

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks in a Meeting With President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey and Republican Senators and an Exchange With Reporters

November 13, 2019

President Trump. Well, thank you very much. We have some of our great Senators, and as you know, we're discussing various things, including the S-400. We're discussing trade and lots of other matters, and we're having a very good discussion. And I thought bringing over some of our Republican Senators that are very much well versed in what's going on in Turkey to meet President Erdogan would be good.

So we're having a very strong discussion on different things, including the safe zone and the border, the oil. And again, trade is a very big factor, because we think we can get the trade up to about \$100 billion. And it's much lower than that right now.

So we're going to have a meeting for a little while, and then we're doing a conference, making a statement. And I think we've had a very successful meeting.

President Erdogan. With my dear friend, President Trump, we've had—we first had a tête-à-tête meeting with a very narrow participation. And then, during lunch, our delegations have met, and now all of the discussions were quite comprehensive.

And, as far as the political dimension goes, we've had the opportunity to focus on our strategic partnership with President Trump. And we've also set our eyes in order to accomplish the target of \$100 billion of a trade volume.

And of course, our indisputable partnership under the auspices of NATO is still there. And, as you are probably aware, on December—between December 3 and 4, we will be gathering for the leaders' summit of the NATO in London. And Turkey is among the top five contributors of the NATO. And of course, our position with the United States, under the roof of NATO, is quite different. It's indisputable. And I believe the London summit is going to be quite busy.

Thank you.

President Trump. Well, we're going to have a big meeting on NATO very soon. I think the President—I think I can say this, because other people know it, and many other people feel the same way—they were very disappointed and he was very disappointed in the statement made by France, having to do with commitment and NATO. That was a big statement that was made a couple of days ago by France. So I think that bothered the President very much. And I don't think he was very happy about it. And a lot of other people feel that way too.

President Erdogan. Yes. It's unacceptable.

President Trump. See? There's a nice way of saying it. Much shorter. *[Laughter]*

Do you guys have any questions? Lindsey, do you want to start off? Do you have any questions? You know the President very well.

Senator Lindsey O. Graham. I've never had an opportunity like this before. I appreciate it. The purpose of this meeting is to have an American civics lesson for our friends in Turkey. And there's a pony in there somewhere if we can find it.

President Trump. And I think we will.

Jim.

Senator James E. Risch. First of all, regarding the remarks of President Macron, we would hope he would re-think those comments. I think that they were ill-advised at the time made, and we would certainly hope that he would rethink those.

Today we're going to have a discussion about common interests that we have and also some disagreements that we have and see if we can't find some common ground where we can get these resolved. And we're—obviously NATO is a—is the strongest and most successful alliance amongst the military powers in the history of the world. We want to keep it that way.

President Trump. Good. Thank you very much.

Rick.

Senator Richard L. Scott. First, I want to thank you, Mr. President, for putting this meeting together. I think all of us want to figure out how we build a better relationship with Turkey. We know that there's issues that we're dealing with right now, but the goal—my goal here and I think all of our goal here is, at the end of this meeting, we're in a better position where we're better allies; where we understand exactly what's going to happen with the S-400; so it's not—so Turkey is heading in the direction of the United States, not heading in the direction of Russia.

President Trump. Right. Very good. It's true.

Joni.

Senator Joni K. Ernst. Yes, thank you, Mr. President. And thank you, President Erdogan, for joining us today. As previously stated, we do want to remain very strong allies in NATO. You are very important to us. So we want to bring you back into that fold. We want to discuss the S-400.

I want to say thank you very much for taking in the Syrian refugees that you have. It is very important to us. And then, as well, we also want to talk about—some of us that have been aligned with the Kurds as well and how we can work with you through that issue.

Thank you.

President Trump. Ted.

Senator R. Edward "Ted" Cruz. Mr. President, welcome. Mr. President, thank you for hosting us.

President Trump. Thank you. Thank you.

Sen. Cruz. We're glad you are here. Turkey and the United States are friends, are allies. We have many shared strategic interests, and we look forward to continuing that friendship and alliance.

At the same time, we have concerns. And I would say the two principal concerns that are in Congress—you've heard both of them referenced—are, number one, the S-400 Russian system, which is incompatible with the F-35. And we very much hope Turkey changes the path it's on and does not employ the S-400.

And number two, the Kurds. The Kurds have risked a lot to stand with America to fight against our shared enemies, and there is very real concern that we do not want to see Turkey engaged in offensive action against the Kurds.

If we can resolve those two issues, I think there is the opportunity for enormous trade, enormous strategic cooperation. But those two issues are real and significant.

President Erdogan. Excuse me.

President Trump. Please.

President Erdogan. First and foremost, we have to make a distinction here—the Kurds and the terrorists. Kurds are, at the same time, my citizens. And my country happens to be the country where the largest Kurdish ethnicities live.

And currently, my Parliament—my political party has 50 MPs of Kurdish descentance, and the other political parties lack that. And especially in the southeastern and eastern Anatolian regions of Turkey, my political party have the greatest political network ever. And you can only appreciate the scale of the investments that we have conducted were you to visit them in situ.

And when President Obama was still in the office, the number of the Kurdish refugees coming from Kobani to Turkey reached 350,000. When nobody was accepting these refugees, we did. And it all depends on us: their health care, their education, anything and any service that you might think. And no one else supported them, financially or economically.

But I assume the ones that you're referring to as "Kurds" are either PYD or YPG. These are terrorist organizations, and they are the offshoots of the PKK. And I would like to submit to your party some documents, specifically. Well, Ferhat Abdi Sahin, it happens to be the almost like a stepson to the previous leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan. And these—this is the information that one needs to know, especially.

And when we were discussing with President Trump, I reiterated the same fact as I did with President Obama when he was in the office: We need to establish this safe zone.

And in the northern part of Syria, for the establishment of a safe zone with a length of four-hundred-and-forty-two—44 kilometers and with a depth of 32 kilometers, we can establish the safe zone maybe with the participation of the international donors. And maybe we can launch an appeal for an international donors' conference to be held.

We have drafted the plans, and we have prepared the projects. And if we were to start taking these steps forward in order to realize these projects, between 6 months to 2 years, we can repatriate about 1 million refugees there in this safe zone. And we can repatriate 1 million refugees in cities such as Raqqa and Deir az-Zor.

Three-million-six-hundred-and-fifty-thousand of the 4 million refugees that we currently have in Turkey are of Arab descentance. And we have also Christian minorities, known as Keldani and Yazidi. They are Christians. And we have about 350,000 Kurdish descendants. A total of 4 million refugees.

And, until so far, we have invested more than \$40 billion. And, until so far, we have only received €3 billion from European Union, but those funds were not directly allocated into our national budget. These funds were used through the Turkish disaster relief agency and the Turkish Red Crescent with the international NGOs.

President Trump. They have 4 million refugees right now in Turkey, and Turkey has been paying the cost for these. And frankly, Europe should step up because Europe is being helped, to a large extent. You have 4 million. If they were released, they would go throughout Europe. So, hopefully, Europe will step up.

Okay. Thank you all very much. Thank you.

Turkey's Purchase of Russian S-400 Antiaircraft System/Turkey-U.S. Trade

Q. Mr. President, how are you going to reconcile between the purchase of the S-400 versus your desire to sell F-35s?

President Trump. Well, that's what we're here for. We're talking about it with our great Senators.

Q. What are the options? What are the alternatives?

President Trump. I think they have a lot of alternatives. We'll work something out. I project that we will work something out with Turkey. I think it will work out fine. Okay?

Q. Mr. President, Mr. President——

President Trump. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, Sen. Risch referred to President Emmanuel Macron of France. President Erdogan referred to Ferhat Abdi Sahin, who is generally known in the U.S. by his nom de guerre Mazloun Kobani Abdi, commander of the opposition Syrian Democratic Forces. He also referred to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a Kurdish political party in northern Syria, and its affiliated militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG); and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgent group. President Erdogan spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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