

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 21, 2018

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St NW  
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable James Mattis  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Mattis:

We were alarmed by the sudden announcement of American troop withdrawal and the evacuation of American diplomatic personnel from Syria. As members of the committees that oversee your departments, we require further information about these decisions.

We support the notion of bringing our military personnel home at the close of the fight against ISIS. However, it is unclear whether ISIS has been defeated and whether security conditions are sufficient to maintain regional stability. In fact, in the last month, the United States conducted more than 250 air strikes in Syria against ISIS targets, including 50 just last weekend, suggesting that, in fact, the fight against ISIS is not yet over.

In Congressional testimony less than one month ago, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, the Special Representative on Syrian Engagement relayed three U.S. goals in Syria: 1) the enduring defeat of ISIS; 2) the advancement of a political resolution to the underlying causes of the Syrian tragedy in line with UNSC resolution 2254; and 3) the withdrawal of all Iranian-commanded forces from the entirety of Syria. He also offered an assessment particularly unsettling given this week's developments:

“An untimely U.S. military departure from Syria would enable ISIS to return, allow Iran to fill the vacuum, place Iraq's stability at risk, and increase the threats to Syria's neighbors such as our key allies Israel, Jordan, and Turkey. Our presence enables us to prevent ISIS's resurgence, consolidate gains, stabilize liberated areas, and alleviate human suffering. It also indirectly helps galvanize diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. Our presence also has the ancillary effect of blocking further Iranian expansion. By virtue of our presence, we are making progress toward these goals, foremost among them the enduring defeat of ISIS.”

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We share concerns that a hasty, poorly planned withdrawal from Syria, uncoordinated with our partners in the region, undermines any chance of achieving these objectives. So, we are baffled by this White House's decision so brazenly at odds with the Administration's putative expert.

We are also concerned that this decision has put our diplomatic personnel in harm's way. Because of an apparent utter lack of adequate planning, members of the START Forward team, diplomats and aid professionals who have been working in Northeast Syria since 2015, remain in Raqqa even after their ordered departure. These are frontline civilians who have worked to provide humanitarian relief and to enable Syrians to return to territory controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—work that is critical to a lasting defeat of ISIS. The Administration had already undermined State Department personnel in Syria in recent months when it cut funding for their stabilization efforts in Northeast Syria. Now, with the withdrawal of American troops and the evacuation of American diplomats, there will be no one left to promote our country's interests. Further, we will leave our SDF partners to deal with the risk of a resurgent ISIS. It will also leave the SDF and its vast territory and key terrain vulnerable to the Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian backers.

Going forward, it will be critical that the Administration provide advance notification to and consultation with the committees of jurisdiction on consequential changes of this nature. Learning about such sweeping policy and strategy changes and their implications in the newspaper—or on Twitter—has shattered any confidence that the Administration undertook the necessary planning to account for the implications of American actions, the security needs of our troops and personnel, or long-term interests of the United States and the region.

With this in mind, we ask you to provide detailed written responses, in classified form if necessary, to the following questions:

- Please detail timelines for the withdrawal from Syria and explain when and how U.S. armed forces and diplomatic personnel will depart.
- When did you receive guidance to plan for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria? When did you receive guidance to execute the withdrawal? Please provide specific dates.
- Please describe the steps taken in advance of the announcement on 19 December to prepare for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria, including one week prior, one month prior and six months prior. Please detail the interagency process by which this decision was made.

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- Please describe how partner stakeholders were informed about the intent to withdraw, including our Counter-ISIS Coalition partners. What were their responses? Will coalition partners continue to operate inside Syria without us? In what ways? Please describe contingency planning for additional security needs, especially in Jordan and Israel, once U.S. troops withdraw. With the withdrawal of troops on the ground, what planning has occurred to address a potentially resurgent ISIS?
- Did you inform Kurdish and other partner forces in Syria and Iraq of the withdrawal? What were their responses?
- The Pentagon recently estimated that between 35,000 and 40,000 local forces would have to be trained and equipped in order to maintain security; however, it also estimated that, to date, only about 20% of that goal had been met. Has this estimate changed in recent days? Do you anticipate that the SDF can hold existing territory without U.S. support? Do you anticipate that the SDF can provide adequate security to support the re-establishment of civil governance without continued U.S. support?
- In 2017, Turkish media reported that the United States had promised that after the defeat of ISIS, it would retrieve weapons provided to the SDF. Has this occurred? Was this commitment made to Turkey by anyone in the U.S. government?
- Just two weeks ago, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joe Dunford acknowledged that the fight against ISIS was not over and avoided giving a “fixed time” for withdrawal. What has changed since he gave this interview on 6 December?
- On 11 December, Ambassador Brett McGurk told members of the Anti-ISIS Coalition, “I think it’s fair to say Americans will remain on the ground after the physical defeat of the caliphate, until we have the pieces in place to ensure that that defeat is enduring...Nobody is declaring a mission accomplished. Defeating a physical caliphate is one phase of a much longer-term campaign.” What has changed since Ambassador McGurk’s statement?
- Without a U.S. presence in Syria, how will ISIS be constrained there?
- What precautions did you take to ensure the safe withdrawal of U.S. diplomatic personnel and assistance personnel from Syria? Did diplomatic and assistance personnel, along with associated contractors, have the necessary paperwork on December 19 -- including visas for any onward location -- to evacuate? Did the SDF guarantee their safety until their evacuation?

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- When the United States suspended funding for stabilization programs throughout Syria, Congress was assured that these programs would continue through commitments made by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Will these programs continue, absent the U.S. personnel needed to implement them? Will the State Department dissolve the START Forward program? Where will members of the START Forward team be placed?
- Some considered the presence of US personnel in Syria to be a point of leverage in the regional alignment of forces and political process. What are the points of leverage now for negotiations with the Assad regime to adhere to the Geneva principles? What measures are in place to prevent Syria, Russia, Iran and Turkey from taking further control of territory or further exerting their influence over groups operating in Syria?
- How will you ensure the safety and well-being of the 50,000 Syrian civilian refugees who are currently living under the direct protection of the U.S. military in the Rukban refugee camp?
- What specific commitments has President Trump made to President Erdogan with respect to Syria?
- During President Trump's 16 July meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, did President Trump discuss or agree to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria?
- Do you support Turkish forces' moving further into Syria and Turkish operations against US-aligned Kurdish forces in Syria? Have you discussed such matters with the Turkish government? Will you continue to provide support to Kurdish militia if they are attacked by Turkish forces - including air cover, arms, and training?
- What commitments has the SDF made with respect to the continued detention of ISIS foreign fighters? How will these detainees be secured? Will U.S. intelligence personnel have access after our troops withdraw?
- What commitments, if any, has the United States given to the Syrian Democratic Forces that future U.S. military support will be provided? Please describe any terms or conditions that would apply to any such commitment.
- Do you agree with the Russian Foreign Ministry's assessment that U.S. withdrawal would pave the way for a real prospect for a political solution in Syria?

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Please furnish responses before the start of the next Congress, at which time our committees will open new lines of inquiry and oversight to shed further light on these matters. Just as the decision to send troops into harm's way is a solemn one, so too is the decision to bring them home with a well-considered plan.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



ADAM SMITH  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee



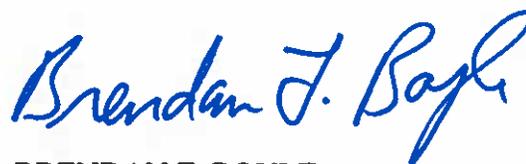
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