose number one priority is not ISIS, whose number one priority is to wipe out the Kurds who they view as a threat to their country because they want to establish their own

independent nation in northeast Syria and southern Turkey. And so here we have people who for two years have fought as the ground force against ISIS in return for our presence which kept the Turks out, these people could be slaughtered, and their children and families in these cities that they live in. And number one: an entire generation of young Kurds are going to grow up hating this country because of what it did and what it could manifest into long-term. Number two: it's morally wrong. And number three is what it does to our reputation in the region. Who is going to partner with us on anything in the future?" Rubio said.

Finally, he warned that it was important that Washington plays a role in future planning of Syria, which he felt would not happen if U.S. troops were withdrawn.

Earlier in December, U.S. President Donald Trump abruptly made the decision to pull U.S. military out of on Syria, against the advice of top aides and commanders, including Defense Secretary James Mattis, who resigned the next day.

Trump has come under withering criticism from fellow Republicans, Democrats and international allies over his decision to pull out of Syria because he believed Islamic State militants have been defeated.

Critics argue that the decision could undercut U.S. leverage in the region and undermine diplomatic efforts to the end the Syrian civil war, now in its eighth year.

Ankara is threatening a new offensive in Syria. To date, U.S. forces in Syria have been seen as a stabilizing factor and have somewhat restrained Turkey's actions against Syrian Kurdish forces.

A complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria would leave a sizeable U.S. military presence in the region, including about 5,200 troops across the border in Iraq. Much of the U.S. campaign in Syria has been waged by warplanes flying out of Qatar and other locations in the Middle East.