

Rothman to Rice: The U.S. Must Support Peacekeeping Efforts in Cyprus

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(Washington, DC)— On Tuesday, April 4, Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ) forcefully reminded U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus has been an important buffer between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish troops, who invaded the island nation and have occupied the northern half since 1974. He then asked her to explain why the State Department has not budgeted to support the U.S.'s annual contribution to the UN presence there.

"Why has funding for this critical peacekeeping force been zeroed out? There are still 36,000 Turkish forces occupying Northern Cyprus and no final deal to create a bi-communal, bi-zonal, federal Republic has been reached between the Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Cypriots in the North. As a result, a great deal of tension remains between Greek and Turkish Cypriots. What kind of message do you think that this zero funding decision sends?" Rothman asked.

Secretary Rice acknowledged that she had not requested any federal funding to support the peacekeeping troops in Cyprus, but stated that no one should interpret this funding cut as a lack of U.S. support for achieving a final settlement on Cyprus. She also said that if the State Department sees a need to continue funding for the peacekeeping force, then it will be able to use existing money to support it.

Rothman, a long-time supporter of strengthening the strategic relationship between the U.S. and the Republic of Cyprus, expressed his concern about the elimination of this peacekeeping funding.

"I believe the Administration's policy with regard to Cyprus is short-sighted and I will work with my colleagues to ensure that the U.S. continues to provide aid for peacekeeping forces in Cyprus," he said. "Their presence provides needed stability and security for the people of Cyprus. Withdrawing U.S. support for this force now wrongly suggests we accept the presence of Turkish occupying troops and does not help ongoing efforts to peacefully reunify the nation."

Rothman's questioning of Secretary Rice took place during a two-hour hearing on Tuesday afternoon before the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the House Appropriations Committee. As a Member of this Subcommittee, which makes recommendations on all U.S. foreign assistance, Rothman was among only 13 Members to have this opportunity to question Rice.

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