

The Secrets Behind America's Departure from the Syrian Al-Tanf Base

(Translated)

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At a highly sensitive regional juncture, America's departure from the Al-Tanf base deep in the Syrian desert has raised more questions than it has answered.

Al-Tanf was not merely an isolated military outpost in the middle of the desert; it was a geopolitical linchpin, controlling a crossroads between Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, and holding a delicate thread in the balance of power between Washington, Tehran, and Moscow.

For years, the base had become a symbol of a limited American presence, small in number but profound in its implications. It served as a surveillance gateway, a point of disruption to strategic land transit, and an indirect tool of pressure in negotiations that extended far beyond the confines of Syrian geography.

Therefore, its departure cannot be interpreted as a mere administrative procedure or a fleeting military redeployment, but rather as a signal of a reordering of priorities and a shift in the philosophy of managing influence.

Is it a tactical withdrawal to reduce costs and disengage from draining hotspots? Or a calculated step within a broader regional deal concerning issues that transcend Syria? Or is it an implicit message that the era of small bases with great symbolic significance has ended, ushering in an era of managing conflict remotely? Major shifts are not measured by the number of troops withdrawing, but by what they leave behind and who fills the void. Al-Tanf was not merely a geographical area, but a point of convergence for several projects: a project to consolidate Syrian state sovereignty over its borders, a regional project seeking to connect capitals by land, and an American vision redefining its presence in the Middle East.

In a world where crises intersect and the compass is lost, the withdrawal from Al-Tanf is more than just a military announcement; it is a moment of choice for new balances and a reflection of deeper transformations in the structure of regional conflict. This is where the real analysis begins: not why did America leave, but what does it mean that it is leaving now, at this specific time?

The Al-Tanf base is located in the border triangle between Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, near the strategic Al-Tanf crossing on the Damascus-Baghdad international highway. The base was established in 2016 as part of a US-led coalition under the pretext of fighting ISIS, but it has transformed into a political linchpin obstructing land communication between Tehran and Beirut.

This event cannot be interpreted solely as a military move, but as a shift in regional balances of power. The US forces have completely withdrawn from the al-Tanf base and handed it over to the Syrian army after a gradual withdrawal that lasted for weeks. Coordination with Jordan was established, and the Syrian army began deploying its units and border guards in the area surrounding the base at the Syrian-Iraqi-Jordanian border triangle. Several sources reported: "The Syrian army takes over the al-Tanf base after the withdrawal of US forces" (Euronews).

This move came after the end of the base's long-standing strategic role in confronting ISIS within the framework of the international coalition, according to their claims. The US

stated that its withdrawal was "orderly" and that it would remain capable of responding to ISIS threats using air power and intelligence if needed (Defense News).

This withdrawal deepens the general instability in the Syrian Desert, an area with light security and social instability after years of war. Al Jazeera reports on this in a report titled "ISIS and the Risks of its Return to the New Syria," highlighting the presence of prisons filled with fighters and the potential for transfers or escapes. Reports have surfaced of thousands of detainees being moved to Iraqi provinces, and videos have emerged showing smuggling or escapes during security clashes: "Facts: Where are the detained ISIS members in Syria being held now?" (Reuters).

The presence of Syrian government forces, rather than American forces, makes the base less likely to be a direct target in any future US-Iranian confrontation, should one occur, as it is not a US target. In other words, the handover reduces the risk of the base itself becoming a target in major confrontations, since it now has its own local forces. Had it remained under US control, it would have been a site directly linked to the coalition, potentially making it a target for retaliation from America's adversaries should the conflict escalate. "The Syrian Army's 54th Division has deployed inside and around the base, with security reinforcements along the borders with Iraq and Jordan" (The New Arab).

Therefore, the American presence in ash-Sham has not ended entirely, but has shifted to other locations such as east of the Euphrates or Jordan. Thus, we can say that this withdrawal from al-Tanf is part of a revisionist American vision for the region, meaning a redefinition of the tools of influence. For years, the American strategy in the Middle East has rested on three pillars:

- Reducing the costly, fixed military presence and shifting from territorial control to remote networked control.

- Relying on precision strikes, intelligence, and local alliances, thereby minimizing direct friction with regional powers.

- Focusing strategic efforts on Asia and containing China, meaning maintaining the capacity to intervene without bearing the daily burden of protecting an isolated base.

Accordingly, policy is not measured by shifts in the number of departing troops, but rather by the type of regional order they leave behind. Leaving the base is not so much the end of a military chapter as it is a quiet declaration of a shift in the architecture of power; from a rigid ground presence to a flexible presence in the air, the economy, and information. It is a moment of transition from the geography of bases to the geopolitics of networks. Syria today stands at a crossroads of balances that are not defined by its borders, but rather by its ability to manage the flow of resources, including borders, sanctions, and reconstruction.

The most dangerous aspect of this phase is not the power vacuum itself, but the miscalculation of that vacuum. When a major power withdraws from a symbolic position, a regional power not only fills that space, but also defines the boundaries of its influence. Herein lies the future of the region: either a calculated competition that prevents an explosion, or a slide into proxy conflicts fueled by misunderstandings and rapid escalation.

The Middle East is entering a phase where conflicts are managed with less fanfare and greater complexity. Those who understand these shifts early on will weather their storms, while those who interpret them with yesterday's logic may find themselves at the heart of an equation whose keys they do not possess.