

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 15, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Mattis:

We write to urge you to prevent the planned delivery of F-35 Lightning II jets to the Republic of Turkey.

Contrary to its NATO obligations and the expectations that should govern a responsible ally, Turkey is actively operating to undermine U.S. interests around the world. Turkey's repeated military actions against American interests, relentless degradation of human rights and democracy under President Erdogan, and clear intention to build a strategic partnership with Russia have completely eroded the U.S.-Turkey relationship.

Our concern about the sale of F-35 jets to Turkey comes against the backdrop of Turkey's planned purchase of the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system. As a NATO ally, Turkey integrates its military systems with those of other NATO members. The United States and NATO have warned Turkey that the integration of the Russian S-400 missile system with the F-35 aircraft would threaten exposure of our most closely guarded military secrets to a major power hostile to NATO and U.S. interests. Despite these warnings, Turkey signed the agreement with Russia and recently pushed up the delivery date from 2020 to 2019. The growing ties between Turkey and Russia and their shared penchant for authoritarian rule, hostility to the sovereignty of other nations, and domestic human rights abuses are fundamentally at odds with U.S. interests. It is inconceivable that we would place the F-35 technology in the hands of the deepening Russian-Turkish military relationship.

We also have no confidence that Turkey will use F-35s responsibly in the region. Under the guise of targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Turkey has bombarded civilian areas and U.S.-supported Kurdish YPG forces. Turkish attacks have also killed Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in Iraq. Turkey's assault on Afrin in Northern Syria has killed hundreds of civilians and displaced more than one hundred thousand others. In the face of international condemnation, Turkey is expanding its campaign in Northern Syria and has set its sights on Manbij, where U.S. troops maintain a presence in the continuing fight against ISIS. Turkey's duplicity and military adventurism in Syria have given

advantage to ISIS, Iran, and Russia, as well as to extremist rebel forces, all at the expense of the United States. Erdogan's outrageous threat to attack American soldiers in Syria is reason enough to block the delivery of any military sales to the Republic of Turkey, let alone the most advanced generation of military attack aircraft.

Turkey has also shown that it cannot be counted upon to demonstrate restraint even when on American soil. On May 16, 2017, President Erdogan set loose his security forces against peaceful protesters assembled in Washington, D.C. This brutal attack was condemned unanimously by the House of Representatives in a vote of 397-0, and led Congress to prohibit a planned sale of firearms to Erdogan's security forces. This vote recognized that Erdogan's despotic attack on American citizens was an attack on our cherished constitutional liberties. The brazenness of this assault and Turkey's refusal to cooperate with the subsequent investigation demonstrates the level of contempt President Erdogan has for the United States and for our democratic values and exposes Turkey as a practitioner and exporter of extreme, violent authoritarianism.


In addition to its threats against the United States, Turkey has made a common practice of aggressively targeting U.S. allies, while aiding and abetting our adversaries. Erdogan has relentlessly harangued Israel, calling it a "terrorist state" and, in retaliation for the opening of the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem, recalling the Turkish ambassadors from the United States and Israel. Turkey continues to provoke Greece and violate its territory; the ramming of a Greek vessel by a Turkish ship is one of the latest salvos in this long-running dispute. Furthermore, more than forty years after illegally occupying Cyprus, Turkey's violations of Cypriot sovereignty have grown more brazen, including recently ordering military vessels to prevent Cypriot-licensed Italian ships from exploring Cyprus' exclusive economic zone for natural gas. Turkey has indicated that it will intensify the standoff by sending its own drilling ships to counter those recently dispatched by ExxonMobil. The European Union took the step of formally denouncing Turkey for these illegal acts. All the while, Turkey has embarked on a strategic realignment with our adversaries, Russia and Iran, actively siding with both nations to bring about an outcome in Syria that excludes the United States and undermines our national security interest of denying Iran strategic depth across the Middle East.

Within Turkey itself, the lurch towards authoritarian rule is intensifying by the day, with American citizens now becoming a target. Under the state of emergency law enacted following the July, 2016 failed coup, Turkey has detained Americans, including U.S. consulate employees; refused to recognize the U.S. citizenship of dual citizens; and denied U.S. diplomats access to the detained. Recently, 220 Members of Congress wrote to Erdogan demanding the release of Pastor Andrew Brunson, an American held by Turkey on baseless charges since October, 2016. Turkey has rebuffed appeals by the Administration and Congress for these Americans' release and appears to be holding them as leverage to secure the extradition of Fethullah Gulen. Allies worthy of our most advanced military technology would not hold Americans hostage over an unrelated dispute. Turkey has also held German, Greek, and other nationals hostage for trade in ongoing disputes with those countries.

Since the coup, Turkey has arbitrarily arrested 160,000 of its own citizens and fired approximately the same number of civil servants. These arrests amount to collective punishment, as Erdogan targets not just critics of his despotic regime but their families as well; more than 600 children are currently imprisoned in Turkey. Arbitrary detention and sham trials are hallmarks of authoritarianism. These mass firings and arrests of journalists, academics, civil servants, judges, and others are designed to intimidate any opposition to Erdogan and chill the freedoms that are the pillars of any free society.

It is hard to imagine a more compelling case for reevaluating the delivery of U.S. military technology to a foreign state. We must hold Turkey accountable for conduct that threatens U.S. national security, undermines the interests of our partners and allies, and represents a broadside attack against fundamental democratic values. For these reasons, we urge you to take whatever steps are necessary to prevent the planned delivery of F-35 fighter jets to Turkey.

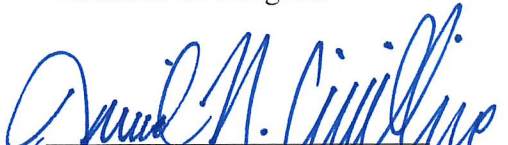
Sincerely,




John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



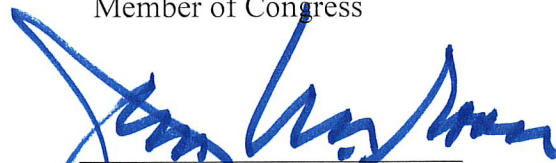
David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman
Member of Congress




James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Member of Congress



Ted Deutch
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

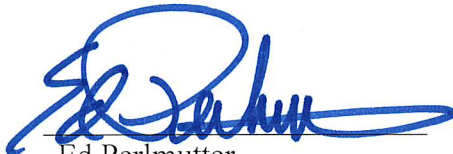

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

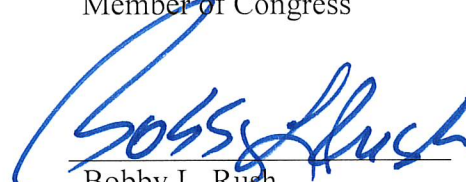

Ro Khanna
Member of Congress


Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Ron Kind
Member of Congress


Charlie Crist
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress


Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

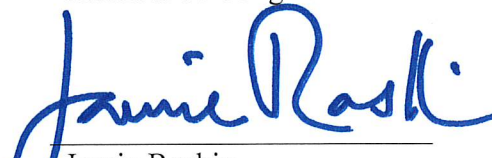

Dave Trott
Member of Congress

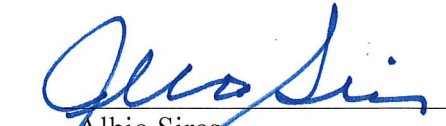

Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress

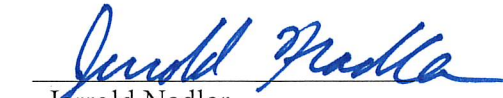

Josh Gottheimer
Member of Congress

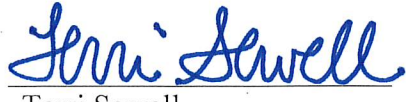

Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

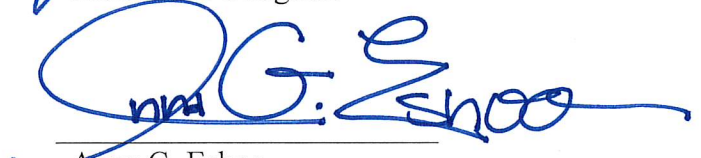

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

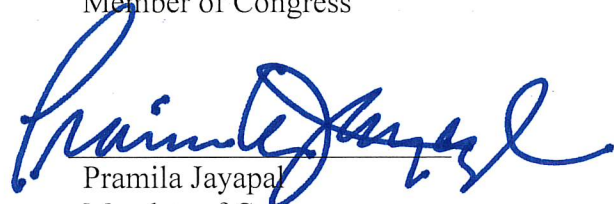

Albio Sires
Member of Congress

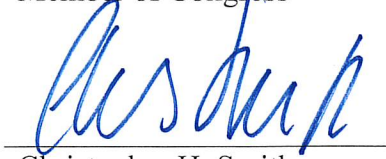

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress


Terri Sewell
Member of Congress


Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress

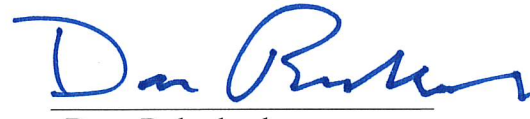

Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress


Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress

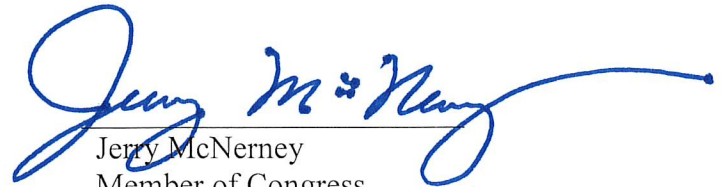

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress


Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress


Bradley S. Schneider
Member of Congress


Ted Poe
Member of Congress


Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress



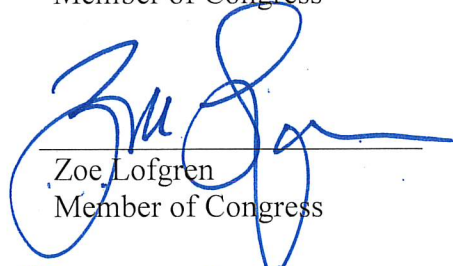
Tulsi Gabbard
Member of Congress



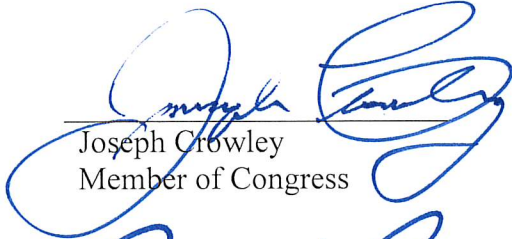
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress



Ted S. Yoho, D.V.M.
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



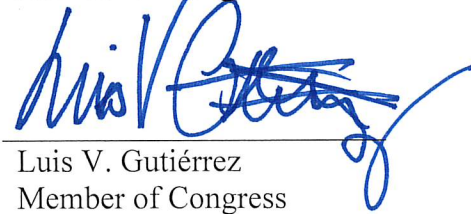
Joseph Crowley
Member of Congress



Robert B. Aderholt
Member of Congress



David E. Price
Member of Congress



Luis V. Gutiérrez
Member of Congress

cc:

The Honorable Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State

Vice Admiral Mathias W. Winter, United States Navy, Program Executive Officer, F-35
Lightning II

The Honorable A. Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of European and
Eurasian Affairs

John Bolton, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs