



INDEPENDENT

Will Trump's withdrawal from Syria make Republicans back impeachment?

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America's foreign policy establishment has been revolting against Donald Trump's latest move in Syria. Senior members of his own party has been publicly slamming him for abandoning America's Kurdish allies to be attacked by Turkey's forces.

This raises the question of whether this is a tipping point for the GOP to no longer shy away from criticising Trump or worry about its political consequences. And now that Republicans have gathered the courage to push back against their president on one issue, they may continue to do so and potentially even join the impeachment crowd down the line.

The public denunciation of Trump's Syria decision by the Republican party seems to be threatening the president's already weak position in Congress. While Democrats have been gearing up to start impeaching Trump in the House of Representatives, Congressional Republicans, who control the Senate, had been united in standing behind him and ruling out any support for impeachment.

But Republican unity broke when Trump moved American troops out of the way of a Turkish incursion into Syria.

Senior Republicans have joined Democrats in slamming the decision to pull troops from northern Syria, urging him to reverse the move, and vowing to take action in Congress against Turkey. Some of Trump's most passionate supporters have abandoned him on the decision and he seems to have no real support in Washington except for Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky.

Members of Trump's own administration have been speaking to the media, anonymously, to voice their concern and confusion on the abrupt decision. "This is total chaos," a senior administration official told the *Washington Post* about the situation.

The sudden clash between the White House and Congress comes at a time when Trump needs his party the most. As his administration has put up a fight against the impeachment inquiry, Trump has been relying on Congressional allies to weather the upcoming storm. Now the GOP's unwavering support for the president doesn't seem so unbreakable anymore.

It is almost certain that the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives will have enough votes to back impeaching Trump. The Republican-majority Senate will then have to make the final decision on whether to remove the president or keep him in office. And at this

point, the Republican divide over Syria may not be severe enough to change the party's general direction towards impeachment.

Experts say Republicans in the Senate had some political room on Syria to criticise Trump but they have kept it limited and will not abandon him because of clear electoral consequences.

John Glaser, director of foreign policy at the Cato Institute in Washington, says he does not see a significant crack in the Republican party's support for Trump. He told *The Independent* that so far Republicans have been "venting" on Syria while holding the line on Ukraine.

"They still see impeachment as too far and too politically costly. And if they do abandon Trump, which some of them could, it will come much later in the impeachment process – when the House is close to done with it and it's been laid out in front of the American public," he said.

The Washington rebellion has not been enough to change Trump's decision in Syria or force him to modify it. But it has urged him to try to distance himself from Turkey's actions. The administration has announced that Trump is prepared to impose "very powerful" economic sanctions on Ankara if needed. But meanwhile the invitation to Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan to meet with Trump at the White House next month is still open and does not seem to be affected by current events.

Donald Trump's decision on Syria is rooted in his campaign slogan of getting America out of "endless wars" in the Middle East. A promise that not only has support within his base, but among the general public across the United States. To average Americans, it may not really matter how Trump is getting out of wards as much as when he is doing it.