

Press Briefing by Senior Administration Officials on the President's Bilateral Meeting with His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia

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SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: My colleague will go ahead and give a readout of the meeting, and then we'll take your questions.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President had an excellent, more than two-hour meeting with King Abdullah. And it was really an opportunity for the President to sit down face-to-face with the King and, more than anything, do two things: One is underscore the importance of the bilateral relationship with Saudi Arabia, and the other was to talk about some of the key regional issues that affect both of our interests so profoundly.

The President underscored how much he values the strategic relationship. The United States has had an important relationship with Saudi Arabia for decades on security, energy, economics, and regional security issues. And the President wanted to make clear that he believes that continues to be the case.

There's sometimes a perception out there of differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia, and the two leaders spoke frankly about a number of issues and what might be or might have been tactical differences or differences in approaching some of these issues, but they stressed, and President Obama made very clear that he believes that our strategic interests remain very much aligned.

When you think about our commitments to the region and to Saudi Arabia, that we are committed to defending our friends and allies in the region from external aggression, our agenda puts nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction high on the list. Countering terrorism in the region and ensuring the secure flow of energy out of the region -- those

are core American interests and they're very much aligned with Saudi Arabia's interests. And it was, again, an excellent chance for the President to sit down face-to-face with the King and talk about that.

They also, as I mentioned, discussed regional security and political issues -- a wide number of them, but maybe I'll focus primarily on Iran and Syria, which they spent significant time on. And once again, it was a good opportunity for the President, on Iran, to underscore what we are doing in the nuclear negotiations, what our objectives are, and to make clear to the King -- and via the King, Saudi Arabia -- that we're determined to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon; that we've gone into the talks eyes wide open, but we believe that this is a common interest in stopping proliferation to Iran; that the arrangements in place now have halted Iran's nuclear program and set it back in important respects, which gives us time to negotiate in the P5-plus-1 to reach a comprehensive solution that meets the criteria that I mentioned, of stopping Iran from having a weapon, and ensuring that its program is exclusively peaceful; and again, to sit down with the King and assure him that that's the objective, that we won't accept a bad deal; and that the focus on the nuclear issue doesn't mean we are not concerned about or very much focused on Iran's other destabilizing activities in the region, which the Saudis and the King are also concerned about. Iran's meddling in other countries in the region, its support for terrorism -- these are things that we've made clear across the board that will not go away, but we believe, and the President was able to explain that dealing with the nuclear issue doesn't mean not focus on those things, and stopping Iran from a nuclear weapon itself will curb Iran's ability to continue its destabilizing activities throughout the region.

Now, one of the destabilizing activities Iran is undertaking in the region, we believe, is its support for the Assad regime in Syria, which is another big topic between the two leaders. As I think you all know, King Abdullah feels very passionately about Syria and the tragic humanitarian situation there, as obviously does President Obama -- and once again, an opportunity to sit down face-to-face. We've actually cooperated well and extensively with the Saudis on the question of Syria. We share the objective of bringing about a political transition. We share the objective of supporting the moderate opposition and isolating extremists and terrorists. And we not only share objectives, but we've been working together very well and increasing our cooperation, which I think is, indeed, getting better and better.

So it was an opportunity not only to underscore that we're trying to get to the same place, but some of the ways that we are doing it.

They discussed a number of other topics as well, but I'll just end with the -- getting back to the core point that I stressed at the start -- the President has been in touch with the King numerous times through meetings, phone calls, exchanges of information, and obviously dialogue among senior officials. But there's nothing like a face-to-face meeting, and that's why it was a priority for the President to actually come here. The King was very gracious; hosted him for, like I said, a good, long meeting. And I think it just underscores the importance we, at least, place on this relationship.

Q Can you talk about the degree to which the King and the President discussed in specifics MPADS through Saudi to the Syrian rebels? And can you be as declarative as possible as to whether or not the administration is revisiting that issue and is now more open to it than, say, it was a couple of months ago?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I'll start with the latter and try to be as declarative as possible that our approach on that issue hasn't changed. Without getting into the specifics of how we feel about this or that weapons system, or different types of assistance that may be provided to the opposition, I think you've heard us before in a number of different contexts explain concerns about certain types of weapons systems that could be part of a proliferation that would not serve our interest. And we've expressed that, and those concerns haven't changed.

Where the meeting is concerned -- again, without getting into the details of what they discussed -- this was not a trip or a meeting designed to coordinate detailed questions of types of assistance to the Syrians --

Q It was not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, the President didn't come here to do what his senior officials do and intelligence and military channels do. He came here to do the strategic discussion that I underscored about our objectives and our commitments.

Q And as a follow-up, did the King bring that up -- the MPADS and giving more assistance to the Syrian rebels?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, it wasn't a technical, detailed discussion of types of weapons.

Q On Iran, what did the King -- did the King seem convinced of what the President said about Iran -- the nuclear deal?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Look, I don't want to speak for the King or his reaction. He listened very carefully. And like I said, what was important about this meeting is obviously we've explained to the Saudis, they know what our position is, but there's nothing like the person who's responsible for driving and making this policy to come down and sit face-to-face with the King and patiently and carefully walk him through what we're doing and what the objective is.

And I think -- again, I can't speak for the King's -- what he took away or his response. But I think it was important to have the chance to look him in the eyes and explain how determined the President is to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and how determined the President is to continue to counter Iran's other destabilizing activities, and that the President and the United States are going into this eyes wide open, there's no naïveté.

Q The decision on MPADS aside, has your view of the opposition evolved over time? Do you see elements of the opposition that are in better position or are more trustworthy? And did the King identify the kinds of opposition factions that would be of help?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I'll say a few things and then my colleague may want to add. I think that it is the case that over time we have been able to develop deeper relationships with the opposition. Part of that simply comes with the fact of providing assistance. You build relationships when you are working with people. And we've also sought to bring together and harmonize the approaches of different countries in the region -- so the United States and Saudi Arabia, but also other Gulf countries, other European allies -- with the objective being strengthening the moderate opposition, but also providing assistance in a way that is complementary, so the sum is greater than the parts in terms of how we are able to strengthen the opposition as a political and military entity.

So these are relationships that have been built up over the course of the last year or two as our assistance relationship has continued. We have confidence in the moderate opposition in Syria. And, frankly, the emergence of some more extremist elements within the opposition I think only reinforces the need to strengthen, again, a more moderate opposition as a counterweight both to Assad, of course, and also to those extremist elements.

But I don't know if you want to characterize.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I mean, just maybe on the coordination piece. It's not just a question of amounts of assistance that go to the opposition. But one of the things we've stressed and tried over time to do is coordinate better with our partners. Because everybody knows there are a lot of different opposition groups in Syria -- they're not always on the same page working together, and they're not going to be effective -- at least we can effectively coordinate our opposition and try to lead them in the same direction.

And that's why I said in the opening, I believe that that --it's always going to be challenging, but we've made a real priority of working with our partners who are also leaders in providing support to the opposition. Saudi Arabia is one of those. And I think it's fair to say that our assistance -- our cooperation on assistance is getting better and better and it's a real priority for both of us.

Q I just would like to clarify on that last point about harmonization and working with the allies -- even if decisions were not made at this particular meeting, are you taking steps to expand the training and equipping of the moderate Syrian opposition -- not alone, but in concert with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and other partners in the region? If you haven't taken such steps in recent weeks and months, are you planning to do so? And if you're not planning to do so, what tangible accomplishments have come out of this meeting and the meetings leading up to it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, Michael, first of all, as a general matter, as you know, we don't get into the details of the types of assistance that we provide. We've been clear that we are working in concert with allies and partners to strengthen the moderate opposition as, again, a military entity that does include military assistance, but we don't get into the specific types of that assistance.

What I would say, though, is we have been improving that coordination and planning with our partners and allies. When you look at the London 11 group and you look at the discussions that we've had in intelligence and security channels, we have been able to improve the way in which we provide assistance into Syria. We've been able to come to a more common view about the groups that we provide support to within Syria. And we've been able to discuss what more effective means are in terms of strengthening them going forward.

So I would say that we made progress on this in the last several months, particularly from the fall up to now. And so we feel like we're in a stronger place as a collective group in support of the Syrian opposition today than we were several months ago.

I think this meeting continues to enforce the strategic direction that the United States and Saudi Arabia have in sharing an objective of bringing about a political transition and an end to the Assad regime, but the necessity of providing that assistance to the opposition so that they are a stronger counterweight to the regime. I think when we are aligned strategically it, again, is in service of the ongoing discussions that we have in those intelligence and security channels about what the best way is for us to coordinate our assistance.

Q Can I follow? When you talk about better coordination and understanding between you and the Saudis and the Gulf countries, does that mean that you're absolutely confident that the people the Saudis are arming are the people you vetted, you screened in the opposition?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, sure, I'm absolutely confident. I made the point earlier that it's not just about the amount and types of assistance, but about strengthening the right groups and being most effective about it. And I don't know if in the situation in Syria you can ever be absolutely confident about anything, but what we're trying to do is agree on who we are trying to help, who we're not trying to help, and take advantage of economies of scale and make the opposition more unified. So that's what assistance -- that's what coordination of assistance is about.

Q I mean, the level of coordination, the improvement of coordination gives you more comfort to change the quality of assistance, to give items that you were not wanting to give in the past to the opposition?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just as a general rule, the more confidence we can have in different groups the more and better assistance we can provide to those groups.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And just to be slightly more specific, too -- we've raised our concerns publicly and privately about ISIL, about al Nusra, and of course, we've indicated our support for the SMC and the SOC, and we believe that we have a common view in terms of wanting to strengthen the right forces in the country. And what you've seen in recent months is not only has the opposition been fighting against the regime, but they have been in a conflict with some of those more extremist elements, which makes it only that much more urgent for us to be ensuring that they have the support that they need, because, frankly, they're the alternative to the Assad regime that we have said we want to come to an end, but they're also the alternative to more extremist elements in the opposition.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And my colleague mentioning the SOC as well as the SMC is important because this is not just about helping the armed opposition. You have a relatively unified Assad regime under this dictatorship fighting a vast array of disparate groups both on the armed side and the unarmed side, and if you want any chance of changing the balance such that you're going to get the political transition that we believe is the only way to bring civility back to Syria, it's only if you can unify those groups in the opposition, both on the armed side and on the civilian side.

So the SOC -- we also have a dialogue with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries about the political opposition, because unless and until they're unified and backed by the armed side, they're just not going to be able to change the balance in the right way against the regime.

Q I asked you the question on Air Force One on the way here about the humanitarian issue, and I'm wondering to what extent that came up? What did the President tell the King about concerns about the -- I said humanitarian -- human rights issues, I should say, in Saudi Arabia?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the beginning of your question I will pick up on -- you mentioned the humanitarian -- you started with the humanitarian --

Q I meant to say human rights abuses that many human rights organizations are complaining about, bipartisan members of Congress are complaining about in this country that we have such great relations with.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, like I said, this was an opportunity to focus primarily on the importance of the strategic partnership and regional issues. There were a whole lot of issues on our bilateral agenda that weren't the focus of this meeting. I do want to take the opportunity to say -- because you started by talking about humanitarian --

Q I apologize --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay, well --

Q Did human rights abuse issues come up at all in the President's talk?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The focus of the meeting was strategic and regional topics.

Q So it did not come up?

Q We need a yes or a no.

Q Yes, really.

Q Did it come up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Can I just finish what I wanted to say about the humanitarian thing? Because I mentioned Syria and I alluded to it, but I want to underscore -- King Abdullah began with that piece and actually showed how pained he is by the humanitarian situation in Syria. So a significant part of the discussion was not just on what we can do, what we've been talking about here, coordinating our assistance to different groups, but what we can do to help the poor people of Syria. And that's a high priority for the King; it's a high priority for the President.

As you all know, the United States is a leading donor of humanitarian assistance. And I just wanted to be absolutely clear that even as we work on all these other tracks -- chemical weapons, political situation, opposition and so on -- we're not losing sight of what really matters here, which is the fate of the people of Syria and its neighbors.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just add one thing here. As we said, we raise a range of issues, including human rights, in our regular dialogue with the Saudis, even if it wasn't a focus of this meeting. I don't know if our schedule has gone out for tomorrow, but tomorrow morning, the President at our hotel will be able to see the State Department Women of Courage award winner from Saudi Arabia this year, Dr. Maha Al Muneef.

We'll send this out. She's the Executive Director of the National Family Safety Program here in Saudi Arabia. She's an advocate against domestic violence. Over many years, she's played an instrumental role in raising the profile of the issue here. And she also played a critical role in landmark legislation that recently passed in Saudi Arabia -- the "Protection from Abuse" law, which for the first time defines and criminalizes domestic violence as it relates to women.

She was not able to attend the Women of Courage award ceremony that Michelle Obama was at in March at the State Department, so the President will be able to give her this award tomorrow in person. Again, women's issues is a particular human rights focus for us in our dialogue with the Saudis. Obviously, religious freedom has been as well. These issues we'll continue to raise bilaterally with the Saudis.

Q Just a quick housekeeping thing. There seems to be some confusion as to whether or not there was supposed to be a dinner after the bilateral meeting. Can you clear that up? The State Department actually tweeted out that there was going to be a dinner.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, no -- there was some discussion of a dinner before we left for the trip, but several days ago, just for logistic reasons and the leaders' schedules, the decision was made to just have it be a bilat -- you know, we were getting in late. So I wouldn't read anything into it other than the fact that that decision was made several days ago. That's why it wasn't on the schedule that we put out last night, the public schedule for today.

They were able to have an over two-hour meeting, so they were fully able to cover a lot of ground. The King was very gracious for this hospitality.

Q I'm not trying to make a leap in any direction with this follow-up question, but did the President engage in any -- I know this was a bilateral meeting -- but engage in any discussions with the Crown Prince? We noticed the breathing tube that the King was using, and he is of advanced age. I mean, what does the future hold in that regard with respect to this relationship, which obviously would have to continue to go on? It's a sensitive question, but --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, no, the King, as my colleague just said -- first of all, the King looked well and sustained a very vigorous discussion about very serious issues with the President. He was in good spirits, so there really wasn't an issue there. The Crown Prince was in the meeting, but it was the President and the King who had the conversation, had the bilateral meeting.

Q Can you give just a general sense of the tone? I mean, obviously the Saudis have expressed real concern about U.S. policy in Syria and Iran and Egypt. Was this in any way tense? Or was he aggressive in presenting those concerns? Just a general --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, without speaking for the Saudis, I think the King appreciated the fact that the President came here to see him face-to-face. He was very gracious. This was not a contentious meeting. It was a good meeting. They really had an open conversation. They both said, look, it's important for us to be perfectly honest with each other. I think the King is known for being frank and honest. So I'm not going to say he claimed that there were no differences and everything -- that we saw everything eye-to-eye on every single issue.

He was able to articulate his views on Iran and Syria. I told you how the President articulated our views, which we thought was important so that there are no misunderstandings, so the Saudis or the King don't think that somehow trying to pursue our interests by stopping Iran from getting a nuclear weapon through diplomacy means that somehow we are naïve about Iran or overlooking some of Iran's other policies. So that was important on our side.

The King also -- the King had a chance, in a very frank way, to talk about what he thinks needs to be done in Syria and his perspectives on Iran. So in that sense, it really was what it was meant to be, which was a chance for these two leaders to sit down face-to-face. But really, it wasn't an opportunity to make complaints or express anger in any way. It was quite the opposite.

Q What about Egypt?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Egypt also wasn't a focus. I mean, two hours may sound like a long time, but with the catching-up to do and then the focus on the regional policy issues in some detail -- which, the ones I mentioned, Iran and Syria, were both very detailed -- they didn't get to every issue that is important to both of us. But what they did at the end was, one, note that they didn't get to every issue and there was so much more to talk about, and asked each other to make sure that their most senior officials continue to communicate -- which they already do, of course.

And like I said, the King has spoken -- the President has spoken to the King on the phone a number of times. They've been exchanging other communications. But they noted at the end, as important and useful as this long meeting was, there's so much more to cover, including some of the issues you all have raised. And they specifically said, let's have our senior officials really follow up on all of these things.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just follow up. I mean, I think an important point here is that, on Iran, as we've said with Israel, for instance, we understand that given the history of the Saudis' relation with Iran and their proximity to Iran, that they're going to be skeptical; that we basically price into the Iranian nuclear negotiations that our Gulf partners are going to be watching with a skeptical eye to make sure that we are getting a good deal. And that's appropriate given the fact that a lot of the destabilizing activity that Iran undertakes is right in their neighborhood -- their support for the Houthis in Yemen; some of their destabilizing activities in the Gulf, as well as, of course, their support for Hezbollah.

So the point the President has made repeatedly is that we are interested in getting a deal that meets our concerns, that assures that the program -- the Iranian nuclear program is peaceful. That, ultimately, would be in the interest of Saudi Arabia and the region, because Iran would be a far more destabilizing force if they had a nuclear weapon. So ultimately, those talks we believe could yield an outcome that is in service of regional security. But if we can't get the outcome we want, the President has made very clear that we're not going to take a bad deal either.

On Syria, I actually think we've been able to channel our efforts into coming together and finding common ground on particularly the question of humanitarian assistance and support for the opposition. There clearly was some difference about the United States not taking military action inside of Syria. But we've been very clear that, frankly, the objective of the military action we were contemplating was chemical weapons, and those are being dealt with through the removal of chemical weapons that is underway, and ultimately their destruction.

When it comes to the underlying conflict, we, frankly, didn't believe that there's a U.S. military option that could bring that conflict to a conclusion and that there needs to be political settlement, but that needs to be reinforced by opposition -- the support for the opposition. So that's where we've channeled things since the fall, when some of these tensions emerged.

Q Just a quick one, a quick answer. You know that we're going to be asked about it. You know the American public has questions about human rights in Saudi Arabia, which in some way seem to be getting worse with the passage of those new anti-terror laws. And the President has spent the last week talking about the rights of the individual, democracy. He met with the Pope and chastised Putin for ignoring human rights. So can you just give us an answer as to why it didn't come up?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Again, I think that the fact of the matter is we have a significant amount of issues with the Saudis. We've had differences in the relationship and convergences on the relationship. Differences include human rights. And the fact of the matter is, today, given the extent of time that they spent on Iran and Syria, they didn't get to a number of issues and it wasn't just human rights. They didn't get to some of the other regional issues that are part of our bilateral relationship as well.

We'll continue to raise these issues associated with human rights, with reforms here in the Kingdom, on a regular basis in all of our interactions with the Saudis. The fact is that given the time they had today and given the need to focus intensively on Iran and Syria in particular, they just didn't get to the full agenda.

Q Would you agree that the human rights situation here seems to be getting worse in some ways?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I would agree that we would have a lot of -- we do have a lot of significant concerns about the human rights situation that have been ongoing with respect to women's rights, with respect to religious freedom, with respect to free and open dialogue. And certainly, some of the recent laws raise questions in those areas of people's ability to express themselves freely.

We've had differences. So we've had differences on human rights as it relates to practices in Saudi Arabia. We've had differences over issues in the region on some of these cases. I mentioned earlier today the differences that we've had with some of the steps that the Egyptian government has taken -- for instance, in detaining journalists; the recent announcement of a fairly shocking number of death sentences.

So we're going to continue this dialogue. But the fact of the matter is given the range of security interests that we have in the region, Saudi Arabia has been a longstanding partner, and so we have to be able to both continue working with them on that agenda, even as we're going to differ on issues related to human rights.

Q Two things, just so we get it on the record -- did the situation with the Jerusalem Post reporter come up at all? And, two, the Women of Courage award, is that going to be an open press event or a travel pool event?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't know the press access. We'll get back to you on that. It's at the hotel. It's not a big, open press event that's for certain.

Q But we have a pool over there.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We'll check on that and get back to you. On the Jerusalem Post, look, this is something that Susan has been raising directly with the Saudis. We have made our views very clear on this. I don't believe it came up in the meeting, but this is -- they certainly know our views and our objection to the way in which that situation was handled.

Just a couple more. Carol.

Q Can you just kind of sum up your takeaways from this meeting and how relations between the U.S. and the Saudis have changed in the meetings leading up to this meeting and then after this meeting? Because it sounds like your view on, for instance, assistance to those Syrian rebels has changed in that you're more willing to give more if it's going to the right elements of the opposition, and that the U.S. and Saudis are more on the same page about who exactly that opposition is. Yet, there are still types of things you aren't willing to do. And as you know, the AP has a story out saying that you have shifted and are willing to do MANPADS under certain restrictions. Can you just clarify exactly --

Q Just directly address that AP story, if you don't mind. (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Look, we have not changed our position on providing MANPADS to the opposition. We have said it's a proliferation risk. So there's just -- this is not an issue that was discussed. It was not a part of the meeting, and there's no change in the U.S. position. Again, we don't discuss the details of types of systems, but we have made very clear publicly our concerns about this one particular system because it does have a proliferation risk. And this wasn't a focus of the meeting. There was no discussion about it leading into the meeting. We, again, have a dialogue on these issues that takes place in security channels, and that's where it's going to stay.

But I don't know if my colleague can address it broader.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, yes, the broader thing -- we came here in the face of a perception -- which I know is a perception because I read it in the newspaper on the airplane on the way in here -- of somehow a split between these two longstanding partners. And that big differences over --

Q And there was, right?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Sorry?

Q Well, that's correct, right?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. I guess -- you asked about takeaway. I don't think it is. The narrative referred to as somehow a big split over a lot of key regional issues and lack of trust and questions, and I think what these couple of hours of

conversations demonstrate and what the President wanted to underscore is actually our strategic interests are much more aligned than different -- which, once again, is not to say that we've been exactly aligned on all of these issues, which is not particularly surprising, but compared to what we have in common, and even on those issues -- on Iran and Syria - - again, the President with the opportunity to say we are determined to counter their support for terrorism in the region and destabilizing activities -- for the King to hear that directly from the President -- we're determined to stop them from getting a nuclear weapon; on Syria, we don't believe there can be stability under the Assad regime, we need to help the people of Syria, we need to support the moderate opposition.

So I think when the leaders have an opportunity to spend so much time talking about these things, I do think it leaves you with a sense that we actually are indeed strategic partners with a lot of interests in common. I mentioned earlier energy. Our defense relationship is enormous. Economic; nonproliferation. Our defense commitment is solid. So that's a takeaway I think is important that we may have different tactical approaches on some very difficult questions, but we remain important core partners.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Sure. One more over there, yes.

Q Thanks. So I just wanted to talk about Iran, because this issue of the President saying that you understand this destabilizing role that Iran is playing. But there's a sense here and in the region that Iran's isolation, diplomatic isolation is ending, that actually -- what is being done to stop that destabilizing force, especially at the moment with the concern in Yemen?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Sure. Well, let me just say a couple of things. First of all, the nuclear negotiations are aimed at achieving a very specific objective related to the nuclear program. I think part of the concern has been that the nuclear negotiations represent a broader rapprochement between the United States and the West and Iran. But the fact of the matter is that's not going to be the case if we don't see changes from Iran and these other areas.

For instance, all of our sanctions on terrorism-related issues are fully in place with respect to Iran. In terms of what we do, we're working against the Assad regime in Syria. Together with our Gulf partners we are working to support the Yemeni government. And we've worked to at times expose Iranian support as a means of disrupting the types of support that they could provide, whether it's to the Houthis or other groups around the region.

We work with a lot of countries in trying to counter Hezbollah's activities, targeting their financing, intelligence cooperation, strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces. So I think on the Hezbollah side of the equation, we have a lot of actions all over the world that are frankly geared at cracking down on Hezbollah's activities.

So, again, I think across the board we have a very aggressive set of measures that we're using to counter Iran's support for terrorism, to expose and counter its efforts to destabilize countries in the region. And those are going to be ongoing, and those also

depend on the cooperation we have with our partners here.

But at the end of the day, if we can get a diplomatic resolution to the nuclear issue that assures that Iran's program is peaceful, that's going to be a good thing. A nuclear-armed Iran would be far more dangerous in terms of its ability to destabilize the region, to leverage its support for terrorism. So that's why we're so invested in that project. And I think our view is at the end of the day, if we can achieve that diplomatic resolution that will be good for the security of the Gulf and of the region. If the Iranians make further changes in their policies as it relates to these other issues, then there may be the prospect of looking at a broader conversation. But they're not doing that.

As near as we can tell, their actions in terms of their regional behavior is the same today as it was before these nuclear talks began. And our efforts to counter those Iranian actions are the same today as they were before the nuclear talks began. And so that's a steady state in an issue where I think we have more convergence with the Saudis as a matter of policy than divergence.

Thanks, everybody.

END

9:11 P.M. AST