

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 6, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write regarding reports that Turkey and Turkish-backed forces are operating outside the agreed-upon “safe zone” in northeast Syria. We ask that the Administration take immediate action against Turkey if these reports are true.

There have been numerous accounts that Turkish and/or Turkish-backed forces are attacking Syrian Kurds near Tal Tamr.¹ If true, these attacks would violate the separate ceasefire agreements Ankara forged with both Washington and Moscow.

As you underscored with Turkish Foreign Minister Cavusoglu on October 31, the United States expects Turkey and Turkish-supported forces to adhere to the agreement reached on October 17.² Ambassador James Jeffrey recently testified that this agreement required the Syrian Kurdish People’s Protection Units and the Syrian Democratic Forces to withdraw “roughly 120 kilometers wide and 30 kilometers deep” in northeast Syria.³ He stated that the safe zone established between the United States and Turkey extends south to the M4-M10 road.⁴ According to the agreement announced by Russia, this safe zone would exist between the towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain.⁵ President Trump subsequently also cited these safe zone parameters and the town of Tal Tamr, the site of reported recent attacks, is outside of the designated safe zone.

¹ “Fierce clashes erupt between Syrian army, Turkish-led forces.” Al Jazeera. 10/31/2019.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/fierce-clashes-erupt-syrian-army-turkish-forces-191031054612060.html>

² <https://twitter.com/SecPompeo/status/1190242318030458881>

³ Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations Holds Hearing on US Policy and Assistance in Syria. October 23, 2019.

⁴ Special Representative for Syria Engagement James F. Jeffrey Remarks to the Traveling Press. October 17, 2019

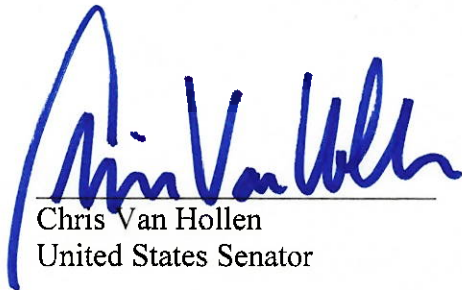
⁵ “Turkey, Russia reach deal for YPG move out of Syria border area.” Al Jazeera. October 23, 2019.
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/turkey-russia-agree-set-syria-safe-zone-joint-patrols-191022171933484.html>

In response to a question from Senator Van Hollen at a recent hearing, Ambassador Jeffrey asserted that if Turkey violated the terms of the safe zone agreement his recommendation “would be to return to the sanctions, and that’s where I strongly believe the administration is right now.”⁶

Given the stakes, time is of the essence. We ask that you immediately let us know if Turkey and/or its proxy forces are operating outside of the area that runs east-west between the towns of Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain and south about 30 kilometers to the M4-M10 road. If so, does the Administration plan to impose sanctions on Turkey for violating the October 17 agreement?

On several occasions, President Trump has threatened to “destroy Turkey’s economy” should Turkey violate its obligations.⁷ In keeping with this position, we ask that the Administration take swift measures to enforce the October 17 agreement with tough economic sanctions. In the meantime, we will continue to work in Congress on the passage of a bipartisan sanctions bill to protect our allies and uphold the credibility of the United States.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



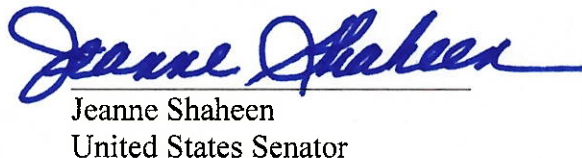
Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

⁶ Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State and Foreign Operations Holds Hearing on US Policy and Assistance in Syria. October 23, 2019.

⁷ “Trump threatens to ‘destroy’ Turkey’s economy with sanction.” Associated Press. October 15, 2019. <https://apnews.com/767054f1f99f40199a80bfea8e16ccdf>