

Foreign Affairs Committee

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Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London, SW1A 2AH

8 January 2019

Dear Foreign Secretary,

I am writing regarding the recent announcement by the US of their withdrawal of troops from Syria.

Along with colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Committee, I am deeply concerned about the announcement by President Trump on 19 December that the US will be withdrawing all troops from Syria early in 2019.

In light of this announcement can you tell the Committee what the UK's current policy towards Syria is and how it has changed in light of this significant change in US policy? What conversations have you had with your counterparts in the US and with other allies since the decision was made?

We will be placing this letter and your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,



Tom Tugendhat MP
Chair

28 January 2019

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Secretary of State

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 8 January regarding US withdrawal from Syria.

I have spoken to Secretary Pompeo several times since President Trump's announcement of his intention to withdraw US military forces from north east Syria, most recently during my visit to Washington on 23 January. FCO officials have also been closely coordinating with their US, French, German and Turkish counterparts to discuss the implications of withdrawal.

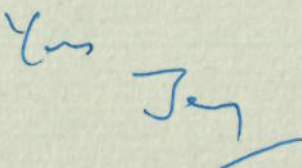
As I believe President Trump recognises, it is important that the withdrawal is done in a way that allows for the significant progress made against Daesh in north-east Syria to be maintained. Although Daesh have lost almost all of the territory they once held, they remain a threat. We remain committed to the Global Coalition, and its objective of securing Daesh's enduring defeat. We are discussing with the US how we achieve these aims in light of their withdrawal.

We have also made clear our concern to Turkey about the risks of unilateral military action in north east Syria. And we have reiterated that our shared goal must remain completing Daesh's defeat, and stability in the region. We welcome the ongoing US-Turkey discussions to this end.

Our broader Syria policy objectives remain unchanged. Despite the military successes of the regime and its external supporters, we do not believe that Asad is capable of delivering a lasting peace in Syria. Our priority remains to end the conflict through a negotiated political settlement. We fully support the UN-led Geneva process, which remains the only legitimate forum to achieve this. It is regrettable that there has not yet been more progress on this front. We have been clear that the fault for this lies squarely with the Asad regime and that Russia must now bring all its influence to bear to persuade the Syrian regime to engage seriously in this process.

UK policy on engagement with the Asad regime has not changed. As the Minister of State for the Middle East told the House of Commons last Tuesday, we have no plans to re-open our Embassy in Damascus, and we will not consider providing any reconstruction assistance until a credible, substantive and genuine political process

is firmly underway. However, we remain at the forefront of the humanitarian response to the crisis in Syria and the region, and will continue to be so.



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