

CBS FACE THE NATION 13 OCTOBER 2019

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SPEAKER: MARGARET BRENNAN, CBS NEWS; MARK ESPER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE; REP. ADAM KINZINGER, R-IL; REP. ADAM SCHIFF, D-CA; SEN. TED CRUZ, D-TX; ANTHONY SALVANTO, CBS NEWS; AMY WALTER, COOK POLITICAL REPORT; GERRY SEIB, WALL STREET JOURNAL; TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA, WASHINGTON POST; CHARLIE D'AGATA, CBS NEWS

MARGARET BRENNAN, CBS NEWS: It's Sunday, October 13. I'm Margaret Brennan in the *nation*'s capital and this is Face the *Nation*. We have breaking this morning as the U.S. announces plans to withdraw the 1,000 American troops still in Syria.

MARK ESPER, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: So I spoke with the president last night and he directed that we begin a deliberate withdraw of forces from northern Syria.

BRENNAN: And over what time period will you be pulling back.

ESPER: Well, it'll be a deliberate withdraw.

BRENNAN: Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper, broke the news to us just a short time ago. We'll have that interview. The move comes after President Trump pulled back dozens of American troops from Northern Syria.

A move that cleared the way for Turkey to stage an incursion there, attacking the Kurds. A group that has long been a U.S. ally in the fight against ISIS. Mr. Trump's actions have alienated both his allies abroad and on Capitol Hill.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

DONALD TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: I'm sort of an island of one again.

(END VIDEO)

BRENNAN: We'll have a reaction from Republican Congressman, Adam Kinzinger. Then week three of the impeachment inquiry was notable for new subpoenas. Behind closed doors testimony and the White House stonewalling.

(BEGIN VIDEO)

TRUMP: So they're pursuing and illegal, invalid, and unconstitutional (inaudible) impeachment.

(END VIDEO)

CBS FACE THE NATION 13 OCTOBER 2019

BRENNAN: House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff is here to give us an update on the investigation. Plus the Chinese boycott the NBA after an official signals support for prodemocracy protestors in Hong Kong. We'll talk with Republican Senator Ted Cruz.

And where do Americans stand on impeachment. We'll have the surprising results from two brand new CBS polls. All that plus analysis on the news of the week just ahead on Face the **Nation**.

Good morning. And welcome to Face the **Nation**. We are following two very big stories this Sunday. The impeachment investigation and the president's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Syria.

A move that has turned into an international crisis. We begin this morning with the Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper. Mr. Secretary, welcome to Face the **Nation**.

ESPER: Good morning Margaret. Thank you for having me.

BRENNAN: The president pulled back from the border with Turkey but there are still about 1,000 U.S. troops in Syria. Are you evacuating them?

ESPER: Look, it's a very terrible situation over there. A situation caused by the Turks, by President Erdogan. Despite our opposition they decided to make this incursion into Syria. And at this point in time in the last 24 hours we learned that they likely intend to expand their tact further south (inaudible) and to the west.

And so we know that's happening. We also have learned in the last 24 hours that the Syrian forces intend -- I'm sorry -- the Kurdish forces are looking to -- the SDF are looking to cut a deal, if you will, with the Syrians and the Russians to -- to counter attack against the Turks in the north.

And so we find ourselves as -- we have American forces likely caught between two opposing advancing armies and it's a very untenable situation. So I spoke with the president last night after discussions with the rest of the national security team. And he directed that we begin a deliberate withdraw of forces from Northern Syria.

BRENNAN: A deliberate withdraw from the entire country?

ESPER: From Northern Syria.

BRENNAN: From Northern Syria.

ESPER: Right, which is where most of our forces are.

BRENNAN: So the 1,000 troops, how long and over what time period will you be pulling back.

ESPER: Well, it'll be a deliberate withdraw and we want to conduct it as -- as safely and quickly as possible. So we want to make sure we deconflict a -- a pull back of forces. We want to make sure we don't leave equipment behind. So I'm not prepared to put a timeline on it. But that's our general game plan.

BRENNAN: You said you're doing this for U.S. force protection because of two advancing armies. Those armies are advancing after the U.S. had already pulled back. After the U.S. Air Force that had controlled the air space stopped doing so.

ESPER: Well, we still have ...

BRENNAN: Do you actually believe they would advance if U.S. forces were there in -- in the numbers and with the force and the Commander in Chief saying don't do this?

ESPER: I do because, you know, it might lead (ph) up to talks with my counter part of the past several weeks, I've been on the job a little bit over two months, it became very clear to me that the Turks were fully committed to conducting this incursion.

The Turks were committed to doing this. This should not be a surprise. And if you go back in time to when we first began this relationship with the -- with the Syrian Kurds, at the time of 2014 the Turks were protesting at that moment.

BRENNAN: Right.

ESPER: And it's gone on and on and since that time they've actually implemented three incursions into Northern Syria.

BRENNAN: But do you actually believe Turkey would fire on U.S. forces. We are NATO allies.

ESPER: Well, I don't know whether they have -- they would or they wouldn't. We have reports already of indiscriminate fire landing near American forces.

BRENNAN: Was that accidental? Was that deliberate? Was that reckless?

ESPER: Well, we don't know. We need to sort that out. We've given them the locations of our forces. I -- but look, I've been to war. I know what war is like. There's a fog out there and things happen. And we want to make sure we don't put our soldiers in a situation where they could be killed or injured.

And look, even if the Turks decided not to attack forces, I mean they're got over 15,000 forces. What we decided to pull back from that immediate zone of attack was about less than 50, maybe two dozen forces. I would be irresponsible for me to keep them in that position and --

BRENNAN: But you did have U.S. Air Force controlling the air space.

ESPER: And we still do. And we still do. It was a coordinated arrangement between us and the Turks, and despite our protestations (ph), despite the fact that we urged the Turks not to do this, they decided to do it and we told them that we would not support them militarily in this action.

BRENNAN: So, how does that not amount to a retreat? You're saying that the President of the United States, the Commander in Chief said don't do this, and then Erdogan said, I am, and he said, OK, I'm not going to fire back. I'm going to pull back?

ESPER: Well, I wouldn't -- I wouldn't characterize -- I wouldn't characterize it this way -- that way. What I'm saying, is we did not want to put American forces into harms way. We did not want to get involved in the conflict that dates back nearly 200 years between the Turks and the Kurds and get involved in another -- yet, another war in the Middle East.

BRENNAN: Well, when it comes to the forces you're talking about, the SDF you referred to, you said it has -- developed in the last 24 hours that you've learned they've struck a deal with Russia?

ESPER: Well, they're working on a deal. I don't know that it's been finalized yet, but we're pretty confident that they will go in that direction. Borrowing some -- we're trying to make some last minute interventions with President Erdogan, but again, my expectation is President Erdogan would not agree to a cease fire.

He would not agree to move back across the border, which we've been pushing him to do. And so, every -- there's every expectation that the -- again, that the Syrian Kurds would cut a deal with the Syrian and Russian forces.

BRENNAN: But to be clear, the reason the Syrian Kurds are striking a deal here is to protect themselves from being killed by Turkey.

ESPER: That's right.

BRENNAN: But, that's what the United States was doing for them. They were our allies, that we were advising and assisting and protecting. It sounds a lot like they were being left to be slaughtered, so what choice were they left, other than to find someone else to protect them?

ESPER: Look, the -- this -- the Kurds have been very good partners in the de-ISIS campaign. They were very good fighters on the battlefield. We, obviously, enabled that as well, but at the same time, we didn't sign up to fight the Turks on their behalf, and we've been clear with them about that.

That's why, since I came into office over two months ago, I've worked week after week with my Defense Administer counterpart from Turkey and urged them not to do this. We sited all the reasons that are now playing out.

The biggest being the likely release of ISIS fighters from these camps and prisons. Not just that, we see a humanitarian crisis emerging, we -- the relationship between the United States and Turkey is being damaged. They're standing in NATO and Europe is being hurt.

We see European capitalist coming out and criticizing President Erdogan for this -- for these actions. Everything that we told them -- all the reasons why we told them not to do this are coming to bear.

BRENNAN: And what price will they pay for it?

ESPER: Well, we'll see over time. You see that some European countries are already talking about specific sanctions and actions, the president is talking about the same. I -- we should expect to see something like that along those same lines.

BRENNAN: Doesn't that just drive them into the arms of Russia?

ESPER: I don't think so. We've got to see how this plays out. But again, we've got to take this one step at a time. It's a very fluid situation, but it's changing by the hour.

BRENNAN: You -- just in the past few hours, online, there have been videos circulating, horrific videos, showing execution of some of these Kurdish allies of ours. There are reports of hundreds of ISIS fighters and family members just running free. There are over 100,000 individuals fleeing this violence, according to the U.N. Does the United States have any idea who these forces are that Turkey is sending in? Who these militias are?

ESPER: It's terrible. It's a terrible situation, we condemn it. We have condemned it. It's -- these are just as things that we told the Turks would happen and play out. Who's conducting it, it's unclear at this point in time. There are Kurdish regular -- I'm sorry, there are Turkish regular forces and there are Turkey proxy forces engaged as well.

BRENNAN: Right. And we don't know who they are?

ESPER: We don't know -- that's right. We don't know exactly who they all are and what they're doing, but we're hearing the same reports from the battlefield as well.

BRENNAN: These are war crimes?

ESPER: It appears to be, if truth, that they are -- would be war crimes.

BRENNAN: European allies are looking at this, and when they hear the president say things like, these ISIS fighters will just flee to Europe, they say that is not appreciating the alliance, that Turkey has been far too permissive in allowing ISIS fighters within its territory. They see this as inevitable that we are headed towards a terrorist attack.

ESPER: We -- we --

BRENNAN: Because of this chaos that the U.S. allowing in the vacuum (ph).

CBS FACE THE NATION 13 OCTOBER 2019

ESPER: Well, let's be clear. The United States is now allowing this. Turkey committed this action. They decided to make and encourage in the northern Syria (ph), despite our protestations, our urgings not to do it, all of our warnings, they decided to do it. The situation --

BRENNAN: But, the U.S. is being permissive, arguably, by pulling back and not stopping them.

ESPER: We are -- we are doing what's in the interest of our service members, not to put them in harms way, not to put 20, 30, 40 soldiers up against a 15,000 man army, which is using air strikes, artillery and ground forces to prosecute a war against the Turks, who's roots go back over 200 years.

BRENNAN: If the U.S. is fired at, do forces have the ability to defend themselves?

ESPER: They do.

BRENNAN: Can they fire back?

ESPER: Absolutely. General Milley's made that clear to his counterpart, I made that clear to my counterpart. I warned them just the other day that they need to respect our positions on a ground, they need to respect our forces and I reminded them that we have the right of self-defense and we will execute if necessary.

BRENNAN: Very quickly, are you going to comply with the subpoena that the House provided you and provide documents to them, regarding to the halt to military aide to Ukraine?

ESPER: Yes, we will do everything we can to cooperate with the Congress. Just in the last week or two, my general counsel sent out a note, as we typically do in these situations, to ensure documents are retained.

BRENNAN: Is that a yes?

ESPER: That's a yes.

BRENNAN: You will comply with the subpoena?

ESPER: We will do everything we can to comply.

BRENNAN: OK. All right, thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. Appreciate it.

ESPER: Thank you, Margaret.

BRENNAN: We taped that interview a short time ago. Since then, our David Martin reports that a U.S. official has told him U.S. troops have already begun moving out of their positions in Northern Syria. We'll have a report from Syria later on in the broadcast.

But we want to go now to Illinois Republican congressman, Adam Kinzinger. He is in Ottawa, Illinois.

Good morning to you, Congressman.

REP. ADAM KINZINGER (R-IL): Good morning.

BRENNAN: You wanted the president to rethink his position. We know from Secretary Esper, this decision to pullout was made last night.

What is the implication going to be?

KINZINGER: Well, it's going to be terrible. And you know, the secretary's doing his job, and you know, he has to follow orders. And -- but the reality, we all know, that if there were still those 30 or 40 soldiers in that part of Syria that Turkey wouldn't attack.

We actually had a pretty good, kind of joint security situation being set up to deescalate that area. In fact, pulling those 50 troops or whatever it is has given license to Turkey, and then now, I think pulling the remaining thousand in Syria is simply an excuse to get out.

Look at this way. You hear the president and people like Rand Paul talk about endless wars all the time, and it's catchy, but actually, we were preventing an endless war, and that actually commenced on Sunday now, a week ago.

And so, it's really depressing. And you know, for me, as a guy that's served in the military and really got into politics because of -- I believe in the role America plays, to see this yet again, you know, leaving an ally behind, abandoning people that we, frankly, told that we were going to be with, is disheartening, depressing.

Frankly, it's weak, and I don't see how it follows through on the president's promise, his biggest promise, of the campaign to defeat ISIS, because I think it is going to resurge.

BRENNAN: Is the president putting U.S. national security at risk?

KINZINGER: Yes, I certainly -- I think so, yes. And I mean, look at what's going to happen out of here. Now, we have another group that now believes they can't rely on the United States. There's a lot of complication in the Kurd situation, and I've seen all this Russian misinformation now on the internet that's being picked up by some of these political blogs, that these are the bad Kurds, and there's good Kurds.

Well, look, there are Kurds that aren't the best folks in the world, but there are also people that we have chosen to equip to fight ISIS, that we were with. We had a created a situation in which there was stability, and out of an impulsive decision I think that the president made.

Otherwise, it was cold and calculated, because we've been thinking about it for a while and nobody else knew. The Kurds found out on Twitter, for goodness sakes. We have left them to the wolves. And the message this is sending to our allies around the world I think is really going to bad.

BRENNAN: So what are Republicans and Congress going to do about it? Are you completely powerless?

KINZINGER: No, we're not powerless. I mean, the president has a lot of power, though. And I said that, no matter - even under president Obama, I said the president's got a lot of power. That's in the Constitution. The things we can do we are going to do. We've got a resolution of condemnation I think next week, as well as some significant sanctions.

The president tweeted about sanctions this morning, but I think he needs to make sure he's following through on them. And they're not going to be surface sanctions. They're going to really Turkey hard.

And then the other thing we can do is be outspoken about this. The American people, you know, who want strength and leadership, who were promised by this president that we would defeat ISIS, deserve to hear the truth and not these things like "endless war" that you hear some on the kind of libertarian spectrum talk about.

There is now a war that's been commenced in Syria, because we have pulled 50 troops out from being able to prevent that war.

BRENNAN: You heard the secretary acknowledge war crimes. The State Department has said they're afraid of ethnic cleansing. So looking at all of that, aren't sanctions just punitive? They're not preventative?

KINZINGER: Yes.

BRENNAN: Is there a responsibility here to do something?

KINZINGER: Yes. Well, I think there is. I think it is not necessarily going to prevent Turkey from doing what they're doing. This has been Turkey's dream for a long time. And the president basically gave the green light to do it.

They're going to important, but I think we also have to continue to say this, which is when the United States backs away, chaos follows through.

And we had a situation of stability there. It wasn't perfect. Erdogan probably didn't want to have to do joint patrols with the U.S., because he wanted to attack. But we're the United States of America, and we can prevent things like that. And we have to remember the strength we have and not just try to run away from every conflict, we could have.

BRENNAN: So "The Wall Street Journal," had an editorial that was pretty strong here in sharply criticizing the president, "for his habit of impulsive judgment and they argued that his judgment can be so reckless that many voters who took a risk on him the first time will ask if he's worth a second gamble in 2020."

Impeachment won't defeat Donald Trump in 2020, but Donald Trump might. Does this make you question whether you're going to support President Trump in 2020?

KINZINGER: Well I'm not going there and question whether I'm going to support -- but it does, I think the president needs to be aware that -- and I know Republican-based voters, I represent both Republicans and Democrats, I have a Republican district.

One of the things they loved about Donald Trump is they're like, he says what he means, he's tough, he's taking the fight to ISIS. And I'm having a hard time seeing how basically pulling out of Syria -- and it's not just about protecting the Kurds, it's about getting intel and fighting ISIS, and I don't see how that's going to be a position of strength, so I'll love to see how 2020 plays out on that.

BRENNAN: Yes, no -- should Erdogan come to the White House next month as planned?

KINZINGER: No, absolutely not.

BRENNAN: Thank you, Congressman. We'll be back in one minute with the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff -- don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL)

BRENNAN: We turn now to the other big story we've been watching, that of the impeachment inquiry in to charges that the president and his allies pressured Ukraine to investigate unsubstantiated allegations of wrongdoing by former Vice President Joe Biden and his son Hunter.

We're joined now by the Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff. Good morning to you Chairman, good to have you here.

REP. ADAM SCHIFF (D-CA): Good morning.

BRENNAN: Before we move to impeachment I want to ask for your reaction to the president's decision to pull out of Syria?

SCHIFF: Well, I agree with my Republican colleague -- I think this is disastrous. It's a complete capitulation to Erdogan that is putting at great peril, probably our strongest ally in the fight against ISIS, and that is the Syrian Kurds -- they were fighting side-by-side with American forces, we have pulled the rug out from under them, they're being slaughtered, there are war crimes being committed against them. And we're seeing ISIS fighters released from custody, just as we predicted would happen.

And for the president to say, well they're just going to go to Europe -- we're not going to have an ally left after this presidency. You can imagine how Europe feels about the President of the United States saying, well we're not really concerned about foreign fighters going to Europe.

They're going to pose a direct threat to our homeland as well, and we ought to care about our allies. This wouldn't be happening, but for this impulsive decision by the president to capitulate to Erdogan by precipitously withdrawing our forces -- it's just what Secretary Mattis warned against.

Erdogan took this as a green light -- and who can blame him for perceiving that that was the president's intention? And the consequences will be far lasting, the damage to our standing, the fact the Kurds are now entertaining going to the Russians to protect them because the Americans wouldn't.

This is just an unmitigated disaster, and I deeply fear, as Secretary Mattis has said, that this will result in the resurgence of ISIS.

BRENNAN: Well, I want to get to the other big topic and that is the impeachment inquiry that you are leading, do you see this widening?

SCHIFF: Well we're keeping our focus right now on the president's coercion of an ally, that is Ukraine, to create these sham investigations in to his political opponent. We have discovered in very short order not only the contents of that call, but also the preparatory (ph) work that went in to that call -- the effort to condition something the Ukrainian president deeply sought and that was a meeting with the president to establish that this new president of Ukraine had a powerful patron, the president of the United States -- it was of vital importance to Ukraine, was being conditioned on digging up dirt on the Bidens.

BRENNAN: So you see that as the quid pro quo. Not just the military aid. First of all, there doesn't need to be a quid pro quo. But it is clear already, I think from the text messages that this meeting that the Ukraine president sought, was being conditioned on their willingness to interfere in the U.S. election to help the president.

That is a terrible abuse of the president's power. Now whether that abuse goes further; that is the withholding of military aid also as leverage, there's certainly strong indications that that is true as well. And we're going to get to the bottom of it.

But here you have a president of the United States abusing his power to the detriment of our national security and doing so to get yet another foreign country to intervene in our election. It's hard to imagine more of a corruption of his office than that.

BRENNAN: When will you begin to hold public hearings. The polling that CBS has done has shown that Americans really are not clear on what to think about this impeachment inquiry over the past two weeks of work you've done.

SCHIFF: Well, actually, you know, I think that the public attitudes have swiftly moved in strong support of the impeachment inquiry. And, you know, what we were trying to do is do a methodical and yet -- with a sense of urgency investigation of these matters.

BRENNAN: Well, the Republicans say it's behind closed doors so you can cherry pick information to be released.

SCHIFF: Well, the Republicans would like nothing better because they view their role as defending the president, being the president's lawyers. If witnesses could tailor their testimony to other witnesses, they would love for one witness to be able to hear what another witness says so that they can know what they can give away and what they can't give away.

There's a reason why investigations and Grand Jury proceedings for example, and I think this is analogous to a Grand Jury proceeding, are done out of the public view initially.

Now we may very call some of the same witnesses or all the same witness, in public hearings as well, but we want to make sure that we meet the needs of the investigation and not give the president or his legal minions the opportunity to tailor their testimony and in -- in some cases fabricate testimony to suit their interest.

BRENNAN: You've been -- well, the whistleblower has made these complaints and hand them -- handed them over. Why push for this whistleblower to come before Congress because Republicans are calling for it and some

CBS FACE THE NATION 13 OCTOBER 2019

Democrats like to ask questions too, but this information's already out there. Can't the Committee do its own investigation without risking the identity of this person being public.

SCHIFF: We can. And you know I think initially before the president started threatening the whistleblower and threatening others, calling them traitors and spies and suggesting that, you know, we used to give the death penalty to traitors and spies and maybe we should think about that again.

Yes, we were interested in having the whistleblower come forward. Our primary ...

BRENNAN: Not anymore.

SCHIFF: Well, our primary interest right now is making sure that that person is protected. Indeed now there's more than one whistleblower that they are protected. And given that we already have the call record, we don't need the whistleblower who wasn't on the call to tell us what took place during the call.

We have the best evidence of that. We do want to make sure that we identify other evidence that is pertinent to the withholding of the military support. The effort to cover this up by hiding this in a classified computer system.

We want to make sure that we uncover the full details about the conditionality of the either the military aid or that meeting with Ukraine president. It may not be necessary to take steps that might reveal the whistleblowers identity to do that and we're going to make sure that we protect that whistleblower.

BRENNAN: You know who was on that July 25 call. You know all the participants?

SCHIFF: I can't say that I do. But we now know what took place on that call. We are bringing in witnesses this coming week from the National Security Council, other State Department officials to find out what they can tell us about the conditionality of this vital military assistance to -- to the conditionality of this vital meeting between the two presidents and the presidents effort to dig up dirt on his opponent.

BRENNAN: Quickly. Do you regret saying that we the committee weren't in touch with the whistleblower?

SCHIFF: I should have been much more clear and I said so the minute it was brought to my attention that I was referring to the fact that when the whistleblower filed the complaint we had not heard from the whistleblower. We wanted to bring the whistleblower in at that time. But I should have been much more clear about that.

BRENNAN: Congressman, thank you very much. And we will be right back. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BRENNAN: Coming up in our next half hour, the latest on the 2020 race for the White House. Who's up, who's down and what impact the impeachment story is having, if any, on the Democratic field, with our CBS News Battleground Tracker. Stay with us.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BRENNAN: Welcome back to FACE THE NATION.

We spoke yesterday with Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz. He's the highest ranking U.S. official to visit Hong Kong since pro-democracy protests began four months ago. We asked him about the president's saying that the situation in Hong Kong was dying down.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

SEN. TED CRUZ (R-TX): And I'll tell you what's happening here in Hong Kong is -- is inspiring. We've seen over 2 million people come to the streets, standing up for freedom, standing up for democracy, and -- and standing up against the oppression of the Chinese communist regime. And -- and -- and I think it is very much in the United

States' interest to support the people of Hong Kong. I'm here. I'm dressed in all black standing in solidarity with the protesters.

BRENNAN: So the protests are not dying out, as the president suggested?

CRUZ: I -- the -- the -- the protests are continuing full force. And I'll tell you something that really illustrates just how powerful the protests are is what we've seen happen with the NBA this past week.

Daryl Morey, the general manager of the Rockets, my hometown team, I'm a diehard Houston Rockets fan, but -- but he tweeted a very benign tweet where he said stand for freedom, stand with Hong Kong. And -- and the Chinese communist government, they just about lost it. They got so upset, they ended up boycotted the Rockets. They ended up pulling them off TV in China. They ended up pulling them off the Internet. They ended up canceling all of -- of their sponsorships.

And, sadly, what ended up happening is the NBA, as a league, began this series of -- of -- of apologies. And it was really sad to see an American company, and indeed a global sports league like the NBA, being dragooned into censoring the free speech of American citizens in the interest of big bucks. It's not complicated why the NBA did that. Television and -- and the Chinese market is worth a whole lot of money.

But -- but, thankfully, a whole lot of us across the ideological spectrum, indeed I -- I helped lead a group, a bipartisan group of members of Congress calling on the NBA to do better to defend free speech.

BRENNAN: Right.

CRUZ: And I'm proud to say the -- I think the NBA is doing a better job of -- of defending those free speech rights.

BRENNAN: But isn't it really the U.S. government that should be leading the charge on this, rather than free enterprise?

CRUZ: Well, but, listen, American businesses shouldn't be in the business of censoring Americans. And we've see this pattern, whether it's the NBA afraid of losing a bunch of money in China, or whether it's Hollywood censoring out any content that is critical of the communist government in -- in China.

You know, it's really an -- an unfortunate dynamic, how China uses it -- its -- its vast resources to promote censorship. And all of our allies are facing this increased aggressiveness of -- of China.

BRENNAN: Exactly.

CRUZ: And we need to stand up. We need to defend our shared values.

BRENNAN: Exactly. So should those kind of protections be in any kind of trade deal with China?

CRUZ: Well, listen, a trade deal is -- is functionally different. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee just unanimously passed legislation on Hong Kong to -- to pressure -- to pressure China to protect the -- the free speech and democratic rights of the people of Hong Kong that -- I'm a co-sponsor of that legislation.

BRENNAN: Right.

CRUZ: And it was bipartisan. We saw Republicans and Democrats come together.

BRENNAN: Well, you're talking about legislation there. But what actions we've see the Trump administration take about Muslim minorities who are being put in internment camps in China are -- have been by the State Department pretty limited.

CRUZ: Yes.

BRENNAN: The Commerce Department blacklist some companies.

How do you stop the Trump administration from using that as a bargaining chip in a trade deal?

CRUZ: I introduced legislation called the Tiananmen Act, that would direct blacklisting the technology companies, the Chinese technology companies, that China is using to engage in surveillance, to engage in repression and imprisonment and in torture and murder of up to a million Uyghurs, a religious minority. And, as you noted, just this week, the Trump administration announced that they were implementing what is the core of my legislation, which is blacklist lifting those Chinese technology companies that are being used to suppress religious minorities. I think that's a really good step. It's a positive step by the administration.

BRENNAN: Have they assured you that won't be in any way considered as a bargaining chip in negotiations?

CRUZ: Well, listen, I -- I think we can do both. It's important to get a trade deal with China. I hope we do get a trade deal with China. We have enormous economic concerns. But we can do that at the same time defend our core values.

BRENNAN: China is a surveillance state. Is it appropriate for President Trump to be saying China should look into the Biden family? Is that appropriate?

CRUZ: Look, of course not. Elections in the U.S. should be decided by Americans. And it's not the business of foreign countries, any foreign countries to be interfering in our elections.

BRENNAN: Even Ukraine? I mean when -- when you're talking about some of this, I mean, do you think that say the president's personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, who's been talking about China., who's been talking about Ukraine, do you want to hear him testify about this sort of shadow foreign policy?

CRUZ: Listen, foreign countries should stay out of American elections. That's true for Russia. That's true for Ukraine. That's true for China. That's true for all of them. It should be the American people deciding elections.

I don't know what Rudy's been saying. I do know, though, that we should decide our elections. It should be the American people making those decisions.

BRENNAN: And you do want him to testify before your committee?

CRUZ: I -- I think it'd make a lot of sense for Rudy to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee. That's ultimately a question for the committee chairman, Lindsey Graham. But -- but I'd like to see Rudy testify, yes.

BRENNAN: So the president is often talking about the need to look into Joe Biden. If he is so concerned, would it be in any way appropriate for him to bring it to his own Justice Department instead of talking about foreign countries looking into his political rival?

CRUZ: I have long advocated that the Justice Department should enforce the law, should investigate corruption, should investigate violations of law regardless of party.

BARTIROMO: But, to be clear, you're not calling for the Justice Department to investigate the Biden family?

CRUZ: I -- look, I -- I don't -- I -- I believe the Justice Department should investigate violations of law. If there's credible evidence of a violation of law, yes they should investigate it.

And I'll tell you what I have called for. I think President Trump wisely released the transcript of his conversation with the Ukrainian government. I think that was good because a lot what the Democrats had been raising, alleging an illegal quid pro quo was not, in fact, backed up by the transcript. But I think -- I think actually the administration should do the exact same thing for Joe Biden, that it should release the transcripts of Joe Biden's conversations with Ukraine, use the same standard for President Trump and Joe Biden and -- and let the American people read the transcripts and decide.

BRENNAN: Senator Cruz, we will leave it there. Thank you for joining us from Hong Kong.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRENNAN: We'll be back in a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BRENNAN: For a look at what Americans are thinking about all those headlines that are dominating our conversations here on FACE THE **NATION**, we turn to Anthony Salvanto, our CBS News elections and survey director.

Anthony's got two polls for us today. And first we'll take a look at the national poll on the impeachment inquiry.

So, Anthony, over the past two weeks, since this has really picked up steam, have you seen a change?

ANTHONY SALVANTO, CBS NEWS ELECTIONS AND SURVEYS DIRECTOR: Not over the last two weeks. We do see hardening partisan divisions here. We see Republicans increasingly saying that they support the president, don't think he ought to cooperate with Congress. Democrats even more strongly approving of the inquiry.

Really important when you watch the polls on this is that you differentiate between support for having an inquiry, which there is marginal majority support, get the facts, learn what happened, and whether or not they think the president deserves impeachment. And that is much more mixed nationally.

What I think is interesting going forward here, Margaret, is that when you talk to the people who say they don't know which way to go on this, they say they aren't paying as much attention and they feel like a lot of this, a lot of names, a lot of places are hard to follow. So it may be a challenge for both parties to move beyond their base as they make their arguments when Congress returns.

BRENNAN: So overstating things to say building support for impeachment? It's more complicated than that?

SALVANTO: Yes, it's more complicated than that.

BRENNAN: Our second survey is of Democrats in the 18 states holding the first primary or caucus contest next year. According to our CBS News battleground tracker, Senator Elizabeth Warren has extended her lead with 31 percent support among Democrats. Former Vice President Joe Biden is second with 25 percent support. And Senator Bernie Sanders rounds out the top tier with 17 percent.

Our next group of candidates shows Senator Kamala Harris with 7 percent support, South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg has 5 percent support among voters in those 18 early contests, and former Congressman Beto O'Rourke has 4 percent support. The other candidates come in with 1 percent or less.

So how, Anthony, is all of this controversy affecting the Democrats?

SALVANTO: Well, the charges that the president has leveled against Joe Biden, they are not hurting him directly. Most Democrats say they aren't true, they don't matter, haven't changed their view of him. But it's Biden's response to those charges that's generating kind of a lukewarm response from these early state Democrats. They say they're somewhat satisfied with that Biden response, but not very satisfied with it.

And then we asked, well, when these candidates -- if these candidates become the nominee, how well would they be able to fend off attacks from the president? Because surely they're going to be coming. And only half of people say that they think Biden will do that very well. You contrast that with Elizabeth Warren, whose numbers are much higher on her perceived ability to fend off attacks from the president.

I also noticed that one of the strength for Joe Biden has been what people perceive as his electability, the idea that he can beat Donald Trump among Democrats. That's down this week. And so I think it may be that, you know, when you talk about electability, it's not just which demographic groups they think a candidate can appeal to, it's also how they rate the way they handle the campaign.

BRENNAN: You said Elizabeth Warren has had a good month. So what's behind that?

SALVANTO: Well, she's up in -- across these early states. She's also then moved up in Iowa, extended her lead in New Hampshire. And a lot of that is, she's doing particularly well with people who say they want a candidate who is tough. Her electability numbers have stayed about where they were. She's also doing much better than Joe Biden in being perceived as a candidate who will fight for people like you.

BRENNAN: That's her slogan, isn't it.

SALVANTO: That's one of her -- that's one of her slogans. So that may be resonating. And I think a lot of this for her too is, you know, not just on policy now and now just on being seen as specific, which she has been in previous polls, but she also seems to be undercutting some of Joe Biden's arguments as well as she gains steam.

BRENNAN: The other frontrunner, Bernie Sanders, has had a tough month in terms of health problems. He had that heart attack.

Is that impacting perception of him?

SALVANTO: Well, we've been asking now in previous polls if folks thought age was a concern for some of these older candidates. And the numbers who say that Sander's age is a concern are up this week.

We followed up and we asked, well, what specifically is concerning? And it was those folks who said it was, said, well, they were worried that he might not be able to do the job of president and all that it requires. So there may be some indirect impact on that for Sanders.

Having said that, the support he does have, the folks who support him are among the strongest, are the strongest, in fact, in their support of any other candidate.

BRENNAN: The passion factor.

SALVANTO: Indeed.

BRENNAN: All right, Anthony, thank you.

All of the results from both of those surveys are now on our website at facethenation.com. And we'll be back in a moment with our panel.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BRENNAN: We'd like to bring in our panel now for some political analysis. Amy Walter is the national editor for "The Cook Political Report," Gerry Seib is the executive Washington editor at "The Wall Street Journal," Toluse Olorunnipa covers the White House for "The Washington Post." He is also a CNN political analyst.

Thank you all for being here.

Gerry, I want to start off with you. Just, the news of the morning, what we heard from the secretary of defense, the pullout of at least hundreds of American troops from the north of the country, unclear when the remaining will be moved out. It sounds like they're first headed to Iraq. Unclear what the plan is.

GERALD SEIB, 'THE WALL STREET JOURNAL': Yes.

BRENNAN: To counter the counterterrorism threat.

How is this going to be digested?

SEIB: Well, first of all, it's striking how ugly this has turned how quickly.

You have Turkish troops moving further into Syria than they promised. You have ISIS prisoners on the loose, apparently. You have U.S. troops getting out of harm's way because they were, in fact, in harm's way. And you have a lot of tension within the NATO alliance because you have a NATO ally, a NATO member, undertaking an action that everybody, including the U.S., opposes. And so that's a pretty ugly picture.

I also think, though, it's striking that you have President Trump saying, this is an attempt to end endless wars. And it kind of tells you exactly how serious he took this promise he thinks he made in the 2016 (ph) campaign to get U.S. forces out of the Middle East and how intent he is on not being accused of failing to make good on that promise by the time the 2020 campaign gets around. It makes you wonder a little bit about what's going to happen in Iraq and Afghanistan between now and the 2020 election.

BRENNAN: Right. And we didn't even mention the fact that on Friday the Pentagon announced they're actually upping the number of U.S. troops in the Middle East. This isn't actually withdrawing from the region --

AMY WALTER, 'COOK POLITICAL REPORT': Right.

BRENNAN: It's adding another 18,000 -- or 1,800, excuse me, to Saudi Arabia.

WALTER: But I think Gerry's right, it's a little bit of the check the box, right? The closer that we get to the election, the more that he focuses on being able to say, I fulfilled the promises I made in 2016. The lengths he's taken on security on the border, right, building the wall, showing how many folks have been apprehended at the border. We're now, I think, on our fifth Homeland Security head since his administration has started.

BRENNAN: Kevin McAleenan, the acting secretary, resigned on Friday.

WALTER: Whose -- yes, resigned. So with the sole focus of that position, which was designed as a broader umbrella for security, right, in American security and coordinating security within the U.S. has been focused almost exclusively on the southern border. And his -- the president's focus on making sure that he can say on Election Day, I have been able to fulfill x, y, z on this.

SEIB: And we should not lose sight of the fact that a lot of people will cheer at that.

WALTER: Yes. Of course.

SEIB: I mean the foreign policy establishment is appalled, but there is a certain base of support for just -- let's just get out. And he's going to tap into that.

BRENNAN: Toluse, obviously the promise resonates to pull U.S. troops out of the Middle East because Democrats are also running on that message. But it's the how it happens, when it happens, if it's planned. That is what the national security establishment usually tries to plan to minimize damage.

What we heard from the Defense secretary is all of this was decided just last night.

TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA, 'WASHINGTON POST': Yes, I thought it was pretty remarkable what Secretary Esper said. He said that we predicted that all of this negative and horrible stuff would happen once the Turks went into Syria, but we still stood down and allowed it to happen. It doesn't make it sound better to say that we knew that this was going to happen, but we thought, you know, we could not stop them from doing it.

We have the president that says, you know, we're America first. We're the strongest military. We've rebuilt the military. But, at the same time, we couldn't prevent this atrocity from happening. We just had to stand down because the Turks were determined to go in.

And it didn't seem like there was a plan about what to do once that happened. Now it seems like they're trying to put together a plan. The president's tweeting and threatening sanctions. But there's not a clear sense that there is a strategy involved.

And we saw what happened in 2014 with the rise of ISIS and how well they used social media to really put fear in the hearts of a lot of Americans and a lot of American voters. And Republicans used that as a weapon against President Obama. And if we see that reemerge and we see those types of videos and images coming out of the region once again, it could threaten President Trump's re-election as well.

BRENNAN: So it's usually thought of as a cliché, oh, foreign policy doesn't matter to voters, national security doesn't.

WALTER: Right.

BRENNAN: Is that true this time?

WALTER: And, listen, it doesn't until it does. And Toluse is right, when it looks like it's directly impacting Americans, that's when -- that's when it really matters.

But I also think it's important to understand when we're talking about fulfilling his campaign promises and checking the boxes, and I think Gerry's right, that, yes, for a lot of voters they do think that's one of the things that they like about him.

But, remember, there's this whole group of voters out there who voted for Donald Trump in 2016, not necessary because they liked what he was saying or they wanted him to fulfill these promises, but they didn't necessarily like the other choice that they had. Now what they're having to choose from, and I think this is an example of this is, do they want another four years of a presidency where things seem to happen without any strategic thinking, where there's so much chaos.

"The Wall Street Journal" editorial put it this way, right, this impulsive judgment. That is the challenge right now for Trump going forward. It's not is his base excited, are Democrats engaged, it's that small sliver of people might not necessarily have been enamored with Donald Trump in the first place, but they are exhausted by what's been happening over these last couple of years and the prospect of it continuing.

BRENNAN: I want to -- I want to talk about one of the people whose running as an alternative, Joe Biden, who has been linked to this impeachment inquiry because of the accusations around Ukraine and his son. His son, Hunter, today releasing a statement, really kind of commenting for the first time on all of this, saying that if his -- his father becomes president, he won't serve on the board of a foreign firm, resigning from the firm he does serve on in -- in China.

And I want to play this sound bite from the vice president, Joe Biden, because he really responded for one of the first times this week.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOE BIDEN (D), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: We all laughed when he said he could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot someone and get away with it. It's no joke. He's shooting holes in the Constitution and we cannot let him get away with it.

To preserve our Constitution, our democracy, our basic integrity, he should be impeached.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BRENNAN: So that public call was really the first time the vice president has said he's -- he's putting his shoulder behind it.

SEIB: And he's been very cautious about impeachment, as a lot of mainstream Democrats have been, like let's -- we saw this movie in the 1980s with Bill Clinton. It didn't turn out well for the Republicans. Let's be careful.

CBS FACE THE NATION 13 OCTOBER 2019

But he came out this week. It puts him more in sync with the Democratic base. And now I think the Biden campaign is doing something very interesting. They are trying to say, essentially, President Trump is trying to drag me, Joe Biden, down because he fears me the most. And that plays right into the Biden campaign narrative, which is, I'm the most formidable candidate to defeat President Trump.

President Trump is making that case for me. You Democrats ought to take heed and understand that I'm the formidable candidate who you can turn to, to defeat President Trump. That's not a bad message for the Biden campaign to put out.

BRENNAN: And, Toluse, how is the White House, how is the president responding to the impeachment inquiry? We can see the tweets, but what's actually happening?

OLORUNNIPA: Well, as we talked about there not being much of a strategy with the Syria policy. It doesn't seem like there's much of a counter impeachment strategy beyond, you know, having these outside lawyers say that the president is immune, that the president should not be investigated. The president going out and doing more rallies than normal and saying that this is a coup, that this is an attempt by Democrats to overturn the 2016 election. So he's going to push forward some language that may seem unsettling to a lot of people as he tries to counter this impeachment inquiry, but there's no sense that there's an actual strategy, a war room within the White House to push back against any of this.

BRENNAN: And how is it landing?

WALTER: Well, I think the point that your recent poll just put forward is that the Biden defense, that this is actually good for me, this makes me look like a frontrunner and that Trump's afraid of me isn't really borne out by those numbers. How well they handle attacks from Trump, Warren up over Biden by 15 points. So I think that, as of this point, it has not been as effective as they would have liked it to be.

BRENNAN: All right. Thanks to all of you.

We'll be right back with a report from Syria.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BRENNAN: We close today with a look at the situation in Syria from CBS News foreign correspondent, Charlie D'Agata, who just filed this report from northern Syria.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

CHARLIE D'AGATA, CBS NEWS FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: Even before the announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. troops, America's Kurdish allies stood little defense against Turkey's relentless onslaught. The U.S. military presence here was the only thing stopping the Turks from attacking in the first place. Now there will be no holding back.

Turkish backed militias who have already penetrated deeper into northeast Syria than ever before will be emboldened to broaden their ground offensive.

This video allegedly shows their gunman executing Kurdish civilians and soldiers on the roadside. The Syrian Democratic Forces say they've been betrayed and abandoned.

Senior SDF Commander Ray Dor Kalil (ph).

D'AGATA (on camera): What is your message to President Trump?

D'AGATA (voice over): We fought beside his soldiers for many years, Kalil told us. We were brothers in arms. He promised that he would protect the Kurds. But he's done nothing.

The U.N. estimates that more than 130,000 Kurds have already fled the fighting.

D'AGATA (on camera): What is your message to President Trump?

D'AGATA (voice over): Why did you leave us alone, she said. We were your loyal allies and you turned our back on us.

D'AGATA (on camera): These Kurdish forces were not only America's most loyal allies in the fight against ISIS here, but they protected us as we covered that fight.

D'AGATA (voice over): With Kurdish forces redeployed to face the Turkish invasion and U.S. troops now largely out of the picture, a resurgent ISIS has already begun striking back in any way they can.

D'AGATA (on camera): Now, the emerging ISIS threat cannot be exaggerated. They used a car bomb in an attempted jailbreak not far from here. ISIS inmates have been rioting. And just this morning, hundreds of ISIS families and supporters escaped from a detention center after it was shelled by Turkish forces.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

BRENNAN: Charlie D'Agata reporting from northern Syria.

That's it from us today. Thank you for watching. And thank you to the Jones Day Law Firm for the use of their facilities here on Capitol Hill.

Until next week, for FACE THE **NATION**, I'm Margaret Brennan.

END

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