



Remarks With Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I am very pleased to welcome to the Department of State my colleague, Foreign Minister of Turkey Ali Babacan. We were discussing the fact that we have met numerous times, first of all at the United Nations General Assembly last year shortly after Ali had become Foreign Minister. I was then in Ankara. We have met at multiple meetings. We seem to be on the same foreign ministers circuit. And indeed, we will see each other again in Paris in just a few days. It is really a great pleasure to welcome you here, Ali, because I believe that despite all of our meetings, this is actually your first time in the Department of State.

We have had wide ranging discussions, as would be befitting for good friends and good allies like the United States and Turkey. We share, of course, values. We share strategic interests. We have talked about a wide range of issues. We've talked about Iraq, where Turkey continues to be one of Iraq's supportive neighbors working hard, as the United States is, for a unified and democratic Iraq that can be a stabilizing force in the region and that will not be a territory on which terrorists can operate. We have talked at length about the Middle East, about Lebanon, about Afghanistan and the work that we do together there. We have talked about the importance of Turkey's continued progress toward its domestic reforms and toward the hoped accession to the European Union, something that the United States supports very much.

I was especially glad to have a chance to also thank Turkey for its active diplomacy around the world, including the extensive discussions that we've had about the efforts that Turkey is making to contribute to the comprehensive peace by sponsoring indirect talks between Israel and Syria. And so we have had a very wide ranging set of discussions. I expect that we will continue those discussions when I see you in Paris. There's never – never enough time to talk about all the things that we're doing together because we have so many of the same interests, so many of the same concerns. And I believe that we're working very effectively in partnership to address them.

I've asked the Foreign Minister to -- for forbearance for one moment just to mention the events in Zimbabwe. The situation in Zimbabwe is really quite difficult and quite grave. The Mugabe government continues to allow a deteriorating situation. We note the detention yesterday of opposition leadership and then detention earlier today of American and British diplomats. This demonstrates that this is a regime that is very much out of step with international norms. We intend to -- we have raised it bilaterally with Zimbabwe. We have raised it through others, and we will raise it with the Security Council because this is outrageous behavior in the treatment of diplomats.

So thank you very much, and the floor is yours.

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Thank you, Condi. It's my great pleasure to be here in Washington, D.C., my first visit to the State Department actually, and we had very productive discussions with Secretary Rice. Turkey and the United States, we are allies, we are partners, we are friends, and we are promoting the very same values in our region and also across the world, whether it's about democracy, whether it's about human rights, free market economy. And these are all the concepts that we promote and the United States promotes also.

The political cooperations, economic cooperations between our two countries are getting stronger and our cooperation in Iraq, especially against the terrorist organization, is also something which is working out very successfully. We have discussed also other issues about Iraq because the stability of Iraq is very important for our region. The political unity, territorial integrity of Iraq is very important concepts for the Middle East. We also discussed about other crisis areas in the Middle East. Turkey is a full supporter of the peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians. We were in the Annapolis conference and have our full support behind the efforts of the United States to find a lasting peace over there. And other tracks of the Arab-Israeli peace talks are also important. The Syrian-Israeli track is now open again, and we hope that that reaches a much expected result.

The United States is also a very strong supporter of Turkey for the European Union accession process, which is important for our domestic reforms, but also it is important for a much wider region. Cyprus is another area which, we have discussed, there is now a new sense of optimism, and we are also happy about the involvement and the support that the United States is giving behind the process so that there is a comprehensive solution sometime soon.

Whether it is Middle East or whether it is Balkans or in Afghanistan, we have very close cooperation. And we target similar roles, similar results for many of the crisis areas across the world. Thank you for very productive talks, Condi.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for two questions. Let's start with Anne Gearan.

QUESTION: Mr. Foreign Minister, first of all, would you like to see a stronger statement of U.S. support for your efforts to get the Israeli and Syria peace talks going? And also, what can you tell us about incursions into northern Iraq and cooperation with Iran on the PKK? Madame Secretary, does that cooperation between a U.S. ally and Iran concern you?

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Well, actually, just after the talks were announced two weeks ago, I think the United States was one of the first countries to come out with supportive stance. And Secretary Rice made immediate statements saying that the United States is behind this process, and I think we have no doubt about it; we are happy about the support. And actually, we also got many support from the Middle Eastern countries, Arabic nations, from the European countries, European Union.

So it seems that the international community really has been waiting for this for a while, and this is actually a -- more of a complimentary work that the United States has already been doing in the region, the Annapolis conference and also the following meetings. I mean, for fighting our fight against PKK, we are doing military operations in close cooperation with the United States armed forces, which are based in Iraq. So there is a very close communication going on between our militaries. And also, from time to time, when the operations are closed to the Iranian border, then there is communication between the Iranian authorities and our authorities as well. Because it's a very rough, mountainous area and the border is not just a straight line. It is a -- also a quite difficult, difficult border, basically.

SECRETARY RICE: I'm quite confident that Turkey and the United States and, indeed, the Iraqi Government, are on the same page about the desire to see the PKK not capable of carrying out attacks against Turkey. The PKK is an enemy of Iraq, it's an enemy of the United States, it's an enemy of Turkey, it's an enemy of the region. And so our concentration, our effort has been to get as much cooperation as we can working with Turkey to deny the PKK the course of using Iraqi territory for attacks against its ally, Turkey.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, Mr. Minister, Turkish-American relations has gone through a difficult time, particularly due to Iraqi war. But there's a good trend in relations recently. What did you discuss with the Minister today? And how do you see the state of relations? Also, what are your views on the closure case against Turkey's ruling party?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I do believe that Turkish-American relations are in a good place, that – of course, that there have been difficult issues that we've had to address together in the past. But I believe that we have really gotten to the place that we are cooperating on such a large range of issues, as I said, that we hardly have time to cover all of the concerns and issues that we have.

We talked today about Kosovo. We talked today about Cyprus. We talked today about Afghanistan, about Iran and the need for Iran to carry out the obligations that the international community has put upon it. We talked about the Middle East. We will be at a conference together about Afghanistan. We were just at a conference together about Iraq. I just think it shows the breadth of our relationship. And I said to the Foreign Minister that the active Turkish engagement in the Middle East and around the world is something that the United States very much welcomes. And the Minister was telling me about the Turkish efforts now in Africa to open more embassies there; I think also a very good thing, because we do promote the same values.

And those values are values of democracy, a strong belief that the rights of individuals to freedom are unassailable and that they are rights that are universal. We see that in the reforms that Turkey is undertaking. And we have just an excellent relationship with the government of Prime Minister Erdogan. I have been fortunate to have a very good relationship with now President Gul when he was Foreign Minister and now with Foreign Minister Babacan. So our view is that Turkey will, of course, resolve its issues through its democratic processes. But we are going to continue to work with this government with which we have found a excellent working relationship, with which we share common values and which increasingly, over the last year or so, we find ourselves working more cooperatively, more in unison to solve really hard problems than I think has been experienced in U.S.-Turkish relations for some time.

QUESTION: I'll take the next question.

MR. MCCORMACK: Charlie Wolfson, CBS News.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, on Zimbabwe. Have you had the time to talk with Ambassador McGee yet to get a personal update on the situation? And does the action taken today by President Mugabe's government, does that warrant anything more than just calling it outrageous or talking about it at the UN? Are you considering recalling your Ambassador for consultations? Or are you considering taking any steps against Zimbabwean diplomats here?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, as you know, Charlie, we've taken a number of steps concerning Zimbabwe over the last years as the Mugabe government has gotten more and more isolated and more and more hostile to international norms. And of course, we are always looking. We are cognizant of the fact, though, that there is going to be a run-off election in Zimbabwe. We need our diplomats to be able to try and help the international community and the African states assure some modicum of civility in those elections and some modicum of fairness in those elections. And so I think it's important that we maintain a presence there and that we be able to do our work on behalf of the people of Zimbabwe, who, I believe, desperately want to have a free and fair election runoff. And so there would be certain costs to trying to bring people back or so forth. We need to keep pressing for what we stand for there.

We are going to raise this at the Security Council. I've not personally had a chance to talk to our Ambassador, but I've had several reports today concerning this situation, concerning the welfare and well-being of everyone, and I will consult with him later. Because this is really an outrageous act and we will have to look at what more we can do. But we are first going to raise it in the Security Council. And I sincerely hope that this time, the Security Council does not consider the mistreatment of diplomats to be an internal matter for Zimbabwe.

QUESTION: Thank you. Madame Secretary, what do you expect Turkey to do -- increase pressure on Iran beyond the UN sanctions? Secondly, Iraqi Prime Minister is going to Iran and you're also in contact with Iranians about this issue. Are you going to continue these negotiations?

And Minister Babacan, what role Turkey could play to increase pressure on Iran over its nuclear program?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there is a course set, first by the six states that have been actively seeking a solution to the Iranian nuclear problem. That's the European 3: Germany, France, Great Britain. And then the other members of the Permanent Five: China, Russia, and the United States. And that course is a dual-track approach by which Iran has been offered very generous incentives to get out of the business of enriching and reprocessing, and to accept the world's help for a civil nuclear program.

I think one thing that we can do is we can all insist that the Iranian Government tell the truth to the world and to its people about what it's been doing, about cooperating with the IAEA, but also in telling the truth about what it's been offered. When I hear that the Iranian Government says that we are trying to deny it the technology of civil nuclear programs, it's simply not true. That's why we have supported the Russian Bushehr reactor. That's why we have supported a Russian idea at one point for a kind of consortium in Russia to provide fuel. Civil nuclear cooperation without the fuel cycle risks are available to the Iranians.

So, one track is a set of very generous incentives, trade and political and others. The other track, though, is through the Security Council. And there are now three Security Council resolutions that speak directly to what Iran must do and all member states. And Turkey, of course, is a member in good standing of the United Nations. All member states have an obligation to carry out the terms of those resolutions and to use whatever offices they have with the Iranians to insist that the Iranians carry out the obligations that the UN Security Council has imposed.

Yes, the Prime Minister of Iraq will go to Iran. Iran is a neighbor of Iraq. We've always said that we don't object to neighborly relations between Iran and Iraq. It would be only – it would be only natural. But we believe that those relations have to be carried out in a way that respects the sovereignty and independence of Iraq and does not interfere in Iraqi affairs, particularly through the arming of militias and criminals who then go and threaten coalition forces and often kill innocent Iraqis.

And so when we find it useful to engage the Iranians through Ryan Crocker's channel, we will do so. But the Iranians need to know that the United States is going to continue to confront them and pursue them as long as they are engaging in policies that endanger our forces and endanger our interests.

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Well, Turkey and Iran, we are also neighbors and we have dialogue with them. On the other hand, we are against nuclear weapons in our region. We do support the recent initiative of the six countries, including the United States, to come up with a new offer package for Iran. We are supporting this. And we believe that political dialogue could help to resolve the issue about nuclear program of Iran. Turkey is implementing the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. As long as the international community has one unified stance, Turkey is also implementing those decisions.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER BABACAN: Thank you.

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