

**STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED
PROGRAMS APPROPRIATIONS FOR FISCAL
YEAR 2020**

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2019

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 2:31 p.m., in room SD-124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lindsey Graham (Chairman) presiding.

Present: Senators Graham, Leahy, Moran, Lankford, Daines, Murphy, and Van Hollen.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LINDSEY GRAHAM

Senator GRAHAM. The hearing will come to order. Thank you all. Ambassador Jeffrey, we really appreciate you being here. When I scheduled this hearing, I had no idea how important it would be. I cannot imagine a more timely moment for you to be before the Senate, and we appreciate all you have done. I share the view of everybody on this subcommittee that you are a professional. You are really good at what you do, and you have probably have not had a lot of sleep lately, but we appreciate your efforts to hold Syria together. A quick opening statement.

We play the ball as we like in golf, at least we are supposed to. In foreign policy you have got to look forward, but you need to look back and figure out what went wrong. I think all of us believe that Turkey's invasion of Syria was not a good thing. It was incredibly disruptive, and it is going to lead the way for further chaos if it is not corrected. That the worst thing to do to our Kurdish allies is to have them deal with Turkey and fight ISIS at the same time. We do not believe that is a good outcome for the United States. The chaos created by Turkey's invasion is going to be to the benefit of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), or Iran, Russia, and Assad, and none of us want that. So the question going forward is, what can we do?

The ceasefire today is welcomed news for all in the region. I hope it will hold. I met with the Turkish Ambassador. We had a pretty good conversation. The safe zone concept is the key to making this a win-win. I have said for years now that the People's Protection Units (YPG) elements in Syria in the eyes of Turkey are aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and are a terrorist orga-

nization. I have also said for years now that the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) was there helping us with ISIS when no one else was, and the YPG elements that the SDF were in really made the fight possible.

The bottom line, about 11,000 casualties from SDF forces to destroy the Caliphate. We lost eight Americans in the last 4 years in Syria. God bless them. But for every SDF casualty, that took the pressure off the United States and the Caliphate could not be destroyed from the air, it was our SDF partners who went on the ground and dugout ISIS. There are 10,000 to 15,000 fighters still running around Syria and Iraq, there are about 12,000 in prison, and the SDF Kurdish forces have held the line.

So I laid out today what success would look like, a safe zone that prevents Turkey from being threatened by armed elements on their border they consider unfriendly, making sure that our Kurdish allies are not ethnically cleansed, continuing to have a military presence in Syria on the U.S. side to guard the oil fields to make sure they do not fall into Assad, Iran hands, and keep partnering with the SDF to make sure ISIS does not come back, maintain control of the skies.

The statement by the President today, I hope and believe, is a positive direction, we just need to build upon it. And with that will turn it over to Senator Leahy.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ambassador for being here. In my years in the Senate, I have gotten to know a few career Ambassadors. I compliment you on having achieved that. I have been impressed by all those I have known. This is a difficult time, I think that would be considered an understatement, but many of us have called for a comprehensive strategy in Syria that defines U.S. interests, and an explanation of how those interests will be protected. I have not seen one, not from the prior administration or the present administration.

But in the absence of a strategy, we have seen a dramatic about face in U.S. policy, almost on a whim. You and I have been in meetings with different Presidents of both parties where there is a discussion when major steps are going to be taken and you have those for and those against, you have a real debate. Here, apparently, the debate is how many characters you could fit in a Tweet.

Now we are debating how to stop President Erdoğan from eliminating the Kurds. We see Putin and Erdoğan shaking hands and basically praising each other. They reap the benefits of fractures in NATO. We see the deals Putin has brokered for Bashir Assad, and for Erdoğan to take control of previously Kurdish held territory.

ISIS prisoners have escaped and without going into the numbers I think it is fair to say they are significant. Commitments by the United States are no longer seen as reliable. We have a large number of U.S. nuclear weapons but Turkey controls the airfield not us.

You place all the blame on Erdoğan. You suggest that the White House was powerless to deter Turkey's invasion of Syria. I have a somewhat different view. I think we are in this position because President Trump has been in the habit of impulsively reversing U.S. policy, this time in an unscripted phone call, turning on our

allies while praising autocrats like Erdoğan, ignoring his own advisers, Republicans and Democrats alike in Congress, in pursuit of his own personal and political ambitions with disregard for U.S. national interests.

And over the past several weeks what I have heard in my State of Vermont, including from people who have served with distinction in our intelligence agencies and our diplomatic corps, and I suspect you know a number of them, they share the goal of bringing our troops home. Obviously we should have debated the deployment of U.S. military forces to Syria before they set foot there. We should have debated the risks and benefits of our partnerships with Syrian militants. But neither President Trump nor the Secretary of State has articulated a practical strategy in Syria or engaged Congress, either party, on these issues.

Instead President Trump made a bad situation a whole lot worse with no apparent consideration of the consequences. But then, as he often does, called the debacle a great success as if putting that on Twitter would make it so. Ambassador, I hope you are going to give us your unvarnished assessment of the situation. But let us not forget the President may wake up in the morning and change his mind again without consulting anyone.

That is a costly lesson he is given too often, and whether it has been voiced publicly or privately, it has caused a great deal of concern in both parties including people that you and I both respect. Thank you.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you Senator Leahy. Ambassador.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES F. JEFFREY, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE
FOR SYRIA ENGAGEMENT AND SPECIAL ENVOY TO THE GLOBAL
COALITION TO DEFEAT ISIS**

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and Members of this subcommittee. It is a privilege to come up here and to talk about something as important and as urgent as this. I submitted a written statement that you have referred to, Mr. Vice Chairman, and I will stand by that.

I just want to touch on a couple of things, and we can get into the questions. One, underlying the specific focus of today's hearing, which is the Northeast and what has happened last few weeks, there is the underlying reality of Syria, the worst human rights and geostrategic disaster of the 21st century from whatever standard, use of weapons of mass destruction to almost half a million people killed, half of a population of over 20 million driven from their homes. Several major terrorist organizations, not just ISIS but predominantly ISIS but also Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has emerged from this morass of all horror.

Intervention by Russia, various other armies are now on the ground, ours, the Turks, the Israelis in the air, although we don't say that too often officially, but the Israelis mention it from time to time, and of course the Iranians. Our policy, and here we have laid out that policy, people may disagree with it, it may not be well enough articulated, but it is the policy and we submitted in response to a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) request last year. The request was submitted by the President. U.S. policy on Syria on the 1st of March, classified secret.

First goal is the enduring defeat of ISIS. The second is a political solution to the morass of Syria that meets American and our other coalition partners' goals. And the third is the removal of all Iranian-commanded forces from Syria. They have no right or reason to be there. They are part of the problem not the solution. But let me turn to the situation on Syria today.

First of all, and I know we need to be forward-looking and I will try to be today, but I think I have to—we need your support, both Democratic and Republican Members of the Congress and of the Senate in particular to go forward on the things we are going to be doing. So I do want to employ you to bear with me as I try to lay out why we did not change our policy suddenly in a phone call. I am not going to let President Erdoğan off the hook. That is what I wrote in my statement and I am going to try to reinforce that. We do not have to debate on the point back and forth because I do want to talk about the future, but I think it is important, so you know that it was not just a flippant position.

Our position has long been four things. One, we were absolutely opposed to a Turkish incursion into Northeast Syria. We understood their security concerns. It was understood in the Obama administration and it was more clearly understood in this administration, but we did not think a military action was justified and we thought, as it did, it would scramble everything. Two, we would not support it in any way, even though Turkey was an ally, and on the call on October 6 my understanding is Erdoğan asked for such support. And you know, it could be through air cover and that sort of thing. We did not give it and we made that clear.

Three, we would oppose this action by the usual diplomatic, economic carrots and sticks. In fact, a major purpose of the call on October 6 was to lay out a package for Erdoğan involving a visit to the United States, efforts on the terrible problem of the S400 and the F-35, where we thought we had a way forward. I think the President has briefed some people on that.

And finally, \$100 billion trade package that our Secretary of Commerce had been working out in return for which we wanted Erdoğan not to go in. So we are using all of the tools short of military force. We made clear to Erdoğan then and in every conversation I have had with his people and everybody else I know, in every conversation I have had with our SDF allies and as far as I know everybody else going back to Ash Carter and General Tony Thomas, who were on the record Sunday to this end. We are not going to use military force to keep the Turks out of Northeast Syria. We did not give a military guarantee to the Kurds against Turkey. We gave them military guarantees against the regime, against Russian mercenaries and others, but not against NATO ally Turkey.

I do not think that was ever briefed up here, but I would really be interested to hear who made that claim that we had given such a commitment because my instructions were not to ever suggest that. In fact much of our conversations with the Kurds, and I had hundreds of them, with General Mazloum, with his political advisors and with various other people in the Northeast that you had to find some kind of political accommodation with Turkey because you couldn't count on us to keep the Turks out militarily. We would try diplomatically but we would not militarily.

Once the Turks made clear to President Trump that they were coming in, and that was in the call, of course his concerns included force protection because we had two little outposts with missions. I will leave it to the DoD to try to explain what they were doing up there. Our two little outposts of 12 people each along a roughly 120 kilometer area that the Turks were planning on coming into and the President wanted to ensure that they were okay, and he said he would move them out of the way. But they were not up there to deter a Turkish incursion and they could not have even if they were.

The Turks would have just driven around them as they drove around other American units when they came in. So what we did, exactly as we told the Turks, as soon as the incursion began, we launched first of all an administration effort to put together a very tough sanctions package on October 14. Congress is working on various sanctions, including yours, Mr. Chairman, that are even tougher. We have some concerns about the waiver but the signal that this sent to the Turks, believe me having been out there and watched how President Erdoğan personally reacted to what Congress is doing, was quite clear. We also undertook all sorts of diplomatic efforts.

There was a Presidential letter that then became public, there was then a Presidential message that I delivered to President Erdoğan telling him we needed a ceasefire right away, or there was a danger of the Russians and the Syrian government would come in. The Turks rejected that offer to have a ceasefire and sure enough the Russians and the Syrian government did come in. So that brought us to the final initiative that the President took which was to dispatch, and I have never seen this diplomatic trio at that level in any negotiation, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, and the National Security Advisor all flew out with a group of the rest of us and within 5 hours of personal negotiation with President Erdoğan, we got a ceasefire.

The Turks have more or less adhered to the ceasefire. Yesterday night they announced because the YPG forces, our partners, that is the more PKK and more Kurdish element of the SDF, had pulled out of the area, roughly 120 kilometers wide and 30 kilometers deep where the Turkish forces were, and the Turks turned their temporary pause into a more permanent halt or what we call a ceasefire.

For reasons, I won't get into the Turks do not use ceasefire. So that is where we are on that. The other two areas, realizing that we would not tolerate further Turkish military action, the Turks were desperate to try to find out what they could do in the rest of the area because they do have concerns all along their border. We had offered them a good deal back in August and we had started executing that. It was called a security zone mechanism giving them patrolling and other things out to 30 kilometers and a pull-back of the YPG all along the border. So the Turks then took up a Russian offer. Again, the SDF had turned to the Russians and to the Syrians when they realized that the Turks were coming in and we would not stop them militarily.

The Russians made an offer for Erdoğan to come to Sochi and Southern Russia, and they negotiated a modified version of our

safe zone in the other two areas of the Northeast where the Turks could patrol with the Russians about 10 kilometers in and the YPG would also pull back 30 kilometers.

So that is where we are right now. We are sorting things out. As you know this morning the President not only announced that we were lifting the sanctions that we had imposed on October 14 because of the Turkish commitment and the Turkish decision to halt their operations, but also that we would be keeping on a small portion of our forces, having announced that we were withdrawing them right after October 6 phone call.

And we think that that gives us a basis to maintain our de-ISIS strategy in the Northeast and that strategy and the stability that generates, I think, contributes to our other two goals, which is the stability of Syria as a whole under a more decent government and the removal of Iranian commanded forces. I will stop there, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES F. JEFFREY

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here to testify on this important issue. As you know, I have just returned from Ankara and I look forward to discussing the October 17 Joint Turkish-U.S. Statement (October 17 Joint Statement) on northeast Syria, which established a 5 day pause in Turkish military operations in the northeast running to October 22, a withdrawal of Peoples Protection Unit (YPG) forces from those areas controlled by the Turkish military, and if all goes well a more permanent halt to the Turkish operation, as well as joint Turkish-U.S. efforts towards the population in the affected 'safe zone' area to ensure security, decent treatment of religious and ethnic minorities and restoration of the security smashed by the Turkish offensive beginning October 8.

The conflict in Syria has raged for over 8 years, fueled by Bashar al-Assad's regime and his despotic and barbaric treatment of Syrian citizens, Russia's continued enabling of Assad's brutality, and Iran's malign influence in the region.

U.S. strategic objectives and national security interests in Syria remain the enduring defeat of ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and their affiliates in Syria, the reduction and expulsion of Iranian malign influence; and resolution of the Syrian civil war on terms favorable to the United States and our allies and in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. A sound strategy for use of our assistance resources is key to achieving these goals.

The United States has worked closely with our local partners, including the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northeast Syria, in the campaign to defeat ISIS since 2014. Our cooperation led to the territorial defeat of the so-called "caliphate" earlier this year. During this time, the United States and our Coalition partners provided assistance to restore essential services, support local security and governance, to alleviate humanitarian needs, and to help restore the local economy in areas liberated from ISIS. These efforts helped meet basic needs and create an area of relative stability in Syria, and enable the enduring defeat of ISIS elements there.

One longstanding issue in this campaign has been Turkey's belief that there is no distinction between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which both the United States and Turkey have designated as a terrorist organization, and the YPG and our partner the SDF. Turkey thus views the YPG—a key component of the SDF—as an existential threat which receives support from the United States. To Turkey, our cooperation with and support to any of these bodies is akin to supporting a statelet on its southern border run by a terrorist group it believes has declared war on Turkey. The State Department has led efforts over the past year and a half to reduce that friction and achieve better coordination of U.S. and Turkish efforts regarding Syria.

When President Trump announced a strong, deliberate and coordinated withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria in December 2018, the administration said we were transitioning primary responsibility for the defeat of the few remaining ISIS remnants in Syria to our allies and partners on the ground inside Syria.

Beginning in January 2019, the administration worked with Turkey on implementing a safe zone in northeast Syria that would prevent the resurgence of ISIS,

protect Turkish security interests vis-a-vis the SDF/YPG, facilitate stabilization, and create conditions to enable the safe, voluntary, dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

This effort culminated in U.S.-Turkish military-to-military arrangement in August for a security mechanism; the SDF was informed and supported the elements of that arrangement. The United States, Turkey, and the SDF all began executing the arrangement in late August. We believe we very quickly implemented the initial steps of the arrangement to create an area along approximately 140 km of the border region in the northeast. This included YPG voluntary withdrawal to approximately 5–14 km from the Turkish border of armed personnel generally, displacement of heavy weapons to 20 km from the Turkish border, U.S.-Turkish cooperation on Turkish air activity over northeast Syria, and joint U.S.-Turkish patrols in the relevant area.

Turkey from President Erdoğan on down disputed the conduct and implementation of security mechanism activities, but, more importantly, pressed beginning in early September for an entirely different concept—one Turkey had tried and failed to foist on the United States and, through us, the SDF since January: a 32 kilometer zone to the key east-west highway, M4/10, along the entire northeast from the Euphrates to the Iraqi border, and sole Turkish military, as opposed to joint U.S.-Turkish engagement on area security. Turkey also began stressing its desire to move up to 4 million Syrian refugees now in Turkey into cities to be constructed in the area, an initiative that went far beyond the scope of the military-to-military arrangement. The United States at every level has underlined our resolute opposition to this plan as a threat to our SDF partners, the fight against ISIS elements, and overall security in Syria.

Indications grew in September 2019 that Turkey was planning for a large-scale unilateral operation. Again, all levels of the U.S. Government warned Turkey not to act.

Erdoğan, however, said that Turkey would soon move forward with its long-planned operation into northern Syria. He was told clearly, including by the President, that U.S. Armed Forces would not support or be involved, and that the United States does not endorse such actions, but that we would not put U.S. forces in harm's way. President Trump also publicly warned Turkey that the United States would take measures sanctioning the Turkish economy if Turkey were to take steps that the United States considers “off limits.”

Turkey launched this operation despite our objections, undermining the D-ISIS campaign, risking endangering and displacing civilians, destroying critical civilian infrastructure, and threatening the security of the area. Turkey's military actions have precipitated a humanitarian crisis and set conditions for possible war crimes. As the President warned Erdoğan, we have used diplomatic and economic tools available to us to press Turkey to halt its military actions.

On October 14, President Trump signed an Executive Order designed to encourage Turkey to halt its offensive military action in northeast Syria and adopt a ceasefire. It provides the United States with the authorities to deliver severe economic consequences and apply additional pressure if Turkey continues with this offensive. The United States has imposed sanctions on three senior Turkish Government officials: Hulusi Akar, the Minister of National Defense; Suleyman Soyly, the Minister of the Interior; and Fatih Donmez, Minister of Energy, and on two ministries, Defense and Energy. Turkey must follow through on its commitments from the October 17 Joint Statement with the United States to avoid further sanctions under this new E.O.

The United States undertook various diplomatic initiatives to reinforce our sanctions, including a Presidential letter to President Erdoğan on October 9 and a Presidential message to him 3 days later. In the latter we warned the Turks that the SDF was likely to turn to Russia and the Assad regime if Turkey continued its offensive, which then occurred. The President then dispatched the Vice President, Secretary Pompeo, and National Security Advisor O'Brien to Ankara to negotiate with Turkey the terms of a ceasefire and the YPG's evacuation from affected areas. As I indicated already, on October 17 those talks, including 5 hours with President Erdoğan, produced a Joint Statement outlining a pause that will lead to a ceasefire—that Turkey and the YPG are adhering to—for 120 hours to allow the withdrawal of the YPG from the Turkish-controlled safe zone. In return, the United States committed not to impose new sanctions under the October 14th E.O., “Blocking Property and Suspending Entry of Certain Persons Contributing to the Situation in Syria.” Turkey has committed to a permanent ceasefire upon completion of the YPG withdrawal; in return, the United States would lift the sanctions now imposed under the E.O. This solution will save lives and contribute to long-term stability in the region.

Assuming the pause moves to such a longer-term halt, we will work with Turkey and local residents on the humanitarian and social commitments of the October 17 Joint Statement, cooperate with our local partners against ISIS even as the U.S. military continues the withdrawal directed by the President, and press for full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, the only hope for a long-term resolution of the underlying Syrian conflict.

To these ends, we are looking to organize a number of senior level meetings with our international partners involved in the Defeat-ISIS Coalition as well as our Syria-focused group. Our intent is to re-affirm with our Coalition partners the shared goals of ensuring that ISIS does not re-emerge.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to taking your questions.

IMPORTANCE OF SYRIA TO U.S. SECURITY INTEREST

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you very much. Senator Leahy, do you want to go first? Okay. Alright. So let us try to explain to someone on the street why Syria matters.

Very quickly let me tell you why I think it matters. There is a border between Syria and Israel, right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Absolutely.

Senator GRAHAM. From an Israeli point of view it would be a nightmare for Syria to fall in the hands of the Iranians because they would be virtually surrounded by enemies at that point. Do you agree with that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Israelis certainly think that way from the Prime Minister on down.

Senator GRAHAM. And Assad is linked up to Iran, is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Ever more, every day, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So from an Israeli point of view, it would be a nightmare for Assad, the Ayatollah to take over Syria. Now ISIS, I think most Americans rightly fear ISIS and I hope most Americans believe it is in our interest to defeat ISIS over there, so they don't come here. In terms of the enduring defeat of ISIS, has ISIS been defeated?

Ambassador JEFFREY. As President Trump pointed out, the ISIS Caliphate, and that was a unique and particularly dangerous manifestation of Middle Eastern extremist terror, was defeated by a U.S. advised SDF Force as well as the Iraqis earlier in Iraq in March of this year. But ISIS as an insurgent, terrorist organization with anywhere between 14,000 and 18,000 followers, armed followers in Iraq and Syria, that is still out there. It is still a danger.

And as I saw, it grew from a small group of al-Qaeda people in Mosul in the hundreds in 2012 to an army of 35,000 commanding much territory in 2014, so that is its capability to regenerate, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So Raqqa Syria is a special place for ISIS, is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is and right now it is under mixed control of our SDF and Syria forces.

Senator GRAHAM. I just want the Americans know that Raqqa, Syria under this weird ideology is the place where they are—it is their Mecca. That is why they went there. So if we leave, they will go back. Do you believe that it has been in our interest to partner with the SDF to keep ISIS from regenerating?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Absolutely. It is one of the most successful, low-cost, high-return military engagements we have ever had, Senator. It also incorporates in one single operation all of the dangers

and risks, political and even military, of getting involved in internal conflict because with that wonderful partner came a serious problem with a very important neighbor that had its own views of its existential security, Turkey.

TURKEY

Senator GRAHAM. And the goal is to have a win-win so Turkey will not be threatened by YPG armed elements, but our Kurdish allies will not be decimated. That is the goal, right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That was what we were pursuing and frankly I don't think quite as well. The last administration——

Senator GRAHAM. So why did Erdoğan do this?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think he didn't read our signals correctly. He is a very——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think he understands better now, our signals?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think this was the first time you really hit him hard.

Senator GRAHAM. So be honest with me, what are our signals?

Ambassador JEFFREY. First of all very tough sanctions. Secondly, the sanctions legislation that is bubbling through this part——

Senator GRAHAM. So you think is helpful for the Congress to stay involved with having potential sanctions against Turkey if they misbehave?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We would like the potential, in particular Senator——

Senator GRAHAM. I got you. So the point is, does Turkey now understand that a military incursion into Syria is unacceptable to American National Security interest?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I watched Vice President Pence on a one-on-one with two interpreters. I was one of them—I am not a very good interpreter but I was in the room—make clear to President Erdoğan——

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think he understands?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We need a ceasefire and without a ceasefire we would continue down the road that we have been discussing, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Do you think the message has been received?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I think President Erdoğan wants a good relationship with President Trump and he wants many of the same goals in Syria as we do.

IRAN

Senator GRAHAM. When it comes to containing Iran, one of the reasons we are going to guard the oil fields, as it were, is we are worried about the oil falling into Iranian hands because they are right there on the border. Is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That certainly is correct. There are many bad actors there. We don't want any of them having control of the oil or the area around it.

Senator GRAHAM. But if we had to pick a list of bad actors, Iran would be pretty near the top, right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They would be competing with ISIS.

Senator GRAHAM. Alright, so there is your choices. I don't know when is that contest. So I really applaud the administration for controlling the oil fields and hopefully increasing production to share it with people in Syria not the Iranians.

SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC FORCES

Point-blank question if you could answer it, are we going to stay in Syria to continue to partner with the SDF?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Senator as you know, and I think everybody in this room knows, this has been debated in this administration repeatedly since the first decision to pull out which was in the spring of 2018, then the even more specific order to pull out in December of 2018, and we have gone back and forth inside the administration—

Senator GRAHAM. Just from your point of view as somebody who really is well-respected, do you think it would be a wise use of American military assets to have a small force of capable U.S. military continuing to work with the SDF to prevent the rise of ISIS?

Ambassador JEFFREY. One, it has been without any doubt. Two, I suspect it very much would be in the future. Three, as a civil servant I am very reluctant to make those kind of decisions.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. But those observations are very helpful to the subcommittee. Senator Leahy.

DECISION TO WITHDRAW U.S. FORCES

Senator LEAHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Ambassador. As I understand it, I was not there, but when you testified before the House, am I correct that you said you were not consulted before President Trump's decision to withdraw from Syria?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Quite the contrary, Senator, and I want to be very specific. I was not informed of the President's phone call until after the phone call, but I consulted through Secretary Pompeo almost daily, and Secretary Pompeo more times every week, several times every week, with the President specifically on Syria. So I had no doubt that my views and the views of the people that I reach out to were represented to the President, essentially during my time entire tenure.

Senator LEAHY. Even though you are the special rep for Syria and the special envoy to ISIS, you did not know he was going to make that decision? You were not told?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Once again, sir, I am caught up on the question of the decision. The decision to pull all of his troops out, I did not know that, but that gets conflated to be honest, and it is a problem I have had for 2 days up here, with some kind of green lighting the Turks to go in. He did not make a decision to green-light the Turks because he didn't green-light the Turks.

Senator LEAHY. That is one of the reasons I asked the question.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I know. I am trying to sort my way through here. I hope I am not just muddling things more.

Senator LEAHY. I don't think you do that. Consider that a complement. But the President has called Erdoğan a friend and a hell of a leader, I am using his words. He called the five-day ceasefire following his unilateral decision to withdraw U.S. troops, the incur-

sion of Turkish forces into Syria, as a great day for civilization. He says it is a great day for the Kurds.

TURKEY AND RUSSIA

Today he called it a great outcome. When I saw this photograph, my reaction was it was a great day for Turkey and Russia. I suppose you could have had Bashir Assad and the Ayatollah in there. How can you call this, not your words, but how can you call this a great day? How can you call it anything other than a strategic loss for the U.S., a win for Putin, disaster for the Kurds, and uncertainty for our allies?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Those are all factors to consider, Mr. Vice Chairman. I would say that, I cannot put myself in the President's mind, but from very extensive back and forth that I am privy to, what the President thought was a great day was the fact that through extremely vigorous diplomacy led by him, including his as he put it unconventional letter, the message he sent to President Erdoğan, the very blunt sanctions he immediately deployed, his work with the Congress, or our work with the Congress on your sanctions, and dispatching the Vice President to Ankara all within just a few days, bringing this offensive to a halt before it could take all that much territory, before it would spread throughout the entire Northeast and create the sort of human catastrophe that we were fearing.

So I mean several hundred thousand people have left at least temporarily their homes. But we were able to stop this offensive after 10 days and then impose—not imposed but put together a ceasefire which has now been holding for 6 days and has become permanent.

Senator LEAHY. Well whatever the sanctions were, they lasted a very short time. They have been lifted, the ones he imposed in reaction to Turkey's offensive against the Kurds. Now here is a picture and I was impressed by, or depressed by, of Russian armored personnel carriers entering the Kurdish zone, inside Syria. We have seen the pictures of Russians gleefully photographing the U.S. facilities that we had to suddenly leave behind. We have seen the reports of large amounts of ammunition value and fuel that we had to destroy.

And we had to leave them behind almost like we were running away, and the Russians posted that worldwide. I don't mean this as a got you question, but is this a new policy, America withdraws and Russia goes in?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The items you have pointed out, Mr. Vice Chairman, are all true. They are all painful. I don't think I know—we don't have a policy of us withdrawing and Russia going in. We have reinforced our military position in Europe, particularly in the Baltics. We have done so throughout the Middle East including most recently in Saudi Arabia, and you know the very strong position we have taken including against China in East Asia.

So, all in all, I think that we are still as we have been since the 1940s holding the line for a global collective security system. I am very comfortable serving an administration that is doing that because I believe, I to my heart and soul on that. This is one issue we are going to have to work our way through. I think the decision

today to keep at least a limited contingent of American troops in Northeast Syria is an example of working through it.

Senator LEAHY. You know, the Turks call it not a ceasefire, but just a pause.

Ambassador JEFFREY. The inside——

Senator LEAHY. You speak the language?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I speak the language. The Turkish word, *ateşkes*, is the same, it is ceasefire, cut fire, but they didn't want to use that word because they borrowed from the Russians. The Russians don't use that word with the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which is the terrorist group that controls Idlib. So, the Turks said we can't use it with the HTS so we will use these other euphemisms. They mean the same thing. It is a ceasefire. Walks, talks, and quacks like a ceasefire, Senator.

Senator LEAHY. Thank you. Maybe you and I should talk more later on.

Senator GRAHAM. What is the Turkish word for don't do it?

Ambassador JEFFREY. *Yapma*. One or another version of it.

Senator GRAHAM. I need to learn that one. Okay. Senator Lankford.

THE KURDS

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you for being here. How long have the Turks and the Kurds been at each other?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Turks and the Kurds have lived together in peace for thousands of years under the Ottoman Empire and with a couple of exceptions of a couple of uprisings in the early days of the Turkish Republic in the 1920s. They are both Sunni Muslims and in that part of the world religion plays a bigger role than ethnicity. The PKK which is an offshoot of the Communist Party under Abdullah Ocalan in the 1980s launched an insurgency trying to spark an ethnic revolt in Turkey against the Turkish government for an autonomous or independent Kurdistan.

An analogy is what Masoud Barzani tried to do in 2017 with his referendum. The difference is in a nutshell, the Kurds of Iraq, and by and large the Kurds in Syria, are clustered in one or two areas along the border, and they do represent a totally different, not only ethnic but cultural and to some degree political entity.

The Kurds of Turkey are spread all through the country in little clumps, but more importantly through intermarriage over half of the Kurds in Turkey are totally integrated in the large cities and everything else.

So thus what the PKK was pushing for was not analogous to Kosovo, where a very centralized—not centralized but consolidated group of one ethnic group broke off from a larger ethnicity, but rather what you had in Bosnia or Rwanda, a horrific thing where a whole society falls upon itself.

Senator LANKFORD. So, in the 1990s the United States listed the PKK——

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Lankford, we are going to give you 2 more minutes. We are not going to hold the history of the Kurdish people against you on your time.

Senator LANKFORD. I appreciate that. In the 1990s the PKK was listed as a terrorist organization by the United States and by Turkey, is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. First by Turkey then by us, that is correct.

Senator LANKFORD. So at least since that time, there has been an active recognition the United States considers the PKK a terrorist organization and has been part of the frustration that is a small group of Kurdish people that in somewhat the Turks seem to consider them all the same instead of being able to consider the PKK specifically. When I talked to the Turkish leaders, they seem to consider all Kurds are all aligned with the PKK and how can you work with the Kurds outside of Turkey?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They don't—with the Iraqi Kurds. Erdoğan has the best of relations with Masoud Barzani and the Iraqi Kurds. They don't with their own Kurds. I knew well Deputy Prime Minister Şimşek—

Senator LANKFORD. The Syrian Kurds?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The Syrian Kurds it is a little different partially because almost half a million Syrian Kurds have fled to the Northeast when after an internal struggle the PKK offshoot, the YPG, took over the pro-Barzani faction in about 2012 and those people fled. So, these are the Kurds that are now many of them in Turkey.

RUSSIA

Senator LANKFORD. Let me ask you this, the Russian bases in Syria. They have had permanent bases there, both naval and air bases, for how long?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Since I believe the 1980s if not earlier, 1970s.

Senator LANKFORD. So Russian presence in Syria and the Russian interaction with the Syrian government is not new to suddenly they have run into these bases and occupied?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is true that it is not new. It is also true that we recognize that that is a relationship unlike the Iranian one that we are not trying to end.

Senator LANKFORD. Right. So, it is interesting to me the number of people that bring up and say suddenly Russia is involved in Syria when they were not involved before when they have had bases there, permanent bases, since the 1980s. We have temporary bases in Syria where we operate from, but they are not intended to be long term and permanent. Is that correct?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Exactly.

FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Senator LANKFORD. The ISIS prisoners that are there, how many of them are foreign fighters?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Of about 10,000 that we captured with the collapse of the Caliphate in March, there are about 2,000 foreign fighters, the rest are all Iraqi, Syrian.

Senator LANKFORD. What was the repatriation like at this point? How many countries are taking their prisoners back?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They come from probably almost 100 countries. We have had pretty good luck with countries in the Middle

East. For example, North Africa, Morocco comes to mind, also countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan, a few others, and we think we may make some progress in Europe with Balkan States. But in Western Europe so far Italy has taken one back, which is the only success we have had.

Senator LANKFORD. The other Western European countries are not taking their prisoners back?

Ambassador JEFFREY. They are not and frankly when reason is they don't know what to do with them. They do not have the legal system we have here that basically is based on criminal syndicate law and the ability to apply that to terrorist groups, and thus if you remember, you bear all the responsibility of the group. They require individual responsibility and guilt and proof and chain of custody and all of that. That simply is not possible on the battlefield.

REFUGEES

Senator LANKFORD. So, let me talk about the returning refugees because there are millions of individuals still hoping to be able to return back to Syria. What does the refugee flow look like from outside of Syria back into Syria?

Ambassador JEFFREY. There has been very little flow back, Senator. We are talking about 6 million people who are refugees and 6 million more roughly are internally displaced people. Of the refugees so far since I have taken the job less than 200,000 have come back. The reason is because we have the most evil dictator in the world in President Assad and he treats them in the same barbaric manner or even worse when they come back than he treats the rest of his population and they are afraid to come back.

Senator LANKFORD. I have visited with some of the refugees as I am sure you have as well, and the number one thing that I hear from the refugees outside the country is that if they go back they fear for their children and for the men to be conscripted into Assad's army and they will have to go fight his battles for him.

And so, they are not interested in fighting Assad's battles and they won't go back until either he is gone or until there is an absolute guarantee that they are not going to be conscripted. Are you hearing that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is exactly our understanding and the understanding of everybody else I know that deals with them, Senator.

Senator LANKFORD. So, if Assad continues to stay there in power, do those refugees return home?

Ambassador JEFFREY. The way we put it because that can lead in a direction of regime change, an Assad who behaves the way he has consistently behaved the last 20 years is a deterrent, a dramatic deterrent, to anybody returning. Until he changes his behavior fundamentally, absolutely not.

Senator LANKFORD. Thank you.

Senator GRAHAM. And he never will so he has got to go. Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good to see you again, Ambassador. Thank you for joining us. You have been doing heavy lifting these past few days. You know, the cere-

mony and the agreement effectuated at Appomattox Court House could probably be called a ceasefire. It did end hostilities between the North and the South, but the history books will judge it to be a surrender because one side gave up an awful lot and the other side took over the territory they controlled.

And so, I think the Turks are right, I don't think this is a ceasefire, I think this is a surrender. The Kurds were not a party to this agreement. Ceasefires are normally when the fighting stops, and the line of conflict remains where it is. The terms of the ceasefire are pretty clear. The ceasefire remains only so long as the Kurds decide to remove themselves from the territory that they controlled. And so, I just think we have to be honest about what this is. This is no victory for the Kurds. This is a ceasefire that only holds so long as they do exactly what the Turks have wanted them to do.

But you see it a little differently and that I think you have in testimony today and yesterday, you have talked about the accomplishment of the ceasefire agreement and you have talked about the leverage that was necessary in order to get this ceasefire agreement. And you have talked both about the sanctions levied by the administration that were held in advance or withdrawn but also the threat of congressional sanctions.

SANCTIONS

You said that yesterday and today that that was part of what got the Turks to agree to this historic ceasefire. So I assumed that given that that was part of the leverage that you used that your recommendation and the administration's recommendation would be for Congress to hold off on passing sanctions because you clearly either implicitly or explicitly used the threat of congressional sanctions in order to achieve this agreement, which I would call a surrender, I think the Kurds would categorize it as a surrender, the administration calls a victory.

Ambassador JEFFREY. We do see those sanctions including a copy of one of them dropped on the lap of the Turkish delegation half-way through the negotiation last Thursday as an incentive to negotiate with us rather than go on. And the YPG did not surrender, they withdrew. They were on the losing end of the military battle. They were holding two towns up until the very end right on the Turkish border, but they were essentially surrounded on the larger scheme of things.

But it isn't that something we—specifically I was in contact with them throughout the negotiation with the Turks. They accepted that agreement because they want to preserve their forces and they want to essentially live to fight, or at least politically engage, another day, which is what they are doing now.

If we had not stopped the fighting, if it had accelerated and expanded and escalated, not only would we probably be pulling our forces out even more quickly, it is impossible for you to imagine the President deciding to keep some on.

Senator MURPHY. Understand that they didn't surrender because they weren't a party to the agreement, we surrendered for them and gave them the choice as to whether to move out under the terms of the agreement or not. Second, and again, I think you have

a tough task coming up here and I understand that you didn't make these decisions, but you are the only person we have to talk to at this point.

U.S. FORCES IN SYRIA

I want to talk to you about this question of troop presence around the oil fields. I have two concerns that I wanted to just get your thoughts on. This sounds like a bit of a panicky reaction to the President's announcement of full withdrawal.

One, what are the ways in which we supply a troop presence that is isolated in a portion of the country that is going to be bracketed by territory controlled by any of these other than the United States?

And second, in Senator Graham's statement today, and he has talked to the President probably a lot more than you have, he referenced using some of the revenues to pay for our troop presence in Syria. That sounds like a pretty complicated transaction in which the United States is going to get revenue from the oil fields, which in a lot of ways would you know frankly play to everyone's fears about our interests in the region that we really just want to be able to make money off the oil.

Are there any plans right now on how to supply and resupply troops that would be isolated in a corner of the country that doesn't have a major troop presence today? And two, have you been briefed on any plans for the United States to glean oil revenues that would be produced alongside our protection?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Sure, and quickly on the surrender, the Kurds left with their uniforms, with their weapons, with honor and dignity and that was the decision of various of us including me to ensure that that happened, and it did happen. On your two questions, the first one is more question for DoD, but because it is a relatively easier question, I know they are working on it and we do contemplate I believe maintaining one of our two airfields that is there so that is the primary way we get things in or out.

But there are roads and other systems to and from Iraq. In terms of the other one, which is more of a Department of State thing, what are we going to do with these oil fields? That is a really good question and we are really working hard on it, but we do not have an answer at this time.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Moran.

KURDS AND CHRISTIANS

Senator MORAN. Chairman, thank you. Ambassador, thank you for being here and for your testimony. First of all, I would tell you that I have been in Kansas and I certainly pay attention to my phone calls and mail. Not every foreign issue generates the attention that this one has generated at home among Kansans and I think a couple of things perhaps are involved in that. There is concern and I would like to have you tell me how I answer the question of those who believe that the Kurds were our allies and that what has transpired has demonstrated the fecklessness of the United States in staying close to their allies, supportive of their allies?

And secondly, there has been an interest in not only the Kurds but Christians and perhaps you can tell me how what has transpired has consequences to Christians in the region? And then if we have more time, I have a couple other questions.

Ambassador JEFFREY. We recognize that this was a big blow to our Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) allies, some of whom are Kurds and some of whom are Arab but certainly the core leadership is the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which are again these Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) offshoots and it was a blow to them. If we are not careful it will be a blow to the Kurdish population regardless of who they support if they are not treated correctly.

In our agreement with Turkey that we signed—not signed, but we agreed to, on the 17th we ensured that there was good language in there on the protection of civilians and specifically ethnic minorities and religious minorities. There are some Christian groups in the Northeast. They have generally been relatively well taken care of by the SDF, YPG Kurds, and they are generally well taken care of.

There is one group of people that the Assad regime is fairly careful with is the Christian minority because by and large they tend to support him as an alternative to radical Sunni terrorists and Islamic extremists. But we are watching that very closely. The President just approved a \$50 million package for our ethnic and religious minorities in the Northeast of stabilization funding and we are looking for ways to ensure that that money is delivered.

Senator MORAN. So, the support for Kurds and others is demonstrated by the agreement with Turkey and then it relies upon Turkey abiding by that agreement.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Right. But as Ronald Reagan once said trust but verify. That is, our trust threatened, we are ready. The agreement with the Kurds that we would lift the sanctions we imposed under the executive order, 14 October, serious sanctions.

We lifted the specific sanctions on three ministers and two ministries, we did not pull back the executive order. It is still there. It is very broad. It is very powerful. And it is an incentive for people to adhere to their agreements.

U.S. GOAL IN SYRIA

Senator MORAN. I also think it is true that many of my Kansans, many of my constituents also are tired of wars in the Middle East, tired of the wars generally, and concerned when our involvement lasts a long period of time. I am still trying to determine what the goal is in Syria for this administration or the U.S. policy.

I think the original goal was the destruction of the Caliphate, but I think other things have now been said such as enduring defeat of ISIS, Al Qaeda, and their affiliates in Syria, the reduction and expulsion of Iranian malign influence, resolution of the Syrian Civil War on terms favorable to the United States. That is different than what I think our original goal of destroying the Caliphate was. What is our goal in Syria today?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Senator, that is a very important question and even after 50 years of dealing with the question of American military force around the world, I have had to learn new things

and rethink this in the past few days. As a Nation we have national security and other national interests supporting objectives around the world. We also have many different ways to pursue them. You can have goals and international relations that you are not willing to use military force for.

And you have goals, like protecting South Korea, you are willing to use military force for. You have goals that you use diplomatic pressure or diplomatic incentives for. That is how we were dealing with the Turks. You have goals that you use military force for. That is what we are doing with our troops in Northeast Syria against ISIS. The complication comes for this body of people who deal with this all of the time, for us who in my case have dealt with it my whole life, and for our soldiers when particularly in internal conflicts, not the 1991 Gulf War where you had a one-sentence order, clear Iraq out of Kuwait, but you are dealing with various groups, the rules of engagement an American soldier had to carry.

General Tony Thomas discussed this on Face the Nation just Sunday how many different forces were within modern range of him and while he didn't get into a lot of detail, I know you had a different set of rules of engagement for each one of them whether you could attack them only if they shot at you. That is the problem with this. Those are legitimate goals of national policy, all three of them. Only one of them was being pursued by military force in Syria, which was a defeat of ISIS, sir.

Senator MORAN. So, the three goals that I indicated to you that I believe, or I have heard are our goals, and your point is some of those goals, one of them involves potential military action?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Exactly, Senator.

Senator MORAN. Thank you.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. I have known you sometime and I have great respect for you and your service. I really do. You were not on the phone call between President Trump and President Erdoğan, right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I was not, Senator.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And until I see a transcript of that call, I have to judge what happened in the call by the results of that call. And what happened was after President Trump and President Erdoğan hung up the phone, Turkish troops attacked our Syrian Kurdish allies using incredibly brutal tactics with some proxies that include Al-Nusra and other Jihadi elements. And so, I agree with all those who say this was a shameful day for America and American leadership.

I agree with The Economist when it says who can trust Trump's America, the consequences of betraying the Kurds. You know that former military officials are very reticent to speak against a commander-in-chief and yet we have a whole series of highly respected, high-level military officials who serve in this part of the world who also say this was a betrayal and a surrender of U.S. leadership. That is what it is and there is no sugarcoating.

PURPOSE OF U.S. FORCES IN SYRIA

The question is where do we go from here questions? Now as I understand the President said that we are going to keep a small number of U.S. troops in Syria to protect the oil fields. My question, Mr. Ambassador is that our position is that we will protect the oil fields but that we will not protect the Syrian Kurds. That we will protect the oil but will allow Turkey or others to slaughter our Syrian Kurdish allies. Is that the position of the United States?

Ambassador JEFFREY. We are continuing to conduct the operations against ISIS. That is my understanding, and we are still working on it of that decision to keep—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Ambassador, I am asking you the President says he is going to keep some troops on the ground to protect the oil. My question is are we protecting the oil and are we also going to protect our Syrian Kurdish allies from slaughter by Turkey?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I know of no military order and I don't think we would see, I could be wrong here. I don't think we will see a military order to—again protect the Kurds against whom? Against ISIS, yes, that is an existing order that our troops have. Against Turkey or against Russia?

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, who are we protecting the oil fields against just ISIS or protecting them against Russia too? That is what the President says.

Ambassador JEFFREY. We are trying to keep them out of the hands of people who would steal them from the Syrians.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Does that include Russia?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It could well be on the list.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, so what are we going to do to protect the oil fields from Russia?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Right now, Russia is nowhere near the oil fields, Senator.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Yes, but that is not—I understand that but as you know Russia has got a lot of leverage in Syria right now, a lot more than we do.

Ambassador JEFFREY. We have got a lot of experience deconflicting on a daily basis.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, are we going to—so it is not our policy to protect the Syrian Kurds from ethnic cleansing by the Turks, is that right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It is our policy. But again, I have to come back to this issue. I will not let it go. It is our policy to do that by diplomatic and political and economic means not by military.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, are we willing to provide any air cover to prevent the slaughter of the Syrian Kurds, our allies?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is military force, sir.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, we are not willing to do that?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That is right. We are not going to not use ground troops but bomb from the air. Again, this could change tomorrow, but I am telling you what it has been since 2014 in Syria.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, it was also our policy to have some special forces on the ground which I do think deter Turkey but let me ask you this question because President Trump says he would

destroy the Turkish economy if they opposed the positions we are taking. And I appreciate the fact you mentioned that the bill that Senator Graham and I introduced had a sobering impact on Turkey because I have to say that the sanctions proposed by the administration in my view were little pinpricks.

SANCTIONS

But here is my question. The President says he will destroy the Turkish economy if Turkey undermines our position. If Turkey kills Syrian Kurds outside the so-called safe zone, which you all negotiated, would that trigger sanctions by the Trump administration on Turkey?

Ambassador JEFFREY. What the President said at one point in describing his sledgehammer against the Turkish economy was if they go outside the lines. From everything I have gotten from Vice President Pence and the guidance that he brought from the President, if there was any indiscriminate attack on anybody, Kurds—remember where the Turks came in were Arab areas largely not Kurdish. I think that we would move towards a repeat of what we saw our up until this ceasefire.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. So, let me just make sure I understand. You would recommend that if Turkey starts killing Syrian Kurds and other partners outside the so-called safe zone that the United States should apply economic sanctions on Turkey, right?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Specifically, we have language for this—

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right, so that would be a violation of the agreement we reached with Turkey.

Ambassador JEFFREY. If it is inside a violation, even if it is outside, my recommendation would be return to the sanctions. And that is where I strongly believe this administration is right now.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I hope there would be much tougher sanctions. And that let me ask you this, if Turkey tries to populate Northeastern Syria with Syrian refugees who do not come from that part of Northeastern Syria, in other words ethnic cleansing by another means, would that trigger American economic sanctions on Turkey? Should that be a condition?

Ambassador JEFFREY. That would trigger a very strong reaction. I cannot testify what that reaction would be because we have a specific agreement with the Turks back in August that they would return people from the region and conducted using the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) standards of voluntary, dignified, and safe.

TURKEY AND RUSSIA

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Okay. Last question. I am not asking you to read the President's mind. I am not asking you to interpret his words. I am asking you whether you think the Erdoğan and Putin agreement serves American national interests.

Ambassador JEFFREY. I am desperately trying to get to my Russian and Turkish contacts to try to find out more details about it. I am personally skeptical.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SUPPORT FOR THE KURDS

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you. One observation and then we will turn to Mr. Daines. I want it to be understood that the Congress would act decisively if Turkey tried to slaughter the Kurds. The Congress would act decisively if there was ethnic cleansing. I hope Turkey understands that we owe it to our Kurdish allies to not abandon them and lead them to be slaughtered.

So, I just want Ambassador, do you understand? But I think I speak for most of the people in this body that we would like to maintain a relationship with Turkey because it is important. But if they do the things that Senator Van Hollen described, that not only would be the end of the relationship, it would be the beginning of the end of their economy and nobody should want to go there.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Mr. Chairman, could I briefly just support—

Senator GRAHAM. Sure.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I would just, Mr. Ambassador, support that statement and the way to make that happen is not for Congress to wait till after that kind of slaughter begins, but to act the past them now so they would be triggered automatically if Turkey undertook that kind of activity.

Senator GRAHAM. Senator Daines. Sorry.

Senator DAINES. Mr. Chairman, thank you and thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Senator GRAHAM. All I can say is I have never seen the Congress respond so swiftly and united, and I think we owe it to the Kurds because they died in large numbers to keep our troops from having to die to fight a common enemy, and I do not want to make an enemy of Turkey, but at the end of the day we are going to judge them by their conduct. And thank you, Senator Daines.

Senator DAINES. Well, you have been an outspoken leader leading from the front, Mr. Chairman.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Senator DAINES. Ambassador, good to have you here as well. Over the course of the last several weeks chaos has reigned in Syria following the removal and reduction of U.S. forces in the region. We have seen reports of ISIS prisoners escaping detention facilities. We have seen coordinated campaigns against ISIS cells halted, and a pact between the Assad regime and the Kurds facilitated by the Russians, and President Erdoğan meeting directly with Vladimir Putin on Syria.

The reduction of American presence in Syria has resulted in increased influence of Russia and Iran and set the stage for a potential resurgence of ISIS. I think withdrawal would be detrimental to our national security. While there are reports that some residual forces may remain in Syria, I have concerns that many of the costs have already been borne and the negative impact of the withdrawal of U.S. interest will continue to only intensify.

Our presence in Syria, while minimal, had resulted in great progress in the fight against ISIS and support of our allies in the region who bore the brunt of the fight and specifically, of course, the Kurds. This withdrawal has placed those gains at substantial risk. I believe it is critical the U.S. hold Turkey and President

Erdoğan accountable for their actions against the Kurds and look forward to working with my colleagues if the Senate considers any related proposals, some already articulated by my colleague Senator Van Hollen as well as Chairman Graham.

ISIS RESURGENCE

My question for you, Mr. Ambassador, in your testimony you highlighted the work that was done with the Syrian democratic forces to defeat ISIS and help restore liberated areas. What risk is there in ISIS resurgence and what is being done to mitigate that risk?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Our biggest concern of an ISIS resurgence still remains is Iraq where they have perhaps deeper roots among the Sunni Arab communities going back to a decade and a half ago. And where in some respects Baghdad's policy decisions have not lent themselves to the best anti-ISIS strategy in the field. We are concerned, however, with the pressure on the SDF, both military pressure, although that is off at least for the moment but the SDF is going to be wary, and possible reduction.

Even if we leave some forces on—obviously there was a reason we had many hundreds of U.S. troops there. They were all doing important jobs related to defeating ISIS. Some of that stuff we can do from over the horizon, some of it we can have our coalition partners do. There were some of them on the ground.

But yes, we will be under pressure. We will be challenged more with a smaller force, and we would be definitely very much challenged if we didn't have any boots on the ground.

TURKEY

Senator DAINES. Question for you about, you have communicated with the Turks and specifically what communication if any did you have with the Turks related to what the U.S. response would be to any invasion of the area?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I had many, many conversations with them. These were on instructions from the White House and Secretary Pompeo.

Senator DAINES. And when did these communications occur?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Essentially every week if not more frequently since I took this job in September of 2018, but I was just picking up on what my predecessors had done because this has been a long-standing problem. We basically said that we think it is an extremely bad idea if you come in. We did not say we would use military force.

In fact while that came up really we made it clear that it was not something we would use military force against a NATO ally but that we would use all the other elements in our diplomatic quiver from mobilizing our coalition partners politically against Turkey to sanctions, to withholding things Turkey wanted from a visit to America, to trade deals, and various other things that any two important countries have in a diplomatic context.

Senator DAINES. Let me just go back to talk about the Turks. What about the communication you had with the SDF regarding the U.S. response to any invasion of the area?

Ambassador JEFFREY. Right, final thing with the Turks was we certainly told them often and directly from the President at the end that if they did come in they were not going to defeat the Kurds anyway because they would create a mess with us, with the Russians, the Syrians, and they would soon be brought to a halt which is just what happened.

With the Kurds it was similar. It was we told them that we were opposed to any Turkish intervention, but that we were trying to work one or another deal. One is called a Manbij Roadmap with the Turks and the People's Protection Units (YPG). Another one is called the safe zone mechanism we did in August with the Turks and the Kurds.

That is we had various ways to try to intercede politically between the two groups to meet Turkish security concerns, to meet the YPG or the SDF's security concerns and its ability to continue operating and that was all buttressed by a variety of political, economic, and diplomatic sticks and carrots. It did not involve either commitments to the Kurds for military action nor military threats to the Kurds, rather threats of other action.

That is the sum of it, everything I said, and I am essentially positive that every other U.S. official who is in a position to speak authoritatively on this going back to Ash Carter who as I said, said Sunday that he did tell the Kurds that they would not oppose Turkey militarily, that has been a long-standing policy.

Senator DAINES. Looking at these agreements that we have put in place between the Syrian regime, Russia, the Kurds in Northern Syria that allow Syrian troops to be deployed along portions of the border of Turkey. How does that impact U.S. interest in the region?

Ambassador JEFFREY. As I said, I still need to see the details but my initial first blush, I am skeptical it will be beneficial to us. On the other hand, we saw the picture of President Erdoğan and President Putin talking about Syria. That picture could have been taken about 15 times in the last 4 years because they have been coordinating closely on Syria while at the same time their interests in Syria are diametrically different.

Russia is supporting the Assad regime. Turkey is against the Assad regime. Russia is allowing Iran in. This is a national security threat to Turkey. So, the Turks are dealing with the Russians just like we do but they are not in an alliance with them.

Senator DAINES. Ambassador Jeffrey, the most recent incursion by Turkish forces into Syria is not unprecedented. It closely mirrors the methods and rationale used by Turkey to invade the area Afrin in 2018. Was the 2018 incursion by Turkish forces a net benefit for U.S. interests and values in Syria?

Ambassador JEFFREY. It had, to be honest with you, relatively little impact on either side. It had considerable human impact on people who had to flee because they felt endangered, particularly Kurds, but it had a little impact on the battle against ISIS. There was some delay of a few months but beyond that we continued on, and it had little impact on our relationship with Turkey.

CHRISTIAN AND MINORITY RIGHTS

Senator DAINES. As you know, there was deliberate destruction of Yazidi and other religious sites in Afrin after Turkish backed

forces took control of the area. And Christian and other minority populations fled for the incursion. Did you raise the treatment of minority populations or other related issues during your sessions with the Turks?

Ambassador JEFFREY. I did. Vice President Pence did repeatedly. And we have language in a paragraph for the two countries to reiterate their pledge to uphold human life, human rights, and the protection of religious and ethnic communities. Vice President Pence was particularly insistent on that with President Erdoğan.

ADDITIONAL COMMITTEE QUESTIONS

Senator DAINES [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I guess I am the last Senator sitting here so I am taking over the Chair here for the Chairman as he is voting. We will wrap up. Okay. I want to give thanks again to the witness for appearing today. Mr. Ambassador, appreciate it. I would ask that subcommittee Members submit any questions for the record no later than this Friday by 2:00 p.m.

[The following questions were not asked at the hearing, but were submitted to the Department for response subsequent to the hearing:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED TO JAMES F. JEFFREY

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR PATRICK J. LEAHY

As I noted in my opening statement, there are fundamental questions that have gone unanswered by this administration regarding Syria. You were asked what our strategy is there, and you responded by listing goals. Goals are not a strategy:

Question. How does the administration plan to achieve each of those goals?

Answer. With regard to the enduring defeat of ISIS, the U.S.-led Coalition to Defeat ISIS continues to coordinate with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and take actions that disrupt and target ISIS networks. We continue to closely monitor the security situation in northeast Syria and maintain de-confliction with relevant nations. We complement this military effort by coordinating closely with the SDF and Syrian Democratic Council to support stability in northeast Syria. The President has been clear that U.S. troops will remain in northeast Syria to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS.

With regard to facilitating a resolution of the Syrian civil war on terms favorable to the United States and our allies and in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, the United States continues to exert maximum political, diplomatic, financial and economic tools to pressure the regime and its allies make progress on a political resolution to the Syrian conflict based on UNSCR 2254. The key elements of the resolution are a lasting ceasefire and a political process that includes development of a new constitution leading to eventual free and fair elections. Central to this strategy is our efforts with international partners to ensure that the Assad regime remains diplomatically and economically isolated until it forgoes its goal of a military victory.

With regard to the reduction and expulsion of Iranian malign influence, we remain committed to pushing back on malign Iranian influence, seeking the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from Syria, and supporting Israel's right to self-defense against Iran. The United States is applying economic pressure to deny the Iranian regime funds that it would otherwise use for malign activities. This amounts to a loss of more than \$30 billion per year, with a total loss likely already exceeding \$50 billion since May 2018. We are collaborating with regional neighbors to put even more effective pressure on Iran for the first time in a long time. We have made it clear, including in our ongoing Syria exchanges with Moscow, that the withdrawal of these forces is a precondition to any lasting resolution of the Syrian conflict.

Question. How does this latest policy shift help to achieve those goals?

Answer. U.S. strategic objectives and national security interests in Syria remain the enduring defeat of ISIS, al-Qa'ida, and their affiliates in Syria; the reduction and expulsion of Iranian malign influence; and resolution of the Syrian civil war on

terms favorable to the United States and our allies and in line with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. The Turkish incursion into northeastern Syria and the resulting adjustments to the U.S. presence there do not significantly change our strategy.

Question. President Trump declared the 5 day ceasefire in Syria a great victory for the world. It is a “triumph for Turkey” that cemented Turkey’s control over territory previously held by the Kurds. Was it a triumph for Turkey?

Answer. Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring on October 9 despite our objections, undermining the D-ISIS campaign; endangering and displacing civilians; destroying critical infrastructure; and threatening the security of the area. However, under the Joint Turkey-U.S. Statement on Northeast Syria, the administration secured a permanent halt to the Turkish operation. We assess Turkey remains in adherence with the commitments made under this agreement and, as noted above, we have not significantly changed our strategy.

Question. Was it also a triumph for Russia? For Bashar al Assad? For Iran?

Answer. The conflict in Syria has raged for 9 years, fueled by Bashar al-Assad’s regime and his despotic and barbaric treatment of Syrian citizens, Russia’s continued enabling of Assad’s brutality, and Iran’s malign influence in the region. We have in no way ceded our influence in Syria or in the region. We remain committed to pushing back on malign Iranian influence. We have used and will continue to use our diplomatic and economic leverage to ensure that Russia cannot single-handedly dictate Syria’s future. We will apply careful diplomacy with the Russians-backed by economic tools and broadly supported international pressure on Assad to leverage Russian influence on the Assad regime to not only seek a lasting negotiated political solution to the conflict in Syria, but also to cease its indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in Idlib.

Question. Since the beginning of the Turkish military invasion of Syria two weeks ago, at least 160,000 people, including about 70,000 children, have been displaced, and reports of civilian casualties and allegations of war crimes have compounded the humanitarian crisis in northeastern Syria: What is the United States doing to help ensure the provision of humanitarian aid to those affected?

Answer. We have and will continue to work with humanitarian actors, Turkey, and local residents on the humanitarian and social commitments of the October 17 Joint Statement, including several high-level exchanges with Turkey on allegations of civilian casualties and war crimes; cooperate with our local partners against ISIS even as the U.S. military continues the repositioning of troops directed by the President; and press for full implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254, the only hope for a long-term resolution of the underlying Syrian conflict. Additionally, U.S. humanitarian partners are providing life-saving assistance to collective shelters currently hosting people displaced by the recent conflict, to include water, sanitization, and hygiene support.

Question. Did the Turkish operation and ongoing Turkish, Syrian, and Russian involvement in areas previously controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces have any impact on where we provide such assistance?

Answer. Before the Turkish incursion, about two dozen U.S.-funded humanitarian organizations, including U.N. agencies and NGOs, operated in northeast Syria. Most of these partners continue to provide essential life-saving assistance to people in need in northeast Syria and across the country.

Question. What is the administration doing to verify allegations of war crimes, and is the administration going to suspend or condition further arms sales to Turkey, as some of our European allies have done, until there is a thorough investigation of, and accountability for, any such crimes? If not, why not?

Answer. The Department of State continues to raise the issue of alleged human rights violations or abuses and violations of international humanitarian law with officials at high levels of the Government of Turkey and reiterated our expectation that Turkey investigate these alleged violations and abuses and promote accountability, including by holding those under its jurisdiction accountable.

The United States will closely monitor any reports on the possible use of U.S.-origin weapons in recent military actions. Turkey is aware that human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law are unacceptable and that any such abuses or violations could affect future arms transfers.

Question. Whether as a result of the alleged use of white phosphorous munitions or any other action, did the Government of Turkey violate any international law, U.S. law, or terms of any applicable end use agreements in its operation in northern Syria, and if so, what action does the administration intend to take in response?

Answer. The Department is aware of reporting alleging the unlawful use of white phosphorous by Turkish forces. The Department takes seriously all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law (IHL). At this time, we have no cred-

ible information related to Turkish forces using white phosphorous in a proscribed manner, to include intentional use against civilians. The Department has raised this allegation at high levels of the Government of Turkey and reiterated our expectation that Turkey fully investigate alleged violations and hold those responsible for human rights violations or abuses and violations of IHL to account. We continue to closely monitor reporting by international and non-governmental organizations related to alleged abuses or violations of human rights and violations of IHL during Turkey's invasion of Syria, and will continue to press Turkey to respond appropriately to any credible allegations.

Question. Is the administration willing to accept Russia and Iran determining Syria's future, and if not, how will this policy shift help prevent that outcome?

Answer. We have in no way ceded our influence in Syria or in the region to anyone, particularly Russia and Iran. We remain committed to pushing back on malign Iranian influence, seeing the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from Syria, supporting Israel's right to self-defense against Iran, ensuring the enduring defeat of ISIS, and supporting a solution in Syria consistent with U.N. Security Council Resolution 2254. The United States is applying economic pressure to deny the Iranian regime funds that it would otherwise use for malign activities. This amounts to a loss of more than \$30 billion per year, with a total loss likely already exceeding \$50 billion since May 2018. We are collaborating with regional neighbors to put even more effective pressure on Iran for the first time in a long time.

The United States continues to work with partners and allies in the region to counter Russian influence. We have used and will continue to use our diplomatic and economic leverage to ensure that Russia cannot single-handedly dictate Syria's future. We will apply careful diplomacy with the Russians-backed by economic tools and broadly supported international pressure on Assad to leverage Russian influence on the Assad regime to not only seek a lasting negotiated political solution to the conflict in Syria, but also to cease its indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in Idlib.

Question. How does the administration explain suspending hundreds of millions of dollars in U.S. aid for Syrian civilians since last March?

Answer. Through intensive efforts to encourage burden-sharing within the D-ISIS Coalition, the U.S. has secured pledges and commitments of over \$600 million since 2018 from Coalition partners for stabilization and early recovery efforts in NE Syria and expects additional commitments moving forward. The contributions of our coalition partners and the \$50 million recently announced by the White House for Syria—which will be coming online soon—will continue vital stabilization efforts and support the administration's priorities, including supporting members of religious and ethnic minority groups, in Syria. The administration, with Congress's support, has in addition provided \$10 billion in humanitarian assistance to Syrian civilians since the conflict began—the largest national contribution in this conflict.

Question. How does the administration intend to spend the \$40 million provided by Congress for stabilization programs in Syria in fiscal year 2019, and the \$50 million recently announced by the President for programs to “protect ethnic and religious minorities and advance human rights”?

Answer. In October, the White House announced \$50 million to protect persecuted members of ethnic and religious minority groups, advance human rights, and support accountability and stabilization. This funding will provide assistance to Syrian human rights defenders, civil society activists, and ethnic and religious minority victims of the conflict. It will also support efforts to hold the Assad regime and ISIS accountable, and support removal of explosive remnants of war, community security, reconciliation, and other stabilization programs in areas liberated from ISIS. As program planning solidifies, we plan to use fiscal year 2019 funding that is earmarked for Syria stabilization assistance, as possible, to support portions of the President's announcement.

Question. Given the extreme insecurity on the ground, who will implement these programs, where, and what impact did the recent policy shift have on your assessment of the likely effectiveness of these programs?

Answer. Given the dynamic security situation on the ground in northeast Syria, State Department and USAID implementers will continue to assess the security situation on a day-to-day basis and adjust or pause certain activities as the situation requires. Our staff will continue to manage and oversee stabilization and humanitarian programming from the United States and U.S. embassies in the region.

Regarding the \$50 million announced by the White House in October, the State Department and USAID are working through allocation of this funding. We will be in touch with Congress to work through details on specific projects and organizations that will be supported when we are prepared to notify the funds.

CONCLUSION OF HEARINGS

Senator DAINES. The subcommittee stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Ambassador JEFFREY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Whereupon, at 3:40 p.m., Wednesday, October 23, the hearings were concluded, and the subcommittee was recessed, to reconvene subject to the call of the Chair.]