

# US Presence in Syria Remains a Critical Component in the Fight Against ISIS

Featuring Jennifer Cafarella and Eva Kahan



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*The United States retains a small but highly effective force in Syria. This force has a clear mission: defeat ISIS and prevent the resurgence of extremist groups in eastern Syria. However, poor communication and muddled media coverage has contributed to a lack of clarity regarding the role and mission of US forces. In this episode of Overwatch, Jennifer Cafarella and Eva Kahan cut through the confusion to provide a clear assessment of the purpose, status, and likely future of US forces in Syria.*

## **Jacob Taylor:**

This is Overwatch, a podcast presented by the Institute for the Study War. I'm Jacob Taylor. The Syrian civil war appears increasingly intractable to the casual observer. Following a drawdown of forces in the fall of 2019, the United States retained a small but highly effective force in Syria. But recent developments such as an injury causing collision between U.S. and Russian forces and an escalation in ISIS attacks have led many Americans to question the value of the U.S. troop presence in the country.

The Syrian conflict is complex, and the mission of the U.S. force presence is highly nuanced. This combined with poor communication and muddled media coverage has made it difficult for the average American to hold an informed opinion on the conflict. With that in mind, Jennifer Cafarella and Eva Khan are with us today to cut through the confusion and provide a clear assessment of the purpose, status, and likely future of U.S. forces in Syria. Thank you both for being here.

## **Jennifer Cafarella:**

Thanks, Jacob. It's always a pleasure, even when we are continuing to record these from home. So, happy to rejoin the podcast.

## **Eva Kahan:**

I'm happy to be here too. Thank you, Jacob.

## **Jacob:**

So the U.S. still has small numbers of forces in harm's way in Syria, which became clear with the reported injuries a few weeks ago. And why is that? What are U.S. forces doing now, nearly a year after the draw-down?

## **Jennifer:**

So there's quite a bit of understandable confusion, I think, regarding what the U.S. is doing in Syria, how involved we are and why. And part of that confusion is actually a reflection of the language that the U.S. leadership has used when referring to Syria, and when referring to the specific mission of U.S. forces. But also because that mission and the role on the ground that we are playing has evolved over the course of the war, which adds the complexity to this that is somewhat natural and in many ways appropriate.

So the injuries that you referenced that were imposed on our forces was a result of a confrontation between American forces on the ground in Northeastern Syria and Russian military forces on the ground. And it led to a lot of good questions in the media and in the debate regarding, why is the United States there and why are we in the position where we are clashing with Russian forces on the ground? That's scary. And it is scary, but the fact is there are some very good and important reasons why the United States is still engaged on the ground in Syria. And those include that while we have managed to defeat the physical ISIS caliphate, meaning the control over terrain and populations that ISIS once had.

Unfortunately, our war against ISIS as an enemy military force is not yet finished. What that means is that when we took away all of ISIS's control of land, ISIS reverted into an insurgency. Which means they dispersed to rural areas, ungoverned spaces across Iraq and Syria, and they deliberately blended with elements of the population in order to continue to fight against U.S.-backed forces from those new positions. The confusion regarding the U.S. role emerges from the fact that President Trump has announced and walked back a decision to withdraw from Syria entirely twice now.

Why did he do that? Well, part of it is because the president has an intent to withdraw U.S. military forces engaged in conflicts that he has described as endless Wars. I'm not going to get into all of the dynamics of that particular set of decisions, but in this case, it led the president to seek an early withdrawal of U.S. forces based on the presumption that their presence on the ground inside of Syria was no longer necessary in order to prevent ISIS from re-emerging. But what happened in both of those cases is that it became clear very quickly that in fact U.S. forces are necessary and not only to prevent ISIS from reconstituting.

The most recent example was a result of the Turkish military actually invading a part of Northeastern Syria. And that triggered a new round of, "Well, should we be there or should we just let the Turks invade?" And we ended up staying, which I think was appropriate. And we ended up staying in order actually to be a force for deescalation in this area and theater to work with our Syrian partners, to preclude a major war with Turkey, as well as to maintain pressure with our local partners on ISIS. So that ISIS does not benefit from the kind of instability that emerges from all of these various actors having interest in Eastern Syria and a desire to out-compete with the U.S. local partner for access to local resources and strategic positioning.

**Jacob:**

So Jenny, you mentioned that what the president has proposed would constitute an early withdrawal. And I would just like you to unspool a little bit what you mean by early. And what in your mind defines a withdrawal of US forces from Syria as being early, as opposed to presumably the alternative would be appropriate, withdrawal that occurs at the appropriate time?

**Jennifer:**

Great question. So the reason I would describe both of those near withdrawals as early, or to use a bit of a more loaded term, premature, is because they occurred prior to the successful completion of their mission. The reason we had deployed those forces into combat in the first place. Now, this is another very fraught topic in the context of Syria, because the war is so complicated and because it is unfortunately so far from ending. And there are a lot of outside observers that for very good reasons, look at the situation in Syria and say, "Well, if the United States is not going to end the war, we should just leave." But in this case, the U.S. was deployed to Syria. Our forces were deployed for a very specific objective. And that objective was to destroy the ISIS caliphate and to make sure that, that evil that ISIS represented through the genocide of the Asebe's for example, and the export of terror from places like Iraq and Syria into Europe, and many other places around the world. That, that evil could not quickly reconstitute.

The reason this reconstitution question is so important is because we've seen this movie before. And in fact, the reason we even had to deploy Americans into harm's way to fight this enemy is because the last time around we withdrew too soon. That decision was made in 2011, by then President Obama, after the U.S. had defeated the predecessor to ISIS, which was Al-Qaeda in Iraq. There's a whole story there that we don't have time to get into on this podcast. But the lesson that President Trump took away and indeed much, if not most the foreign policy and defense establishment took away from that encounter is, it's very important that we do not take our eye off the ball. That we do not cede a major opportunity for a group like ISIS to re-emerge. And that we would become

surprised again, that we would be unable to prevent the kinds of massacres and horror that ISIS unleashed, if we withdrew.

So the question of what kind of sustained military pressure, and what kind of local partnerships is necessary to prevent 2011 from repeating, which means preventing essentially the ISIS rise that happened from 2011 to 2014, from repeating. That question had not actually been fully resolved. And so when President Trump announced the withdrawal, there was a lot of pushback and there was a lot of concern, including from myself that, “Hey, wait, we haven’t finished this conversation about what kind of pressure is necessary.” And perhaps even more immediately worrisome than that, we have very visible signs that ISIS is in fact already resurging. There is a large level of violence that is happening on the ground that we at ISW and many other places have been tracking. That indicates that it would take ISIS even less time to resurge and regain territory and resume this kind of slaughter this time, in what is now 2020, than it took ISIS last time in 2011. So the stakes are higher and unfortunately we have less room to make mistakes. And that’s one of the reasons why this was such a heated moment and why this remains such a lively conversation and debate here in Washington. As we consider, how do we reduce America’s military footprint abroad, but without accepting what many, including myself would regard to the unacceptable risks, including risks to U.S. interests, but to American lives and the lives of our allies and partners as well.

**Jacob:**

Now, with regard to acceptable risk. I take your point that there’s likely a misunderstanding of the U.S. mission in Syria. That there are many people and observers who view it as just a quagmire, that there isn’t a specific goal. And so what are we doing there? And you’ve addressed that and said, “No, there is a specific goal.” But even among those who understand that there is a specific goal, it does seem that there are critics who say that the U.S. is putting American lives at risk in Syria for a mission that is well, for one, unachievable and for two, potentially not worth it. And what is your assessment of that? And what factors would go into a calculus to determine whether the U.S. presence in Syria represents an acceptable risk for U.S. lives and assets?

**Jennifer:**

It’s a very important question. And candidly, it’s one that I wish we as a nation were discussing more openly. Because I don’t think that any one person including myself has a final answer to this. And I think we have some very hard decisions to make as a nation about what kinds of risks and to whom we’re willing to accept. But where I come down on this is that look, the United States had made a decision in 2011 to withdraw. We then made another decision in 2014 to redeploy in order to fight a brutal and barbaric enemy. That requires risks. You are deploying American men and women, as well as coalition men and women who joined us into harm’s way. They are there to achieve a mission. It is very important in my view that we, as a free society question the validity of that mission, as well as its achievability. Now, in this case, the U.S. forces that deployed to fight against the Islamic State were spectacularly successful. Candidly, they were more successful than even I expected them to be. Because I had been skeptical at the start and in the early stages of the intervention against ISIS. I was skeptical of the strategy, which was to deploy these guys to work with local partners, to bring down the Islamic State with as minimal of a U.S. role as possible.

And while I supported the principle of, as minimal of a deployment as possible. I was quite unsure that our local partners would be capable, actually of defeating the Islamic State. And while we did end up scaling up the U.S. role quite a bit, over the years, I was wrong. Those local partners were much more capable than I had expected. And our forces deployed to enable them, were more capable than I expected of enabling them. And so that’s incredible and it’s a huge success. And unfortunately, I think it’s being overlooked in some of this good questioning of, what is the United States doing in Syria? And is it achievable?

We do need to take stock of what we have already achieved and how incredible that was as we consider, okay, what do we do from here? And yet, I think we still have hard questions that are unanswered regarding, is there an end in sight that we, as a people can accept? Because right now the strategy in Syria is to keep American forces deployed into harms way to prevent ISIS from the reconstituting, and to prevent a wider destabilization that would allow ISIS to reconstitute. But the war is far from over. So right now it's a bit of an indefinite strategy. We're going to sit there and hopefully continue to succeed with the hard work of those men and women. But there's no vision for what the end of that tunnel looks like, at least that I personally can expect.

The Trump Administration's strategy is sound in principle. And that strategy is that the U.S. forces are enabling our local partner, and contributing military pressure towards a diplomatic settlement of the war. That would actually lead to some kind of a reconciliation or compromise between the various sides of the war, including our local partner, the Assad regime, the Syrian opposition, and other activists. I think that's the right goal, right? We want a negotiated settlement of this conflict, but I don't see a pathway from here till there. And that continues to concern me. So while I do think that the forces that we have deployed are serving an incredibly important function and that withdrawing them would lead to immediate outcomes that are against our national interest. I think we still need to do better.

We need to do better of their service and sacrifice. And we need to, as a nation, develop a strategy to take the military success that they are achieving and sustaining, and turn that into a actual political and diplomatic outcome. That strategy hasn't emerged yet, but it's something we're continuing to work on here in Washington. And that we remain hopeful is actually possible if we can help our civilian leaders understand what is at stake here, and understand the options for where to go from where we are now.

***Eva:***

Jenny, I want to hop on to a concept that you mentioned that I really want to thank you for bringing up, which is the amazing success that U.S. forces have had to this point in Syria. And the degree to which that success has been enabled by our partner forces on the ground. We're tracking at ISW, a couple of conflicts that have come up between U.S. partner forces and tribal allies in Eastern Syria. And a notable inflection in those conflicts is the degree to which all of our partner forces, including Arab tribes, who have previously worked with the Assad regime, prior to the Syrian Civil War. All of these actors have been relying on the U.S. to act as an honest broker between them in reaching an agreement and helping them come to a political settlement through which they can continue the counter-ISIS mission from a point of equal standing.

And we've seen U.S. personnel intimately integrated into these tribal meetings with our Kurdish partners in Eastern Syria. All of what demonstrate, the vital role that U.S. forces have played in bringing together the counter-ISIS coalition. Now, the strengths that U.S. forces have in Syria is directly related to the degree to which their involvement on the ground is seen as lasting and permanent. And so the trust that we've been able to cultivate with our Kurdish and Arab allies relies on a continued U.S. commitment to eradicating ISIS. And as you so wisely mentioned, reaching an eventual political settlement, something that is very much still in the works.

***Jennifer:***

Eva, you're absolutely correct. And I think that's another good example of, in some ways the secondary benefits of having a stake in this fight. Because the technical mission of the U.S. forces deployed to this area, as President Trump would describe it, is to secure oil infrastructure and to deny that revenue to malign actors such as the Assad regime. And ensure that the revenue in fact goes to our local partner and via channels that don't enable malign actors like the Assad regime. But the simple presence of those forces on the ground and the perception at least for now, and hopefully that continues to be the case, the perception that those forces are there to stay. And

that the United States is in fact, a reliable broker has given these forces the ability to shape the broader political situation on the ground in an incredibly complex and difficult environment.

And I can't stress enough that, that impact cannot be measured in the same kind of concrete metrics that we'd like to measure. How many ISIS guys have we captured or removed from the battlefield, with the size of the force that we've deployed? You can do that. We do, do that against the Islamic State. But these broader effects on how the actual human beings that live in these areas and that have to pick up and rebuild their lives after ISIS. The effect that our forces who are deployed and risking their lives can have on that broader situation is absolutely vital. And I would argue very, very much worth the risks that we've taken so far.

**Jacob:**

So building off that, how are both aspects of the mission that the Syria effort and this broader counter-ISIS effort going as of September 2020?

**Jennifer:**

Right. So the U.S. mission in Syria is a subordinate mission to the broader fight against ISIS. And that means it is nested within the counter-ISIS campaign that is happening within Iraq, next door. And the forces that we have deployed in Syria are therefore also creating security and in some ways political conditions that also benefit us on the Iraqi side of the border. And I think that's another aspect of the concrete effects that this deployment is generating for us that is overlooked. What do I mean by that? Well, for example, the scope of the terrain on which these U.S. forces are operating with our local partners is along the Syrian-Iraqi border. And it sits on very valuable smuggling routes and ISIS transit routes across the desert that were we not present, would significantly widen. And would enable ISIS to scale up its cross theater military campaign involving forces deployed in both in Syria and Iraq.

Now, we can't prevent transit across that border in absolute terms, because we're talking about desert terrain here. But it is in fact, absolutely essential that we are present in order to at least disrupt that flow. And we are definitely having that impact. ISIS is able to do only marginal levels of this kind of transit. But to Eva's point, it is also very important that we are cohering this population under a security umbrella, and hopefully increasingly a acceptable governance and political umbrella that actually provides sort of an Island here, a bulwark against the kind of extremism that ISIS represents. But also against other malign actors like Iran, that very, very, very aggressively seek to not just undermine the U.S. presence and ultimately expel us, but to leverage this cross border terrain to support their own wider regional objectives.

Now, this is another source of a ton of controversy in terms of, are the U.S. forces in Syria deployed to counter Iran? No, that is not their mission. And the Defense Department is very clear about that. But it also doesn't need to be their mission because that's not the point. The point here is that we have a local partner and a local population that Iran would like to gain, and therefore we should not seat it to them. Certainly not for no good reason, simply because we want out of this conflict. And so we have to consider the broader regional aperture for what is at stake and what are the consequences of this U.S. mission in Syria, because it is important for Syria's sake alone. But to the point behind your question, it is actually nested within a broader regional strategy that is in fact very vital for U.S. interests, as well as our partners in places like Iraq and the wider Middle East.

**Eva:**

Jenny, I want to pull out your phrasing of our support for the SDF, our current partners in Eastern Syria as a security umbrella. Because I think that concept really shapes both the Iranian and other pro-Assad forces' approach to the SDF in Syria. But also the way that ISIS is viewing the current status of governance in Eastern Syria. The



SDF, our Kurdish partners, have been able to maintain relative political stability in Eastern Syria, thanks to the U.S. military enabling the SDF counter-ISIS campaigns. And ensuring that pro-Assad forces on the other side of the Euphrates River, do not attempt to take back this land and its valuable oil and gas resources.

Now, ISIS is aware that, that kind of stability is what enables the continued arrest campaigns and raids that are actually eroding ISIS attack capabilities. And so lots of what ISIS is attacking these days in SDF controlled Syria, isn't the military capacity of the SDF, but rather the civilian leaders who are continuing to work with the SDF and the larger governance components. So municipal buildings, post offices, these sorts of targets demonstrate that ISIS is concerned about the level of political stability that the U.S. has been able to ensure in Eastern Syria, and is working to break apart those political alliances. It's that kind of stability that the U.S. is capable of maintaining as we continue to work to eradicate and remove the ISIS capacity to reconstitute after we've left.

**Jacob:**

I'd like to move now squarely into the U.S. and specifically the debates that are happening in the U.S.. Syria appears to be pretty far from the forefront of the U.S. debate over foreign policy at the moment. In fact, from where I'm sitting, it seems like foreign policy in general, given current conditions in the U.S., is pretty far from most Americans, maybe five, 10, 20 most salient issues. But that being said, we have Americans on the front lines in Syria and elsewhere. Is it possible that the debate over what to do in Syria will become a major salient issue in American political discourse before the election occurs in November? And if so, how does that happen?

**Jennifer:**

Thank you for the question. Look, it is a source of personal disappointment to me that we as a country continue to, I think in many ways, let down the men and women that serve for us. By failing to keep them front and center to how we see the world and how we understand America's role as it is, and as it needs to be. I think too often, the U.S. deployment to these conflicts just gets forgotten. And I think you're right, that it's happening again. Now I do think there are two scenarios in which Syria could reemerge and surprise people again by dominating headlines.

One is a good one and one is a bad one. The good one is that our elected leaders decide to make it a priority and the voters decide to push them on it. I do think that there is some indication that, that could still happen during this election. Where we do actually have statements from Vice President Biden regarding Syria. And we have had new statements from President Trump defending his legacy in Syria and the policy that he has implemented. I hope that more Americans seize upon that and continue to ask hard questions of both of them regarding what they would do in Syria and what they actually think is the benefit of either side of the potential options. What is the benefit of staying in Syria? And what is the benefit of withdrawing? They're hard questions to ask, and I think it could happen. I don't think it's the most likely case. Then again, that's disappointing to me. I think more likely we are going to have some kind of crisis events in Syria, which could well happen between now and the election or after the election and before January of 2021. That catapults Syria into the headlines again, and takes everybody, including the policy by surprise. And sets us into another one of these crisis response cycles.

**Jacob:**

Just to spool that out a bit, what specific crises might we see during that timeframe specifically?

**Eva:**

Jacob, I can take that question. We've been looking at a variety of ways in which pro-Assad actors in Eastern Syria have been pushing the U.S. allied forces, the SDF, but also the U.S. to withdraw. And attempting to spark a type of crisis that would lead U.S. policymakers to see the risk in Syria, as greater than the reward of achieving our

mission and defeating ISIS. Namely, we have seen Russian hybrid attempts to undermine the U.S. mission and our SDF partners in Eastern Syria using an information campaign to make the RSDF partners seem like an illegitimate occupying force. And to drive local Arab tribes to rebel against the SDF and essentially splinter the counter-ISIS coalition.

In a most dangerous situation, Russian forces could actually exploit these revolting tribes in order to grant themselves license to legitimately intervene, in order to protect those tribes. And use that veil of legitimacy to push harder against U.S. troops, probably in a deniable fashion, in order to cause unacceptable injuries or casualties that would lead U.S. policymakers to decide again, that the Syria counter-ISIS mission was not achievable. In a more likely scenario, we have also seen Russian efforts to undercut the U.S. Diplomatic Alliance in Syria. Russia extended a diplomatic arm towards the political wing of our SDF partners, and maybe attempting to negotiate a behind the curtain deal between the SDF and the Assad regime, which would then render American diplomatic efforts functionally irrelevant. That second line of effort may be reinforced by the primary line of effort on the ground and through a hybrid information warfare, which again, could push the SDF into feeling pressured to negotiate, possibly for a subpar deal without allowing US forces to continue to provide support in the counter-ISIS mission. We're also seeing pressure from the Assad regime and their Iranian backers in the same type of insurgent or deniable activity to push against SDF governance and try to undermine what the SDF is doing in order to re-take that land, thus disarming the counter-ISIS mission in Eastern Syria.

**Jennifer:**

So to sum up Eva's excellent discussion of the risks of escalation here. The most likely major crisis to provoke the kind of high-level reconsideration of the U.S. role, Jacob, that your question framed is that the Russians decide to provoke a crisis. And they decide to provoke a crisis in order to attempt to compel us once again, to withdraw. The pressure that Eva described coming from the pro-regime side and often Iranian backed units is also a danger. And I just want to emphasize what she laid out as a additive form of pressure on what the U.S. is trying to do and maintain in Eastern Syria. That over the course of the second half of this year into next year could actually pose a very real challenge when considered in the context of the simultaneous ISIS campaign that our guys and their local partners are trying to beat back.

So the situation is serious, the risks are high, and unfortunately they are growing. And it is in our interest to re-engage this topic before that crisis happens. And again, to my earlier point, I retain hope that we will find the wherewithal to do that. But I do think in a more likely scenario, this is going to get bad to the point of a crisis. And then we're going to have this conversation all over again.

**Jacob:**

To conclude this conversation, I'd like to turn actually to Iraq and Afghanistan, two other important theaters in the overall U.S. Counter Terrorism, counter-ISIS effort. Where the Trump administration is drawing down from both Iraq and Afghanistan, as we speak. Do those decisions affect the situation in Syria? And if so, how?

**Jennifer:**

So they do affect the situation in Syria. And it may sound a bit counterintuitive because the effects aren't immediate and linear, but they are important. And that's because the effect of the U.S. troop reductions in Afghanistan and Iraq is to take more additive risk by reducing the military pressure on organizations, including ISIS in Iraq and the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. It is a given from my view based on what we have already seen on the ground in these places, that our reduction in military pressure will seed further ground for these jihadists to gain traction.

It is true that the United States will continue to work with local partners, and we will continue to apply some military pressure on these adversaries. But we have to resist the urge to define down the scale of the problem to meet the level of the commitment that we wish to make to solve that problem. What do I mean by that? Well, in both cases against ISIS and against the combination of the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, the U.S. is facing enemies. That to Eva's earlier point are not solely a military threat.

All three of those actors have visions for replacing, for first of all, breaking states and replacing them with a extreme form of Islamic governance. And therefore, U.S. decisions to reduce commitments can lead to a weakening of our local partners in ways that provide political opportunity for these actors to discredit those governments in part through their military campaigns. But also through some of the ideological arguments that these actors make, which I think we too often dismiss. What I mean by that is in the case of Afghanistan, the withdrawal that we are conducting is as a result of a negotiated agreement with the Afghan Taliban. Al-Qaeda views that negotiated agreement as a huge victory, because it will lead ultimately, likely, to the full withdrawal of U.S. forces, except for perhaps small counter-terrorism operations.

And it will accommodate the Afghan-Taliban into in theory, a future Afghan government that is regarded as legitimate. Thereby, legitimizing the Taliban, which Al-Qaeda sees as the leadership of the entire movement that Al-Qaeda seeks to wish to bring into power across the Middle East. So how does that affect Syria? Well, it affects Syria because in the Syrian Civil War, jihadist groups, not just ISIS are ascendant. And they are making an argument to populations inside of Syria, as well as populations abroad, that there is no option, but a religious jihad in order to protect themselves and their families.

And they are making the observation that the U.S. does not have the wherewithal to fight them or the wherewithal to protect our local partners. And so the cascade effect of reducing military pressure before we've accomplished our mission can in very dangerous ways embolden the ideology and the argument, including the political argument that our adversaries make. Now, that may seem sort of lofty and not concrete, but we are already seeing concrete examples of how this effect is washing over other theaters. Where we now have Al-Qaeda affiliates in places like Syria that are reflecting the same kind of calculus that, perhaps they should cut some kind of a political deal that would lead to a withdrawal of U.S. forces or a reduction in the U.S. role to only very few, very tailored counter-terrorism operations.

That would seed, for them, significant room for them to continue to expand their recruitment and their indoctrination of local populations. Why am I talking about this in the context of ISIS? Well, I'm talking about this in the context of ISIS, because ISIS itself is operating within this broader jihadist movement globally. And Al-Qaeda seeks to profit from the damage that we have done to ISIS. And Al-Qaeda is already making forays into Eastern Syria. They haven't yet really re-established a presence there, but that competition can be quite dangerous for us. And it is difficult, but we have to constantly resist the pressure to focus narrowly on what is the situation only happening in the counter-ISIS fight, limited to Eastern Syria.

And understand the broader regional context, but also the broader, in many ways global context in which our fight against the Islamic State rests. Because if we withdraw too maturely, the scenarios that can emerge, include ISIS taking over once again, but it also includes Al-Qaeda filling that vacuum. And Al-Qaeda filling the vacuum could in some ways be even more dangerous than ISIS filling the vacuum. Because while we were able to muster a global coalition to defeat ISIS, we have not been able to reach the same level of common understanding with our allies and partners regarding Al-Qaeda. And that is in part because Al-Qaeda is playing this much more sophisticated political game, that in the long run, I do very much worry could outflank us.



**Jacob:**

Jennifer Cafarella and Eva Khan, thank you both for being here today and taking the time to share your expertise and assessments with us.

**Eva:**

Thank you, Jacob.

**Jennifer:**

Thank you, Jacob. And look, I hate to end it on such a dire note. So I would just conclude by saying, I think we need to continue to focus on the incredible impact that the men and women who serve this country overseas are having. And we need to not dismay at the scale of the challenge because it's big. And we have a long ways to go until we can rest. But I think that the more that we focus on what we have achieved so far, the more energy and confidence we are actually going to find in tackling the problems ahead.

So with that, I just would like to make that note. So I would just like to make that nod to our service members, given that the focus of this conversation is those who are deployed in Syria and the incredible good they actually are managing to do. And it's a world about in that conflict.

**Kim Kagan:**

Thank you, Jenny. That's well received. Thank you for listening to this episode of Overwatch. We look forward to your feedback on this episode and previous ones. Visit [www.understandingwar.org](http://www.understandingwar.org) to learn about ISW's work and to sign up for our mailing list.

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