

# Manbij: A Convenient Killing of US Troops

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**Source:** [Strategic Culture](#)

With unseemly haste, US news media leapt on the killing of four American military personnel in Syria as a way to undermine President Donald Trump's plan to withdraw troops from that country.

The deadly attack in the northern city of Manbij, on the west bank of the Euphrates River, was reported to have been carried out by a suicide bomber. The Islamic State (ISIS) terror group reportedly claimed responsibility, but the group routinely makes such claims which often turn out to be false.

The American military personnel were said to be on a routine patrol of Manbij where US forces have been backing Kurdish militants in a purported campaign against ISIS and other terror groups.

An explosion at a restaurant resulted in two US troops and two Pentagon civilian officials being killed, along with more than a dozen other victims. Three other US military persons were among those injured.

US media highlighted the bombing as the biggest single death toll of American forces in Syria since they began operations in the country nearly four years ago.

The US and Kurdish militia have been in control of Manbij for over two years. It is one of the main sites from where American troops are to withdraw under Trump's exit plan, which he announced on December 19.

Following the bombing, the New York Times headlined: "ISIS

Attack in Syria Kills 4 Americans, Raising Worries about Troop Withdrawal". The report goes on, "the news prompted calls from Republicans and Democrats for President Trump to reconsider his plans to withdraw troops from the country."

A more pointed headline in The Washington Post was: "Killing of 4 Americans in Syria Throws Spotlight on Trump's Policy".

The Post editorialized, "the bombing showed that [ISIS] is likely to be a force to be reckoned with in Syria for the foreseeable future." It quoted politicians in Washington claiming the "bombing deaths... were a direct result of a foolish and abrupt departure announcement [by Trump], and made the case for staying."

Democrat Senator Jack Reed, who sits on the Senate Armed Forces Committee, said: "From the beginning, I thought the president was wrong [in ordering the withdrawal]. It was a strategic mistake for the whole region."

With macabre smugness, anti-Trump politicians and news media appeared to exploit the death of US troops in Manbij to score points against Trump.

The president's claims made just before Christmas of having defeated ISIS were widely replayed following the Manbij attack this week by way of ridiculing Trump's order to pullout US troops from Syria.

Nevertheless, despite the deaths, Trump and his Vice President Mike Pence stated they were still committed to bring the 2,000 or so US troops home. Some military figures also went on US media to defend Trump's pullout plan in spite of the terror attack in Manbij.

There clearly is a serious division in Washington over Trump's policy on Syria. For Democrats and supportive media outlets, anything Trump does is to be opposed. But there are also elements within the military and intelligence nexus which are

implacably against, what they see as, his “capitulation to Russia and Iran” in Syria. That was partly why his Defense Secretary James Mattis resigned days after Trump made his announced withdrawal at the end of last month.

Having invested years and money in regime-change machinations in Syria, there is bound to be US military and intelligence cabals which are resistant to Trump’s move to pack up. Not that Trump’s move portends a peace dividend for the region. It is more a “tactical change” for how US imperialism operates in the Middle East, as his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in Cairo last week.

That is why Trump’s order to take troops out of Syria may not be a clear-cut withdrawal. His National Security adviser John Bolton on a tour of the Middle East last week has already tried to undermine Trump by attaching all sorts of vague conditions to the troop pullout. Bolton and Pompeo have talked about the need to ensure the total defeat of ISIS and of the countering of Iranian presence in Syria.

This brings up the question of who may have carried out the bombing in Manbij? Was it really a suicide bomber? Was it really ISIS? Several observers have pointed out that ISIS have not had any presence in Manbij for the past two years since the Americans and Kurds took control of the city.

As always, the key question arises: who stands to benefit from the killing of the American troops? The scale of the attack suggests it was carried out with a sharp political message intended for Trump.

One potential beneficiary are the Kurdish militants who are being abandoned by the putative US withdrawal. Without their American sponsor on the ground, the Kurds are in danger of Turkish forces launching cross-border operations to wipe them out, as Ankara has vowed to do. A Machiavellian Kurdish calculation could be to “disprove” Trump about “ISIS being

defeated", and that US forces are needed to prevent any resurgence of the terror group in Manbij and northeast Syria.

Another sinister player is the CIA or some other element of US military intelligence. It is certainly not beyond the realm of plausibility that the CIA could facilitate such an atrocity against American personnel in order to discredit Trump's withdrawal plan.

Certainly, the way the anti-Trump media in the US reacted with such alacrity and concerted talking points suggests there was something a bit too convenient about the massacre.

It would in fact be naive to not suspect that the CIA could have pulled off such a false flag in Manbij. As in 1950s Vietnam, as told by Graham Greene in 'The Quiet American', the CIA have been doing such dirty tricks with bombing atrocities and assassinations for decades in order to precipitate wars in foreign countries that the agency calculates are in America's geopolitical interests.