

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

JOSEPH M.A.H. LUNS

SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE

NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL

THE BRIEFING ROOM

5:02 P.M. EDT

MR. NESSEN: As you know, the President has met now for roughly an hour with Secretary General Luns of NATO and with the 15 permanent representatives to the North Atlantic Council. The Secretary General is with us and would like to say a few words to you, and then he will be happy to answer your questions.

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, the North Atlantic Council has just been received by the President, who was accompanied by the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, and Ambassador Rumsfeld and some other aides.

The Council saw it as a further underlining and as strong evidence of the President and the Government of the United States with regard to the interest of the United States in the Atlantic Alliance and in Europe, which was so successfully brought into the open during the summit conference.

Moreover, we have felt all encouraged by the way the House and Senate have passed the appropriation for defense of the United States of America. And, for your further information, I can say that part of the Council went first to Monterey in California where there was a meeting of the Defense Ministers of the nuclear planning group of the Alliance, four permanent members -- United States, United Kingdom, Germany and Italy -- and six rotating members, three at a time. This time it was Turkey, Denmark and Belgium.

We had the occasion of seeing something of your defenses and were extremely impressed with the huge base at Vandenburg, where we flew to, and where we had very good briefings, and we are now in Annapolis for a Naval symposium, which will end tomorrow, and on Saturday we go back.

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The meeting with the President lasted an hour and was a working meeting where the President informed us of certain recent developments and where the members of the Council had the occasion of putting questions and giving views.

I may tell you that Greek-Turkish relations, the Middle East situation, and the possibility of a summit conference in Helsinki pursuant to the possible successful end of the Conference of Cooperation and Security in Geneva were among the items discussed.

If there are questions, I will, with pleasure, try to reply to them.

Q Mr. Secretary, how close do you think that the European Security Conference is to agreement and a possible summit?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: In the Middle East?

Q No, the European Security Conference.

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: I would say this, if you had asked me this three or four days ago, I would have been rather pessimistic, but there seems to be signs that the Soviet Union is moving in order to allow the conference to have a modest measure of success, which is the condition put by the countries in order to go to Helsinki.

But I would like to stress that the government of Finland has informed us that they need at least four weeks to prepare a conference and the Soviet Union proposes the 22nd of July, so it is far from certain. If it is not in July, it will not be before October. There is agreement that August and September should not be made available for the conference.

Q Are the European countries involved in this summit conference satisfied with the degree of Soviet concessions on opening up their borders?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Not yet.

Q Mr. Luns, another date has been mentioned in reports from Geneva for a summit, that is July 28.

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: That was the first suggestion by the Soviet Union.

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Q Do you think those six days will be enough to get the summit on the track, or not -- the difference between the 22nd and 28th?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: I must say I have my doubts, but I don't know.

Q Mr. Secretary General, what did the President say to you and the Council regarding the U.S. reappraisal of the Middle Eastern policy?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: I don't think I can go into too many details, but I would say the President was, and his Secretary of State, were moderately optimistic. They did not exclude the possibility of reaching, within the next months or so, a new agreement, and were very aware of the dangers of a stalemate.

Q Excuse me, sir ---

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: They were very much aware of the dangers of a stalemate, again.

Q You say they might reach an agreement as soon as within the next month?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Not within the next month, but within the next months, plural.

Q You are quoting the President, are you, sir?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: The President said he did not exclude it. So I say moderately optimistic. And you know the Syrian, I think, Prime Minister, is already in Washington at this moment.

Q He has just arrived?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Yes.

Q Mr. Secretary, was the subject of Portugal discussed at all? And if so, what is the latest assessment of that?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: I reply in the negative -- it was not discussed.

Q Could you tell us a little bit of what was said with regard to Cyprus? Anything said with regard to lifting ---

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SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: There was a general discussion where the President stated his view, and then the Ambassadors of Greece and Turkey spoke, both in a conciliatory manner. It was again stressed how much the action of Congress with regard to Turkey has hampered the reaching of an agreement and have soured Turkish-American relations. And I, for one, may perhaps say that I would welcome a reversal of that decision just as your Government would welcome it.

Q Mr. Secretary, did the President indicate he is more optimistic now that Congress will change its mind about the Turkish arms cut-off?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: I think the President rightly is very prudent when he talks about Congress; so would I be. But I have the impression that he had this morning a session about this very matter. That is my impression.

Q Did he seem encouraged by that session this morning?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: The President is very prudent.

Q Mr. Secretary, has the representative from Portugal been participating fully in all the activities in recent days?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Portugal is not a member of the nuclear planning group so Portugal was not represented in Monterey, but the Ambassador of Portugal in the NATO Council was. He is in Annapolis, and several Portuguese officers, among them the rather powerful Admiral Azevedo is there, too.

Q Mr. Secretary, I don't detect that anything very new was said today. Was anything said today that you didn't already know during the summit?

SECRETARY GENERAL LUNS: Yes, it was. But I would say when I left the room I was asked to say a few words to the press, and I am even more prudent than your President. (Laughter)

It was very nice to see you, anyhow. Keep smiling. Goodbye.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

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(AT 5:10 P.M. EDT)