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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

October 16, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20520

Secretary Pompeo:

I write to seek details about President Trump's recent call with Turkish President Erdoğan, during which President Trump agreed to move U.S. troops out of northeastern Syria to allow for a Turkish military operation in the area. President Trump's October 6, 2019 phone call has set off a cascade of destabilizing events with great significance for the region and U.S. foreign policy. Just over a week later, Kurdish forces, long allied with and protected by U.S. troops, have joined with President Bashar al-Assad out of desperation, Turkey is engaged in troubling military operations, and as a result the U.S. has sanctioned Turkey, a NATO ally. To make matters worse, it now appears Russian troops are filling the void left by President Trump's decision to remove American troops.¹

President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops reportedly came as a surprise to senior administration officials and was apparently made without the knowledge of senior defense officials.²

You and other administration officials have contended that the President did not give Turkey a "green light" to move into Syria.³ Yet, following President Trump's October 6 call with President Erdoğan, the White House's own statement said, "Turkey will soon be moving forward with its long-planned operation into Northern Syria. The United States Armed Forces will not support or be involved in the operation, and United States forces, having defeated the ISIS territorial 'Caliphate,' will no longer be in the immediate area."⁴ It is hard to see what other conclusions could be drawn from this statement.

In the midst of these destabilizing events, President Trump invited President Erdoğan to the White House.⁵

¹ Ben Hubbard et al., "In Syria, Russia Is Pleased to Fill an American Void: As the United States withdraws from Syria, Russia is stepping in, running patrols to separate warring factions, striking deals and helping President Bashar al-Assad advance," *The New York Times*, Oct. 15, 2019.

² See, e.g., Carol Lee & Courtney Kube, "Chaos in Syria, Washington after Trump call with Erdogan unleashed Turkish military: U.S. forces in Syria got an urgent alert Monday morning to pull back," *NBC News*, Oct. 7, 2019 ("At 3 a.m. local time, the commander of the Syrian Democratic Forces, Gen. Mazloum Kobani, also received a phone call from a senior U.S. official telling him to get on a video teleconference with an American military commander who informed him President Donald Trump had ordered U.S. troops to withdraw"); Lara Seligman, "Defying Pentagon, Trump Endorses Turkish Operation in Syria: The move caught senior defense officials by surprise," *Foreign Policy*, Oct. 7, 2019.

³ Secretary Michael R. Pompeo, Interview with Judy Woodruff, *PBS NewsHour*, Oct. 10, 2019.

⁴ Statement from the Press Secretary, Stephanie Grisham, The White House, Oct. 6, 2019.

⁵ President Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, "He is coming to the U.S. as my guest on November 13th," Oct. 8, 2019.

This is not the first time the President has heaped praise on President Erdoğan.⁶ Nor is it the only source of President Trump's relationship with Turkey, which is home to a Trump Organization property that has earned the President between \$1 million and \$7 million over the last three years.⁷ President Erdoğan attended the opening of Trump Towers Istanbul in 2012,⁸ and even President Trump acknowledged in the past that he had "a little conflict of interest" when it comes to Turkey.⁹

It is imperative that Congress and the American people understand what President Trump said on his call with President Erdoğan. As we have now seen from President Trump's July 25, 2019 call with Ukrainian President Zelensky, President Trump is not above putting his own personal interests before U.S. national security interests and you are willing to play along with his betrayal of office and country. We need to understand if another betrayal took place on October 6, and how Turkey came to possess the belief that it now has free rein in the region. To that end, I request that you help secure the public release of President Trump's October 6 call with President Erdoğan and answer the following questions by October 17, 2019:

1. Did the State Department concur with President Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from northeastern Syria? Who in the Department participated in the decision-making process?
2. Did you have advance knowledge of President Trump's decision?
3. Was there any interagency discussion prior to Trump's announcement on Syria? What was the outcome of those discussions?
4. Did you listen in on, participate in, or receive a readout from the October 6 call? If not, did anyone from the State Department?
5. What records do the State Department and the White House have related to the October 6 call between President Trump and President Erdoğan? Is there a verbatim transcript? Please provide a log of all such records and produce them to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee no later than October 30, 2019.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical national security matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member

⁶ See, e.g., Josh Delk, "Trump praises Erdogan: 'We have a great friendship,'" *The Hill*, Sept. 21, 2017.

⁷ Financial Disclosures of Donald J. Trump, 2017-2019, filed with the U.S. Office of Government Ethics; Heidi Przybyla & Anna Schecter, "Donald Trump's longtime business connections in Turkey back in the spotlight: The president's decision to remove troops from Northern Syria has put renewed focus on his relationship with Turkish President Erdogan," *NBC News*, Oct. 9, 2019.

⁸ Ivanka Trump, @IvankaTrump, "Thank you Prime Minister Erdogan for joining us yesterday to celebrate the launch of #TrumpTowers Istanbul!" April 20, 2012.

⁹ Donald J. Trump, Interview with Steve Bannon, *Breitbart News*, Dec. 12, 2015.