



Press Release

Demanding the Immediate Resignation of General Ralston as Special Envoy in Turkey

On August 28, 2006, the US State Department announced the appointment of former USAF General Joseph Ralston as a "Special Envoy for countering the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)."

General Ralston is a vice-chairman of The Cohen Group, a private lobby firm with close ties to the American Turkish Council (ATC) and Lockheed Martin. According to an article in the Washington Post in May of this year, Lockheed Martin acknowledged it was a client of The Cohen Group, and paid some \$500,000 to The Cohen Group for services rendered in 2005. General Ralston is also a member of the 2006 Advisory Board of the ATC, as well as a current member of the Board of Directors of Lockheed Martin.

Lockheed Martin is also a member of the ATC. Ralston's appointment came at a time when Turkey was finalizing the sale of 30 new Lockheed Martin F-16 aircraft (approx. \$3 billion) and as Turkey was due to make a decision on the \$10 billion purchase of the new Lockheed Martin F-35 JSF aircraft. The sale for the F-16's was approved by Congress in mid-October and Turkey's decision in favor of the F-35 JSF was announced on October 25, shortly after Ralston's recent stay in Ankara, ostensibly to counter the PKK.

At the same time, a unilateral PKK ceasefire went into effect on October 1, although it was rejected by both the Washington and Ankara governments' days before it went into effect. This is in spite of the fact that the PKK prefers to negotiate a political settlement to the Kurdish question in Turkey, and had indicated its willingness to do so repeatedly over the last 13 years and, most recently, in August, with demands that are fully consistent with Turkey's EU accession criteria. Last week, during a question-and-answer period after his address at a meeting of the Eurasian Strategic Research Center (ASAM) in Istanbul, General Ralston, as America's Special Envoy, refused the possibility of applying an IRA-type model to solve the issue of the PKK and the wider Kurdish question in Turkey. General Ralston, as an appointed official of the US government, has indicated there is no possible peaceful, political settlement on the horizon, a policy that goes against the will of the Kurdish people.

Additionally, there continues to be a hostile posture from the Turkish armed forces toward Iraqi Kurdistan, the only peaceful portion of Iraq. In early April, the Turkish army dramatically increased its presence in the Kurdistan region of Turkey to some 250,000-300,000 troops. Many of which were concentrated along the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. By the end of April, during Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Ankara, hostile actions against Iraqi Kurdistan began, ostensibly aimed at alleged PKK

camps. Attacks included bombings, violations of Iraqi airspace, and infiltration of Turkish special operations forces. To date, the main targets of the Turkish military in Iraqi Kurdistan have been unarmed civilian Kurds and livestock.

The decision to appoint Joseph Ralston, a former military officer with widely-known links to the defense industry, its lobby, and the Turkish lobby, calls into question the sincerity of the American administration in seeking a political solution to the gross repression carried out against the Kurdish people by the Turkish Republic. It also calls into question the sincerity of the American administration in seeking to establish democracy and democratic values in the Middle East. Both of these are magnified by the American and Turkish refusal to seek a peaceful solution which the current ceasefire affords.

By virtue of General Ralston's intimate connections with the defense industry, and with the lobby group of a foreign state that has so far shown itself hostile to any democratic changes for the Kurdish people within its borders, we consider the appointment to be an example of an extreme conflict of interest.

As such, we at the Kurdish National Congress of North America demand the resignation of General Ralston as Special Envoy to Turkey.

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