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Remarks by Ambassador John R. Bolton, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, on the Mehlis Report (S/2005/775), at the Security Council Stakeout, December 13, 2005

Ambassador Bolton: Obviously we're going to be very interested in hearing Commissioner Mehlis' report. I think there are three critical issues before the Security Council as we try to ensure that there's clear international commitment and pressure to have the Mehlis Commission investigation continue. The first issue of course will be meeting the request of the government of Lebanon to extend the life of the Commission. The second would be to support the government of Lebanon's request to broaden the mandate of the Commission to look at these other assassinations and bombings in Lebanon. And the third would be to find a way to keep pressure on the Syrian government to meet its obligations of full and complete compliance with the work of the Commission, which up until now the Syria has obviously failed to do. So we'll be listening to the briefing, I'll have some questions for Commissioner Mehlis on such subjects as what Syrian officials are engaged in the obstruction of the investigation. We'll try to evaluate what he and others have to say. We'll be consulting during the evening on next steps and we'll be prepared to go from there. I can answer just a few questions then I have to go in.

Reporter: (inaudible) Are you ready for sanctions?

Bolton: Well, I'm not at all happy because I think Syrian cooperation has been grudging at best. I think they have tried the lowest common denominator approach to see what they can get away with, they have not met their obligations under previous Council resolutions of full and immediate cooperation. I said yesterday this really is obstruction of justice on their part and we are looking for ways to make sure that the international pressure on Syria is unrelenting, that their obligations to cooperate with the Commission are not mistaken and that they don't think they can try a 5% solution and find that we're satisfied with it because we are most emphatically not satisfied with it.

Reporter: (inaudible) you and many others will simply not mention the word sanctions. Is this a realization that sanctions will simply not get through?

Ambassador Bolton: No. In part it's a realization we're having meetings in Washington now to decide on what our policy is going to be. We have been carefully reviewing what the Mehlis Commission report says. We want to hear what Commissioner Mehlis has to say for himself today. I met with the Commissioner earlier and I passed all this back to Washington. But I think there's no ambiguity on the point that the Council's word is at stake now. The Council has given Syria a requirement for full and immediate cooperation that requirement has not been met. And for the Council's credibility to be preserved it has to ensure that the pressure and compliance continue. Now how exactly we do that, we're still considering, I grant you that. But on the part of United States there is absolutely no wavering from the proposition that Syria is not going to get away with obstructing this investigation, it's not going to cover up the actions of its senior officials and it's not going to escape the consequences.

Reporter: (inaudible) There have been some press reports saying that the US position has shifted from considering collective sanctions on Syria to considering individual sanctions on Syria. Is that rumor or fact?

Ambassador Bolton: We haven't ruled out any possible responses. We have legislation in effect that Congress has adopted with respect to a number of behaviors by the government of Syria including their continued support and financing of terrorist groups and their acquiescence in the passage of the terrorists, terrorist finances and weapons across the Iraq border now just two days before a critical election in Iraq. So we have a range of issues with the Syrian government. Here in New York, the point that we're trying to emphasize is that we have not only the Hariri investigation and the likely broadening of that investigation, but don't forget we've also got Syrian failure to comply with Resolution 1559, and their lack of complete withdrawal from Lebanon, their failure to undertake the steps that 1559 requires. The government of Syria responds unfortunately only to pressure, at least that's our experience to date, so we're considering what additional pressure we will bring to bear. Syrians hold the key to this themselves. If they complied with 1636, 1595, 1559, it's a long list these days and getting longer, they could put themselves back in the good graces of the international community, but their lack of cooperation, in fact their affirmative obstruction of the Mehlis Commission needs a response and we're looking to find exactly what that should be.

Reporter: (inaudible)

Ambassador Bolton: I would characterize that as broadening the investigation, extending I consider a temporal - broadening yes, we are going to support that. We have been cooperating with a number of member governments in the Council including France, of course, and we hope for broad support for that. But that's quite important for us.

Reporter: (inaudible)

Ambassador Bolton: We don't have the official letter from the government of Lebanon yet we're still waiting for that and for a translation. But we hope to be as supportive to the government of Lebanon as possible. But before we get into the specifics we need to see the letter. I'll be happy to talk to you when we get back out here. Thank you.