

The President's News Conference With President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey
November 13, 2019

President Trump. Thank you very much, everybody. Please. I want to begin by welcoming the First Lady with us today, and the First Lady of Turkey. Thank you very much for being here. This is a great honor to have you.

And we had a wonderful and a very productive meeting. And before we start, I would like to thank President Erdogan for releasing detainee Serkan Golge, who was in detention—in different forms of detention. And I appreciate that very much. That was a very nice tribute. And he'll be coming back at some point in the not-too-distant future. So that's very good news for the United States and also very good news for Turkey.

Turkey, as everyone knows, is a great NATO ally and a strategic partner of the United States around the world. Our economic relationship has tremendous potential and continues to expand and to grow. Direct engagement and diplomacy between our nations are essential to ensuring a future of peace and prosperity and promise for our citizens.

Over the course of the day, President Erdogan and I had a frank and productive conversation on a range of very important topics. Among those topics we discussed was the situation in Syria.

Last month, I sent Vice President Pence; Secretary of State Pompeo is with us; National Security Adviser O'Brien—thank you—to meet with President Erdogan in the hopes of ending all of the hostilities. The negotiations were very successful, and the United States and Turkey achieved a tremendous amount on that day. And I think we're working toward getting it better and better. It's a complicated situation. It's been going on for hundreds of years.

Today, the cease-fire continues to hold. And I want to thank the President for his partnership and cooperation as we work to build a more stable and peaceful and prosperous Middle East. We've assured each other that Turkey will continue to uphold what it's supposed to uphold. I'm a big fan of the President, I have to tell you that. And I know that the cease-fire, while complicated, is moving forward and moving forward at a very rapid clip. There's a lot of people that want to see that work after so many decades and so many centuries, you might say.

The United States and Turkey are working extensively on many other security issues. Turkey has the second largest armed forces in NATO after the United States. And they're a very strong second, I might add. And I'm pleased that Turkey has been steadily increasing its defense spending and is very close to the 2-percent-of-GDP range, unlike many of the other countries. At this moment, they're 8 out of the 28 countries that are current, in terms of their obligation, financially.

Turkey has made a vital contribution to NATO's Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, and its partnership was important to our destruction of the ISIS caliphate. In fact, just recently, when we took out al-Baghdadi—and take him out, we did—Turkey knew that we were going over certain areas. They were very, very helpful, and we appreciate that very much. Good for both countries. We really appreciate it. We're grateful to President Erdogan and to the citizens of Turkey for their cooperation in the constant struggle against terrorism. He fights it like we do.

Key to our security collaboration is our trade—defense and military equipment program. American foreign military sales to Turkey total many billions of dollars, and Turkey supplies component parts to many American defense programs. They make parts of the frame, as an example, for the F-35.

Turkey's acquisition of sophisticated Russian military equipment, such as the S-400, creates some very serious challenges for us, and we are talking about it constantly. We talked about it today. We're talking about it in the future. Hopefully, we'll be able to resolve that situation. We've asked our Secretary of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs and our respective National Security Advisers to immediately work on resolving the S-400 issue.

We've also recently agreed to work toward a \$100 billion two-way trade agreement—Secretary Ross is here—and I think we've made tremendous progress on that. We have a lot of trade with Turkey, but it could be many times larger. And Turkey would like to see that, and it would also be good for the United States. So we intend to bring it up to about \$100 billion. That would be four times what it is right now. Our goal is to expand commerce between the United States and Turkey, reduce our trade deficit, and ensure a truly fair and reciprocal relationship.

We are, just for those of you that have any interest—we discussed it today also—our trade agreement with China is moving along very rapidly. We'll see what happens, but it's moving along rapidly. China wants to make a deal, that I can tell you.

One of my chief priorities as President has been removing the barriers to American trade and investment and ending the illicit practices that harm our workers. We encourage Turkey to further open its markets—and they are doing that; they're doing that very much—toward American goods and American services. Our markets are open. Turkey is opening up their markets, and they're opening up rapidly.

Mr. President, as we have seen in recent weeks, the U.S.-Turkish alliance can be a powerful force for security and stability not only in the Middle East, but beyond. I look forward to working with you. And to your representatives, I want to thank you very much all for being here. I've gotten to become very familiar with all of you, and I really appreciate it. You're doing a fantastic job for the people of Turkey.

And I look forward to continuing to find a common ground, harness common purpose, and to advance the vital interests of our people and the abiding friendship between our nations. We have a great relationship, both personally and with the great country of Turkey, and we look forward to moving that forward and making it an even bigger and better relationship. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[At this point, President Erdogan spoke briefly in English as follows.]

President Erdogan. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much. Thank you.

[President Erdogan spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

President Erdogan. Mr. President, my dear friend; distinguished Ministers; Secretaries; distinguished members of the press: I would like to, at the onset, salute you with my most heartfelt emotions on behalf of myself and my nation.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dear friend, President Trump, and the First Lady of the United States for being such gracious hosts today.

We've managed to comprehensively discuss all the issues in our agendas with Mr. President all throughout the day, and the discussions were very sincere. We all agree that we need to further profound our cooperation and that Turkish-American relations should be erected upon a strong and a very healthy foundation. I think we should remain resolved in order to open a new chapter in our relations, which are in full compliance with our deeply rooted alliance.

We have reciprocally stated our will to fight terrorist organizations imposing a clear and a present danger upon our national security. We have especially underlined the significance of fighting against Daesh in a sustained fashion, especially in the aftermath of the demise of Baghdadi—the death of Baghdadi. We have detained several prisoners trying to flee the prisons in Syria and come to Turkey, and we currently have more than 200 Daesh terrorists who have been incarcerated.

And with the Operation Peace Spring initiated on October the 9th, Turkey took another step forward in fighting terrorism in a very resolute fashion. Our country, with this operation, blew a very significant impact upon the separatist agenda of terrorist organizations, such as PKK and YPG in Syria.

In order to further strengthen our cooperation in Syria, we believe we have gained a significant momentum with our October 17 agreement or memorandum. But in order to harm this memorandum, PKK and YPG are attacking our soldiers and the civilians in a very provocative fashion. And, in the last 24 hours, more than 19 attacks and harassing shots took place. And, at the beginning of this month, in Tal Abyad, a bomb was placed—an explosive device was placed in an outdoor market, and as a result of the explosion, 13 civilian lives were lost.

Despite all of these developments, in order to settle the conflict in Syria in a sustained fashion, we are reiterating our commitment to our memorandum—our agreement with the United States. But some circles who are empathetic towards these terrorist organizations are feeling deeply upset. They are deeply disturbed, and they are using this information in order to cloud the understanding of the public opinion and that perception with the eventual gain or goal of harming our relations.

And some historical developments and allegations are being used in order to dynamite our reciprocal and bilateral relations. Especially in the House of Representatives, some of the resolutions that were passed on October 29 served this very purpose and hurt deeply the Turkish nation, and they have a potential of casting a deep shadow over our bilateral relations. And I shared this information with Mr. President.

The decision makers in an incident that took place about 104 years ago should not be politicians, but historians. We have nothing to hide, and we have a full self-esteem in that regard. But I need to state very clearly that we are, as Turkey, on the side of dialogue and open discussion and debate. And we have voiced our proposals to the Armenian party to open the archives reciprocally and establish a history commission.

I believe the Senate will take this—take the United States out of this vicious cycle, which happened as a result of the resolution of the House of Representatives. Turkey and the United States stand side by side in order to fully eradicate Daesh and in order to bring peace and stability Syria once and for all. And for this purpose, we should keep on working together.

Turkey remains, or it should be, the most reliable partner of the United States in this region to achieve these targets. We are the only NATO ally, as Turkey, who has fought Daesh in a very resolved fashion. And until so far, we have detained 7,680 foreign fighters, and we have sent them back to their countries of origin. And we have been entry to 77,000 individuals who are considered to be affiliated with Daesh terrorist organization. And right now, in our prisons, a total of 1,216 Daesh members are incarcerated, coming from 40 different countries. We have quite recently detained 287 individuals, including women and children who have fled the prisons that PKK and YPG used to control.

Our country is being showcased as a target, and this terrorist organization caused 304 Turkish citizens to die—and against which we are going to keep on fighting. And it's very important to understand that the foreign fighters should be accepted by the countries of origin.

And we have the same understanding with President Trump in order to convince the countries of origin to do this.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we have a border line of 911 kilometers with Syria. And when the war broke out 9 years ago, we were the ones at the forefront impacted heavily and maybe the most. Currently, we have 3,650,000 Syrian refugees and a total of more than 4 million refugees. And we have spent about \$40 billion, even beyond that, for these refugees in our country. And until so far, Europe only sent €3 billion, despite a higher pledge. Through our NGOs and, similarly, we are providing sustained humanitarian aid to more than 3 million people living on the Syrian territory.

Back in the year 2015, at the G-20 Antalya summit, I launched an appeal in order to establish a safe zone in Syria. But because of the delay, hundreds of—tens of thousands of civilian lives were lost. This problem cannot continue forever and ever.

Previously, with our Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, we have managed to clear an area of 4,000 square kilometers of terrorist presence. And I agree with the proposals of the President. It's very important to realize our goals.

I said Operation Euphrates Shield and Operation Olive Branch, and through these operations, we've managed to repatriate 365,000 Syrians back to their motherlands, especially in Jarabulus. And thanks to the Operation Peace Spring, we have secured many towns and many villages, and the rightful settlers are going back.

We have shared our projects with President Trump and our several plans for the safe zone. And with the support of the United Nations and international community, we can repatriate many more Syrian refugees in the northern part of Syria. We're talking about an area of 444 kilometers in length and 32 kilometers in depth. One million people can be repatriated. And in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, 1 million more individuals can be repatriated. So a total of 2 million refugees can be repatriated.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, the Fethullahist terrorist organization, known as FETÖ, attempted to destroy the constitutional order of Turkey with a failed coup attempt, and it is a terrorist organization behind this failed coup. They have killed 251 individuals, harming 2,193 citizens. And they have even dared to bomb our Parliament—airborne. We have once again accentuated our expectations vis-a-vis our friends at the U.S. administration to once and for all eradicate FETÖ presence here.

And we have also discussed with President Trump how to achieve the \$100 billion trade volume threshold as soon as possible. We believe that we should not confuse political incidents with commerce-related aspirations. And our Secretaries of Commerce are currently heavily invested in achieving the \$100 billion threshold. We hope and pray that we will shy away from certain measures which will make it much more challenging for us to reach these targets.

And we have also quite naturally discussed our deeply rooted relations in the field of defense industry, primarily the S-400 system and the F-35 program. We can only surmount the hurdles that we experience through dialogue.

My dear friend previously stated, back in Osaka at the G-20 summit, the injustice orchestrated against Turkey, in terms of the acquisition of Patriot missiles. And we have clearly stated to President Trump that, under suitable circumstances, we could acquire Patriot missiles as well. As Turkey, we are ready and committed to sustain a very constructive dialogue with the United States Congress, and this is an idea that I've shared with President Trump as well.

So with these thoughts in mind, I hope and pray that our discussions and deliberations all throughout the day with President Trump will yield the most auspicious results.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank President Trump for their kind invitation and for being such gracious hosts all throughout the day. On behalf of my personal self, on behalf of my delegation, I would like to thank you.

President Trump. Well, thank you very much, Mr. President. And I called up the Senate; I asked a couple of our Senators. And we really ended up with five, and others wanting to come, and we'll keep them apprised. But some of them joined us. They happen to be here. Senator Jim Risch. Thank you, Jim, very much. Ted Cruz, thank you very much. Lindsey Graham. Lindsey, thank you. And Rick Scott. Thank you, Rick, very much. Joni is here—Joni Ernst—someplace.

These are people that want to see peace in the Middle East, and I thought it would be appropriate to have them come over. And they met with the President, and we had a lot of very frank discussion. And we're dealing with a very big subject, a complex subject. It's been going on for centuries, in many cases. But we're making a lot of progress—tremendous progress—in the Middle East.

Okay, a couple of questions. Go ahead, OAN. Go ahead.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Trump. Thank you.

Impeachment Hearings/Intelligence Community Whistleblower/The President's Telephone Conversations With President Volodymyr Zelenskiy of Ukraine

Q. First, I would like to just start out getting your general reaction today to the impeachment hearings on the Hill. Do you feel that Democrats made their case? And how did you feel about the Republican performance?

President Trump. Are you talking about the witch hunt? Is that what you mean? *[Laughter]* Is that what you're talking about? I hear it's a joke. I haven't watched. I haven't watched for 1 minute because I've been with the President, which is much more important, as far as I'm concerned. This is a sham and shouldn't be allowed. It was a situation that was caused by people that shouldn't have allowed it to happen.

I want to find out who is the whistleblower, because the whistleblower gave a lot of very incorrect information, including my call with the President of Ukraine, which was a perfect call and highly appropriate. And he wrote something that was much different than the fact. I want to find out why the IG—why would he have presented that, when, in fact, all he had to do was check the call itself and he would have seen it.

I'm going to be releasing—I think, on Thursday—a second call, which actually was the first of the two. And you'll make a determination as to what you think there. But I've heard—just a report—they said it's all thirdhand information. Nothing direct at all. It can't be direct because I never said it.

And all they have to do is look very, very simply at the transcript. If you read the transcript—this was analyzed by great lawyers. This was analyzed by Gregg Jarrett. It was analyzed by Mark Levin. It was analyzed by everybody. They said this statement that I made—the whole call that I made with the President of Ukraine was a perfect one.

So that this country gets put through that, that we have to waste this gentleman's time by even thinking about it, talking about it—I'd much rather focus on peace in the Middle East. And I hear that it's a hoax, and it's being played as a hoax. That's what I hear, but you'll have to tell me.

Go ahead.

Syrian Refugees in Turkey/Repatriation of Captured Terrorist Suspects/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Terrorist Organization/Turkey's Incursion Into Northern Syria

Q. Then, if I may, on Syria and peace in the Middle East: President Erdogan talked about repatriating Syrian refugees back to their homeland.

President Trump. Yes.

Q. Have you had those discussions with European leaders, since there are so many Syrian—

—
President Trump. Well, no. I think that, frankly, Europe should be paying for this, to a large extent. As of this moment, Turkey has been paying for most of it. I think the President was saying today, they've spent over \$40 billion on the cost of that—40 billion.

[*President Erdogan spoke in English as follows.*]

President Erdogan. Thirty.

President Trump. How much?

President Erdogan. Thirty billion.

Participant. Forty.

President Trump. Forty. That's what I said. [*Laughter*] Whatever. He spent a lot, okay? [*Laughter*] They're giving—they're throwing out all these different numbers. I heard it was \$40 billion. How was that—40 billion? Correct? So \$40 billion. And I've heard that number from others. And that's a lot. Europe has contributed about 3 [billion].* And a lot of these people would go all throughout Europe. I mean, it would be a devastating situation for Europe, because he's got 4 million people. He has a lot of Kurds, too, that they're helping and taking care of.

So I have spoken to Europe about it. I think they should help us with ISIS, because many of them left France, and they left Germany, and they left U.K., they left different countries. And these countries should help us, because if they ever did get released, which we won't be doing—but if they ever did get released, that's where they want to go. They want to go back to France and Germany and U.K. and all of those other countries that are not helping us. I gave them the option, "Would you like to have them back?" And intelligently, they said, "No, thank you." But that's not right, and it's not fair.

I can tell you also that Turkey captured—when they—some escaped during the conflict, when they had the heavy shooting. And I mean, I think I know how they happened to escape, but it's one of those things. Doesn't matter, because Turkey captured everybody that escaped, plus an additional group.

When we took over, when I became President, ISIS was rampant all over the Middle East. And, as of about a month ago, I think, Lindsey, we can say that we have now 100 percent of the caliphate. And they'll always try and grow, but they haven't been able to do that. And what we did last week with al-Baghdadi—who is the absolute founder, leader—set them back. We also got his number two, and we have our sights on his number three.

So they're not going to be growing too fast. But I will say, Turkey has been helping us a lot.

Q. So, with that, I have—I also have a question for President Erdogan. With the—what you're calling a realignment along the northern Syria border, a lot of Christians in that region are feeling very vulnerable. Groups on the ground are saying that attacks on Christians have

* White House correction.

increased under this new policy. And that they're not feeling safe any longer. Can you guarantee that the Turkish Government will also protect Christians in that region? In fact, there was an attack on an Armenian priest—he died, he and his father—this week. ISIS is claiming responsibility.

[President Erdogan spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

President Erdogan. Thank you. Thank you. On the contrary, Keldani, Yazidi, and Christian minorities is an area where we're especially sensitive about. And we have certain, different plans—whether it be the ones remaining on the side of Syria, whose sanctuaries have been destroyed, whose churches had been destroyed—will see their sanctuaries getting revived and their churches will be reconstructed so that they can go back and start praying there again. And these are the plans that we're making for them.

As I said before, the Christian minorities—Aramaic Christians—Catholics, Keldani, and Yazidi—the ones who are living on our side of the border have no problems whatsoever, but the ones remaining on the side of the Syrian territory will see their worshiping practices restored and revived in a special manner.

They are receiving health care, they're receiving humanitarian aid in every aspect possible. Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much. Would you like to pick somebody?

President Erdogan. *[Inaudible]*

President Trump. A friendly person from Turkey, please. Friendly. Only friendly reporters we like to see. There aren't—

Q. I'll try.

President Trump. —too many of them around.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Trump. Thank you.

Kurds/Turkey-U.S. Relations/Turkey-U.S. Trade

Q. You have had the burden of Obama's flawed foreign policy. And one of those flaws was allying the U.S. with the U.S.-designated terrorist organization, the PKK, and its Syrian offshoot, YPG. You're trying to mend the damage that it did to U.S.-Turkey relations.

However, you also invited the ringleader of YPG to the White House, his code name Mazloum Kobani. And he is responsible for at least 18 terrorist attacks in Turkey, which caused the death of 164 soldiers and 48 civilians. So, after today's meeting, do you still think of inviting him to the White House, which will be very offensive and hurtful for the Turkish public? Thank you.

President Trump. Well, I had a very good talk with him. We had a very good—recently. And we're working very closely together, and we're also working very closely together with your great President. And a lot of things are happening. A lot of very positive developments are happening.

A lot of that is definition: what's your definition of the various groups within the Kurds—you call the "Kurds"—and then you have various groups. And some like them, and some don't. But I think we've made a tremendous amount of—we've gained a tremendous amount of momentum and strength and knowledge over the last short period of time. So we'll see what happens.

But I will say that the relationship with President Erdogan and Turkey has been outstanding. And you know, it's a major country with a tremendous military. They're one of our very big purchasers of military equipment. They have the finest equipment in the world, which the United States makes. We make, by far, the best equipment in the world. Turkey understood that a long time ago.

So I think a tremendous amount of progress is being made. Okay? Thank you very much.

You could ask the President a question, now. Same reporter. You're sure you're a reporter? You don't work for Turkey with that question? *[Laughter]*

Q. Me? Okay. I'd be glad to.

[The reporter continued in Turkish, and her question was translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Mr. President, about FETÖ, we are not getting the best of news out of the United States. And the FETÖ office targeting Turkey is extensively invested in their daily works, but I can see certain traces that the U.S. Government is ready to understand more about FETÖ.

So my question is: How do you perceive the situation developing vis-a-vis the Fethullahist terrorist organization and the American approach to FETÖ in that regard? Can we expect anything further?

President Erdogan. Yes. Thank you. During this current visit, we are going to submit—as we already have, actually—a great deal of documents and evidence. And FETÖ is a terrorist organization, and he is the leader, the ringleader of this terrorist organization. They have killed 251 people in Turkey. They tried to undertake a coup against the Government, the state. And more than 1,000—more than 2,000 people have been injured. And the ringleader is living on an area of 400 acres in the United States, running his network all around the globe, and this is something unacceptable.

And during this visit, as I've said before, we have introduced an additional array of documents. We will submit them to the relevant authorities, including Mr. President. And in the light of these documents, I think they will appreciate the situation. We send the terrorists back, if they ask for them, and I'm sure they will do the same for us.

President Trump. John of Fox [John Roberts, Fox News], please.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Trump. Thank you.

Impeachment Testimony/U.S. Ambassador to the European Union Gordon D. Sondland

Q. I know that you didn't spend a lot of time glued to the TV today, but there was one moment where Ambassador Bill Taylor recounted a conversation that an aide of his overheard. It was the day after the phone call with Zelenskiy, on July the 26th, in which the aide says that he overheard you say to Sondland, "How are things going with the—proceeding with investigations?" Sondland repeated back to you, according to this aide, that "Ukraine was prepared to do everything that you wanted it to do." Can you—was that—is that correct? And can you fill in some more of—

President Trump. I know nothing about that. First time I've heard it. The one thing I've seen that Sondland said was that he did speak to me for a brief moment, and I said, "No quid pro quo under any circumstances." And that's true. The other, I'd never heard this.

In any event, it's more secondhand information, but I've never heard it.

Q. Do you recall having a conversation with Sondland on July 26?

President Trump. I don't recall. No, not at all. Not even a little bit. The only thing—and I guess Sondland has stayed with testimony that there was no quid pro quo. Pure and simple.

Yes, please.

Q. And President Erdogan: President Trump sent you a letter on October the 9th, urging you not to launch a military action into northern Syria. He said, quote: "Don't be a tough guy. Don't be a fool." You ignored that letter, and you went ahead, and you launched a military action into northern Syria. Can you explain why you ignored the President's warning?

President Erdogan. Well, this letter was re-presented to Mr. President this afternoon. And I've also underlined the fact that a terrorist such as Ferhat Abdi Sahin should not be considered as an interlocutor by a country such as the United States. And this individual, Ferhat Abdi Sahin, has been instrumental in the killings of hundreds of Turkish civilians, and he is a person labeled as "like a son" for the terrorist leader who is currently incarcerated in Turkey, Abdullah Öcalan.

So a person like this should not be welcomed by a country such as the United States. And similarly, this person was welcomed by a country such as Russia. So it's very difficult for me to understand these when we're trying to fight terrorism on a global scale. If we're going to sustain our fight against terrorism in a healthy fashion, we need to be much more sensitive than we currently are. "It happens to us today, and it will happen to somebody else tomorrow" is a saying that goes in our language.

We have also provided information and the document thereof to our interlocutors in the White House, including Mr. President. And I have also submitted a document produced by CIA, pointing out to the fact that this individual is a terrorist, to Mr. President.

And, as I've said before, I have shared them with His Excellency, Mr. President. And we gave back the letter that we have received.

President Trump. President, please.

[*President Erdogan spoke in English as follows.*]

President Erdogan. For me?

Kurds/Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) Terrorist Organization/Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Q. Thank you very much. Mr. Kurd, from Kurdistan. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for all you have done for Kurdistan and for Peshmerga in fight against ISIS.

President Trump. Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Q. My question is: All Senators I meet—all of them I interviewed them—they believe Kurdistan is very unique in the Middle East and protects all minorities.

President Trump. Right.

Q. What is your clear policy on the Kurds right now?

And another question for President Erdogan: Why you are not able to form negotiation with the Kurds in Syria, as Iraqi Kurdistan? Do you think they will be your friends in future? Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Trump. Well, thank you very much. And I will say that we've had a great relationship with the Kurds. And we fought with them very successfully against ISIS. We fought

together. We had—we have great generals, and we have great equipment, and it's certainly helped a lot. But we were very, very successful.

And we captured, as I said before, 100 percent. I was going to—when we were at 97 percent, I was going to say, "Well, that sounds pretty high to me." And I was thinking about stopping it then. And a lot of people said, "Please, go to a hundred." And very quickly, very rapidly, the military got the hundred. I wanted to have that. But we have a great relationship with the Kurds—we have had. We're with them now; we get along with them.

And by the way, I think the President, he may have some factions within the Kurds, but I think the President has a great relationship with the Kurds. Many Kurds live currently in Turkey. And they're happy, and they're taken care of, including health care—we were talking about it before—including health care and education and other things. So that's really a misnomer. But our relationship with the Kurds has been a very good one. Okay? Thank you.

[President Erdogan spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

President Erdogan. First, we have to make a distinction between two things. We have no problems with the Kurds; we have problems with terrorist organizations. Some terrorists coming out of the Kurds—which are they? What are they? PYD and YPG, which are offshoots of the terrorist organization, PKK.

Just as we have no problems with our brothers and sisters in the northern part of Iraq, where we enjoy great relations, and we have no problems with, similarly, our brothers and sisters in the northern part of Syria, during the times when Asad was not recognizing the Kurdish presence in the northern part, I told him that he needs to give these individuals passports and that he was making a mistake.

And secondly, there is something really important. I want you to know this: My political party has more than 50 MPs of Kurdish ethnicity in the Turkish Parliament. We don't have problems with the Kurds, but we have problems with the terrorists. And of course, you're not going to own up to the terrorists, are you—whoever they are, whoever they might be? But we have to make a distinction here. We're just fighting terrorists, period. Because the terrorists don't have an ethnicity, they don't have a nationality, they don't have a flag. If they are terrorists, that is a terrorist. If you don't fight back, then tomorrow you will have to pay a very hefty price.

Thank you.

President Trump. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:06 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Emine Erdogan, wife of President Erdogan; Serkan Golge, a U.S. citizen who was arrested by Turkish authorities in July 2016 and released on May 29; Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu and Secretary General of the National Security Council Seyfullah Hacımuftuoglu of Turkey; Fox News commentator Gregory W. Jarrett; radio show host Mark R. Levin; Intelligence Community Inspector General Michael K. Atkinson; and Mazloum Kobani Abdi, commander of the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces, who is known in Turkey as Ferhat Abdi Sahin. President Erdogan referred to Minister of Trade Ruhsar Pekcan of Turkey; Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish citizen living in exile in Saylorsburg, PA, whose followers were blamed by President Erdogan for the July 15, 2016, coup attempt; Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgent group; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria. He also referred to Daesh, an alternative designation for the ISIS terrorist organization; the People's Protection Units (YPG) Kurdish militia in northern Syria; and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Kurdish political party in northern Syria. Reporters referred to Hovsep Bedoyan, a

parish priest for the Armenian Catholic community in Qamishli, Syria, on the Turkish border, and his father Abraham Bedoyan, who were killed in an ambush attack on November 11; Acting U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine William B. Taylor, Jr.; and David Holmes, Counselor for Political Affairs, U.S. Embassy in Kiev, Ukraine.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Turkey, President Erdogan.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Abdi, Mazloum Kobani; Atkinson, Michael K.; Cavusoglu, Mevlut; Cruz, R. Edward "Ted"; Erdogan, Emine; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Ernst, Joni K.; Golge, Serkan; Graham, Lindsey O.; Hacımüftüoğlu, Seyfullah; Levin, Mark R.; O'Brien, Robert C.; Pence, Michael R.; Pompeo, Michael R.; Risch, James E.; Ross, Wilbur L., Jr.; Scott, Richard L.; Sondland, Gordon D.; Trump, Melania; Zelenskiy, Volodymyr.

Subjects: Afghanistan : NATO, role; China : Trade with U.S.; Commerce, Department of : Secretary; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Communications : News media :: Presidential interviews; Congress : House of Representatives :: Impeachment inquiry; Europe : European Union :: U.S. Ambassador; Intelligence, Office of the Director of National; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; State, Department of : Secretary; Syria : International diplomatic efforts; Syria : Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF); Terrorism : Counterterrorism efforts; Terrorism : Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist organization; Terrorism : Terrorists :: Repatriation of captured terrorist suspects; Turkey : Minister of Foreign Affairs; Turkey : National Security Council Secretary General; Turkey : President; Turkey : Relations with U.S.; Turkey : Security cooperation with U.S.; Turkey : Syria, role; Turkey : Syrian refugees, humanitarian situation; Turkey : Trade with U.S.; Ukraine : President; Ukraine : Relations with U.S.; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser; White House Office : Vice President.

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