

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S SYRIA POLICY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

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OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND REFORM

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- * “Why is Turkey Fighting the Kurds in Syria?”, *New York Times*, October 9, 2019; submitted by Rep. Hice.
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THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S SYRIA POLICY: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

Wednesday, October 23, 2019

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:37 p.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Stephen F. Lynch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Cooper, Welch, Rouda, Wasserman Schultz, DeSaulnier, Hice, Gosar, Foxx, Cloud, Green, and Higgins.

Also present: Representatives Pressley and Massie.

Mr. LYNCH. The hearing will come to order.

Without objection, the chair is authorized to declare a recess at any time.

Today's hearing is entitled "The Trump Administration's Syria Policy: Perspectives From the Field." I'll now recognize myself for five minutes for an opening statement.

Before I begin, I'd like to take a moment to remember my friend and our chairman, Elijah Cummings, who we lost almost one week ago.

Like others on this committee, I had the pleasure and privilege to call Elijah my friend for almost 20 years as we worked on the many issues that have confronted Congress and our country. Mr. Cummings has bequeathed a legacy of compassionate service to those families in our society who still struggle to receive the full promise of the American Dream.

While he had an abiding faith in the goodness and kindness of humankind, he was firm in his commitment to use his many talents and the power of his position to weigh in on behalf of the disenfranchised and to reduce the suffering that he saw in this world.

Elijah lived his life in a meaningful cause: the cause of justice, the cause of liberty, and the cause of equality for all. We and our Nation would be well-served to follow his example. His spirit and his presence here on this committee will be sorely missed.

Today, we will examine the Trump administration's sudden decision to withdraw U.S. forces from northern Syria and abandon our Kurdish allies.

As everyone knows, a little more than two weeks ago, President Trump had a phone call with Turkish President Erdogan. We don't know exactly what the transcript of that conversation reveals, but

we do know that the White House released the following statement about the call, and I quote it here.

Quote, “Turkey will soon be moving forward with its long-planned operations 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,” close quote.

Nowhere in that statement is any indication that President Trump tried to delay President Erdogan’s planned operation. Indeed, I think it could be interpreted that his statement facilitated that incursion.

Nowhere in the statement did the White House condemn Turkey’s invasion and the destabilizing effects it would have across the region. Nowhere did the statement warn about the hundreds of thousands of civilians who would be displaced; only that the United States military would no longer be in the immediate vicinity.

With that, President Trump ceded virtually all of America’s ability to influence events on the ground in northern Syria.

He abandoned our allies, the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, who for years were our partner force and the most effective fighters against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. As a result, the SDF will no longer be able to apply continued counter-terrorism pressure against ISIS, which will almost inevitably allow them to reemerge.

Equally concerning is that the power vacuum left by the United States is already being filled by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, Russia, and Iranian militias. President Trump’s uninformed, whimsical, and indifference-to-loyalty-and-life decisions on the phone with President Erdogan will result in disastrous consequences for U.S. national security and has undermined U.S. credibility on the world stage.

According to one Kurdish fighter—and this is a quote—“America will never again be able to count on the Kurds to fight ISIS. We don’t trust America anymore,” close quote. This is very important, so let me read the Kurdish view again. Quote, “We don’t trust America anymore,” close quote.

Trump’s betrayal of an ally and what it says about America will inflict severe damage to American diplomacy, military strategy, and foreign policy for many years to come. But don’t take my word for it. Even President Trump’s most ardent supporters and former administration officials have criticized his decision. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has described the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria as, quote, “a grave mistake,” close quote. Senator Lindsey Graham has called the decision “shortsighted and irresponsible.” Former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said, quote, “If we don’t keep the pressure on them, ISIS will reemerge. It’s absolutely a given that they will come back.” And, last week, 129 of my Republican colleagues voted alongside 225 Democrats to oppose President Trump’s decision to withdraw U.S. forces from northern Syria.

Today, we have the great privilege of welcoming Ilham Ahmed, Executive President of Syrian Democratic Council; and Marty Palmer, a formal Special Forces officer who fought alongside our Kurdish SDF allies in northern Syria.

We're also joined by Bernice Romero from Save the Children to provide an update on the humanitarian situation in Syria, as well as Emerita Torres, director of policy and research at The Soufan Group and a former U.S. diplomat.

We're also pleased to welcome John Glazer, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.

A quick logistics note for our members. As you have noticed, Ms. Ahmed is accompanied today by a translator, Mr. Civiroglu, which will require additional time to interpret questions and answers between members and the witnesses. While I intend to hold members to the usual five-minute time limit for questions, I will allow extra time, at my discretion, if I determine that fairness requires granting a member additional time, whether that member is a Democrat or Republican, to question Ms. Ahmed.

I would like to again thank all of our witnesses for your willingness to help this committee with this work.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member, Mr. Hice of Georgia, for five minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. HICE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I likewise appreciate your comments about Chairman Cummings. Obviously, he and I and many on this side disagreed on many issues, but I will say he was always very respectful. I had many conversations with him outside of this room, and he was always respectful and will be greatly missed. I appreciate your comments.

And I appreciate having this hearing today. Likewise, I want to thank all our witnesses for being here. I especially want to thank Mr. Palmer for your service to our country.

But, regretfully, many members today cannot be here because of the House majority having created a scheduling conflict. And, Mr. Chairman, as you know, the House majority has scheduled a deposition today as part of the illegitimate impeachment inquiry. As a result, the House majority has forced members to choose between this hearing and the deposition, and, despite the importance of this topic, I believe the choice was, unfortunately, very easy for other members to make.

Arbitrary rules imposed by Chairman Schiff have created an unprecedented secrecy around the inquiry. Next week, members will be able to review the transcript of this hearing and followup with additional questions at our leisure, but the deposition in this partisan impeachment inquiry is not so cut-and-dry.

The rules on who can access and how to access deposition transcripts are unclear and constantly changing. Members of this committee who have sought to review transcripts have been turned away. For those few lucky members the Democrats will let peek at the transcript, Chairman Schiff is now insisting that Republican members have Democrat staff babysitters.

Who knows what other rules are coming? With changing rules, shifting targets, and unprecedented lack of transparency, the Democrats' impeachment obstacle course unfortunately demands Republican members' whole attention.

So, back to the topic that we're here to discuss today, first, I'd like to say that the videos emerging of individuals throwing rotten food at U.S. soldiers is abhorrent. Those men and women have put

everything on the line to further the goal of a safe and secure Syria and should not be treated that way.

Beginning in 2011, Syria has been in a state of unrest. It began with the Arab Spring, which led to a civil war, all while the previous administration stood on the sideline.

Then, President Obama drew his now-infamous red line. President Obama said that if Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad were to use chemical warfare, it would warrant United States military intervention. About a year later, when Assad did use chemical weapons on his own civilians, the Obama Administration gave the keys to Russia in negotiating with Syria. While there are now fewer chemical weapons in Syria, Russia has gained significant influence.

When Assad used chemical weapons again in 2018, President Trump did not balk. Instead, he launched a military strike on significant Syrian assets, sending a clear message to the Assad regime that the use of chemical weapons will not be tolerated. The continued efforts by the Trump administration have led to the defeat of the ISIS caliphate and a significant weakening of Islamic extremism in the region.

Just a few weeks ago, President Trump announced the decision to withdraw troops from the border between Syria and Turkey. The role of the U.S. military is to protect vital U.S. interests, not to be a unilateral nation-builder or arm insurgencies against a NATO ally.

Previous administrations' actions, from arming insurgents in Latin America to intervening in Iraq and Libya, have proven that unilateral U.S. military action can indeed be problematic, and this situation is no different.

The Syrian Democratic Forces, a U.S.-backed insurgency, is comprised of members of the YPG. The YPG is a splinter group of the PKK, a U.S. and Turkey registered foreign terrorist organization. It's no wonder why Turkey is uncomfortable with this alliance.

An article titled, "Why is Turkey Fighting the Kurds in Syria?" in *The New York Times* further explains the connection. Mr. Chairman, I would ask unanimous consent to submit this for the record.

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection.

Mr. HICE. Thank you.

I'm sure that everyone in this room, as well as the Trump administration as a whole, are devoted to the safety and security in Syria and the surrounding region.

Moreover, since we are spending today discussing borders, I think it's an appropriate time that we recognize that the Turkish-Syrian border is almost 6,000 miles away. And while, no question, this issue does merit review, it's concerning to me that Democrats are more focused on a border crisis 6,000 miles away than the crisis at our own southern border.

During Fiscal Year 2019 alone, Customs and Border Patrol apprehended almost 1 million migrants at the southern border—this is an 88-percent increase over the previous year—many of them having criminal records. So I continue to call on my Democratic colleagues to provide our law enforcement men and women the resources they need to solve this crisis.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for this hearing, and each of our witnesses, and I look forward to hearing the testimonies and the questions ahead. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman.

Just as a matter of clarification, the rules for access to hearings and depositions have not changed, at least in the past 10 years. So they continue as they were under the Republican-led House, and those rules are still in place today. Hopefully—

Mr. HICE. Mr. Chairman, I would beg to differ, but I realize this is not the time.

Mr. LYNCH. Right.

Mr. HICE. We have members not allowed to see those transcripts.

Mr. LYNCH. Well—thank you, Mr. Hice.

As mentioned, we are honored to be joined today by Ilham Ahmed, Executive President of the Syrian Democratic Council. Ms. Ahmed has been part of the Kurdish struggle for freedom and democracy since the 1990's, with a particular focus on women's rights. She is joined today by a translator, Mutlu Civiroglu.

Ms. Ahmed, I'd just like to thank you for being here and for your sacrifice on behalf of the international community in the fight against ISIS.

We are also very pleased to welcome Mr. Marty Palmer, who graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point and has served combat tours of duty in both Iraq and Syria and was awarded the U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award for outstanding junior officer leadership. He's now pursuing his MBA at Columbia Business School.

Mr. Palmer, thank you for your service and for helping this committee with its work.

We're also joined by Ms. Emerita Torres, director of programs and research at The Soufan Center. In her 10-year career as a U.S. Foreign Service officer, Ms. Torres served diplomatic tours in Brazil; Pakistan; Colombia; Washington, DC.; and the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. Ms. Torres is also a graduate of New York University and the Harvard Kennedy School.

We're also fortunate to welcome Ms. Bernice Romero, who is currently the senior director of international humanitarian public policy and advocacy at Save the Children. Ms. Romero also worked for several years as the advocacy and campaign director for Oxfam International, where she oversaw Oxfam's international campaigns of humanitarian crises, trade, aid, climate change, food security, health, and education.

Our Nation's diplomats and humanitarians oftentimes are not recognized for their work and sacrifice in the way that they should. So I thank you all for being here and for your service.

And, last but not least, we'd like to welcome Mr. John Glaser, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. His research interests include grant strategy, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, the rise of China, and the role of status and prestige motivations in international politics. Mr. Glaser has been a guest on a variety of televisions and radio programs and is the co-author with Christopher A. Preble and Trevor Thrall of "Fuel to the Fire: How Trump Made America's Broken Foreign Policy Even Worse (and How We Can Recover)."

Mr. Glaser, thank you for being here today as well, and we look forward to learning from your policy expertise.

I'd now like to ask the witnesses to please rise to be sworn in, and that would include the interpreter, Mr. Civiroglu. Please rise and raise your right hand.

Do you swear or affirm that the testimony you're about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Thank you very much.

Let the record reflect that the witnesses have all answered in the affirmative.

The microphones are sensitive, so make sure you please pull them up so that you can be heard.

Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record.

With that, Ms. Ahmed, you are now recognized to give an oral presentation of your testimony.

STATEMENT OF ILHAN AHMED, CO-PRESIDENT, SYRIAN DEMOCRATIC COUNCIL, ACCOMPANIED BY INTERPRETER MUTLU CIVIROGLU

[The following statement and answers were delivered through an interpreter.]

Ms. AHMED. I would like to thank you, Member of the Congress, for this support, and I would like to thank for this committee for this opportunity. My condolences for loss of your colleague.

I came from Syria among the fight—heavy fight that has been ongoing for years. We have lived in that world moment by moment, at the same time by growing our hopes for a brighter future.

Our peoples—Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens, Christians, Yazidis—we built a society together, and we liberated 30 percent of the Syrian land. Under our self-rule, all faith, all religion were free to express themselves, live freely—Yazidis, Syriacs, Christians, and Muslims. Our hope was to continue living in harmony, peace after ISIS as well, and build a democratic Syria.

In the fight against ISIS, we lost 11 fighters and 25 people who sacrificed their body who were disabled in the fight. We appreciate American forces for their fight with us and the achievement we scored together.

Unfortunately, after we liberated all these areas, the Turkish State has not given us opportunity to buildup the life that we were hoping for. Always continued to get threats over us—increased those threats.

We had a very good relation with U.S. Government and the U.S. forces in terms of fighting against ISIS, but also realizing our hopes to build a democratic future, to build stability in the region, we received promises from America. They told us, we will continue fighting with you as long as Daesh is there, we will work together to make sure stability is there, and we're going to be in Syria until the political solution is achieved on the ground. These are the promises were given to us.

When our free region came under attack, we asked the help. They told us, we have no power over there so we cannot help you.

We were told, wherever our forces exist, we won't allow any attacks to those regions.

For those reasons, we trusted the U.S., we trusted American forces. We thought, when there was an attack to this region, the U.S. will not allow that. We didn't expect them to fight on our behalf, but we were assured that they would not allow that. We put our hope to coexistence, to live together as of now with the people of the region.

Even one day before the attack, we were under assumption that the airspace is going to be closed by the U.S. The safe zone mechanism that established with the U.S., we accepted, we agreed upon with that to prevent attack of Turkish State. We withdrew our forces. We destroyed the trenches on the border. We pulled out our heavy weapons. Our joint patrol on the border with U.S. and Turkish forces have already started.

Unfortunately, after the phone call of Mr. Trump with Mr. Erdogan, we were told that the airspace is going to be open and our forces are going to be withdrawn from the border area. We were shocked, we were puzzled. We didn't hope that this would happen.

As a result of this, we found ourselves in a fight with Turkish State. We defended ourselves. Turkish Government came to our homes, our lands, fought against us. Our forces were still fighting against ISIS and they were still chasing the sleeper cells of ISIS when the Turkish Government attacked us without any reason. We never had any threat against Turkish Government.

As a result of this war, around 300,000 people were displaced, 250 people were killed, and a majority of them were—large number of these were kids, children. And 300 people are so far disappeared, unaccounted for.

Moreover, the city of Sari Kani Ras al-Ain was devastated. It's razed as a result of air strikes, artillery attacks, and mortars. Our politicians were killed, heads [have] been cutoff. Open executions took place.

The Turkish Government has been using—carried out crime against humanity. Chemical gas, phosphorus, has been used. Until now, we are not able to do inspections because we don't have means to get it inspected. What kind of weapon is that?

We very much wanted to stop this war. We were always told that we cannot stop it.

As of now, 100 kilometer in length and 32 kilometers in depth, our land, the Syria land, is occupied by the Turkish State. There are many ISIS presences under the name of—ISIS presence. These attacks [are] under the name of Syrian Army, Syrian National Army. They are now put into the region. They brought by Turkey. They swear at us that they're going to behead you. They chant the same slogans of ISIS. They are called opposition. Turkish Government called them opposition, but they are a different form of ISIS, which are put forward by Turkey.

There were some attacks against the camps. Some ISIS members managed to escape. From the ISIS families, around 600 people escaped—six French ISIS wives, two Belgian. And 10 more managed to escape. We don't know what nationality they are from. There's a big risk that, once more, the safety of the international commu-

nity and the U.S. can be under threat again because of this situation. The guy who carried out the New York attack, he is captured—he is under our—he's kept by us now. He's detained by us now.

The civilian use station, now there are some hopes that Turkish Government is going to stay there, is going to take care of the station. This is very wrong. But there is a reality that our geography is now divided. The groups that are controlled by Turkish Government continue their attacks against us.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Civiroglu, you have to instruct the witness that we are over time.

Mr. CIVIROGLU. Sure.

Ms. AHMED. The attack were continuing. Even yesterday, there was some attack. One of our friends, a female fighter, her body was mutilated, and these people were stepping on her body.

Mr. LYNCH. I understand.

I understand you also have some photographs. So I'd like to make a motion that Ms. Ahmed's photographs are entered into the record. I understand that members have been provided copies of those, but if you're willing to submit the originals, we'll put those into the record.

Thank you.

Ms. AHMED. This is a burned kid I mentioned earlier. We suspect there was a chemical gas used. This kid.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay.

Ms. AHMED. A Christian kid has been murdered.

The displacement of civilians.

A kid whose leg was cutoff.

Massacres Turkish Government carried out.

This is a body of a female fighter. Her body is mutilated in this photo.

These are the soldiers, these are the fighters the Turkish Government is claiming to be opposition.

Mr. LYNCH. Okay. Those photographs have been entered into the record.

Mr. LYNCH. I want to thank you for your testimony.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Palmer, you're now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF CAPTAIN MARTIN PALMER (RET.), FORMER
SPECIAL FORCES OFFICER, FIFTH SPECIAL FORCES GROUP**

Captain PALMER. Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Martin Palmer. I'm here to testify to my personal experience working alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF, during my time in Active Duty, not to comment on U.S. policy or military strategy in Syria.

By way of background, after graduating from West Point in 2009, I spent nine years in the Army, first as an infantry officer with the 82d Airborne Division and later as a Special Forces officer with Fifth Special Forces Group.

During my military service, I was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, two Bronze Star medals for meritorious service, and was the 2018 recipient of the U.S. Army General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award. I served three combat deployments: to Afghani-

stan in 2011 and 2012, Iraq in 2016, and Syria in 2017. I left Active Duty in July of last year.

In 2017, I spent seven months in Syria serving as the commander of a Special Forces detachment. During this deployment, my team of Green Berets partnered with the SDF, of which the Kurds comprised a large portion. Through numerous combat operations, I saw firsthand the commitment, dedication, and resiliency of the SDF. Their efforts proved critical to our ability to combat the Islamic State.

During a combat patrol one night on the front lines, my team and I received effective machine gunfire from multiple ISIS positions. Upon receiving contact, the SDF soldiers at our position fought alongside us as we attempted to locate and destroy the enemy positions. Within minutes, the SDF area commander arrived at my position with additional soldiers and was by my side during the fight, even as bullets peppered our position, and we were able to eliminate the threat.

This type of stand-and-fight mentality is not one I often witnessed in other partner forces during my previous deployments to the Middle East. This was the first of many experiences during my time in Syria when I observed firsthand the commitment, bravery, and dedication of the SDF as they partnered with my detachment in the fight against the Islamic State.

Beyond their admirable qualities, the Kurds were an effective partner force. They made remarkable progress in turning back the Islamic State and liberating several key Islamic State-held towns, including its self-proclaimed caliphate of Raqqa. The Kurds raised their hand to fight the Islamic State at a time when few else did. I witnessed these tactical successes regularly on the battlefield as the SDF fought with discipline and resolve.

On numerous occasions when the SDF and my team would drive through areas recently liberated from Islamic State control, the Syrian villagers would cheer and even cry—a moving testament to the immense contribution the SDF has made in liberating people from the horrors of life under the Islamic State.

But this success came at a cost. SDF casualties were a regular and tragic occurrence during my time in Syria, and thousands of Kurdish soldiers gave their lives for this mission.

During one operation, an Islamic State fighter detonated a car bomb at one of the positions of the SDF unit with whom I was partnered. The car bomb instantly killed eight SDF soldiers and wounded close to a dozen more. My team worked to provide first aid for the wounded, many of whom had gruesome injuries. I saw firsthand, in a very real and powerful way, the magnitude of the sacrifice the Kurds were making in the fight against the Islamic State.

Moreover, the SDF continued their offensive the next day, demonstrating a resiliency and commitment that was prevalent throughout my deployment.

Our relationship with the SDF was a true and critical partnership. Just as my team benefited from their commitment and tactical abilities, the SDF could also not have been as successful against the Islamic State without our support.

During one operation, SDF fighters were within a few hundred yards of a strategic Islamic State objective when they started receiving sustained effective fires and suffered several casualties. The SDF did not have the capability to unilaterally suppress the threat and were prepared to withdraw to a safer position to prevent further casualties, negating days of hard-fought gains. However, my team was able to provide the necessary combat power to ensure the safety of the SDF, enabling them to successfully press forward with their mission: seizing the Islamic State position. This was emblematic of our relationship with the SDF—a partnership built on mutual trust, support, and necessity.

These examples are but of a few of the many instances that illustrate how valuable the SDF were as a partner force for my detachment. The SDF stood shoulder-to-shoulder with us and fought courageously and effectively time and time again. Their loyalty and dedication to the cause was pervasive in every operation.

I will always value the relationship my team had with the SDF and will never forget the sacrifice they made for the cause of defeating the Islamic State.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee. I hope my testimony will help shine a light on what it was like to work shoulder-to-shoulder with Kurdish soldiers through the seven months of my deployment to Syria.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Palmer. Thank you for your service and your willingness to testify before this committee.

Ms. Torres, you're now recognized for five minutes for a presentation of your oral testimony.

STATEMENT OF EMERITA TORRES, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH, THE SOUFAN CENTER, DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Ms. TORRES. Thank you, Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Hice, distinguished members. Thank you for hearing my testimony today. Today, I will emphasize how The Soufan Center perceives the consequences of our policy reversal in Syria on our ability to defeat ISIS.

The President's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from northern Syria, which allowed for a Turkish military invasion, is a foreign policy disaster that has plunged Syria further into chaos. Beyond lives lost, geopolitical consequences, and a scar on U.S. credibility, this decision is a gift to ISIS.

Within hours of the President's announcement, two ISIS suicide bombers attacked the base of the Syrian Democratic Forces in Raqqa. ISIS social media has repeatedly mocked the SDF over the last week, calling it an abandoned American ally.

ISIS websites reported 27 attempted attacks against the SDF in the week following the invasion, compared with an average of 10 attacks over each of the previous three weeks. The leader of ISIS, al-Baghdadi, urged ISIS followers to free jihadists and their families from detention camps in an attempt to replay its infamous "Breaking the Walls" campaign.

In August 2019, the inspector general report concluded that ISIS was resurging in Syria and solidifying its capabilities needed to

lead an insurgency in Iraq. While the fall of Baghouz in March 2019 was considered the end of the physical caliphate, remnants of ISIS still exist throughout Iraq and Syria, including sleeper cells. The group also maintains a global footprint through a bevy of affiliate groups.

We should be gravely concerned about the conditions of the ISIS prisons where 12,000 ISIS fighters are being held and secured by the Syrian Democratic Forces. The SDF made clear long before the troop withdrawal that they lacked the capacity to detain these fighters.

Following the Turkish invasion, the SDF has been departing these positions, leaving the prisons vulnerable. There have been no concrete plans about how these prisons will be secured. And now that the United States has abandoned the Kurds, why would we expect them to do us any more favors?

ISIS militants and affiliates are escaping prisons and camps. Last week, Iraq's Defense Minister acknowledged that several ISIS militants have crossed into Iraq. According to Belgian authorities, five of their citizens are no longer present in SDF-controlled locations.

Over 800 people affiliated with ISIS, largely women and children, have escaped the Ayn Issa camp in northern Syria. Al Hol camp, where close to 70,000 people reside, is proving to be a breeding ground for ISIS, as pro-ISIS sympathizers are radicalizing others and organizing in the camp.

Taken together, the overcrowding, lack of security, and squalid conditions of these camps are a recipe for disaster.

We've seen this movie before. We already know how it ends. During the surge in Iraq, tens of thousands of Iraqis were held in U.S. detention centers, including in Camp Bucca. In these overcrowded camps, the next iteration of terror emerged. Led by Baghdadi, these prisoners became the future foot soldiers of ISIS. The group's nascent leadership engineered the "Breaking the Walls" campaign that freed thousands of fighters.

The issue of overcrowded detention centers spawning another wave of terror is relevant once again in Syria. ISIS maintains provinces from Nigeria to Afghanistan, to Indonesia, and across the Middle East. The group has planned or inspired heinous terrorist attacks globally, including in the United States. ISIS's ability to organize should not be underestimated, and the risk of prison and camp escapes must be taken seriously.

The U.S. policy change in Syria has empowered our adversaries and betrayed our allies. The Kurdish forces have been the U.S.'s most trusted partner in fighting ISIS over the last five years. The Kurds lost 11,000 fighters in the battle and have taken up the immense responsibility of guarding nearly 120,000 people in camps and prisons across Syria. The presence of U.S. troops on the border, even if small in number, was intended to both support the Kurds as they engage in fighting ISIS for us and to serve as a tripwire to deter Turkish attacks on the SDF.

I conclude by highlighting three recommendations.

First, military options should never be the only solution to conflict. We need diplomacy. The United States should encourage Turkey to pursue dialog with the Kurds.

Second, ISIS is resurging, and we need a plan. We must mitigate the risk of escaping ISIS fighters to ensure that they cannot cross borders into neighboring countries. To do this, we need to open lines of communication with the power brokers in the country and the region.

Third, Western governments must take responsibility for their citizens in ISIS prisons and camps. They should take their citizens back home, where they can undergo risk assessments, face prosecution, and engage in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Ignoring this problem will only fuel the cycle of marginalization and grievances that attract individuals to join terrorist groups in the first place.

In closing, the U.S. troop withdrawal from Syria is self-defeating, damages American credibility, and walks back much of the hard-earned gains made by the SDF and the global coalition to defeat ISIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Ms. Torres.

Ms. Romero, you're now recognized for a five-minute presentation of your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF BERNICE ROMERO, SENIOR DIRECTOR,
INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE, SAVE THE
CHILDREN**

Ms. ROMERO. Good afternoon. I first want to thank Chairman Lynch and Ranking Member Hice for today's hearing and the opportunity to speak to the humanitarian crisis that is devastating Syrian communities.

The humanitarian needs across Syria remain at staggering levels. Nearly 12 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Five million of these are children. In fact, half of all children now living in Syria have grown up knowing nothing but war.

Save the Children has reached millions of children inside Syria and in the refugee-hosting countries. We have seen how children suffer in this conflict, enduring physical and mental wounds that may be irreparable. With schools closing and minimal support for mental health, we are witnessing in real-time the loss of a generation.

My remarks will focus on three topics: northeast Syria, including the impact of recent hostilities and issues related to foreign families linked to ISIS; northwest Syria; and, finally, the regional refugee response and the rising threats of forced returns.

In the past two weeks, more than 160,000 people, including more than 70,000 children, have been displaced in the fighting in northeast Syria. Many are living in camps and informal settlements, which are short on humanitarian supplies and basic infrastructure.

Despite the recent cease-fire announcement, we've seen continued hostilities. Children have been killed and injured in the fighting, health facilities and schools have been attacked, and other services have been shutdown.

Save the Children is assisting the newly displaced by providing goods and services such as psychological first aid, education, nutrition, and health screenings. But while we and others are able to

continue our programs in some areas, this new instability has severely restrained the response, with many NGO offices and programs suspended or closed down.

There is much the U.S. Government can do to help improve the situation. Primarily, the U.S. must wield its diplomatic leverage to press for a lasting cessation of hostilities, protection of civilians, and unobstructed humanitarian access.

And while immediate needs such as medical care and food must be a priority, the U.S. and other donors cannot forget about the medium-to long-term needs of the displaced, including mental health and psychosocial support as well as access to education for the hundreds of thousands of children caught up in the violence.

Further complicating the situation is the presence of thousands of foreign women and children with perceived or real affiliations with armed groups such as ISIS. In the wake of the conflict with ISIS in Syria and Iraq, a large population of foreign nationals have been living in displacement camps across northeast Syria. 12,300 foreign nationals have been present in three camps. This includes 9,000 children from more than 40 different nationalities. More than 8,000 of these children are under the age of 12, while more than 4,000 are under the age of five.

Save the Children is operational in the Al Hol annex, which houses the foreign women and children. The conditions have been challenging. Even before recent events, critical gaps existed across all sectors, including health, education, and protection.

But foreign children trapped in Syria are victims of the conflict and must be treated as such rather than looked at as terrorists. Many of them were brought or trafficked into Syria or were born there over the course of the conflict.

Given the life-threatening dangers they and their families face, Save the Children calls on governments to repatriate them to their country of origin. We thank the U.S. for its policy of repatriating American citizens in these camps and for pressing other nations to do the same. To ensure child protection, this must take place as soon as possible while still feasible.

We can't forget about the massive needs in the northwest. In 2019, conflict and displacement have raged across Idlib, where nearly 3 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, half of which are children. Save the Children is calling on all parties to deescalate the conflict in the northwest and support a cease-fire.

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2165, which ensures cross-border humanitarian access into Syria from Turkey and Iraq, must be renewed. U.S. leadership is key to ensure that the violation of fundamental human rights and international laws designed to protect civilians does not become the new normal.

Finally, we can't forget the millions of Syrian refugees. Refugee-response funding needs have doubled over the past five years. The U.S. must continue to allocate robust funding for the refugee response and press others to do the same.

Efforts by some host governments to repatriate refugees back to unsafe areas in Syria is particularly concerning. The U.S. has been clear about its opposition to forced returns and must continue to stress that returns of refugees or asylum-seekers should be voluntary, safe, and dignified.

One hundred years ago, Save the Children's founder said every war is a war against children. Syria is no exception. Yet, before recent events, the world barely seemed to notice. The danger is that, once headlines about Turkey fade, the conflict in Syria will again fall off the radar screen, even as its impact on Syrian children continues. Sustained political engagement by American leaders and support for a humanitarian response will be needed then more than ever.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Ms. Romero.

Mr. Glaser, you're now recognized for five minutes for an oral presentation of your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF JOHN GLASER, DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN
POLICY STUDIES, CATO INSTITUTE**

Mr. GLASER. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Hice, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the privilege of having me here to speak today.

The United States became directly involved in Syria early in the civil war. Our focus then was on undermining the Assad regime by providing aid to various armed opposition groups. The primary security rationale for our increased involvement in Syria in recent years was to destroy ISIS. And, although remnants of the group remain, that objective has largely been met, and it makes good strategic sense to withdraw.

I'll say at the outset that the manner in which the administration initiated this withdrawal was clumsy and injected unnecessary risk and instability. I'll address that more in a minute.

The justifications for a continued U.S. military presence in Syria have expanded well beyond the initial reason for their deployment. It went from defeating ISIS to protecting the Kurds, pushing back against Russian and Iranian influence in the country, serving as a buffer to protect Israel from regional enemies, helping usher in a post-Assad Syria, and now, apparently, securing oil fields.

This is a classic case of mission creep. It amounts to letting the United States slip further into a Middle East war without clear objectives, without serious scrutiny about what is actually achievable, and without a public debate that includes a vote in Congress authorizing the mission.

There have been a number of contradictions in our Syria policy. We knew undermining the Assad regime and creating a power vacuum in a significant portion of the country might generate more instability and enliven a dangerous rebellion, and yet we continued to pursue this policy.

We knew that there were substantial numbers of jihadist terrorists within the various rebel opposition groups, but we continued to aid them until recently. Turkey is a NATO ally who sees the Kurdish population along the Turkish/Syrian border as a serious security threat, and yet we've pursued a tactical alliance of convenience with the Kurds to battle ISIS. Suffice it to say that aiding and arming and allying with two adversarial entities is not only a contradiction of sorts but seems destined for an inevitable and bitter transition away from that.

It was a mistake to have offered or even implied any promises to the Kurds that we weren't fully prepared to deliver. An autonomous Kurdish State in northern Syria was an implausible scenario, given the situation on the ground. And to the extent that we led anyone to believe that that was our objective, it was a mistake and, I think, put the Kurds in more danger.

Now, with regard to the process of this withdrawal, the President ordered this change in policy completely outside the interagency process, and that makes for a messy implementation.

The administration also failed to employ sufficient diplomatic muscle to help carry out a responsible withdrawal. We should have had a deliberate dialog with Turkey, for example, long before any announcement to withdraw. As distasteful as it may be, the U.S. probably should have worked with Damascus to facilitate a formal arrangement with the Kurds that would allow Syria to reassert its sovereignty over those territories and, thus, prevent a Kurdish incursion and attack on the Kurds. This could've helped satiate the Turkish concerns of the PKK safe haven over the border while also deterring further action.

We could've engaged in this kind of arrangement months ago. In fact, the reports suggest that the Trump administration actually discouraged those talks. Yet just such an arrangement is what's falling into place between the Assad regime and the Kurdish forces. I should mention that the former commander of U.S. Central Command, General Votel, has also signed on to that approach.

The United States also probably should've sought some cooperation with Russia. Both the U.S. and Russia want stability; they want to prevent the reemergence of ISIS. Both have reasons to oppose Turkish incursions into Syria. Moscow has leverage over Damascus; we have leverage over Ankara. These are opportunities for diplomacy to take place, but it didn't. The bottom line is that active and skillful diplomacy was the best tool for serving U.S. interests in Syria and allowing a smooth and responsible withdrawal.

Going forward, the United States should pressure Turkey to refrain from further aggressive tactics in Syria. Washington should lend quiet support to negotiations, particularly the Astana Process, but not seek to be an active participant, I think.

The economic sanctions that Congress is prepared to impose on Turkey may send an appropriate signal but are largely symbolic. Sanctions alone have a very poor track record of altering the behavior of a target state, and no one should expect them to have much tangible impact in this case.

Should the United States determine that a future military deployment to Syria is necessary for U.S. security and interests, it's incumbent upon this body to openly debate it and ultimately to vote on authorizing the use of force. A unilateral decision by the executive branch to keep either residual forces there or to redeploy at a later date is subject to Congress's constitutional prerogatives and, more recently, the War Powers Act.

I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Glaser.

And just to put a finer point on that, I do know from yesterday's testimony in the Senate that James Jeffrey, who is the Special

Representative for Syria Engagement and the Special Envoy to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, was not consulted in this decision.

So, at this point, I would like to welcome my neighbor and colleague, Ms. Pressley of Massachusetts. We welcome her to the committee. I would also like to welcome the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Massie.

I'd like to make a motion to allow both Ms. Pressley and Mr. Massie to participate and to engage in questioning when their time arrives.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now yield myself five minutes for questioning.

So, Ms. Romero, a number of us on this committee have been to all of the Syrian refugee camps, going back to, you know, the early days of conflict between, you know, Bashar al-Assad's regime and some of the rebel groups in Aleppo and elsewhere in Syria. So we traveled to Kilis up in the north, north of Aleppo, to Adana, out by Idlib. We went to Beirut, where many of the refugees fled, and also to Zaatari, which is the camp in Jordan, about 85,000 refugees.

What do you know about—now, that was all before the Turkish incursion that we're now witnessing. Is there any data or any information that you have with respect to the current situation, what may have been exacerbated by the withdrawal of U.S. troops and then the subsequent invasion and incursion by Turkish troops and that violence? What has that done to the flow of refugees to these camps and elsewhere?

Ms. ROMERO. Yes, I mean, we don't have hard, hard numbers yet, and, frankly, the situation changes every day. But basically what we have seen is movement from the populations that were in the area where there has been violence toward Al-Hasakah and further south.

They have been setting up in kind of informal shelters. They've been taking over schools, different buildings. You have very overcrowded conditions, difficulties delivering services there and reaching people there.

Most of the humanitarian agencies have had to withdraw their international staff. Syrian local staff has remained active and has been delivering services to the moving populations as much as possible. They're operating in a very insecure environment, obviously. Some of them, actually, themselves, have become refugees and have decided to leave, for fear of the changes that may happen and fears of conscription and fears of violence because of what's going on.

So lots of population movement. We've seen in the news thousands of people moving into Iraq. We think that the camp that was set up there will be at maximum capacity by day after tomorrow if the flows continue at this level. So lots of strains on the services and lots of movement.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you.

We did have a chance last week to visit with King Abdullah. The Jordanian schools on the border there near Zaatari have gone to two shifts. So the Jordanian kids go to school in the morning to early afternoon, and then the Syrian kids come in and go to school from late afternoon onward.

So it's amazing that the Jordanians—and, actually, in Beirut, the similar situation, where the local kids are going to school in the morning and then the refugee kids in the same schools. So, very, very generous and gracious by those host countries, but still enormous pressure.

Ms. Torres, we've had an opportunity over the last month, myself and other members of this committee, to visit Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Afghanistan, asking those governments to repatriate their nationals who went to Syria to fight on the side of ISIS.

I would say that the results have been mixed, the responses have been mixed. There's not been this outpouring of willingness to repatriate those fighters because of the radicalized state they are in.

How do we tackle this?

Even countries that have resources, for political reasons and for stability reasons, are very nervous about bringing those individuals back.

Ms. TORRES. Thank you, Chairman.

I think the first thing we have to recognize is that, if we do not take these people back to their home countries, we're only redoing the cycle. We are creating a new cycle of terrorism if we don't take these citizens back, if we don't provide them with justice in their own countries.

What we have done, what I understand many countries have done, some countries—Kazakhstan is an example, Russia is an example—have taken their citizens back. They have invested in rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

I understand, as far as our center is concerned, we've met with other governments to talk to them about perhaps changing their legal systems. I know a lot of European countries, for example, have had a difficult time because their sentencing and their charges allow for maybe two to five years' imprisonment, and they're scared and concerned about what happens when terrorists are then freed.

There are ways to go about that. You can change your laws. You can change your legislation. You can also develop parole-like programs that would allow for a smoother transition for terrorists to rehabilitate and eventually reintegrate.

Mr. LYNCH. Very good.

My time has expired. I'd like to yield at this time to the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Hice, for five minutes.

Mr. HICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Glaser, you mentioned the fall of ISIS, so to speak, in your testimony. Since that time, under what authority has the U.S. utilized to stay in the region?

Mr. GLASER. None. There is no legal authority for a U.S. military presence on the ground in Syria.

What's often cited is the 2001 AUMF, which, through three Presidencies now, has been expanded and stretched to include groups that—you know, the language in that legislation authorizes the use of force against al-Qaida, the perpetrator of the attack, and anyone who aided or harbored them. Later on, the word "associated forces" came up, but that's actually not in the text.

We've targeted, under this bill, groups that had nothing to do with 9/11, groups that are enemies of al-Qaida, groups that didn't

even exist at the time of 9/11. It's gone from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Niger, Somalia, Libya. So this is a very real problem.

Mr. HICE. So would it be your opinion, then, that the withdrawal of troops that the President just ordered was really necessary under the current legal framework?

Mr. GLASER. Yes, although there is a problem, in that he quadrupled the number of troops on the ground in his first two years in office. So I don't think he's paying too much close attention to the AUMF. But it is certainly true that Congress has not done its job in authorizing—

Mr. HICE. I don't think anyone up here would question that, but it is a complicated issue.

Let me ask you this. Whether we're dealing with humanitarian need or peacekeeping efforts, whatever, on a long-term-scale-going basis, what kind of legal framework would be necessary?

Mr. GLASER. Well, if U.S. troops are needed, then Congress needs to authorize that. U.S. troops should be used in order to defend imminent threats to this territory and its people. Peacekeeping missions through the U.N. might be a different situation.

In terms of other legal authority, you know, I think we need to pay close attention to the strategic justifications for why we're there. There's a substantial academic literature—although we have done a good job in fighting ISIS and coordinating things on the ground—there is a substantial academic literature in political science demonstrating that, when external powers involve themselves in a civil war on multiple parties, it has the effect of exacerbating and prolonging and intensifying that conflict. That's basically what we've done from the beginning.

Mr. HICE. Okay, let me throw this out to you, I hear people ask me this when I'm in the district, this type of question, and I think it's appropriate here. We've got some 40,000 veterans here in America homeless. Some numbers go up to 6 million or so children, family members who are hungry, and yet there's this constant helping of people in other countries that need help—I'm not trying to belittle that at all or diminish the need, but the fact of the need that we have here, how do you respond to that?

Mr. GLASER. So I certainly think it's important for this government to have as a priority its own people, and I think what's more incumbent upon us is to not make things worse abroad, rather sort of do no harm, rather than take it upon ourselves to view every problem as an American one to be solved.

The other problem with this is that, when we do find it worthwhile to go abroad, to fix problems and help people, we often have the bad habit of seeing things only through a military prism. It's almost like our military is our only tool, when, in fact, diplomacy and aid have a lot going for them and can actually do things at cheaper cost and with greater humanitarian benefits.

Mr. HICE. Okay. One other question, and my time's going to run out. Going back to the previous administration with a chemical weapons red line and the inaction that came as a result of that, what kind of impact do you think that had on, say, where we are right now?

Mr. GLASER. Actually, I think the impact has been greatly exaggerated. There's also a substantial literature in the academics and political science realm on the issue of credibility. It's taken to be a justification for all kinds of U.S. military interventions. But states tend to pay close attention to the actual circumstances at hand and not extrapolate with other locations and situations. So the fact that we—it would have been wrong, frankly, for the United States to bomb Syria as punishment for chemical weapons attacks. Chemical weapons has a special place in our mind, but the vast majority of casualties in Syria have come from bombs and bullets. So it's patently irrational to put these as special category and pretend like they're especially deadly weapons, and then justify a U.S. military action, which by the way, at the time did not have congressional approval, and would have been illegal under international law, since it didn't have U.N. Security Council approval.

Mr. HICE. I yield back.

Mr. COOPER.

[Presiding.] The gentleman's time has expired.

I recognize myself for five minutes. First, I would like to ask unanimous consent that we enter into the record the current issue of *The Economist Magazine*. The cover reads, "Who can trust Trump's America? The consequences of betraying the Kurds." The article inside the magazine goes into greater detail, and the subtitle there is "Removing American troops from Syria triggered an invasion, betrayed an ally, and trashed the national interest." There's a sub article beneath that that focuses particularly on the history of the Kurds, and the subtitle there is, "America's abandonment caps a century of global duplicity."

That's really the subject of this hearing, and this is one of the most influential magazines in the world. It's a British magazine. This is apparently what the English-speaking world thinks of America's recent policy reversal.

The second focus would be Mr. Palmer. I have the privilege of representing Nashville, Tennessee, which is very near Fort Campbell, and I am a huge fan of its Special Forces. Not to take anything away from the 82d Airborne, but I admire you and your career—West Point, two Bronze Stars, a MacArthur Award—and I'm proud that you're continuing your patriotic service by being willing to testify today.

Captain PALMER. Thank you.

Mr. COOPER. Your firsthand view of what it's like to fight with Kurds by your side, and when you pointed out in your testimony how relatively rare it is for allies in the Middle East to stand and fight with you, should be testimony that's heard by everyone on this committee. Actually this is one of the few bipartisan issues in Congress because the vote was overwhelming: 129 Republicans being willing to vote that the recent policy reversal was a huge mistake. That was a breakthrough. I hope that more and more Republicans will listen to your testimony and understand what a vital ally the Kurds have been. This policy reversal is a deeply felt betrayal. No one knows today what it's going to be like, and I hope [in] the recent announcement that the cease-fire will be permanent. Wouldn't that be great? But otherwise the Kurds face one of the largest armies in the world, the Turkish Army, who have been

known to show no mercy. And as the gentleman from Georgia repeated in his opening remarks, is it just Turkish propaganda when they link the YPG with the PKK? You know, these are deep issues, but our allies should not be abused.

It goes without saying that most of our colleagues know that the Turks recently have bought the S400 Russian air defense system. That is not a NATO-friendly move. That is not a U.S.-friendly move. I'm worried that the fundamental problem here is, really, we've given into Russian foreign policy interests in the region and perhaps even have built a land bridge from Iran to the Golan Heights. So that to me is what is really at stake here. And to abandon our best friends, our fighters, was a tragedy.

So, Mr. Palmer, I don't know if you care to elaborate on your testimony since you're the only person here who's had firsthand U.S. military experience on what it's like to fight with the Kurds by your side.

Captain PALMER. Thank you, Congressman. Yes, my time in Syria, the Kurds were a very reliable and dedicated partner for us. Literally every combat operation we were on, they were by our side with us, fighting alongside us, and that sort of commitment to my team and to our mission as a whole was something that we really valued and enabled our success.

Mr. COOPER. Did they look like terrorists to you?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, the unit I worked with, I saw a SDF unit that was dedicated and had a lot of resolve and commitment to fighting the Islamic State.

Mr. COOPER. Would we have been as successful in taking on ISIS or DAESH without the help of the Kurds?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I don't know about specific other policy proposals. I can speak specifically to my experience over there, and, yes, the Kurds and the SDF, absolutely were instrumental in our success against the Islamic State.

Mr. COOPER. And didn't they suffer, like, 11,000 deaths and we had, what, six?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, we greatly provided the security they provided to our team, and that added support really made, you know, made my unit safer over there as well.

Mr. COOPER. But that's a disproportionate sacrifice on their part when they suffer 11,000 casualties, and we take 6.

I see that my time has expired.

The gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Gosar, is recognized.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Palmer, also, thank you for your service. We certainly appreciate that. Would you agree with me, the following recipe? Good process gets you good policy, gets you good politics. Would you agree with that?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I'm not qualified to speak on policy.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Glaser, would you care to weigh in on that? Good process gives you good policy, gives you good politics?

Mr. GLASER. Seems reasonable to me.

Mr. GOSAR. That's what I think. So Mr. Glaser, back to you again, I just want to reiterate—go through this in my mind and

make sure. So, back in 2013, when Obama decided to strike within Syria, 2013, Congress was actually put on notice, were they not?

Mr. GLASER. They were.

Mr. GOSAR. So, at the time, Republican leadership and this year, under Democratic leadership, an AUMF could have been brought up that quick.

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. So let me get this straight. So we keep hearing everybody talking about the constitutional role of Congress. Would you consider that leadership from both parties let the Kurds down?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. Interesting. Interesting. Seeing that they're the ones that dictate the process.

Ms. Torres, do you believe that a long-term, large-scale effort by the U.S. military is required in Syria?

Ms. TORRES. I think that we need to stay vigilant about what's happening in Syria, what's happening in Iraq, with regards to the resurgence of ISIS. I think we need to continue to assess and continue to remain vigilant and continue to monitor the situation. I think that the withdrawal of troops out of Syria at this time was a bad idea, especially the way that it was done, without any notice, without any preparation, and it's allowed for our Kurdish allies to take the brunt of the conflict. It's also left us in a position where we're no longer in a good position to assess what's happening with ISIS. We have ISIS militants and those that are in these camps that are escaping—

Mr. GOSAR. Well, let me—you know, I've got limited time. So how many U.S. servicemen were actually removed from Syria?

Ms. TORRES. I understand about a thousand.

Mr. GOSAR. Let's say 28 from that zone, 28, and they were moved back into Syria, further back. That's 28. That's the number we're talking about. Would you agree with me, Mr. Glaser, that's the number?

Mr. GLASER. Well, there's a number of things going on. So the initial order from Trump to relocate about the number that was reported is 50 to a 100—I know the President now says 28—was to relocate within somewhere in Syria. Then things unfolded, and it seems to be now the policy to withdraw all of them, with the exception of maybe 200.

Mr. GOSAR. Well, it seems to be, but what we know of is that there's 28. Now, let me go back through this. I've got some limited time. So, in World War II, we had a number of allies, did we not, Mr. Glaser?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. Was one of them the USSR, the Soviet Union?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. And what did we do after we won that war? Did we instantly try to help the Soviet Union?

Mr. GLASER. Excuse me. Did we try to help them?

Mr. GOSAR. Yep.

Mr. GLASER. No. Pretty quickly after the war ended, we engaged in mutual suspicion and—

Mr. GOSAR. The cold war happened, did it not?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. Yes. Can you tell me a little bit about after World War I, Europeans' idea of breaking up the Middle East? Was there at one time a proposal for different 'stans? Kurdistan was one of them?

Mr. GLASER. My understanding of the history is that that was in discussion at the time but didn't work out that way.

Mr. GOSAR. Let me ask you a question, then again. How long have we been fighting this war in this piece of—on this piece of sand?

Mr. GLASER. The United States?

Mr. GOSAR. No, no, no. The war. The war of all these people in this area. How long have we been fighting on this piece of sand?

Mr. GLASER. Sir, which war are you referring to?

Mr. GOSAR. All of them. We've been fighting from before Christ.

Mr. GLASER. Right.

Mr. GOSAR. Has there been any resolve?

Mr. GLASER. Well, there are a number of different conflicts in the region, and you have to speak about them specifically to say anything meaningful about them, I think.

Mr. GOSAR. So let me ask you a question. We've hailed a barnstorm at the President, but we got a stalemate right now.

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. GOSAR. Does the analogy "doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result, insanity"—

Mr. GLASER. I think that certainly applies to our policy.

Mr. GOSAR. So wouldn't it be nice that we tried something a little bit different?

Mr. GLASER. I should hope so.

Mr. GOSAR. Wouldn't it—I would say maybe it's a little awkward the way this has turned out, but what if it actually turns out to be something that can actually work out?

Mr. GLASER. Well, that would be to everyone's benefit, but I think the reversal of the process, where Trump orders a withdrawal and then we scramble to fix it with diplomacy, should have been done the right way around the first time.

Mr. GOSAR. Yes. I yield back.

Mr. COOPER. The gentleman's time has expired. The gentleman from Vermont, Mr. Welch, is recognized.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you, and I want to thank the witnesses. I particularly want to thank Ms. Ahmed. Your country has suffered so much for so long, and our heart goes out to you. I want to raise the question about how this happened.

It really goes to what you're saying, Mr. Glaser. You know, there's a number of people on the other side of the aisle who have a view, and I share it, that we should not be in as many of these long-term conflicts as possible. But I wanted to ask some questions about what the consequences are of the way in which the President of the United States acted with literally no notice to our Kurdish allies—and thank you, Mr. Palmer—with no notice to the State Department, with no notice to the Department of Defense, with no notice to anybody. We are seeing the creation of an unnecessary and total avoidable humanitarian disaster. That's the concern I have at this moment. So some of the questions I have are about who is in that band that is affected by the Turkish incursion. I'll ask you,

Ms. Torres. You might have the best statistics, but other people can't. How many people live in that area that is subject to the Turkish incursion?

Ms. TORRES. I mean, it's difficult to estimate. I've seen numbers in the millions, but I'm not sure if my colleagues might have better numbers.

Mr. WELCH. Does anybody have—how do we not know, before the President went in there, how many people would be in the line of fire? Mr. Palmer, do you have any idea what the population is in that area?

Captain PALMER. No, Congressman.

Mr. WELCH. Ms. Ahmed?

Ms. AHMED. In the border area, approximately 3 million people are living. Not only this recent area that Turkey got control of, but also in rest of Euphrates and also my hometown, Afrin, is under Turkish occupation.

Mr. WELCH. Let me just go on. What I understood, I think Ms. Torres, you said, is 160,000 or so people have been displaced?

Ms. TORRES. That's correct.

Mr. WELCH. And this means they're not in their home, right? They went to bed the night before the President made the phone call, and the day after that, they didn't have a home, right? Where did they go?

Ms. TORRES. So I think some have gone to camps. Some have gone to IDP camps. Some have been injured along the way.

Mr. WELCH. What camps? We don't have the camps there to accommodate. They're all overfilled already. Mr. Palmer, you know, one of the extraordinary things about our military is their capacity to do logistics, to plan, to execute a very complicated mission. Would it be like logistics 101 before you take an action that's going to displace 160,000 people, that you have some idea where they're going to go?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I don't think I'm qualified, necessarily, to speak to military strategy as a whole. My mission over there was more focused on counter-Islamic State operations.

Mr. WELCH. You know, I appreciate your discipline, but it's, like, obvious. If you're going to do something where 160,000 people are going to have to leave their homes, and you feel some responsibility because it's the action you're allowing, or you're taking, you're going to make some arrangements.

I will ask you this, Mr. Palmer. You spoke about just the fighting force and the extraordinary band of brothers situation you had with Kurdish allies, right? But there were also Syrian fighters who were standing up to that monster Assad who live in that area as well, correct?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, most of my operations were specifically with the SDF. I know there were other groups out there, but mine was specifically the SDF—

Mr. WELCH. But in Raqqa, there were many Arab fighters who were standing up against Assad, and that was a brutal fight there, correct? So, I mean, I'll just ask Mr. Glaser. You're right about the plan should come first, not just the phone call, you know: Hey, my friend, Mr. Erdogan, you know, do what you wish.

How in the—what is the peril to the Arab fighters living in many of these cities now that the Russians and the Assad regime has free hand to roam around there? Do you have any apprehension that reprisals will occur?

Mr. GLASER. Yes. And although I am very, very critical of the way this was done, it's also true that we should be realistic that, I mean, any transition in policy—

Mr. WELCH. You know, don't—just don't say that. There will be consequences, but when it is on us, because we make a voluntary decision about how we're going to execute, and the consequences are that innocent lives are lost, that is not subject to being washed away because it's quote, realistic. I mean, I'm with—I want to say to my Republican colleagues: There's two issues here, and I know my time's up. One is, what's our long-term policy there, and there is fault that can be ascribed all around. But to take an action where, in one fell swoop, with no consultation, no forewarning, we betray allies who have been with us, and we leave innocent people at the mercy of people who are going to get them, I don't get that. That's not what I call American. I yield back.

Mr. COOPER. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentleman from Texas is recognized for five minutes.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Palmer, for your service. Thank you, Ms. Torres, Ms. Romero, Ms. Ahmed for being here and sharing your story with us.

Mr. Glaser, I was wanting to see. Could you tell us in how many nations our military is deployed?

Mr. GLASER. We have some form, usually Special Forces, of U.S. military deployed to more than 150 countries. It's effectively the whole world.

Mr. CLOUD. More than 150. Okay.

Mr. GLASER. Those are small. You know, we have bases in about 70 or 80 countries, but those are larger contingents.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And could you touch on some of the partners that play in the region, just a brief general history?

Mr. GLASER. Of the partners in the region?

Mr. CLOUD. The players in this conflict in the region.

Mr. GLASER. Yes. Well, I think the important thing to understand about the specific issue is that Turkey has long had a tense relationship with the Kurdish population in the southeast, and there's long been Kurds over the border. Back in 1998, Syria and Turkey came to an agreement, the Adana agreement, where, you know, they agreed to not allow any cross-border Kurdish cooperation and direction of operations, and it worked effectively. My understanding is that Moscow is using that agreement as the basis for its negotiations with Turkey.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. And is it true that we've been in this conflict, in a sense, arming what would be both sides of this conflict over the—

Mr. GLASER. Well, yes. I mean, we're arming many sides in the conflict, unfortunately, especially early on in the process, before the kinks had been worked out. Unfortunately, we cooperated with our Arab Gulf allies in delivering aid, sometimes lethal aid, to rebel

groups, and that got into the hands of some people that we should want to keep arms out of.

Mr. CLOUD. You touched on this before, but could you briefly again explain the concept of mission creep and how that applies in this region in the sense of, what was our original authorization in being there, why were our troops deployed, did they accomplish their mission, and what authorizes them to stay there?

Mr. GLASER. Yes. In general, it's very easy to insert the U.S. military into a situation, and it's much, much harder to get them out because when conditions change, new objectives arise, and you know, as the Congressman was saying, there are risks inherent in any withdrawal and any change in policy. So Syria is one of the messiest conflicts on the planet, and getting out is very difficult unless we're very—

Mr. CLOUD. And what's the authorization that had us there?

Mr. GLASER. As I said before, there is no legal sanction for U.S. military troops in Syria.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. You mentioned concerns about the abruptness of total withdrawal.

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. CLOUD. Would you say that this was the right thing, the what was right but maybe the how was the issue?

Mr. GLASER. Right. I think it's important—I think it's in U.S. interests to disentangle itself from most of the conflicts, if not all, in the Middle East. We should be more clear about what interests are at stake for the United States and not go willy nilly into these conflicts. Sorry. What was the rest of your question?

Mr. CLOUD. Our authorization for being there.

Mr. GLASER. So we need to authorize the use of force. It's something that Congress has been disincentivized to do, and the executive branch historically is willing to avail itself of that lack of constraint.

Mr. CLOUD. I only have a minute if you can—I have a couple more questions to get through. A lot of this testimony today was written, of course, before the news of the day. This is a very developing story. It's a couple weeks old. I was happy to hear a lot of discussion among the witnesses about the importance of diplomacy. And today it seems like news is breaking in which diplomatic efforts since the withdrawal are having perhaps some effect.

Just one month ago today, the President was at the U.N. talking about how, in 80 percent of the countries of the world, people of faith are persecuted. And it is—you know, when you sit in our position, your heart goes out because you wish you could help everybody in the world. Yet we know we have limited resources. We also have a constitutional obligation. Could you explain, when it comes to military activity, how the Constitution defines us to prioritize that process?

Mr. GLASER. Well, the Constitution gives Congress the authority to determine the Nation's involvement in hostilities abroad, and the executive, you know, short of dealing with an imminent threat that he has to preempt, the President directs those and tends to decide when they end, which is unfortunate. But, yes, there are a lot of things going on in the world. I have a pretty narrow conception of what the U.S. military should be used for. I think it actually

does them a disservice to deploy them in situations that don't rise to the level of a serious threat to this Nation's security.

Mr. COOPER. The gentleman's time has expired.

The gentle lady from Massachusetts is recognized.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this critically important hearing today and for waving me on so that I could participate. In tumultuous times like these, the critical role of congressional oversight cannot be overstated. Once again, this administration's blatant disregard for the humanity and dignity of the world's most vulnerable is on full display. Over the last several days, we have witnessed the bloodshed, displacement, and overall humanitarian crisis that can result from the reckless and self-serving decisions by this administration. We have heard about the military and national security implications of the administration's removal of U.S. Forces from Syria. However, it's equally important to center the lived experiences and agency of our Kurdish allies, whose value cannot and should not be measured solely by their contributions to U.S. interests.

Ms. Torres, based on your national security expertise, how would a diplomatic approach on the front end, paired with a strategic troop withdrawal, have avoided this violence in the first place?

Ms. TORRES. Thank you, Representative Pressley.

I think, first off, I'm going to take a step back. As a former diplomat, I have participated in the policy process under both administrations. I participated and been on the other side of our administration's leaders, having discussions and debates on foreign policy and on discussions on what happens next, assessments of intelligence, assessments of what's happening on the ground, talking to local stakeholders. I think that, right now, what is happening is a lack of a foreign policy process, a lack of a national security process. So, with that in mind, I think that this entire decision has been marred with a lack of an understanding of what's happening on the ground. So it's difficult for me to say what should have happened, but what I can say is that there wasn't a policy process around what should have happened.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Very good. Ms. Romero, your organization, Save the Children, is on the front lines of helping those who are now displaced due to this humanitarian crisis. How will the increased instability in northeast Syria affect the ability of organizations like Save the Children and others to operate in the northeast?

Ms. ROMERO. A lot depends on how—sorry. A lot depends on how things develop. But right now, we're facing the possibility of the supply lines, the roads that we use to get supplies in to northeast Syria, to reach populations, will be blocked or will be so insecure that we will not be able to reach certain populations. We know that our national staff is very concerned. We face the possibility that they will themselves become refugees. Some of them already have, or IDPs, rather, and that we will be faced with a smaller work force. We face the possibility of existing camps where people are able to arrive becoming overcrowded, the wash or the sanitation services, the water services being inadequate to reach the population. We face the prospect of not knowing where people are and not knowing how to reach them, and even if we do know how to reach them, not being able to cross the violence in order to reach

them. So it makes an already volatile and difficult operational environment even more volatile, more uncertain, and it makes our mission to reach the most vulnerable children that much more challenging.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you. I want to focus on another non-military consequence of this abrupt withdrawal. A key component of the Defeat ISIS campaign was to help provide local communities with stabilization assistance to enable displaced persons to safely and voluntarily return to their homes. According to the State Department, stabilization can include, quote, efforts to establish civil security, access to dispute resolution, deliver targeted basic services, and establish a foundation for the return of displaced people. Ms. Torres, would you agree with that characterization?

Ms. TORRES. Yes, I would agree.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Ms. Ahmed, can you briefly discuss how the SDC supports U.S.-led stabilization efforts in northeast Syria?

Ms. AHMED. By supporting the local administrations, and to some extent, we were assisted in that aspect, to support local administrations.

There were promises that the stability and security would be further provided. A return and come back for ISIS will not be allowed. That included rehabilitating or educating all society. And we had some certain programs to deradicalize ISIS families.

But with Turkish Government's attack, all these were on hold, all were destroyed, these programs. Now ISIS is reemerging. The security of the region has collapsed. In the so-called safe zones, massacres are ongoing. And the Turkish threats, again slaughtering, still continue. With what—under what international law Turkish Government has been using F-16s to attack us, through our partners that have been fighting against ISIS. American rebels are being used against us with what authority crossing the border of another country and killing attacks against us when we are no threat.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Thank you.

Mr. COOPER. The gentlelady's time has expired.

Ms. PRESSLEY. Sorry, we're over time. Thank you.

Mr. COOPER. The gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, is recognized.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Glaser, is it a factual statement that America has large numbers of troops in the region on the ground out there?

Mr. GLASER. Yes, sir.

Mr. HIGGINS. So, when we discuss what's referred to as a withdrawal of troops—and let me say that I clearly understand that America is conflicted on this. We seek a righteous position on this. But when we discuss what's referred to as a withdrawal of troops—and we still have massive numbers of troops in the region—would it be fair to state that this is a movement of troops within the region?

Mr. GLASER. Yes—

Mr. HIGGINS. Is there a chance—thank you for that clarification. Is there a chance that a newly established buffer zone would stabilize?

Mr. GLASER. There is a chance. We have to see.

Mr. HIGGINS. Okay. I'd like to focus, if we could, I'd like to ask your opinion, good sir, regarding where we are, considering the totality of circumstance as a Nation with this Turkish/Syria situation. On the one hand, you know, the American citizenry that we serve desires us to disengage from unnecessary warfare overseas. On the other hand, we intend to stand by our allies. This is reflective of the conflict that we genuinely face as a body and as a people. So let's talk about our allies. Is Turkey, in your opinion, conducting itself as according to NATO standards?

Mr. GLASER. No.

Mr. HIGGINS. Do you think Turkey should be held accountable for any reported violations of Geneva Conventions during this conflict?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Do you think Turkey should be subject to removal from NATO? Should its status be considered as potentially rescinded from NATO?

Mr. GLASER. Potentially. It should be a tool.

Mr. HIGGINS. Do you think that that could be a tool that could be used to leverage Turkey?

Mr. GLASER. Yes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Given the very precarious nature of the military engagement in this region of the world, and the conflict that we face as a Nation, regarding our own role, our own righteous role within this ongoing generations-long conflict, in your opinion, sir—let us step past how we got to where we are—and would you share with us, in my remaining two minutes here, how you would envision a righteous solution to where we are? Let's forego how we got here. We could debate that. What's the answer? How do we move forward? Advise the American people. America's watching.

Mr. GLASER. So I think, over the medium to long term, it makes sense to reevaluate our entire approach to the region. That includes which countries we're closely allied with and cooperate with and which ones we're set against. I think we should have an arm's length approach to the region, and we should have an offshore balancing approach in terms of our military posture. We have rapid response capabilities to deploy in crisis situations from offshore, and we should take advantage of that by and large.

You know, I think the Saudi relationship needs to be reevaluated. I think they act against U.S. interests, pretty substantially and for various reasons, we've been unwilling to engage in that reevaluation.

Mr. HIGGINS. Comment if you will on Turkey's emerging increased relationships, including military relationship, including the purchase of military hardware from Russia and their, as of yesterday, newly negotiated posture with Russia. Comment on that, please, in my remaining 30 seconds, sir.

Mr. GLASER. Yes. I think that's another reason we should reevaluate the way we do alliances, particularly in NATO. I think the habit has been to just add more NATO allies with the frivolity with which most people add friends on Facebook, without considering closely their regional interests, the extent to which we'll have to adopt those regional interests, as their ally.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you for that clarification. In my remaining 10 seconds, yes or no, would it be fair to consider that Turkey is really the responsible actor here?

Mr. GLASER. They are one responsible actor.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, sir.

I yield, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. DESAULNIER.

[Presiding.] Thank you, and I'd like to recognize myself for the next five minutes and thank all of the panelists for being here. I appreciate your efforts both here today and in your professional—and your experience.

Mr. Palmer, thank you for your service. It's appreciated.

Ms. Ahmed, thank you for being here and your service in a very difficult circumstance, to both of you.

So, Ms. Romero, I want to focus most of my questions on the humanitarian needs as they were before this incident and after. Most of us have had the good fortune—well, for the wrong reason—to be able to go to the Middle East and go to refugee camps and talk to Syrian refugees and hear about their real-life dilemmas of walking, leaving everything they knew in a war situation. I don't think most Americans—at least I wasn't until I went and had that experience—realized, and most Americans don't realize the history and the delicacy of relationships in the Middle East since at least World War I. And the whole question of whether the Kurds should have had a state or not. So, in all of this delicate foreign policy, the human aspects of this, I think, are getting missed in large part, and the demands you had. So tell me what the humanitarian needs and demands were before the incursion, and talk a little bit about what's happened since.

Ms. ROMERO. In a sense, the demands are the same because the fundamental ask from the humanitarian community is that there be a cessation, a lasting cessation of hostilities, that civilian protection be upheld, and that humanitarians be given, you know, unfettered access to people in need. I think those are the three sort of big policy asks from the humanitarian community, you know, yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

The difference is a difference, I would say, in scale, because now we have additional displaced people. We have a larger population to serve. We have more constraints. If there is not a permanent cessation of hostilities in this area, we will, as I described earlier, struggle to continue to provide services to internally displaced people and to refugees. We will have bigger funding needs. We will face different cross-line challenges. You know, supply lines, different suppliers not wanting to supply us. We've withdrawn a number of our international staff. They have certain expertise that local staff does not have. So, for instance, health services are being curtailed in northeast Syria because much of that comes from outside expertise. Within that, psychosocial support, which we've seen to be a growing need among children, especially, who have seen horrific things; you don't have that kind of specialization necessarily locally. And local staff have their own threats and challenges that they're feeling in terms of safety.

So, you know, the stability of our work force is also made more vulnerable. But, fundamentally, you know, it's those three things:

Humanitarian access, cessation of hostilities, and, you know, respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Okay. I want to focus you in the little time I have left first with Ms. Romero, and maybe, Ms. Ahmed, you could add anything on northeast Syria. So, on October 18, Amnesty International reported that Turkish-backed forces were conducting, quote, indiscriminate attacks in residential areas and have, quote, displayed a shameful disregard for civilian life. According to Amnesty International, aid groups working in the region, describe the U.S. withdrawal and recent fighting has created a, quote, combination of worst-case scenarios in the northeastern part of Syria, happening all at once. Is this an accurate assessment, and how do you see this improving or not improving, getting worse? Knowing that a cease-fire is what you want first, but after the cease-fire, you're going to deal with a world that hopefully allows some autonomous governing for the Kurds, but history tells us that has not been the tendency in these kind of military imbalances.

Ms. ROMERO. I mean, for us, again, whether it's the Turks, whether it's, you know, whichever the party the conflict is, the request is the same. This further complicates it because it's an additional party to the conflict. And, yes, it will—it has and will exacerbate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Ms. Ahmed, any comments? On the humanitarian—

Ms. AHMED. Many civilians were harmed when the Turkish government and their tanks attacked us. The city of Ras al-Ayn in Serekaniye has totally been destroyed because of these attacks. It's razed. Eighty-thousand people are outside, are without home. They have nowhere to go. It's a terrible humanitarian situation. This fight needs serious consideration, needs to be taken very seriously, this situation. Those who want to return, those who are lucky to have their house still over there, they're not allowed to go back. These attacks are not allowing people to return. So they are forcing them to be displaced. This cannot be called cease-fire. This is continuation of the war. This means that more people will be killed. It's being told that we save Kurds being massacred. But the important thing is their future should be protected by constitutional recognition and their basic rights. This administration on the ground should be recognizing formally the Kurdish role because all people of the region are in this administration. It's democratic. It's supports the integrity of Syria.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you. I appreciate it. The chair would now like to recognize the gentleman from Kentucky.

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to participate in this subcommittee. Ms. Ahmed, is it the goal of the Syrian Democratic Council to establish a sovereign country for Kurds or an autonomous country for the Kurds?

Ms. AHMED. As an independent country, it's not a part of our project. Within the Syrian context, we want a decentralized government. The local administration to be set up in—within all Syria—like the Jazira region, Hasaka region, Halep region, Ladkiya region. These all should be in a decentralized system. This would be autonomy—local autonomy.

Mr. MASSIE. Would there be one government, and who would provide the military defense of this decentralized government?

Ms. AHMED. Defense can be one but as local as well. So the local—the forces that is living in that region are part of the general forces, Syrian forces.

Mr. MASSIE. Okay. Thank you very much.

Has anybody in the U.S. Government who you can name said that is also the policy of the United States to establish that?

Ms. AHMED. The U.S. so far hasn't told us a clear policy in terms of Syria to us. They always told us the Syrian people would all—determine their future. What is the project of the U.S. for Syria? What do they think about the future of Syria? This was never communicated clearly to us. As the Syrian people, we gave them a project. And we wanted U.S. to support, we tried to get U.S. support in this framework. A Syrian decentralized—a democratic Syria. That they're going to have freedom in it.

Mr. MASSIE. So there was the hope from the Kurds of this, but no promises from anybody in the U.S. Government to establish that?

Ms. AHMED.

[Answers question. Not interpreted into English by the interpreter.]

Mr. MASSIE. Thank you very much.

Mr. Palmer, where did ISIS get the weapons that you were fighting against?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I need to be very careful about divulging any classified information.

Mr. MASSIE. Do you—can you tell us what's been publicly available about where ISIS got their weapons?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I just need to be careful about stepping on any intelligence-gathering information.

Mr. MASSIE. Where did the Kurds get their weapons?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, that fell under part of our United States program.

Mr. MASSIE. So we provide them weapons?

Captain PALMER. Yes, Congressman.

Mr. MASSIE. So we've not said we're going to take those weapons away, correct?

Captain PALMER. Not to my knowledge, Congressman.

Mr. MASSIE. Mr. Glaser, can you walk us through the beginning of the civil war in Syria and what the U.S. involvement was or has been?

Mr. GLASER. Sure. So there were protests in 2011. There were harsh responses by the regime. It slowly turned into an armed rebellion, partially because at the time we had been completing our surge in Iraq—

Mr. MASSIE. I've got 45 seconds. Can you tell us what the U.S. involvement was in the beginning?

Mr. GLASER. Sure. Very early on, we ended up aiding armed rebels groups in Syria.

Mr. MASSIE. And this was before the emergence of ISIS?

Mr. GLASER. Well, it's difficult to say. Yes, technically before the big rise in 2013 and 2014, but, of course, ISIS is really just an out-

growth of the Sunni insurgency that rose up to fight U.S. Forces in Iraq. So it's hard to say what the beginning point would be.

Mr. MASSIE. In my remaining time, I would like to ask Ms. Ahmed, how many Kurds have been displaced as a result of the civil war? Did the Kurds support the civil war at the beginning? And are the Kurds better off or worse off now that Assad has been destabilized?

Ms. AHMED. The Kurds have established—

Mr. MASSIE. I'm sorry?

Ms. AHMED. Sorry. The Kurds have established a democratic system with Arab Syria—or Syria's Christians. In my hometown, I think there used to be 800,000 people living. Internally displaced people running away from regime. Syrian Government areas, they were coming to our region. They were around 100,000 IDPs. Turkey attacked that area and those IDPs became refugees. For example, people are living in 10 kilometers distance of their home, but Turkish Government is not allowing those people to return to their homes. They settled Turkomans. The families of these Islamic groups are settled in Kurdish houses. They are massacring the Kurds every day. They are killing, kidnapping, seize their properties, kill their—burn their trees. Property is all stolen. So they carry out the policy of burning off everything in my hometown right at the moment. 800,000 Kurds of Afrin, they are now refugees. In the Jazira region, after the recent incursion, there are a number of people who are now refugees. People of Kobane, Darbasiyah, Ras al-Ayn, and a number also in Tel Abyad, including us, they were displaced. The policy of ethnic cleansing, massacring, is being taken—is being carried out in these places.

Mr. MASSIE. My time is long expired. Does she have an answer—yes, I'll yield a minute to Mr. Cloud.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Massie.

Ms. Torres, you said something that I wanted to just clear up. You said that no official foreign policy process was followed.

Mr. TORRES. Thank you. To clarify, I am no longer in the State Department. So I was reflecting on some of the experiences that I've had in the past.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. I just wanted to make clear, who does set foreign policy in our country?

Mr. TORRES. So it's actually a little complicated right now to determine that, but—

Mr. CLOUD. Really? Is it?

Ms. TORRES. I mean—

Mr. CLOUD. I think everybody in America know who sets foreign policy for our Nation. Who defines foreign policy for our country?

Mr. TORRES. The President.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. So would he, therefore, also define the official foreign policy process?

Mr. TORRES. Yes. With advising from departments and agencies, including the State Department.

Mr. CLOUD. And doesn't he have the option to choose who we gets advice from?

Mr. TORRES. That's the President's prerogative.

Mr. CLOUD. Okay. I just wanted to clear that up because this is playing out in a number of different fronts, including what's going on in the basement of our Capitol lately among a number of State Department officials who don't seem to be sure and aware who sets foreign policy for our country. So I appreciate you clearing that up. Thank you.

Mr. TORRES. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH.

[Presiding.] The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Rouda, for five minutes.

Mr. ROUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The President often liked to say on the campaign trail that we were going to win so much that we would get tired of it and ask him to stop.

Mr. President, stop. There are Kurdish allies of ours who are dying in the streets because of your decision against the advice of those around you to pull out of Syria. In fact, the only real winners are ISIS, Syria, Assad, Iran, Turkey, and Putin. We've already talked about the President's decision and how it would enable the return of ISIS. The Syrian regime is backfilling in areas that we have controlled for quite some time.

Ms. Torres, have you seen evidence of that already, territory that had been held by the United States, that has not been held by Assad for years, being reclaimed by the Syrian government?

Mr. TORRES. I'm sorry. Can you repeat the last part of—

Mr. ROUDA. The land that was being held by the Kurds, with support from the U.S., is Syria taking over parts of that, and is that areas that have not been controlled by Syria for quite some time?

Mr. TORRES. We have seen reports of that, but I may want to defer to my colleague. But we have seen reports of that.

Mr. ROUDA. In President Trump's cease-fire deal with Turkey, Turkey denied it was actually a cease-fire, seemingly failed to hold, and the parameters of its safe zone were so unclear that it would be almost impossible to enforce anyways. In fact, testimony in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday, it appears the U.S. delegation didn't even use a map when negotiating the safe zone with Turkey. And, yes, my colleague is right that the President is the arbitrator of foreign policy. It's just unfortunate that it looks like the Keystone Cops are the ones that are driving our foreign policy right now.

Yesterday, Turkish President Erdogan and President Putin agreed to remove Kurdish forces from the Syrian/Turkish border, making Putin the key power broker in the region.

Ms. Ahmed, can you tell us what your reaction to that deal is, that took place yesterday?

Ms. AHMED. This deal imposes SDF forces to go withdraw from the border area. So up to 30 kilometers, this area is left to Turkey. That poses a serious threat on our safety and security because the regime has not done any democratic changes so far, and the same mentality coming from regime forces also pose a threat for us. Turkish and Russian patrol and the regime, it's very—it's a dangerous situation for us, for the Kurds. What they say to us: You either have to withdraw, or we're going to let Turkey attack you.

Mr. ROUDA. Okay. Thank you. Mr. Palmer, I think you've seen the TV coverage of U.S. bases being overrun and controlled by Russian forces. How does that make you feel?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I'm only going to talk to my experience in Syria during 2017. I'm not necessarily qualified to speak to the current—

Mr. ROUDA. I'm not asking you from an official capacity. I'm just asking you as a person who has served the government and our country in a patriotic way. How does that make you feel?

Captain PALMER. Congressman, I'm just not going to testify to other than my experience.

Mr. ROUDA. Ms. Torres, do you have any comments in that area?

Ms. TORRES. I think, on our end, on behalf of The Soufan Center, and as an American, I think that it's difficult to turn away from allies who we've depended on for a very long time to, in a way, protect us from the terrorist threat that we face emanating from ISIS in Iraq and Syria. So to see that happen so abruptly and without a policy and without a process and without diplomacy was really hard to swallow.

Mr. ROUDA. Mr. Chairman, thank you for having this hearing, because it's repeated over and over the foreign policy mistakes of this administration. What has transpired in Ukraine, where crimes were committed, yet the continued cover-up by those involved and those who will support this President to no end, regardless of the obvious wrongdoing, is disheartening to all of us.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman.

The gentleman yields back.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses who have come here today, majority and minority witnesses. Thank you for your excellent testimony.

Ms. Ahmed and Mr. Civiroglu, thank you for being here and traveling such a long way to provide the perspective that I think only you could provide. So we are extremely grateful for your courage and your willingness to come here today.

Without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses to the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for a response.

I will ask our witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able if you receive additional questions.

Mr. LYNCH. This hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:38 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

