

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 6, 2019

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper,

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as Secretary of Defense. We write to express our strong support for the F-35 program in the wake of Turkey's removal from the group of F-35 partner nations. Given the program's importance to our national security, we write to encourage continued F-35 sales beyond the current set of participants. We believe that F-35 expansion strengthens our relationships with our strategic partners and allies and provides your department with a means to advance the goals of the *National Defense Strategy*.

As a former partner country in the F-35 program, Turkey was part of an anticipated \$2.2 trillion in partner and Foreign Military Sales (FMS) of the joint strike fighter. Turkey planned to purchase 100 of the fifth-generation aircraft, and to receive over \$9 billion in projected work related to the F-35 over the life of the program. By proceeding with the purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense missile system, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has elected to forego these benefits. Locating the S-400 in Turkey posed an unacceptable threat to the F-35's superiority over our adversaries, and risked compromising the F-35 investments made by this country and our partners. We fully support the decision by the White House and your department to remove Turkey from the program.

We also commend the administration's recognition that Mr. Erdogan's S-400 decision did not diminish the importance of the F-35 program, nor the desire of our allies and partners to make the F-35 the backbone of their air forces. Put simply, the F-35 platform is coveted by our friends and feared by our adversaries. Demand for the aircraft remains understandably high. Countries in the F-35 program, whether they be F-35 partner countries or vetted Foreign Military Sales (FMS) customers, receive the most advanced, multi-role fighter jet in the world. In addition, these governments deepen their defense ties with the United States, increase their military's interoperability with our own, and enhance their capacity to deter foreign aggression. In return for all of this, the United States strengthens its security and receives a boost to American jobs, exports, and the defense industrial base.

The *National Defense Strategy* makes clear that the United States must strengthen its alliances and attract new partners in order to adapt to the long-term, strategic competition posed by China and Russia. We believe that expanding the F-35 program offers an important means to accomplish this, especially to governments in good standing with the United States that are threatened by China and Russia.

Given that accession into the F-35 partnership program closed in 2002, we understand that future F-35 expansion will likely be achieved by adding new FMS countries or increasing sales to countries already in the F-35 program. We applaud reports indicating that your department is already taking some of these steps and encourage you to broaden those efforts, understanding that any countries potentially purchasing the F-35 must not acquire the S-400 or similar systems too.

Since its inception over 25 years ago, the F-35 program has depended on an unprecedented level of defense manufacturing collaboration between the United States and its partners. Far from simply being a product of the United States' alliances, we believe the F-35 program today is a tool to strengthen these very alliances and help grow new ones. We therefore support the continued expansion of the F-35 program at a time when the United States must proactively seek out ways to mitigate the growing threats posed by our adversaries.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter and congratulations again on your confirmation as Secretary of Defense.

Sincerely,



Pat Toomey
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator

Susan M. Collins

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

Mike Lee

Mike Lee
United States Senator

Shelley Moore Capito

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator

Marco Rubio

Marco Rubio
United States Senator