

# Implications of the Trump Administration's 2018 Foreign Policy Decisions Regarding the "Kurdish Situation" in North-Western Syria

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## Abstract

*The Kurdish population has historically experienced one of the most precarious humanitarian situations within the confines of the Middle Eastern region. However, the newest chapter of the Kurdish crisis, focusing on the Turkish and Syrian Kurds, remains marred by the cultural incompetence fueled by ethnocentrism displayed by the United States. This ethnocentrism in turn prompted culture shocks throughout the global community. As a result of inconsistencies with tone displayed through foreign policy, ignoring the cultural roots between this already complicated crisis, and rash decision-making regarding troop withdrawals added further obstacles within any process of solution in the Turkish-Kurdish issue (as well as adding complications to the already complex Syrian conflict).*

The most pivotal development in the contemporary era of the Kurdish crisis is former President Trump's redaction of support for the Kurds during the Syrian Civil Conflict. As Syrian and dissenting forces (including Syrian rebels and Turkish-Kurds) clash in dispute, the geographic location of the Kurdish troops lends itself for further discord. Therefore, the crisis at hand lies in the Turkish reaction to the newly abandoned Kurds in the midst of a Turkish movement towards authoritarianism.

This crisis holds major implications in a cultural and political sense. Formulated by decades of power struggles, this crisis has percolated into one of the foremost cultural crises in recent developments of political

science. The ramifications of state sanctioned violence against an already stateless people (ie. Turkey and the Kurdish population in Turkey and Syria) will have a negative effect for the populace involved as well as the surrounding areas. Refugees and asylees typically move towards neighboring states for refuge, although others may navigate towards a refugee camp for placement into a host country. This aspect of the cultural crisis between the Kurds and their respective home state's government is pivotal for public awareness; the reception of individuals fleeing from persecution is an important factor to consider when mitigating this crisis. The public reception towards a group is an integral part of the assimilation process when

a refugee moves to a different state. Depending on the disposition of the populace of the host state, the integration of the refugees may benefit or suffer.

As the issue of the “Kurdish question” evolves throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, various regional developments have tested these relationships. Historic issues of hostility and repression towards the Kurdish population within Turkey and Iraq have set the stage for the hostility to ensue in the aftermath of the redaction of Trump’s support for the Kurds in the current conflict within Syria.

### **Methodology**

An extensive literature review of qualitative sources was conducted in preparation for this research. Specifically, a review of Trump era foreign policy decisions and memos, political science and international relations journals, and communication journals were utilized to enhance the foundation for this project.

### **Conclusion**

Upon examination and analysis of the literature, it is clear that the cultural failures in a political capacity bleed into a larger humanitarian issue. The Kurdish population holds a precarious position in the regional environment; while they are vulnerable from a political standpoint, there is a noticeable strength in terms of their military and cultural expression. However, the Kurdish vulnerability became exacerbated by the perceptual environment of sudden abandonment by the United States—a global actor once thought to be a strong, consistent ally. In turn, the ties that were perceived through a collectivist cultural lens by the Kurds was interpreted as a massive break in trust, which is of great importance in terms of understanding the cultural facets of this crisis. Consequently, culture shock was felt both globally and domestically through this

issue with the Kurds. This dissonance between what was expected of the United States foreign policy action and what *actually* occurred prompted shock within many global actors, both state and non-state.

Furthermore, United States foreign policy has revolved around a culture of the realist theory in international relations, meaning that power and security are the central components of the policy decisions. However, this decision to remove troops from this area of Syria exemplifies the ethnocentrism exhibited by the Trump administration in this capacity. This decision to withdraw troops from this region in Syria not only does not consider the cultural and historic implications of the regional complexities, but also moves away from the traditional realist theory and focuses more on the “wants and desires” of the Trump administration. Additionally, the lack of incentive in the Trump administration to exercise cultural competence is apparent, especially within the context of this situation in Syria. Cultural competence is “an integral aspect regarding the intercultural communication” that is present within foreign policy interactions, according to Neuliep (422). In many of the foreign interactions between the United States and other countries during the Trump administration, there has not been a display of the necessary components to apply cultural competence towards global action through foreign policy.

Overall, a cultural examination of the norms, behaviors, and customs of a population will benefit not only the United States in terms of foreign relationship building, but also benefit the population of the areas that the foreign policy inevitably affects. This concept will hold salience as the global relationships will experience further change in the upcoming months and years due to the change in presidential administration. Within this impending

change, the policies with Turkey and the Kurds may be reformulated and reconsidered in the Biden administration. As of March 2020, the Biden administration has yet to

create changes to the policies and decisions made within the previous four years regarding this issue.

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