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# United States Senate

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November 5, 2019

The Honorable Joseph Maguire  
Acting Director of National Intelligence  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence  
Washington, DC 20511

Dear Director Maguire:

We write to express our grave concern about the instability in Syria, and particularly about the escape of numerous Islamic State (ISIS) detainees from detention facilities that had been run by America's Kurdish partners in the Syrian Defense Forces (SDF).

The SDF has been holding more than 10,000 captured ISIS fighters, including 2,000 so-called "foreign fighters," committed jihadists who traveled from Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere, to join ISIS. Many of these individuals are hard-core terrorists, with the kinds of expertise – bomb-making, leadership and propaganda – that had made ISIS such a threat to the United States and our allies.

As the Kurds understandably shift their focus to defending themselves, their ability to securely detain these ISIS fighters will become increasingly uncertain. Already, press reports have indicated that senior U.S. officials say they have "no real idea" how many fighters may have already escaped, and how many more are likely to do so.

If the past is any indication, it was escaped al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) prisoners that formed the core of what became known as ISIS, contributing to the group's eventual takeover of Mosul and much of northern Iraq. The subsequent influx of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria increased the terrorist threat to the United States and Europe. If left unchecked, the escape of ISIS detainees in Syria could lead to similar counterterrorism setbacks.

Therefore, please provide to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence an assessment of the impact the escape of ISIS detainees in SDF custody could have on the security of United States and our allies, including the detainees who have escaped and those still residing in SDF custody. In order to better inform the American public, the Congress, policymakers and America's allies, this assessment should be unclassified to the extent possible, with a classified annex if needed. Please provide a response to this request by November 19, 2019.

Sincerely,



Mark R. Warner  
Vice Chairman



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Mark T. Esper, Secretary of Defense