

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel of Turkey February 11, 1992

Turkey-U.S. Relations

The President. I have been looking forward to this visit to set the right tone of this important U.S.-Turkish relationship. And I should tell you that we were just delighted, and we will work closely with you in every way. And we're pleased to see you here.

The Prime Minister. I do appreciate your invitation, Mr. President. I think we have something to talk about.

The President. We've got a lot to talk about. The U.S.-Turkish—

Q. Mr. President, are you plotting the demise of Saddam?

The President. The U.S.-Turkish relationship is a very, very important one.

Q. How much do you intend to discuss the situation in Iraq? Will that be a big focus of your talks?

The President. Well, we're going to have a lot of discussion on a wide array of subjects. I'd let the Prime Minister set the agenda, of course. But I will be reiterating how important the U.S.-Turkish relationship is, how much confidence we have in this Prime Minister, and how closely I personally want to work with him. And I think out of that then, we'll discuss a wide array of issues. But we've got so many issues to talk about that I don't know where we're going to begin.

Presidential Primaries

Q. Mr. Bush, Buchanan started running a spot in New Hampshire yesterday saying that he cares more than you do. Do you think you've settled that issue?

The President. Why don't we just let the voters settle that one on next Tuesday and keep our sights set on what we've got to do here.

Trade Negotiations and NATO

Q. Mr. President, there are people in Europe wondering if the American Government is linking the GATT issue to the troops level.

The President. The GATT to troops? No,

there is no linkage at all. I will be telling the Prime Minister, and he'll probably say the same to me, that it is important that we get a GATT agreement. Secondly, without setting priorities, it is important that we retain a strong presence in NATO in Europe. And so, there is no linkage between them. The Vice President made that very clear.

And so I'm glad you raised that one because there's been some confusion about it, and this is important. I want a successful conclusion to this GATT round, and we're going to press hard to get that. And I want a strong U.S. commitment to NATO. And I think that's important to Turkey, and I think it's important to freedom around the world.

Q. You're not going to get GATT, are you?

Q. But is GATT a security issue?

The President. No.

Q. Not at all?

The President. No. They're separate. These two questions are separate. One relates to world trade, and it is very important we get a successful conclusion to the GATT round. And you have a whole question of security. And NATO is very important to the security of Europe, indeed. And I think what it projects is important to worldwide peace and stability.

Q. Well, isn't it time they took care of themselves?

The President. So there is no linkage. There is no linkage.

Q. Isn't it about time after 45 years? We have 150,000 troops there. Aren't 75,000 enough?

The President. We've set the proper level, and we're going to stay with the level that we have set. And so we're not going to be driven by people that now think there is no threat in the world and that the U.S. has no responsibility. We have a disproportionate responsibility for world peace. We are very grateful and lucky that we have come as far as we have in terms of world peace. And

we are not going to let this be set by a lot of politicians. We're going to do what's right for the national security, whether it's good politics or bad.

And we've set an appropriate level. And I will be guided not by political challenge but by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by the leaders of the military in Europe with whom we work in close cooperation, Manfred Woerner to many others. So that's the way it is, and that's the way it's going to be.

Q. But sir, some in Europe are saying that you use the Senators to—

The President. This isn't a press conference. I've got a lot to learn here from the Prime Minister.

Q. Did you use the Senators to give Europe any warning?

The President. On what?

Q. On the GATT issue, that the GATT has to be resolved?

The President. Absolutely not. There is no linkage. No, I'm glad you raised that one. That's the last question. I am glad you—there is no linkage. What some Senator says over there, that's his business. I'm selling what the policy of the United States Government is. And there is no linkage, and we will have a strong presence in NATO. Those are the two givens.

And that's it. Thank you very much, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]. Thank you very much.

[At this point, one group of journalists left the room, and another group entered.]

Turkey-U.S. Relations

The President. May I say to the visiting journalists from Turkey what an honor and, really, privilege it is to have the Prime Minister here. I respect him. I watched his victory with admiration. I have congratulated

him on that. And I'm going to assure him today that the relationship between Turkey and the United States is vitally important to us—I think it's important to Turkey, too—and that I will give him my full, unqualified cooperation. He's a good man, and he's there. He's the Prime Minister of Turkey, and I'm going to be working as closely with him as I possibly can.

And welcome to the United States, those of you who are not based here.

Q. Mr. President, your guest was an opposition leader when you met him last in Istanbul. Now he's a Prime Minister. How does this signify the strength of Turkish democracy?

The President. It signifies pretty good strength. It also shows he's a pretty good prognosticator or predictor because he sat there in great confidence and told me without any arrogance, with confidence in his own ability, "I will be the next Prime Minister." And I reminded him of that a few minutes ago. And yes, sure enough, he was just correct.

But it says a lot about the viability of Turkish democracy because we work closely with the government in Turkey. I'm not knocking the previous government. I'm simply saying this good man has been elected, and he has my full cooperation and the cooperation of the United States Government. And that's U.S.-Turkish relationship at its best.

Thank you all very much.

Note: The exchange began at 11:02 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. During the exchange, the President referred to Manfred Woerner, Secretary General of NATO.