

Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden and Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim at a Press Availability

obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/08/25/remarks-vice-president-joe-biden-and-turkish-prime-minister-binali

August 25, 2016

The White House

Office of the Vice President

For Immediate Release

August 25, 2016

Cankaya Palace
Ankara, Turkey
(August 24, 2016)

4:32 P.M. (Local)

THE VICE PRESIDENT: I've been told by the Prime Minister that he'd like me to speak first. I want to thank him for his hospitality and say good afternoon to everyone.

I've been to Turkey many times as a United States senator, going all the way back to the 1970s, as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and as Vice President. But I'm saddened to be back in Turkey today in the sense that I'm saddened that -- of the unconscionable attack that took place in an attempt to bring down Turkish democracy.

What a lot of people around the world also failed to focus on is part of that attempt was also to attempt to assassinate the President and the Prime Minister. This was a fulsome attack on Turkey and its democratic institutions.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, President Obama asked me to come to Turkey today in order to remind the world of the paramount importance that we place on the relationship between our nations as allies, as partners, and as friends.

It is as an ally and a long-term friend of the Turkish people that I'm here today to express in no uncertain terms the continuing, unwavering support of the United States for Turkey in the wake of last month's attempted coup.

As I reiterated to the Prime Minister, we are available and ready to provide any assistance that the Turkish government or Turkish people need -- if any -- as they continue to move forward, as they reassert and strengthen their democracy.

The United States immediately condemned the tragic events on July the 15th. President Obama was one of the first world leaders to speak out in support of the Turkish government, even while the coup was still unfolding. I remember at the time when he and

I heard the news, we weren't sure whether it was real or whether it was some concoction made up on the Internet and the Web. I'm serious. It was so startling.

My only regret that the whole world could not have been with me today as I visited your parliament, Mr. Prime Minister. Walls pockmarked with bullet holes. Twisted rebar and pipes and concrete rubble on the floor. Steel beams jutting out of the ceiling. Shattered glass strewn everywhere. As a matter of fact, I walked up to your office. Thank God you were not there. No, thank God you were not there. It is in ruins.

The bombs left behind a shell of what once stood, scarred by the betrayal striking at the heart of Turkish democracy. Had they hit at a slightly different place, even just a few meters away -- whether the jets firing or the helicopters riddling the parliament with gunfire -- had they hit just a few meters away, God only knows how many more lives would have been lost -- including a number of the parliamentarians.

And your insistence that you go back in, your speaker of the parliament's insistence that you assemble in the parliament while the coup was taking place is evidence of your collective courage and determination.

Of course, it's not just the parliament building that was scarred by this betrayal. It was the hearts of the people of Turkey and their most basic sense of security that was put in jeopardy. And they bear the scars, as well -- not just those who were injured and killed, but all the people of Turkey.

But the whole world watched as the President, bravely coming back to the capital, went on the air, as I understand, through a cell phone being recorded and asked the Turkish people to take back their government. They came together in unity to say, no, this will not be allowed to happen here in Turkey. We will defend our democratic institutions. Nothing will take us down.

That resolve was there for the whole world to see. The United States was shocked at the violation of the fundamental democratic principles that both our nations cherish. But we were also awed by the bravery of the Turkish people who literally stood in front of tanks -- some at great personal risk, and some actually run over by those tanks -- to defend your democracy.

As you would say in this region, they were martyrs. We would say they were great heroes and patriots, literally giving their lives for their country.

So on behalf of President Obama and the people of the United States, I want to once again, Mr. Prime Minister, extend to all the people of Turkey our condolences to the families and loved ones who were injured, but particularly those who lost a loved one. We pay tribute to not only their bravery but their incredible resolve, their incredible commitment to their democracy, to ensuring that their country remains strong, vibrant and resilient, and democratic.

We honor those that made the ultimate sacrifice. And I'm confident -- because I know you -- they will never be forgotten in the annals of Turkish history.

Let me be clear, as clear as I possibly can: I want to ease any speculation, some of which I have heard, as to whether or not the United States had some advance warning, the United States had some foreknowledge, the United States had some complicity. The United States of America did not -- did not -- have any foreknowledge of what befell you on the 15th.

The United States of America, the people of the United States of America abhor what happened, and under no circumstances would support anything remotely approaching the cowardly act of the treasonous members of your military who engaged in this behavior. We did not have prior knowledge. We did not support. We immediately condemned. And we continue, as we did before the coup, to stand shoulder to shoulder with not only the government of Turkey, but with the people of Turkey.

The people of Turkey have no greater friend -- if you'll excuse me for being so self-serving -- have no greater friend than the United States of America. Let me say it again: You have no greater friend than the United States of America.

We've seen that borne out each time we stand together, face down threats to our shared security and our common values. And the United States government is committed to do everything we can to help your government, Mr. Prime Minister, to bring those to justice who are responsible for the coup attempt, while adhering to the rule of law, which is the foundation of both our societies.

Let me say publicly the same thing I said privately to the Prime Minister: Gulen -- Mr. Prime Minister, I understand the intense feeling your government and the people of Turkey have about him. We are cooperating. We are cooperating with Turkish authorities. Our legal experts are working right now with their Turkish counterparts on the production of and the evaluation of material and evidence that needs to be supplied to an American court to meet the requirements under our law and the extradition treaty to extradite Gulen.

And we're going to continue to do so as you continue to bring forward additional information. We have no -- no, no, no interest whatsoever in protecting anyone who has done harm to an ally. None. But we need to meet the legal standard requirement under our law.

I should make clear under American law: No President of the United States has authority to extradite anyone on his own power. That only an American court can do that. Were a President to attempt to do that, it would be an impeachable offense. But we have no reason to do anything other than cooperate with you and take every substantiating fact and make it available to the extent it exists to an American court.

It always takes time, and quite frankly, it's never understood by your people or our people. It's never understood why the wheels of justice move deliberately and slowly. And it's totally understandable why the people of Turkey are angry. But there should be no doubt that we will continue to work closely with the Turkish government as this

process unfolds. And if the pain of the attempted coup were not enough for any one nation to have to tolerate, the people of Turkey shortly thereafter continued to suffer unconscionable and barbaric acts of terrorism.

In the most recent attack, ISIL targeted a wedding where more than 50 were killed, including 29 children under the age of 18. It's not only heartbreaking, it's barbaric. It's inhumane. And this is not the first such heinous attack to take place on your soil, either at the hands of ISIL or the PKK.

The PKK has spread destruction in southeast Turkey on at least three occasions, doing major damage, ruining lives and property in an attempt to intimidate. The United States condemns these cowardly acts unequivocally.

And, Mr. Prime Minister, and to your colleagues, no two losses are the same. But we understand. We understand. America has been the victim, as well -- not just 9/11, but recently, this year. We understand. And our hearts go out to you.

So I want to offer not only my condolences to the loved ones of those who were killed and injured in the string of recent terrorist attacks, but I also want to offer my condolences to all of your countrymen who have suffered so much from those who seek to impose their will through violence -- whether it's ISIL or Daesh or the PKK, or any other organization devoted to terror. They will not, they cannot, they must not succeed. Their entire purpose is to undermine everything we believe in. Their entire purpose is to get us to change who we are. We can never and we will never let that happen.

The people of Turkey, like the American people, do not cower in the face of threats or terror. We do not bend. We do not bow. And we are resilient.

That's the other reason why I'm here, Mr. Prime Minister, because we will stand together to defend our nations against those who seek to undermine our democracies of our great elective governments. We continue to fight together against ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

Today, the Prime Minister and I spoke about the progress we've been making to defeat these terrorists. And I thanked him for how quickly Turkey resumed its counter-ISIL operations after the attempted coup. It's an important statement of our unwavering commitment to destroying ISIL as an evil in the world.

Incirlik remains a lynchpin for coalition forces to keep hammering and degrading ISIL in Syria from the air. And our work together to train and equip Syrian opposition forces is increasing the effectiveness of local forces fighting ISIL on the ground. And we continue working toward a permanent political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you and thank your government for the incredible generosity that you continue to show to more than 3 million refugees -- 3 million refugees who fled the violence and conflict in Syria and Iraq, an enormous burden for your country to shoulder.

We also spoke about how the United States and Turkey can continue to support Cypriot leaders as they work to conclude an agreement this year hopefully that will reunify the island in a bizonal, bicomunal federation. And we discussed the joint effort to support regional energy security.

And finally, Mr. Prime Minister, you and I affirm that the relationship between our people goes far beyond our official bounds. It is built on a strong base of strong family ties and values. It's rooted in a long, long history that underpins both our democracies.

To the people of Turkey, we want to express our admiration -- and I mean this in a literal sense -- our administration for the way you took to the streets and demanded you take back your democracy.

So I want to thank you again, Mr. Prime Minister, for your hospitality. I look forward to continuing to build on the progress we've made here when I meet with President Erdogan a little bit later this afternoon.

Again, thank you for your hospitality and for letting me go first. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER YILDIRIM: (As interpreted.) Thank you. Distinguished members of the press, we have Mr. Vice President, of the United States of America, Mr. Biden. We are very happy to be welcoming him here in Ankara. So, welcome.

I would like to thank you and your delegation for this visit. We touched upon the bloody coup attempt of the 15th of July, but we also had the opportunity of discussing regional matters. And as you mentioned, the relationship between Turkey and the United States have a very long history, a very deep-rooted history. Therefore, from time to time, there might be incidents which tend to damage this relationship. But on both sides, of course, we should never allow this to happen.

On the 15th of July, we had terrorists in military disguise, which had infiltrated our armed forces, and they tried to orchestrate a coup. But this attempt was defeated thanks to the determined stance of our President, and of course the actions of 79 million Turkish citizens who took ownership of their democracy, who took to the streets and defeated this assault. And on this occasion, I would like to once again honor the memory of our martyrs that sacrificed their own lives in defense of Turkish democracy, and the same goes to all of our martyrs of course that were killed in the fight against terrorist organizations. And I would like to wish a speedy recovery to the injured.

Mr. Biden, as you mentioned, this heinous coup attempt was, in our opinion, orchestrated and instructed by Fethullah Gulen. And as per the treaties that we have between our two countries, the necessary steps should be taken with a view to his extradition to our country. And we have taken the initial step in that process. And you have had very frank remarks for the Turkish people and also for our government, and those comments and remarks are of vital importance for a sound functioning of this process, and we are grateful to you for those remarks.

So having a technical team arriving from the U.S. here in Turkey, and talking to our judges and prosecutors here on the ground, is a clear sign from your side that you're taking this very seriously, that you're attaching great importance to this. Therefore, I would like to once again thank you for being sensitive about the matter.

Our greatest expectation would be that we don't lose any time in conducting these legal processes, and of course the final expectation of our nation is, I believe, clear. This was an attempt against our democracy. And from the United States, which is a friend and an ally, of course, can never welcome this kind of a move. And both President Obama, yourself, and other officials from your administration, you have had many remarks in the days following the coup, and those have been of key importance for us.

The process of extraditing the head of the terrorist organization that was behind the attempted coup, if it can be expedited and accelerated, and if we can have more cooperation in the process, I think the grief and grievances of the Turkish people, of the Turkish nation, will be remedies to a certain degree, and their overall sentiments about the issue will go back to being more positive.

As you rightly mentioned, we have had good cooperation fighting against terrorism, and we had the opportunity today to go over our cooperation. We talked about actions with regard to Daesh, the PKK. And we, of course, underlined the importance of determination in fighting against these terrorist organizations.

So, of course, the situation in Syria is not very bright. Millions of Syrians have had to leave Syria. 500,000 Syrians lost their lives in this civil war, including the young and the elderly. And, of course, people have been displaced. And Turkey opened its doors to more than 3 million people. They are welcome here in this country. We've been sharing everything, all of our means, with them -- and we will continue to do so.

Of course, however, this is not a sustainable situation. Therefore, both the U.S., the Russian Federation, and other players, including Turkey, Iran and other countries of the region, should come together with a very positive attitude and approach to what's been happening. And we have to put an end to what has been going on in Syria and find a solution so that we don't have any more people losing their lives.

And we are particularly sensitive about two points in this. One is preserving the territorial integrity of Syria and not giving any advantages to any ethnic groups, or not allowing the circumstances that would lead to that to come together or to happen. Turkey will never accept a new Kurdish formation along its borders, and we consider this to be a grave threat to our national security. On the other hand, all ethnic groups needs to have the perception that they are being represented in a just and fair administration structure. And we will continue to work towards this end.

When it comes to the Cyprus issue that has been going on for many years, also we are aware of your efforts throughout the years, which are very much appreciated by Turkey. The first time around, we missed the opportunity for a solution in Cyprus. But this time, I

think, it is especially important not to miss this chance. And the Greek Cypriot administration should be very careful. It is our recommendation that they do not miss this chance for a solution.

The Turkish Cypriot side has been victimized as a result of embargoes and restrictions. But nonetheless, they have always been in favor of a solution on the island. And this time around, as well, they will be supportive of a solution. No one should have any doubts or hesitations about that matter. But of course, at the end of the day, even if there is an agreement, that will be subject to a referendum. That is one point to bear in mind.

So, Mr. Biden, the relationship between Turkey and the United States will never be disrupted by anything -- not the event or incident of the 15th of July, or anything else. We should not let that happen. And your visit today is a great opportunity to get rid of some of the misunderstandings and also to show that the U.S. administration and the American people are on the side of the Turkish government and the Turkish people, that you have great solidarity with us.

So with that, I would like to extend our gratitude to you, in person, and to your delegation. And it is with these thoughts that I would like to thank once again my dear friend, Mr. Vice President, Mr. Joe Biden, and your friends. Welcome to our country, sir, once again.

Now we will have one question each. So as the host, I can take the first question. Please go ahead.

Q Sir, this morning, an operation was initiated into Syria. Are there any details that you can share with us with regard to this operation? And will the action be targeted towards PYD in the upcoming period? And what kind of a timeframe do you have in mind for the Turkish armed forces to be present in this region?

And also, a question to Vice President Mr. Biden. Sir, as the Prime Minister was saying -- the Prime Minister touched upon Turkey's position with regard to a Kurdish corridor. What's the stance that the U.S. has? How would you assess a Kurdish corridor being formed? Because the U.S. has been known to give some support to PYD and YPG over the recent period. So what is your stance when it comes to the Turkish concerns about the issue? Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER YILDIRIM: (As interpreted.) Dear friends, as you now know, there's been a structure called the Syrian Arab Coalition and they've been focusing on clearing the west of the Euphrates, the area of Manbij, from ISIS. And those operations have now come to an end. But after those operations, you had ISIS elements moving towards the Turkish border, and they started to settle in the Jarabulus area that is just across the Turkish town of Karkemish. And that was followed by PYD movement towards the Afrin region from two different directions.

Therefore, in light of what has been happening, we have acted to protect our border security and also prevent our citizens from losing their lives, and their properties being damaged as a result of mortar and rocket fires. So starting from last night, we started

firing into positions in Syria. We also have air forces -- the Turkish air forces participating in the operation. So the elements that were the closest to the border have now been pushed back.

We have a full agreement with the American administration when it comes to what has been going on in terms of the operations, and that is that PYD elements should never come across towards the west of the Euphrates and that they should not engage in any activities west of the river of the Euphrates.

So we had the opportunity of assessing these points in our meeting, as well. And we have once again seen the determination of the U.S. administration about the issues. So elements of PYD or YPG will not have any presence towards the west of the river of Euphrates. And we once again confirmed the sensitivity of the U.S. administration about the issue and we're very grateful to them for that.

So our general take, if you will, with regard to PYD and YPG is that we know for a fact that they are working hand in hand with PKK. It might look like that what they're doing is helping in terms of the fight against Daesh, but the U.S. should know that at the end of the day, you might maybe use a terrorist organization to defeat another one, but what you have in hand at the end of the day is that terrorist organization that you used, or that you benefitted from, and how do you deal with that terrorist organization? That is the question. Therefore, in order not to have a greater threat, I think that would be the right approach with regard to PYD and YPG.

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: No corridor, period. No separate entity on the Turkish border. A united Syria. And the Prime Minister explained precisely the arrangement that we have relative to both Jarabulus and the commitment we made with regard to Manbij. We have made it absolutely clear to the elements that were part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, the YPG that participated, that they must move back across the river. They cannot, will not, and under no circumstances get American support if they do not keep that commitment, period.

And so I have a question now. Does anyone have a question for me?

Karen. I'm not sure you even knew you raised your hand. You have a computer in your hand. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you. Mr. Prime Minister, a question for you. Despite what Vice President Biden said about no U.S. participation in the coup, it's certainly been suggested by many people in your government and certainly in the media that, in fact, there was some support, if not direct participation. Are you ready to say now that your government takes what the Vice President has said as the final statement on that matter and say to the American people and to your own people that you do not believe that the United States supported or had anything to do with the coup attempt?

And to Vice President Biden, in all of these statements that have come out since the initial statements in the United States about the coup attempt, certainly from President Obama and others, there's been a mention of concerns about human rights abuses -- possibly

human rights abuses -- and adherence to the rule of law and principles of democracy. You didn't raise that in your statements today. Can you tell us why not? Is that because you're not concerned anymore? Is it something you decided you ought to raise in private?
Thank you.

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: I'll be happy to answer the question but I'll let the Prime Minister answer his first. Or do you want me?

The answer is, look, the fact -- we've discussed this in our meetings today. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, and everyone associated that I met with so far has made it clear they plan on making sure their constitutional principles are adhered to, that the rule of law will prevail. This is a recent occurrence. Remember the confusion after 9/11. Let's give this some time. Let's give them some time.

I believe they mean what they say, and so let's move on. The main purpose of my meeting here today was to show solidarity and, quite frankly, to -- I feel guilty that it took me this long to get here. I feel badly that there wasn't the opportunity to come a day or two or three or five after it occurred. But I am proud to be here, proud to show our solidarity with the Turkish people and the Turkish government. And I've enjoyed our, as they say in the foreign policy field -- which I hate the impression -- we had a frank and thorough conversation. Translated in the neighborhood I come from, we understand one another. We understand one another. And so let's give this some time.

PRIME MINISTER YILDIRIM: (As interpreted.) Thank you. The frank statements of the Vice President are very important for us and for the Turkish nation. I think the Turkish people will take those into account.

What I would like to say is this: The U.S. administration, President Obama, and Mr. Vice President, as well, have clearly and explicitly condemned the coup attempt not just today but before as well. And they made it clear that they see this as an act against democracy. This is the final statement in our eyes. This is what stands in our consideration. There might be different opinions among the people, of course, and those are perceptions and we are here to correct some of those perceptions. And I am sure that the healthy and sound functioning of the processes with regard to the extradition of the head of the terrorist organization will also, in a short amount of time, return or rectify the people's perception back to their normal, positive situation.

Thank you.

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Thank you.

END

5:10 P.M. (Local)