

# Top US General Reaffirms Occupation of Syria During Visit

US planners continue to occupy northeastern Syria under the pretext of fighting ISIS

By [The Cradle](#)

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*Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited US forces occupying northeastern Syria on Saturday, 4 March, allegedly to assess efforts to prevent a resurgence of ISIS and to review safeguards for US forces against attacks, including from drones flown by Iran-backed militias, Reuters has [reported](#).*

Some 1,000 American troops continue to support allied Arab and Kurdish militias from the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in the region.

Milley, whose term as chairman of the joint chiefs ends in September, met with the commander of the US-led coalition to defeat ISIS, Army Maj. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, and reviewed security measures from an undisclosed base in Syria's northeast.

According to *Al-Monitor*, Milley's visit to Syria [signals](#) the Biden administration's seriousness about keeping troops in the country in support of the SDF.

"We're committed to maintaining our force presence in support of the enduring defeat of ISIS," the Pentagon's top Middle East policy official, Dana Stroul, told reporters last week.

"This is a mission that has the full support of the Secretary of Defense," Stroul said.

Syria analyst Jennifer Cafarella of the Institute for the Study of War noted the importance of continuing the US military occupation in northeastern Syria. She [observed](#) in 2017 that "Whether Washington chooses to admit it or not, the US now has direct influence over the vast majority of Syria's most productive oil fields," and that the territorial gains of the SDF "are Syrian national treasures that when added up amount to brute geopolitical power for

the US.”

Despite US claims that it is committed to the defeat of ISIS, *Al-Monitor* notes that “Nearly four years after the [ISIS] defeat on the battlefield, some 10,000 suspected fighters from the group remain in makeshift prisons under SDF control, with not even a hint of international political will to establish war crimes tribunals on the horizon.”

US planners previously welcomed the growth of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. An August 2012 Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) [report](#) had made clear that Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Qaeda were the driving forces of the US and Gulf-backed insurgency against the Syrian government, and that the US and its regional allies supported the establishment of a “Salafist principality” in eastern Syria as part of the effort to topple Assad and divide the country.

For 18 months after the declaration of the so-called Caliphate, US planners took [no action](#) against ISIS, allowing the group to threaten both Baghdad and Damascus.

Milley’s visit comes just over a week after US Congressman Matt Gaetz (R-Fla.) introduced a war powers bill that would force the Biden administration to withdraw US troops from Syria. The bill is unlikely to clear the House, but a previous measure issued in 2021 gained some bipartisan support.

Introduced on Wednesday, 22 February, the [legislation](#) would require US President Joe Biden to remove all US forces from Syria within 15 days after the legislation is signed into law.

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*Featured image: U.S. Battalion in eastern Syria in 2019 Photo: Creative Commons / U.S. Army Reserve*

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