

Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden After a Meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu

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The White House

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THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister. And I want to thank you and your wife, Dr. Davutoğlu, for your hospitality. When you come to Washington and visit me and the President, I can't promise you something as magnificent as this, although we're incredibly proud of -- (laughter) -- you look out over the Bosphorus, you look -- I say to the press my greatest problem was concentrating on our conversation. Fortunately the chairs were facing the wall, not the windows. It's just absolutely magnificent.

And I sincerely mean it, Mr. Prime Minister, you and I have -- I think it's not presumptuous to say -- built a close personal relationship, as well. I trust you. We trust one another. And I should say to the press, we always scare the living devil out of our respective staffs because we start taking out maps. (Laughter.) And he and I start pointing. And I can see the military guys on both sides going, oh, my God, what are they going to do? But we usually get it right. And I thank you very much for the -- for not only the discussion, but the precision of the discussion.

The Prime Minister and I have -- I hope a number of things in common -- but one is that we want to make sure -- because it's such an important relationship, Turkey and the United States, that there is no misunderstanding -- that there is no misunderstanding; that where we agree, we agree with precision; where we have a disagreement, we state it flatly.

And the truth is on the strategic questions we're discussing, there is no disagreement. We do agree with you, Mr. Prime Minister, that in terms of their actions, Daesh and PKK, and al-Nusra, there's no substantive -- they're terrorist groups. They're simply terrorist groups.

And here in Turkey, they threaten and do harm and are of severe consequence to the interests of the people of Turkey. And we do recognize that.

And I want to begin by offering, though, my deep condolences to the Turkish people, as referenced yesterday after I came out of the Blue Mosque and the wonderful hospitality of the mufti. And I was able to become -- the American press traveling with me is used to my saying things like this, but you made me a hero. I was able to show my wife and my granddaughter the Blue Mosque, and they now think I'm important that I was able to do that. But it was -- it is such a moving, incredible experience.

And again, thank you for the hospitality.

But we did place a carnation at the site of the most recent bombing, the most recent atrocity committed by Daesh, where 10 German tourists were blown up. But I said at the time, and I'll say again, we Americans don't fail to understand how many Turkish citizens have been the victims of terror and continue to be. So our hearts go out to the Turkish people and the families of the foreigners, in this case the Germans, who lost loved ones. And we are determined collectively and together to wipe out these terrorist organizations.

We spent a great deal of time in our discussion -- we ran over -- because we were talking about our shared mission on the extermination of ISIL. And we've gotten very precise -- very precise. We do believe that our plans together have matured. They've gotten more coordinated. And we're increasingly making progress. And I am confident that we will -- that that progress will be sped up as a consequence of our meeting today and our continued collaboration.

And there is a thorough understanding that ISIL presents a clear and present danger not only to Europe, to the neighborhood, but particularly to Turkey. And we have shown robust cooperation in the commitment to defeat ISIL in Turkey, and we've taken -- Turkey has taken some very important steps, very important steps to improve the security at its border. And America and other coalition aircraft are now operating out of Turkish air bases so we can gather better information about ISIL activities. We can ramp up our air campaign against ISIL targets to the highest tempo since the beginning of the campaign. And we can better support local forces on the ground that we jointly support as they take back territory.

But today we agreed to do even more. Today we discussed how we can improve the support of local Sunni Arab forces working to cut off what remains of ISIL's access to the Turkish border. And that's a priority for both our nations so that we can prevent new fighters and equipment from reaching ISIL and conducting attacks against Syria and so that the control now and after we defeat ISIL of the border is within Turkish control, that it's secure, that there are no separate states sitting on your southern border.

And so together we continue to work toward a political resolution of the situation in Syria. We are neither optimistic nor pessimistic. We are determined in terms of how this beginning. John Kerry is meeting in Saudi Arabia as we speak. We're meeting, all of us, in Davos. The Prime Minister and I separately met with our counterparts, and we do know that it would be better if we could reach a political solution. But we are prepared. We are prepared if that's not possible to make -- to have a military solution to this operation in taking out Daesh.

And again, ISIL is not the only existential threat to the people of Turkey. The PKK is equally a threat, and we are aware of that. Although we believe the vast majority of Kurds want to live in peace with everyone in society, I have to be absolutely clear, the PKK has shown no desire or inclination to do that. And it a terrorist group plain and simple. And what they continue to is absolutely outrageous.

And I know -- we know, the world knows that your government, Mr. Prime Minister, has in the past tried to find a negotiated peace with the PKK, to lay down arms or leave. And they have not, and you've been left with no option.

But I hope and I'm certain that you will not give up the possibility of continuing to try to encourage a political solution. But in the meantime, you must do what you need do to protect your people.

And we talked about the contribution that can be made in Iraq. I've spent a great deal of time in Iraq. One of the things we talked about is the way -- there is an expression, an old expression in America, there is more than one way to skin a cat. But we talked about, and we hope we can work out with Ankara and Baghdad and all parties included is a joint and coordinated effort to defeat ISIL, take back Mosul, and make sure it does not become a proxy for any other country in the region, that it's returned to the people of Mosul. And that's who will occupy that city.

And so we talked about potential modus vivendi to be able to do that. I am not authorized, but I am sort of self-appointed to see if I can work out something between my good friend the Prime Minister of Turkey and my good friend the Prime Minister Iraq as to where we can work out a modus vivendi because we're all on the same page.

And so there's much more to talk about. We went into great deal, but I'm not going to take your time because we're all hungry. (Laughter.) No, because we're about to go to lunch. And there's a couple more subjects that we're going to raise. I want to just mention, Mr. Prime Minister, how much I appreciate your commitment to try to end years of deadlock in the conflict on Cyprus. Both -- I met with both parties on the island, they're moving toward a negotiated agreement. I think it may be -- may be, God willing -- finally within the reach to see if we can reach a settlement. Turkey is playing a critical role in advancing a just and lasting settlement. And I want to thank the Prime Minister for the strong support of what has turned out to be, in my view after dealing with this for years and years and years, genuinely Cyprus-led discussions, which is the key ultimately.

And we're also working together to strengthen the energy security of Europe. But it is our view that Turkey has an opportunity to play a historic role, a critical role as a lynchpin and a potential transit hub connecting the region from Azerbaijan to Israel to Iraq to Europe. And it holds great potential. And we are prepared to work with and be of any assistance we can in putting Turkey in that position.

So I greatly appreciate this opportunity to meet with the Prime Minister and I believe to genuinely make progress on a number of issues that are important to both our people. So the partnership between our two nations is enduring. It's rooted in history. It's in the

hearts of our people. There are hundreds of thousands of proud Turkish Americans who make my nation stronger every day. And I want to close by saying: Turkey is a strategic partner. The success of Turkey -- economically, politically, and physically -- is overwhelmingly in the self-interest of the United States of America. And I hope our Turkish friends feel that reciprocally, that our success is theirs, as well.

So thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. And thank you all for taking the time to come and listen.

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