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Pressed by Turks, Rice Seeks to Solve Kurdish Rebel Threat While Urging Restraint

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ANKARA, Turkey, Nov. 2 — Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) came under pressure Friday from Turkish leaders seeking American help to curb Kurdish guerrillas in northern [Iraq](#). But it was not clear whether her public pronouncements at the outset of this long-awaited visit would be enough to satisfy them.

During a string of meetings in the capital, Ankara, before heading to Istanbul, Ms. Rice took pains to demonstrate support for Turkey. She called for restraint in an attempt to forestall any Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq, where the Kurdish rebels stage attacks on Turkey from mountain hide-outs.

“I think it’s fair to say that we all need to redouble our efforts,” Ms. Rice said at a press conference on Friday. “All across the world we’ve seen that it’s not easy to root out terrorism.”

Turkish leaders continued to sound resolute. “Our expectations of the United States are very high,” the foreign minister, Ali Babacan, said, standing next to Ms. Rice. “We want action.”

Less than two weeks before Ms. Rice’s visit, the Kurdish rebels, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, killed 12 Turkish soldiers near the border with Iraq, prompting Turkey to threaten a military offensive. Turkey is a [NATO](#) member and a strong American ally in a troubled region, so a military offensive into Iraq — whose territory is controlled by the United States military — could be deeply problematic for all parties.

The Turkish prime minister, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), has been skeptical of military action in the past, and is well aware of the damage an offensive would inflict on Turkey, which is pressing for acceptance into the [European Union](#).

Few Turkish officials expect the United States to offer military action, but a public display of support for Mr. Erdogan could ease the pressure on him to choose military action.

“The Americans are not being concrete, and that is narrowing down the field of maneuver for the government,” said Ilter Turan, a professor of political science at Bilgi University in Istanbul. The political opposition is fanning nationalism, he said, and with trust in the

United States at a low in Turkish society, it is “difficult for the Turkish government to appear that it is trusting the Americans without some concrete results.”

Mr. Erdogan will meet with President Bush next week, and he reiterated this week that he would not press for a large-scale offensive, but that he expected support from the United States.

But with American forces already stretched thin in Iraq, American military commanders have balked at taking action against the rebels, known by their initials, the P.K.K., and the Bush administration has focused its efforts on pressing Iraq’s Kurdish leaders, who control the area in which the P.K.K. hides, to take action against the group. Those leaders, however, say that it is impossible to dislodge the fighters from the remote mountains where they hide, and that the only solution is through diplomacy and amnesty.

The Kurdish rebel situation “has now become, rightly or wrongly, a test of where the United States holds Turkey,” said Soli Ozel, a professor of international relations at Bilgi University.

Support for the United States eroded further last month, when a House committee approved a resolution condemning the mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman Turks during World War I as genocide. The full House did not vote on the resolution, but Turkey reacted angrily, threatening to shut off its territory as an American supply hub for Iraq, and recalling its ambassador from Washington.

The Bush administration opposed the genocide vote, and has worked to smooth things over since then. Ms. Rice delicately referred to the Armenian issue on Friday as “the events of 1915,” but made no mention of the word genocide, a term the Turks strongly reject.

Even within the Bush administration, there has been criticism that the United States, in more than four years in Iraq, should have done more to rein in the Kurdish guerrillas. Gen. [Joseph W. Ralston](#), who is retired from the Air Force and until last month was the United States special envoy for countering the P.K.K., told McClatchy Newspapers on Friday that United States inaction on the P.K.K. issue might force Turkey to act. General Ralston resigned his post, administration officials said, because he was frustrated with the failure of Iraq and the United States to do more in northern Iraq.

Bush administration officials are in the middle of a delicate balancing act, trying to shore up Mr. Erdogan’s hand against those in his country calling for military action. But they are also strenuously trying to avoid a new front in the war, and Ms. Rice must find a way to give Mr. Erdogan public backing while privately urging restraint.

Professor Turan said that might not be enough. “This kind of explanation is often seen as buying time,” he said. “I think what the public wants to hear is something concrete.”

Speaking to reporters on her flight to Ankara, Ms. Rice said pointedly that Turkey's problems with the Kurds could not all be laid at America's door. "This didn't arise with the liberation of Iraq," she said. "The problem has been there, and no one has been able to deal with it. And so now at least we have an Iraqi government that wants to deal with it."

But there is little trust between the Turks and the Iraqi government; Mr. Babacan, the foreign minister, spoke Friday of doubts about the efforts of the Iraqi government to rein in the Kurdish guerrillas.

Ms. Rice is supposed to participate with Iraqi and Turkish officials in a three-way discussion on Saturday to try to come up with a joint plan that all sides can agree on. Administration officials said that the American military had collected a list of P.K.K. guerrillas and issued orders for American forces to pick them up if they encounter them in Iraq. Beyond that, American spy planes will also feed intelligence to Turkish forces on P.K.K. movements in northern Iraq, administration officials said.

Helene Cooper reported from Ankara, and Sabrina Tavernise from Istanbul.

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