

## Headlines:

- **Russia begins Troop Withdrawal from Syria**
- **Saudi Arabia brings back Cinemas**
- **End of the American Century**

## Details:

### Russia begins Troop Withdrawal from Syria

Russian president Vladimir Putin confirmed that Russia would maintain a permanent air base and naval facility in Syria after announcing plans to begin the withdrawal of some of its troops from the country. The Russian president's announcement came during a visit to the Khmeimim base in Latakia, where Putin told Russian troops they would be "returning" to their homes "victorious". "You're returning home to your homes, families, parents, wives, children and friends victorious, the motherland is waiting for you, friends. Have a safe journey. I thank you for your service." Russia intervened in the country after Bashar al-Assad in the summer of 2015 highlighted he had lost most of the country and was giving up regaining the north of the country. Russia's intervention on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 eventually turned the tide in the country and with the fall of Aleppo in January 2017 the last major bastion of resistance, the Syrian rebels have been virtually defeated. Russia has attempted to present this intervention as the beginning of a new found resurgence, but the truth is this was an extremely small intervention by Russia which consisted almost entirely of an air campaign rather than troops in the ground. Against an opposition that lacked any surface-to-air capability. As Russia draws down in Syria it has strengthened the hand of the US, whose dirty hand it fulfilled.

### Saudi Arabia brings back Cinemas

In Muhammed bin Salman's latest move to move Saudi Arabia back to 'moderate Islam' he has allowed cinemas to open for the first time in 35 years as he continues a push to overhaul its society and image. The first movie theatres will be opened by March 2018 and it is intended that up to 2,000 screens will be in place within 12 years. Announcing the move on Monday 11 December the culture minister, Awwad Alawwad, said: "This marks a watershed moment in the development of the cultural economy in the kingdom. Opening cinemas will act as a catalyst for economic growth and diversification. By developing the broader cultural sector we will create new employment and training opportunities, as well as enriching the kingdom's entertainment options."

### End of the American Century

In its latest analysis, the RAND Corporation, the US non-profit organisation issued a damning indictment of the America's military forces, calling on the administration of US president Donald Trump to reassess the nation's defence strategy and security posture. The report warned: "US forces could, under plausible assumptions, lose the next war they are called upon to fight, despite the United States outspending China on military forces by a ratio of 2.7:1 and Russia by 6:1." It added: "The nation needs to do better than this." It found that, when taken collectively, the series of national defence issues "represent the major elements of an international security environment that is more complex and more dangerous than that to which Americans have been accustomed since the end of the Cold War." RAND also highlighted the US military is "failing to keep pace with the modernising forces of great power adversaries, poorly postured to meet key challenges in Europe and East Asia, and insufficiently trained and ready to get the most operational utility from many of its active component units." It added: "If adversaries perceive US military [...] as inadequate to the task of deterring and defeating coercion or aggression, the viability of this nation's entire national security strategy and, indeed, the rules-based liberal order that it has promoted for more than 70 years, will be called into question."