

Statement From the Secretary of Defense

defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/1992704/statement-from-the-secretary-of-defense

You have accessed part of a historical collection on defense.gov. Some of the information contained within may be outdated and links may not function. Please contact the [DOD Webmaster](#) with any questions.

Immediate Release

Oct. 18, 2019

"Yesterday, Vice President Pence announced an agreement between the United States and Turkey to establish a ceasefire in Northeast Syria. As a result, Turkey has agreed to pause its offensive operations in Syria for 120 hours to allow for the withdrawal of the Peoples Protection Units from the roughly 20-mile safe zone along its border. Upon completion of the YPG withdrawal, Turkey has committed to enacting a permanent ceasefire.

Yesterday, General Milley and I had the opportunity to brief the Senate and House Armed Services Committees in classified hearings on the events that led to Turkey's incursion into Syria. We had a very serious, candid, and constructive discussion about where we've been, where we are, and where we are going when it comes to Syria and Turkey. I appreciated the members taking the time to hear from us, and we are thankful for their continued support to our service members.

I just got off the phone with the Turkish Minister of Defense. I reiterated the United States' position that Turkey must adhere to the full terms of this agreement, and that we expect Turkey to ensure the safety and well-being of all people in the area controlled by Turkish Forces. Protecting religious and ethnic minorities in the region continues to be a focus for the Administration. This ceasefire is a much needed step in protecting those vulnerable populations. I also reminded him of Turkey's responsibility for maintaining security of the ISIS detainees located in the affected areas.

The United States is continuing our deliberate withdrawal from Northeastern Syria as previously announced. The force protection of our service members remains our top priority, and as always, U.S. forces will defend themselves from any threat as we complete our withdrawal from the area. No U.S. ground forces will participate in the enforcement of this safe zone, however, we will remain in communication with both Turkey and the SDF.

Tomorrow I depart for the Middle East to visit with our troops and international partners, and to receive an update on the other important operations in the region. From there, I'll travel to the NATO Ministerial in Brussels to discuss a host of issues with the Alliance, to include the next steps in our D-ISIS Campaign. I look forward to meeting with my Turkish and other counterparts in Brussels to reinforce the importance of ensuring a lasting political solution to the situation in Syria. Thank you. " - Secretary of Defense Mark Esper*

*Statement was updated at 2 p.m.

Esper Defense Secretary