

# Statement to the Press by Vice President Joe Biden and Turkish President Recep Erdogan

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The White House

Office of the Vice President

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6:20 P.M. (Local)

PRESIDENT ERDOĞAN: (English audio unavailable.)

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Mr. President, I'm delighted to be here. We've been -- we've known each other for many years. And I've been the recipient of your hospitality in your city; last time I was here in your home with your family. And it is -- this city has come to define for me what hospitality really means.

As I told my fellow Americans during the President's visit to Washington, you can't understand the meaning of hospitality until you've been welcomed by a Turkish family into their home. And again, my thanks to you and your daughter and your son and your wife. And thank your wife for hosting my wife, Jill, today. She is anxious to see her again.

Mr. President, I'm not sure our teams are going to allow us to get together any more. We came to have lunch, and you and I ended up having a conversation that lasted almost four hours. So I don't think they're happy when we go off alone in a room together. When we came down, they looked very, very hungry. So I apologize to our collective staffs.

The President and I, as I said, have known each other for a long time. I have great respect for the President. And we have always had a direct, frank and open discussion on every issue because that's what friends do, that's what allies do.

And the one thing that is absolutely clear is that the depth of that friendship and the resolve of that partnership is as strong as it has ever been. In spite of the fact that the world is facing and we collectively are facing some difficult problems right now.

The President and I have been talking about Iraq and Syria for a long time. We wanted to get to some of the detail today. We spoke about our work as part of an international coalition to degrade and eventually defeat Daash, ISIL -- and most people in this region

and I'm comfortable referring to ISIL as Daash. And we talked about Syria's future, as well.

We had a candid discussion, and we strategized together as allies and friends do and should. On Iraq, the President told me of his impressions of developments taking place in Iraq. I had an opportunity to spend several hours yesterday and again this morning with the Prime Minister who just returned from Iraq. And we're on the same page. We have the same view.

And we're -- I was -- I told the President how impressed the new Iraqi government was at the fact that he and his government reached out a hand to the Iraqi government, and they're working in close coordination with Prime Minister Dr. Abadi.

Turkey has shown significant leadership in this regard. As I said, including the Prime Minister's recent visit to Erbil and to Baghdad last week.

On Syria, we discussed in-depth the full range of issues that face us both and the options available to deal with those issues. Not only to deny ISIL a safe haven, and to roll them back and defeat them, but also to strengthen the Syrian opposition and pursue a political transition away from the Assad regime.

We spoke about our efforts to train and equip the moderate Syrian opposition forces, and the others protecting their communities.

Turkey, as a consequence of what's going on in Syria today, is carrying a heavy humanitarian burden. There are over -- I'm told by the President -- close to 1.6 million refugees in Turkey. And Turkey is providing, as they do in humanitarian relief from housing, to health care, to food, to clothing. And it's the government and the people of Turkey that have often cared for those displaced by this war. Accommodating so many is a costly proposition. And the United States has provided humanitarian assistance inside Turkey to refugee countries holding them, but it should not in any way underestimate the amount of the requirements that have imposed upon the President and the people of Turkey.

We have devoted -- because of what Turkey is doing, we've been able to devote roughly a little over \$3 billion to this effort, including \$200 million to Turkey, which is not nearly the cost they incur. But collectively we are working to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Turkey, the largest burden of that being thrust upon the Turkish people.

And beyond our humanitarian efforts, we're both taking a -- talking to and working together to stem the flow of foreign fighters to and from the battlefields of Iraq and Syria, and to dry up their funding. And we thank Turkey for their leadership in this regard.

On Cyprus -- we spoke about Cyprus. I traveled to Cyprus in May, and I met with both Mr. Eroğlu and as well as President Anastasiades. And I'm told I didn't realize at the time I was the highest-ranking American in five decades to visit the island. Because our administration and the United States remains committed to supporting the U.N.-led effort to renew the island as a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation.

Today, the potential exists -- if the political will is there -- to reach a solution that benefits everyone on the island and in the region. Right now that requires a focus on de-escalating tensions and returning to the negotiating table in Cyprus. Given the significant energy potential in the Eastern Mediterranean, the rewards to both communities on Cyprus of finding a cooperative path forward has never been greater. The visit also gave me an opportunity to discuss the importance of our robust economic partnership with Turkey, as well.

In addition, I had an excellent meeting with Turkish civil society earlier today. And, Mr. President, our countries have been allies for 60 years. I would posit today that our partnership is as strong as it ever has been. Today we're working closely together once again to meet the very pressing challenges of this moment, and to further strengthen the strategic partnership between Turkey and America.

I said earlier, we need Turkey. And I think Turkey believes that they need us, as well. We are close. We are going to continue to discuss how to approach each of these problems in the region. And as I said, I thank you, Mr. President, for your welcome and your hospitality and for your friendship to my country. Thank you.

END

6:28 P.M. (Local)