

Remarks by Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT)

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CODEL TO TURKEY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) is recognized for 5 minutes. Mr. SHAYS. Earlier this month, I returned from a congressional delegation trip to Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait.

As part of that trip, my staff member, a retired colonel in the Army, Dr. Nick Palarino, and I spent 4 days in Turkey traveling to the southeastern region, not a place Members of Congress usually go. I would like to share my impressions with my colleagues about our strong ally in the Middle East, Turkey. My staff and I pursued a different itinerary than other codels in Turkey.

First, we visited Ankara and met with the U.S. Ambassador and the Country Team, members of Parliament, and Turkish military officials to get a better understanding of the problems faced by Turkey battling the terrorist group, the Kurdistan Worker's Party, known as the PKK.

We then traveled to Diyarbakur, a city and region where a large number of Turkish citizens of Kurdish descent reside, and met with the governor of the province and local officials, many of them Kurds.

We also traveled to Habur Gate on the border with Iraq and met with the commercial truck drivers who wait in line for days, often more than a week, trying to get their products into Iraq. We even had the opportunity to cross the bridge into Iraq and meet with U.S. forces, members of the 571st Movement Control Team and Logistical Task Force Bravo, who escort commercial trucks into Iraq.

Before going to Istanbul, we met with the chamber of commerce representatives and stopped overnight in Mardin and met with the governor and local Kurdish officials. In Istanbul we met with businessmen doing work in Iraq and a very precious family that lost their son, brother to their PKK terrorists. This is just one of thousands and thousands of families that have lost loved ones to the PKK.

After traveling the length of Turkey from Istanbul to the border with Iraq and meeting with U.S. and Turkish officials, these are my general impressions:

Turkey is a Muslim country with an active and vibrant democracy. Although the southeastern region of Turkey has a great deal of unemployment, the majority of the Turkish economy is growing, and people feel optimistic about their future. The current leadership and ruling party in Turkey, the AKP, is attempting to address the unemployment issue by helping to develop the southeast region. There is enormous potential for development throughout Turkey.

Turkey wants to be a partner in the European Union, and we should continue to strongly advocate its admittance.

Turkey has stood shoulder to shoulder with the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the long Cold War against Communism, and we should never forget that. Turkey is now standing with us shoulder to shoulder in our fight in the global war against terrorism. It is providing bases for U.S. military forces, troops and nonmilitary assistance in the global war on terrorism.

We are right in standing shoulder to shoulder with Turkey in its fight against the PKK. The PKK is a terrorist organization that has killed thousands of Turkish soldiers and citizens. The PKK is an enemy of Turkey. It is an enemy of the United States, and it is an enemy of Iraq. We should do all we can to assist Turkey eliminate this threat from its border and continue the strong alliance our countries have built over the years, and I think we are. The recent action Turkey has taken to confront the PKK in Iraq is long incoming and more than justified. Turkey has been patient and understanding in the challenges the Iraqi Government faces and has acted in a strong, but measured, way. It is essential that we appreciate the friendship we have with this great country and do everything we can to strengthen this relationship.