

Remarks With Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal After Their Meeting

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Remarks

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Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: (In Arabic.)

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness. *Assalamu alaikum*. I am very honored to be here and very, very grateful for His Royal Highness, Prince Saud Al-Faisal's very generous welcome here. We had a superb dinner and meeting last night, and a meeting before that for some period of time with His Royal Highness the Foreign Minister, where we discussed all of the broad issues of the region and of importance to our countries.

This morning I had the privilege of having another meeting with the Crown Prince, with Minister of Defense Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud and we discussed again the extraordinary cooperation that takes place. And I said to both the Foreign Minister and to the Defense Minister that on almost every key issue of security and of mutual importance in the region, from Syria to the peace process, to the concerns we share about transitioning the economy of Egypt, to Yemen, to this region, we are working cooperatively in important ways. And the relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia is critical to both of our countries.

So we're working side by side to combat violent extremism, to promote more robust trade, and to strengthen the ties between the American and the Saudi people. And His Royal Highness just mentioned the 70,000 students who are studying in America. I come here today to affirm the strength of this relationship and the importance of it going forward. We are committed to maintaining our strong economic relationship and to creating more jobs. On the drive over here, His Royal Highness talked to me about the numbers of young

people and the need to provide jobs for them and the work that His Majesty the King and others are all doing in order to provide for a more diverse economy here in the region. We need to do this in both of our countries. We are also working to do that in America.

During this time of great political transition and uncertainty, we're working together to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Middle East and around the world. Across the Arab world, men and women have spoken out demanding their universal rights and greater opportunity. Some governments have responded with willingness to reform. Others, as in Syria, have responded with violence. So I want to recognize the Saudi Government for appointing 30 women to the Shura Council and promoting greater economic opportunity for women. Again, we talked about the number of women entering the workforce and the transition that is taking place in the Kingdom. We encourage further inclusive reforms to ensure that all citizens of the Kingdom ultimately enjoy their basic rights and their freedoms.

We discussed, as His Royal Highness has said, the importance of peace in the Middle East, and I pointed out that President Obama will be traveling shortly to Israel, to the region, and listening, opening up the opportunity and working to try to determine the way forward. We agree on the importance of that progress.

The Foreign Minister and I also discussed our shared determination to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. And we both prefer – and this is important for Iranians to hear and to understand – we both prefer diplomacy as the first choice, as the preferred choice. But the window for a diplomatic solution simply cannot, by definition, remain open indefinitely. There is time to resolve this issue, providing that Iranians are prepared to engage seriously on the P-5+1's most recent proposal.

We also discussed the urgent need to bring an end to the bloody civil war in Syria and to promote peaceful, inclusive transition, and provide the Syrian people with the safety, security, justice, and freedom that they deserve. The Foreign Minister could not have been more clear about the importance of this issue, the importance of this opportunity, and I make clear today that the United States will continue to work with our friends as we did in Rome to empower the Syrian opposition to be able to hopefully bring about a peaceful resolution, but if not, to continue to put pressure on Bashar Assad.

Finally, the Foreign Minister and I talked about our collaboration to support successful democratic transitions in Yemen, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, and to curb violent extremism and to discredit the false and dangerous message that al-Qaida is spreading. So I look forward to continuing to work with His Royal Highness. I can look forward, as President Obama does, to a continued strong relationship with the Kingdom, and we look forward and are grateful to the Kingdom for its important contribution to this relationship now.

MS. NULAND: Thank you. We'll start today with Anne Gearan from *The Washington Post*, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Foreign Minister, is U.S. agreement last week in Rome to begin providing food and medicine to the Syrian fighters anything close to enough to speed an end to the war? You mentioned in your opening statement the Saudi view that the rebels should be – or the Syrian people should be able to defend themselves. Is this going to be enough to help them do that?

And for Secretary Kerry, are the arms that Saudi Arabia is already providing to the Syrian rebels at risk of falling into the wrong hands and basically being part of the problem that you have identified?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: As to providing enough aid and security for the Syrians, Saudi Arabia will do everything within its capabilities to help in this. We do believe that what is happening in Syria is a slaughter, a slaughter of innocent people, and we just can't bring ourselves to remain quiet in front of this carnage. Morally, we have a duty to protect them. I have never heard or seen in history or in our present time, it is the only time in a great while that a regime would use a strategic missile towards his people and he too is killing innocent children, innocent women and old men. He is hitting his cities diabolically at a time when we are concentrating either to get food or medication, he is choosing a time when there is more citizens in the area of bombardment than any other time. This cannot go on. He has lost all authority in that country. He does not have a role to play anymore. Nobody who has done that to his citizens can claim a right to lead a country.

SECRETARY KERRY: I think His Royal Highness has spoken very eloquently about the situation in Syria. And I would simply add there is no guarantee that one weapon or another might not at some point in time fall into the wrong hands. But I will tell you this, that there is a very clear ability now in the Syrian opposition to make certain that what goes to the moderate, legitimate opposition is, in fact, getting to them, and the indication is that they are increasing their pressure as a result of that. Believe me, the bad actors, regrettably, have no shortage of their ability to get weapons from Iran, from Hezbollah, from Russia, unfortunately, and that's happening. So I think His Royal Highness has made the status of this challenge absolutely crystal clear. Bashar Assad is destroying his country and his people in the process to hold onto power that is not his anymore. The people have made it clear he's lost his legitimacy.

QUESTION: Your Highness, our guests, welcome to Riyadh. (Inaudible) newspaper. My question will be about the negotiations between the group of 5+1 and Iran. Are the negotiations are limited, or are you planning to negotiate another phase? As you mentioned a few minutes before that there is al-Qaida in Iraq, also (inaudible). Iran is involved with the issue in Syria and also in Bahrain. So are you going to negotiate another issues plus the Iranian (inaudible) – excuse me – nuclear file?

SECRETARY KERRY: No. The focus for the moment, the first focus, is the most urgent focus, which remains the challenge of the nuclear program. That is a threat that extends all throughout the region, and in fact globally because of the issue of nonproliferation. So the initial focus is on that issue, and the answer to your first part of the question is it is

absolutely not unlimited. Talks will not go on for the sake of talks, and talks cannot become an instrument for delay that in the end make the situation more dangerous. So there is a finite amount of time. Thank you.

MS. NULAND: Next one, Catherine Chomiak, NBC, please.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Foreign Minister, the P-5+1 talks in Almaty were mentioned, and they concluded with a promise of more talks. Are you concerned that the international community and the Americans are simply being strung along and the Iranians are playing for more time?

And Mr. Secretary, what's your argument to those in this region for why they shouldn't be developing their own nuclear capabilities to counter this threat growing in their backyard? And also, you're meeting with Palestinian President Abbas. What's on your agenda for that meeting? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Basically, any negotiation should have a time limit. We can't be like philosophers who keep talking about how many angels a pinhead can hold. We have to talk seriously, we have to talk honestly, and we have to put our commitment clearly on the table. That's what negotiation is. Negotiation is not to get somebody that negotiates to trick you into a position along with the negotiation because it still is not told. A negotiation must be serious. It must – the negotiation must show intent. A negotiation must show his motive is really settlement.

(Inaudible) they have not proved to anybody that they are sincere in their negotiation. They have continued to these negotiation to ask for to add to more negotiation in the future. They reach common understanding only on issues that require further negotiation, and so this is what (inaudible). They continue to negotiate and all it comes down to building an atomic weapon continues unabated in an area where it is already dangerous with the availability of atomic weapons. So we have to insist on Iran showing the motivation and a clear understanding that they are there to negotiate for a period of time and then come to terms with the conditions of IAEA and NPT.

SECRETARY KERRY: Catherine, there are really five principal reasons, I think, for why people in this region should not develop their own nuclear capacity, and I think you asked the question, "What would I say to people why you shouldn't do it?" Reason number one: Because President Obama has made it clear that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon, and therefore there is no need to develop that security.

Reason number two: It's very difficult to imagine circumstances under which a country would actually use it without, in fact, making the world far more dangerous.

Reason number three: There is a huge danger of proliferation. And the reason we are pushing so hard against in Iran is not anti-Iranian; it's because we are moving towards a world to have less nuclear weapons, not more, and because every time a country engages in the enrichment process and manufacture of nuclear weapons, you run the risk

with respect to security that someone else will get a hold of that enriched material – an extremist – and potentially use it. So the threat is not just the threat of a nuclear bomb. The threat is also the threat of a dirty bomb or of nuclear material being used by terrorists.

The fourth reason is that it makes the entire region less stable. If one nation does it, another nation does it, another nation does it; you haven't increased the stability or the peaceful prospects of a nation, and what you've done is you've diverted your resources from the young people who need jobs, from the investments you need into business, into something that we learned with the Soviet Union and the United States leads to a place where you ultimately want to figure out how do you get rid of them. Remember President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev meeting to say we're going to go from 50,000 nuclear warheads and reduce down. Now we have moving towards 1,500, and President Obama wants to move to less. So we do not want a movement – the road to a world with less nuclear weapons does not pass through a nuclear Tehran, and that's another reason why we don't want to do it.

And yet another reason why we don't want to do it is that important people who have been part of global affairs for a long time – Secretary Henry Kissinger, Secretary Bill Perry, Secretary of Defense Jim Schlesinger, every former Secretary of State of the United States with one exception – have all said, people like Secretary George Schultz, Secretary Colin Powell, have all said we should move to a world hopefully, ultimately without nuclear weapons when we learn how to resolve our problems and deal with conflict differently.

Again, you cannot have a more peaceful Middle East, you cannot have a more peaceful world when a country that exports terror and is involved in the internal affairs of other countries and breaking its own agreements with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and not living up to the standards of the IAEA is moving in the direction it has been. We are asking nothing more of Iran than its full compliance with the nuclear – with the Nonproliferation Treaty, the NPT, and full compliance with the IAEA. And to have any other country begin to move in another direction would undermine our ability to be able to achieve that and have a more stable and peaceful and prosperous region.

Those are the powerful reasons that I think it is so important that other countries not move. It is also the powerful reasons for why we want Iran to comply with the rest of the world. Countries can have peaceful nuclear power. Nobody says no to that. But you have to live by a certain standard, and it is the international community – not Saudi Arabia, not the United States – that has set that standard. It's the international community, and that's what we're asking for compliance with, the international community's standards.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Abbas?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you.

SECRETARY KERRY: I beg your pardon?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Abbas?

SECRETARY KERRY: Yes, I am.

QUESTION: And what would you hope to discuss with him?

SECRETARY KERRY: What do you think I might discuss with him? (Laughter.) I'm going to have a meeting with him. I look forward to the meeting, and it's part of the process of moving through this region. Prime Minister Netanyahu is aware that I'm meeting with him, and we will talk about all of the obvious issues. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you very much.

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