

Turks demand action, not words

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November 02, 2007 08:00:58 PM

ANKARA, Turkey — Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Friday branded the Kurdistan Workers' Party a "terrorist organization" and a "common enemy" of the United States, Turkey and Iraq, but she stopped short of committing Washington to military action against the guerrilla force.

Turkey has threatened to launch military operations against the group in Iraq alone if necessary, and Turkish officials indicated that they weren't satisfied by what Rice told them in talks Friday.

"This is where the words end, and the action needs to start," Foreign Minister Ali Babacan said. "Her words were good to hear, but words offer nothing new," said another government official, who requested anonymity because he isn't an authorized spokesman.

The Bush administration has assured Turkey at least four times that it would take action against the PKK, as it's known in its Kurdish initials, but hasn't done so, in part because there are no U.S. troops in Iraq available for such a mission.

Rice's talks in the Turkish capital with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Babacan opened a four-day period of consultations that will culminate Monday with a meeting in Washington between Erdogan and President Bush. Erdogan has said he'll decide on Turkey's actions after the meeting.

In the past month, PKK fighters operating out of northern Iraq have killed 30 Turkish soldiers and captured eight. The Turkish parliament has authorized military intervention, and the army has been in a heightened state of alert, with some 100,000 troops on the Iraqi border. State flags are on display throughout the country, and tens of thousands of protesters have taken to the streets calling for war against the PKK.

Rice's words were the strongest yet from the United States in the growing crisis over the PKK, which the European Union and the U.S. classify as a terrorist group. "Turkey, the United States and Iraq have a common enemy in the PKK. We have branded the PKK as a terrorist organization," she said after her talks.

She said she'd delivered a tough message to officials of the Kurdish Regional Government, which has control over the border area with Turkey.

"It is absolutely the case that there cannot be terrorism emanating from the region," she said. In a recent conversation with Massoud Barzani, the president of the government, she

said she'd made "the very clear point that the KRG needs to separate itself from the PKK in a very, very clear and rhetorical way. And he assured me that they had no intention of harboring the PKK, no intention of supporting the PKK, no intention of trying to do anything but root out terrorism in northern Iraq."

Rice continued: "And that's what they need to concentrate on because it is — the Kurdish Regional Government is not going to prosper in conditions in which there is instability in northern Iraq, and the PKK is a serious source of instability in northern Iraq at this point."

The crisis centers on as few as 3,000 PKK fighters, who after a four-year cease-fire went back on the attack against Turkey after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The fighters — who've run military training camps in northern Iraq — dart into Turkey, assault military or civilian targets, then return to Iraq to replenish their supplies.

The assaults, combined with the passivity of the United States and Iraq in reining in the PKK, outrage the Turks. In a country in which national service is mandatory, almost everyone has close ties to the military, and when soldiers are killed, it's felt deeply. Many Turks liken the national mood to that of the United States after 9-11.

Erden Akcoy, 26, said he'd finished his last tour of service in the Turkish army in 2004, patrolling the area that the PKK is hitting now. "It's too much," the Ankara student told McClatchy Newspapers. "I have signed up again. We must all be willing to fight for Turkey."

Almost no one here expects the Kurdish Regional Government to react, and Foreign Minister Babacan summed up the reason: "They make statements that seem to sympathize with the PKK."