


Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq after Bilateral Meeting

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PRESIDENT OBAMA: I want to welcome back Prime Minister Maliki to the White House. It's been two years since the last U.S. troops left from Iraq, but the strategic partnership between our two countries remains very strong.

We honor the lives that were lost, both American and Iraqi, to bring about a functioning democracy in a country that previously had been ruled by a vicious dictator. And we appreciate Prime Minister Maliki's commitment to honoring that sacrifice by ensuring a strong, prosperous, inclusive and democratic Iraq.

We had a wide-ranging discussion about economic issues, regional issues, and security issues. And much of our discussion centered on the fact that, although Iraq has made significant progress in areas like oil production and a range of other reforms that have taken place, unfortunately, al Qaeda has still been active and has grown more active recently. So we had a lot of discussion about how we can work together to push back against that terrorist organization that operates not only in Iraq but also poses a threat to the entire region and to the United States.

I emphasized the ambition of continuing counterterrorism support and partnership, that we were encouraged by the work that Prime Minister Maliki has done in the past to ensure that all people inside of Iraq -- Sunni, Shia and Kurd -- feel that they have a voice in their government. And one of the most important expressions of that will be elections next year. I encouraged that Iraq pass an election law and that that moves forward so that people understand that when they have differences they can express them politically, as opposed to through violence.

I also appreciated the efforts that Prime Minister Maliki has made recently to restore stronger relationships with its neighbors, including Kuwait and Turkey and some of the other Gulf states, and expressed my interest in providing whatever support is necessary to make sure that Iraq is working cooperatively and effectively with its neighbors.

We spent considerable amount of time talking about Syria, where the spillover effects of the chaos and Assad's horrific treatment of his own people has had spillover effects in Iraq as well. And we agreed that it's in the interest of both countries to try to bring about a political settlement, a political transition, inside of Syria that allows the Syrian people to make decisions about their own lives, while, at the same time, isolating extremist factions that could end up not only threatening people inside of Syria, but throughout the region as well.

And I shared with the Prime Minister our efforts to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue in a peaceful way, but emphasized to him how important it is that Iran seize this opportunity to take the right path in accordance with previous international norms and resolutions. My hope is, is that we can arrive at a resolution, but I emphasized to the Prime Minister how serious we are about preventing a nuclear arms race in a region that would only add to the dangers that so many people there already face.

Throughout this discussion, the main theme was the United States wants to be a strong and effective partner with Iraq and we are deeply invested in seeing an Iraq that is inclusive, that is democratic, and that is prosperous. And I communicated to the Prime Minister that anything that we can do to help bring about that more hopeful future for Iraq is something that we want to work on.

So, welcome, Mr. Prime Minister. Thank you so much for coming.

PRIME MINISTER MALIKI: (As interpreted.) Thank you very much, Mr. President, in the name of God, the merciful. Mr. President, you went into the details of all the issues that we discussed and the dialogue was very good. So we mentioned many, many issues that are of common importance for us, and we agreed on them. It was a very positive, very deep and very strategic dialogue.

We had an agreement that we signed between Iraq and the United States, as you know, and we have a friendship agreement and we have a Strategic Framework Agreement. And we need to activate them. And this was one of the main purposes of our visit. We need to enhance our bilateral relation and to enhance the agreements.

We discussed many issues that are very important for Iraq, for the region, and for the whole world. And this clearly tends to show that the Strategic Framework Agreement is of essence for the cooperation between the United States and Iraq and for the issues of the world.

And in our discussions today, we wanted to take the Strategic Framework Agreement and our bilateral relation sort of out from the unilateral security and military assistance that the United States provided to us. We wanted to move to a multi-layer relation at the political, economic level. And we hope the United States and the United States company and economy to participate in the rebuilding and developing area.

We have a common vision about all the issues that we discussed when it comes to diagnosing the region of terrorism to the Middle East. And we talked about the way of countering terrorism, and we had similar positions and similar ideas. We discussed the

details of our cooperation with the people who are in charge and will discuss further details about this. What we want is for Iraq and the region to be able to work together. And we are working in Iraq at the security level, intelligence level, social level -- at all the levels in organizing our people in order to fight al Qaeda, because it's a scourge for Iraq and the Middle East.

And I told the President that we improved our relation and are still working on improving our relation with all the countries in the region. And we are aiming at creating a moderation front in order to fight the sectarian front and the violence and the terrorism. This is very important. And we, as Iraqis, we act responsibly at all the necessary levels -- political, security, and military -- to do so.

We do know that the democratic experience in Iraq is nascent and fragile, but it was born very strong. And we need to continue enhancing it and consolidating it, because democracy is very important. We also want to have the mechanisms of democracy such as elections and we want to hold the elections on time -- and the government is committed to do so -- alongside with other issues like enhancing the national identity. Democracy needs to be strong, and we are going to strengthen it because it only will allow us to fight terrorism.

And as the President said, we are in total agreement when it comes to finding a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria, a solution through dialogue. We are very supportive of Geneva II. We want the Syrian people to have the right to self-determination and to choose its leader. And also, we want a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear problem. We do hope to avert nuclear wars in the region, and we also want to avoid the use of chemical weapons, because we and the Syrians suffered a lot from these weapons.

And we will continue with our good relations, bilaterally, and with the Strategic Framework Agreement. We want them to be strong, and we will continue working on that.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Q Mr. President, anything on the LAX shooting? Any thoughts on the LAX shooting?

THE PRESIDENT: Obviously, we've been monitoring, and we're concerned about it. But I'll let the law enforcement folks talk about it directly.

All right? Thank you, guys. Thank you.

END

4:22 P.M. EDT