



Press Statement
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
May 18, 2006

U.S.-Saudi Strategic Dialogue

Following is the text of the United States-Saudi Arabia Strategic Dialogue Joint Statement:

Begin Text

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Saud Al-Faisal today co-chaired the second Ministerial Meeting of the United States-Saudi Arabia Strategic Dialogue. The Strategic Dialogue was established by President George Bush and then-Crown Prince, now King, Abdullah at their summit meeting in Crawford in April 2005. Its first formal meeting was inaugurated by Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Saud in Jeddah in November 2005. The Strategic Dialogue meets every six months, alternating between Saudi Arabia and the United States, to discuss issues of strategic importance to the two countries. The Working Groups meet on a continuous or "as needed" basis to deal with functional issues and provide an institutional framework through which officials from a number of departments and Ministries from both governments work to constructively and comprehensively address a range of issues of importance to both countries.

One of the key objectives of the Strategic Dialogue is to institutionalize relationships across government departments in both countries to ensure that issues are dealt with effectively. This is done through the working groups. At the level of the Strategic Dialogue, senior officials from both governments have the opportunity to assess the overall relationship and to exchange views on strategic matters of importance to both countries, whether these matters are bilateral, regional or international. Since the initiation of the Strategic Dialogue, our two countries have been able to clearly and honestly exchange views on bilateral, regional and international issues. The Dialogue has also contributed to educating each other about certain aspects of our respective societies and systems. This has led to better understanding on both sides, which in turn has eased some of the respective concerns we may have had about each other. We look forward to further enhancing our understanding of each other in a manner that serves both our people.

During today's meetings, the Chairs of the respective Working Groups reported on their activities and discussed their agendas for the next six months.

- **The Counterterrorism Working Group** provided an overview of the extensive counterterrorism and counter-terror financing efforts by both countries, including joint efforts and training programs. They also discussed ways to enhance international cooperation in the war on terror, in particular the exchange of information.
- **The Military Affairs Working Group** works as part of the existing Strategic Joint Planning Committee (JPC) between the two militaries. The JPC is working to enhance interaction between the two militaries and to support the Kingdom's efforts to upgrade its military capabilities.
- **The Energy Working Group** represents the Bilateral Energy Talks which have been in existence since the late 1980's. The aim of this working group is to deepen the existing bilateral dialogue on energy. As the world's largest oil producing and consuming countries, Saudi Arabia and the United States have a shared strategic interest in secure and stable energy markets and moderate prices that support strong world economic growth.
- **The Economic and Financial Affairs Working Group** continued its efforts to enhance economic cooperation, trade and investment between the two countries by setting an Action Plan for 2006. The Action Plan will address trade and investment climate issues, coordination of aid, and regional issues of mutual concern. The Working Group will meet in the Fall.
- **The Consular Affairs Working Group** seeks to initiate cooperative measures related to a wide array of consular issues affecting citizens of both nations including: problems relating to child custody and abduction, which will be considered in a humane manner that gives primacy to the interests of children and families; barriers to entry and exit; and establishment of an equitable visa system that provides robust security while facilitating legitimate travel for nationals of both nations.
- **The Partnership, Education, Exchange, and Human Development Working Group** seeks to promote mutual understanding between the United States and Saudi Arabia and increase cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries. In this regard, both sides will continue discussions to reach agreement on the King Abdulaziz Al-Saud - Franklin Delano Roosevelt Scholarship Program, a merit-based program for Saudi undergraduates to study in the United States. The United States side was pleased with the decision of the Saudi government to form an interagency group to enforce Saudi laws regarding trafficking in persons. It also welcomes the measures the Saudi government has taken to combat extremism and intolerance. The two sides agreed on the ongoing need to combat extremism and promote intercultural understanding and mutual tolerance. The United States and Saudi Arabia agreed to work together to establish a Junior Achievement chapter to promote entrepreneurship and job skills training for Saudi youth and foster private sector development. They also agreed to continue efforts to increase people-to-people contacts and promote understanding through exchanges and other efforts.

Both sides agreed that a stable, democratic, unified, pluralistic, and prosperous Iraq is in the interest of all countries, and expressed their hope that the new Iraqi government will work to preserve the unity, identity and territorial integrity of Iraq, and their intent to support the new Iraqi government both politically and economically.

Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Saud reiterated the critical importance of achieving a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East. They also expressed their opposition to any unilateral steps taken by either side in the dispute that may prejudice final status negotiations or undermine progress toward a two-state solution. Both sides recognize the importance of providing assistance to the Palestinian people, pledge to work to ensure that such assistance is forthcoming and delivered through proper channels, and hope that the Quartet will follow through on its May 9 statement regarding a special mechanism that will be implemented efficiently and in a timely manner, to ensure direct delivery of aid to legitimate recipients.

With regard to Iran, Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Saud expressed their shared concern about the serious threat of nuclear weapons proliferation in the region. Prince Saud reiterated the Gulf Cooperation Council's position that the whole Middle East, including the Gulf region, should be free of all weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons. The United States and Saudi Arabia look to Iran to work with the international community to play a constructive role in the region.

Saudi Arabia is studying positively the Proliferation Security Initiative.

Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Saud expressed their satisfaction with the second round of the Strategic Dialogue, and both look forward to continuing this important dialogue between the two countries. The next meeting of the Strategic Dialogue will take place in the Kingdom in the fall of this year.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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