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Remarks with Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul After Their Meeting

Secretary Colin L. Powell

C Street Entrance
Washington, DC
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SECRETARY POWELL: Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I've just finished a very, very useful and productive luncheon meeting with my colleague, Foreign Minister of Turkey, Abdullah Gul. We have met many times over the last several months and we always have a good exchange of view. We discussed a number of bilateral issues, as well as regional issues. We discussed the situation in Cyprus. We talked about the Middle East at some length. We started really, though, reflecting on the strength of the U.S.-Turkish relationship and all we have been through together as friends and allies over the last 50 or so years, a relationship that we cherish, and even though from time to time there are difficulties because we are so close to one another, we can work our way through these difficulties.

I expressed my appreciation to the Minister for the significant offers of assistance we have received from Turkey for reconstruction, humanitarian and other support efforts in Iraq to help the Iraqi people rebuild their society from the devastation caused by Saddam Hussein and to assist in bringing a better life to the people of Iraq. I gave to the Minister a paper which responded to their offers of assistance, and we are deeply appreciative of those offers. And as you know, Turkey already is doing quite a bit with respect to humanitarian aid ever since you and I met in your office a few months ago. And there's a lot of business that's going back and forth which will benefit both the Iraqi people and the Turkish economy and Turkish contractors.

We also talked about the possibility of a military contribution from Turkey. As you all know, General Abizaid was in Ankara a few days ago and made a request to the Turkish Government, and the Minister and his government have not had time yet to fully analyze the request, but he has assured me that it is under the most active consideration.

And so it was a good discussion, a full discussion. And, Mr. Minister, it's always a pleasure to have you here, and I invite you to say a word or two, sir.

MINISTER GUL: Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, in fact, Turkish-American relations are so important. It's very historical. It is so deep and strategic. Therefore, we would like to continue. We'd like to strengthen it, deepen these relations. For that we will work together.

We talk many issues, as Secretary Powell just told you. We are approaching all these issues in a positive way. Definitely, from time to time, even between the friends, between the families, you have difficulties but trust each other. We'll definitely overcome all these things. So we are very much optimistic for the future for our relations.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, any concrete step for the Cyprus issue in the discussion?

SECRETARY POWELL: We discussed the need to not lose the opportunity that is before us. And I commented favorably on the proposal that has been left on the table by the Secretary General and encouraged my Turkish friend to work with Mr. Denktash, and we would work with both sides to see if we can not get some movement quickly. We see a lot of things happening on the ground as the people themselves are now moving back and forth.

We want to convert that into a substantive agreement in the political world and come up with a comprehensive settlement. And I know the Minister has that same goal and we're working hard, but there were no new initiatives. We kind of reviewed the state of play of the discussions.

QUESTION: Is the United States willing to put combat troops into Liberia, or do you intend to restrict any assistance to logistical assistance?

SECRETARY POWELL: As you know, we're working with ECOWAS and the United Nations in preparing ECOWAS troops to go into Monrovia to stabilize the situation. I am pleased that there is a lull in the fighting right now, and that gives us the opportunity to move these ECOWAS troops into Monrovia.

We have teams in Freetown, Sierra Leone, working with Nigerian troops to see what their needs are. We have other teams that will be going to other African nations, and there are other nations that have expressed an interest outside of the ECOWAS community of participating in these efforts. The President has not yet made a decision as to whether or not the United States would commit troops beyond logistics and support, support troops and efforts. Most of that logistic efforts will probably be by contractor support and not by troop support, but we have an open mind on that as well. But with respect to combat troops on the ground, that's still under consideration and the President is examining the options.

Barry.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary --

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SECRETARY POWELL: Excuse me. Barry.

QUESTION: Is it possible -- referring to your interview with the Lebanese journalist, is it possible for Hamas to have any kind of a political future? You seem -- you were very strong about wanting them to get rid of their arms, get out of the terror business, but you also said if they hope to have a -- you know, you seem to leave open the door to something less than the destruction of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Or is that reading too much into it?

SECRETARY POWELL: Any organization that has a terrorist component to it and supports that kind of terrorist activity cannot have a place in the peace process. Now, if an organization that has a terrorist component to it, a terrorist wing to it, totally abandons that, gives it up, and there's no question in anyone's mind that that is part of its past, then that is a different organization. But right now, Hamas still has a social wing to it that does things for people in need, but, unfortunately, its good works are contaminated by the fact that it has a terrorist wing that kills innocent people and kills the hopes of the Palestinian people for a state of their own. And I think that covers it rather well.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, is there an urgency to the U.S. request for Turkish troops in Iraq? How soon would you expect a response from Turkey?

And to the Foreign Minister, will Turkey be seeking the condition of the UN or NATO framework for such a stability force in Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: We would like a decision as soon as possible, but that is a judgment for the Turkish Government to make. And I am pleased that the Minister indicated that they would be working on this, and in fast a manner as possible, and I was pleased to receive that news.

MINISTER GUL: UN -- NATO involvement definitely will make the job easier.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, did you discuss the credit guarantees for the Turkey?

SECRETARY POWELL: The what?

QUESTION: Credit guarantees, the \$8.5 billion credit guarantees, what Congress had approved.

SECRETARY POWELL: We talked briefly about it, the fact that we have provided funds to Turkey, which they then can convert into loans and loan guarantees. But we just took note of the fact, and we are pleased that we were able to provide this kind of assistance. And we talked about IMF responsibilities and commitments, yeah.

QUESTION: The fifth --

SECRETARY POWELL: The fifth review. The Minister gave me a rather positive assessment of the Turkish economy in the current quarter. So I think we're moving along well with respect to economic development.

QUESTION: What part of Iraq would you like to put Turkish troops?

SECRETARY POWELL: I used to be in the Department of Defense, but I am not now. So I will yield to my colleagues in the Pentagon, who the Minister will be seeing later.

QUESTION: What kind of an assurance have you received from the Turkish Foreign Minister on the deployment of Turkish troops in Iraq today?

SECRETARY POWELL: As I said to you earlier, the Minister has received our request. The government of Turkey is studying the request. I'm sure he'll have more conversations at the Pentagon this afternoon, and he has assured me that it is under active consideration.

Thank you.
[End]

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