



Remarks With Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
January 16, 2007

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: (Via interpreter.) In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful, I welcome Her Excellency Dr. Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State, and her accompanying delegation to Saudi Arabia. Her Excellency met with the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques where detailed talks were made during which the situation of the region was discussed in general.

Talks addressed the new developments in Iraq. We heard from Secretary Rice the new plan of President Bush for Iraq, its basis and the objectives to be achieved.

On our part, we agree with President Bush on the need of the situation in Iraq to a new approach and strategy with clear purposes and objectives that respond to the current developments and applicable in the field.

Saudi Arabia agrees to the objectives sought in: halting security deteriorations through dealing with all sources of violence and terrorism and armed militias in all regions without discrimination or bias; ensuring achievement of national unity between all Iraqi people, segments, races and political groups on principles of equality and equivalence between all in rights, duties and sharing treasure -- through this objective we hope to introduce some amendments to the Iraqi constitution that ensures integration of these groups in the political process; maintaining independence and sovereignty of Iraq and its territorial integrity by stopping external meddling in the Iraqi affairs that aimed at tampering and disintegrating its national fabric.

We hope that President Bush plan goes forward to achieve these objectives in view -- we hope to support the plan by resuming the Iraqi national accord conference in response to the efforts of the Arab League in view of the situation in Iraq of impact on the security and stability of the region and entire world.

Our talks handled the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lack of the discussions of Secretary Rice with the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships and the efforts to revive the peace process aiming at realization of just, comprehensive, permanent and viable peace, establishment of independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel according to the vision of President Bush and based on international legality basis, the agreements signed between the two parties, the roadmap and the Arab peace initiative.

I would like to express our welcome of the assertions of Secretary Rice on renewing the commitment of the U.S. Administration to make progress in the peace process, establishment of the Palestinian state and intensification of U.S. efforts to solve Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We also are looking forward to ending the blockade and closure imposed on the Palestinian territories, stopping incursions policy and collective punishment of the Palestinian people that increase its human suffering.

Meanwhile, we'll feel that reviving the peace process should benefit from experiences in the past by focusing on the key issues in the conflict and working on finding radical solutions to them. Partial solutions proved ineffective in making progress in the peace process.

We discussed also the risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region placing a new hazard to the world and regional security. On our part, we expressed importance of handling this issue through dialogue and peaceful negotiations. These should be comprehensive without exclusion of any country in the region from any international measures or efforts in this regard.

Our talks also touched upon the situation in Lebanon and the danger posed by the current crisis to stability, sovereignty and national unity of Lebanon. We agreed on the importance of calming down the situation and defusing the existing tension and paving the way to the success of Paris III conference with support and interest for our two countries.

I welcome again Dr. Rice. I hope to address us and I leave the floor to her.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness. Thank you very much for welcoming me here. I would also like to thank very much His Majesty King Abdallah for hosting me last night. We had extensive discussions and I appreciate very much the opportunity to come to Saudi Arabia and to talk about the issues of common interest at this rather challenging time in the Middle East, but also a time that we believe and hope can become a time for opportunity.

I did say to His Royal Highness that the United States would deepen its involvement in the efforts to find a peace between Palestinians and Israelis so that the President's vision of two states living side by side in peace and security could be realized, and described some of the efforts that we will be making over the next several weeks. I look forward to further discussion of that issue with the GCC, Jordan and Egypt this evening.

I also want to underscore that the Saudis were very helpful in helping us to think through some of the elements about Iraq. Obviously, we have the same goal, which is an Iraq that is unified, whose territorial integrity is intact, which does not face outside interference and meddling, which is an Iraq in which all Iraqis, all Iraqi citizens, are treated equally and can count on the protection of the state without regard to religion or ethnicity.

Finally, it is very important to note that we are working together concerning the situation in Lebanon and for the support of the government of Fuad Siniora and we will of course have later on this month a conference in Paris that will I think signal the very strong support of the international community for the Lebanese Government.

All in all, I think it's been a very good set of discussions. We will resume our strategic dialogue at a time to be determined, we hope very soon, because it is in that dialogue that we cover the wide range of bilateral issues that we wish to explore, and I look forward to resumption of that strategic dialogue as well, Your Royal Highness. Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: May I choose a Saudi --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, and I'll choose American. Good. Sounds good. You want to go first?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: American first for you.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh all right. Barbara Slavin.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Madame Secretary, have you read the letter that Ali Larjani presented to King Abdallah? Would you share its contents with us and

tell us what you think Iran is trying to do by sending such a letter? Do they want perhaps Saudi Arabia to mediate in the dispute between the United States and Iran?

And Your Highness, could you tell us, are you concerned that the United States and Iran may be headed for a confrontation, a military confrontation? Should this meeting of the GCC+2 be seen as an anti-Iranian configuration and would Saudi Arabia be prepared to take steps such as increasing its oil production to reduce prices and put pressure on Iran to change its behavior? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Barbara, first of all, the United States -- this is not a conflict between Iran and the United States concerning its nuclear program. There is a resolution 15-0 in the Security Council that sets out the demands on Iran to stop its enrichment and reprocessing activities so that negotiation can begin. That's not a position of the United States; there is therefore no need for mediation between the United States and Iran. Iran needs to respond to the requirements of the international community. And I want to repeat what I've said before: If Iran responds to that, then the United States is prepared to join its European colleagues in discussions about how -- and negotiations about how to move forward for a civil nuclear program for Iran if indeed Iran wants a civil nuclear program. So I don't think this is a matter of mediation.

In terms of what the President said, it's quite obvious that it's important for the United States to protect its forces that are serving in Iraq. We are doing that within the boundaries of Iraq and we will continue to work with the Iraqi Government to make certain that networks of people who are building dangerous materials are indeed stopped, that we can stop them from doing that.

As to the diplomacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia, that's diplomacy between Iran and Saudi Arabia and I'll leave it to His Royal Highness to respond.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you, Madame Secretary. As the Secretary said, there is no need for mediation in this regard. Both sides are (inaudible) not negotiations and know each other well enough to (inaudible) with good intentions (inaudible) peaceful settlement to any differences that exist and this is what we hope. Our relations with the United States are longstanding and need no explanation. Iran is a neighbor of Saudi Arabia so obviously we hope to avoid any conflict with Iranians. We are not undergoing any form of mediation on this issue.

As to the oil issue, Saudi Arabia's policy is very clear in this, that it takes its responsibility with great seriousness in maintaining a healthy market both for the consumers and the producers and that any crises that happen in the past, Saudi Arabia has carried its responsibility in this regard and I'm sure it will do so in the future.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) Your Highness, in view of the strategy or the new strategy of President Bush, you have heard the details from the Secretary of State yesterday. The Kingdom is with best option to save what is -- should be saved for the difficult solution? Do you have any reservations on the strategy on the new American plan? Have you found it the best option or at least the acceptable option? What is the Saudi vision to make this a success?

(In English.) And Madame Secretary, welcome to Riyadh. With reference to your new strategy on Iraq, do you really have the (inaudible) and the ability to hear from the influential leaders in the region and what are the chances to safeguard the plan from failing? And we heard you described this time as a very critical and challenging time in the Middle East. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: (Via interpreter.) In fact, as I have said, with regard to remarks minutes ago, we agree with the full objectives set by the new plan, the strategy. This has objectives that it is -- it were applied, it will solve the problems facing Iraq. Naturally, representation requires a response from Iraqis themselves to these objectives. The responsibility, as said by President Bush, lies basically on the Iraqis to reach to agreement. We cannot be Iraqis more than Iraqis. Consequently, the countries -- other countries can help but the burden, the whole burden and taking a decision will be the Iraqis' one. We hope to participate as an Arab group to reach to the objectives and targets of the strategy by seeking a national conciliation that opens the way to all Iraqis to acquire confidence that they will be the -- the state will deal with them equally in duties and rights to build the Iraqi institutions able to serve security -- maintain security and use the Iraqi treasures to build Iraq that can participate in the stability and growth of this region.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me just underscore something that His Royal Highness just said. As the President has said, Iraqis have to decide what kind of country they are going to be. Are they going to be a unified country or one in which there are sectarian passions? And in talking to Prime Minister Maliki, I really do believe that he and the other Iraqi leaders very much want to build a unified Iraq.

But there is much work to do in order to do that. There has to be a real effort at the national reconciliation plan that was announced some time ago. There has to be a real effort to deal with the security situation, particularly in Baghdad, in an even-handed fashion so that all Iraqi citizens feel protected by their government.

And the President's contribution to this is to assist the Iraqis by augmenting American forces, by augmenting American efforts at economic reconstruction and political governance, building the institutions of governance. And we believe that this plan will work, but obviously it depends on human beings and it depends on human beings to execute it fully. And that includes for the Iraqis to execute their obligations fully.

As to the input from the region, that's precisely why I'm here and I expect that we will continue to talk about what we can do when the GCC+2 meets. I should note that the GCC+2 meets not in opposition to anyone but rather in a positive agenda, which is an agenda for a Middle East that is different from the one in which extremism really does threaten to undermine the fabric of these societies and of Middle East peace. And so I look forward to meeting with the GCC+2. It's a positive agenda.

Finally, let me just say yes, it is a challenging time in the Middle East. I think everyone can see that. But I'm a student of history and I know that positive change only comes out of challenging times. And if you look back at the entire history of when there have been positive breakthroughs, it is usually because the sense of crisis and challenge has been managed in a way that people take the opportunities before them. Indeed, I am told -- I don't read Chinese but I am told that the Chinese character for crisis is *wèiji*, which means both danger and opportunity. And I think that states it very well. We'll try to maximize the opportunity.

Oh, Neil. Sorry.

QUESTION: Good morning. Hello. Neil King with the *Wall Street Journal*. Mr. Foreign Minister, in light of the recent hangings and what Secretary Rice just said about it will be all dependent on what people do in Iraq as to whether it works, what level of confidence do you have in the Maliki government's ability to treat all sides evenly and to handle this crisis at the moment?

And more broadly, did you share with the Secretary any warnings about what Saudi Arabia might do if Iraq's dissolution were to continue? I just wanted to note also that in what you had said before you said several times that you shared the objectives of the Bush plan. We were just interested if you also share the means of the plan itself, the specifics of the plan.

And just lastly, Madame Secretary, can you just provide us some specifics about what you might have asked the Saudis in your meetings this morning or last night as to what assistance they might bring to bear in Iraq, whether it's debt relief or reconstruction aid or what? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Well, for the confidence in the Maliki government, it is not the confidence of Saudi Arabia that it sees in the Maliki government; it's the confidence of the people of Iraq, and that is the important thing, I think. The duties that he has are really heavy. He has to deal with many issues that are of tremendous consequence for the future of Iraq: how to stop the resistance, how to bring the people into the fold of political rather than military action to implement their wishes. After all, it is a democratic government that exists now. It is not through the bullet but the ballot that people should deal with the issues. He has to deal with the militia issues. So he has a full agenda and that requires not the confidence of countries outside of Iraq, but it depends on how we gain the confidence of the people of Iraq in doing what he needs to have done.

In supporting the plan, the plan has objectives. The details of how to implement those objectives I don't think we can cover in one night of discussions, so we really

cannot comment on what the means will be applied for this. But a lot of responsibility, as his speech explained, lies on the Iraqi Government itself so it depends on what program the Iraqi Government puts that the details will be clarified. And so we are hoping that these objectives will be implemented, but the means are not in our hands. They're in the hands of the Iraqis themselves.

SECRETARY RICE: We have had many conversations about how Saudi Arabia may support the development of a stable and unified Iraq. Obviously, some of the financial issues between Iraq and Saudi Arabia will need to be worked out. I know that there have been discussions and conversations. As you might imagine, some of these issues are quite technical. They go back to understanding the basis for debt. It goes back to actually having technical people go to documents. And I think some of those discussions have been held and we're hopeful that in the near future we can have another meeting of the international compact, which actually does outline some responsibilities of the Iraqis and some responsibilities of the international community, and it's a process then of understanding how the mutual responsibilities can lead to a more stable Iraq. And so we did talk about when it might be useful to have another meeting of the international compact. I think that really is the way to bring together the help of all parties.

But Saudi Arabia has also been helpful in urging national reconciliation, on talking to people with whom they have ties to urge national reconciliation. And if the Arab League is indeed prepared to go forward with a reconciliation conference, I think that will also be very useful to the Iraqis. So I think there is plenty that is being done. We all need to redouble our efforts. The Iraqis need to take on their responsibilities, and let me say just not at the national level. It's not just the Maliki government and those around him, but we are also working very hard at the local level and at the provincial level because delivery of goods and services to the people is really going to take more -- take place much more at the local level. And so that is another place that we can find means for success for the plan that the President has put forward.

QUESTION: Good morning, Madame Secretary. My name is Talat (ph) from a Riyadh newspaper. Ma'am, recently some European countries like Germany, Spain, Italy, have been calling for a new international peace conference to be held like the one that was held in the '90s in Madrid. I'd like to know what's the position of the United States about that conference and do you think such a conference will really boost and help to solve the Palestinian-Israeli question? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: We'll take two more questions after this.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. One and one?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: One and one.

SECRETARY RICE: All right. The idea of an international conference is one that at some point may make sense, but what I've found in talking to the parties is that they most want to try and engage each other, not the international community as a whole. We have to be very careful about gestures, and rather I think now try to get down to work in what has proven to be an extremely difficult problem to make progress on. There have been times when we thought we were close as an international community only to find that we couldn't quite get there.

And so I found when I talked both with President Abbas and with Prime Minister Olmert that they were attracted to an idea that actually President Abbas had raised, which is a more informal discussion of issues that they have not talked about for six years. And I think that is the way really to start this process. I will join them for those discussions. I think we will certainly be in very close contact with the regional states in support of what they are trying to do. They also have a bilateral channel that is dealing I think effectively with the day-to-day problems. It needs to be kept alive and kept very vibrant.

And finally, it's very important that we realize we do have a roadmap. It's just to make sure that we accelerate progress along that roadmap while talking about what it will take to establish the Palestinian state. So I think that's the best way to start and I think it is the way that the parties want to start as well.

Andrea.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Madame Secretary, Your Royal Highness. If I could follow up on Neil King's question, Your Royal Highness, if the recent behavior in Iraq and some of inability of the Maliki government to stand up to Shiite militias proves to be fatal to the chances of this government, if there is a further dissolution, what other steps might Saudi Arabia and other Arab leaders take? What would be the options that you would be considering if this civil war progresses?

And Madame Secretary, what other help besides financial help and debt relief do you think the neighbors of Iraq might provide to try to stabilize the situation?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Why speculate on such dire consequences? Why not speculate on the positive side that everybody will come together and hopefully move out of the morass that exists in Iraq which serves nobody, Shiites or Sunnis or Turkomen or Kurds or -- it serves no one. It serves no neighboring country, no regional power and no international power. We are more hopeful than speculate on things going wrong.

The advantages of a solution and the settlement for Iraq which is an old and historic country with a civilization that goes back thousands of years, I cannot for the life of me conceive that a country like that would commit suicide given the goodwill and the desire of all to help in this. And I hope that your dire speculation will not come about, but our hopeful speculation will be the dominant result in Iraq.

SECRETARY RICE: And Andrea, as I said, I think that the political support in the form of support for national reconciliation -- Saudi Arabia is an extremely important regional power and has very great influence in this region. There are also ties of family and kinship across borders that go back through history and I know that Saudi Arabia is urging reconciliation, urging that all should participate in the political process and participate fully in the political process. It was very helpful, for instance, at the time of the election, in calling for all to participate in the political process.

Again, I do know too that the possibility of reinforcing Saudi -- reinforcing Iraq's place in the Arab world through an Arab initiative would be a very useful matter. And so there has been those talks before, there's been a conference before and I hope there will be in the future.

QUESTION: (Via interpreter.) (Inaudible) from *Al Hayat* newspaper. Madame Secretary, you are looking for peace and stability in the region, as you said. Are you saying -- how can this stability and peace be achieved and you are excluding a basic party in the region, Syria, (inaudible) with pressures on (inaudible)?

Your Highness, as for the Lebanese issue, have you agreed to take specific steps to solve the problem in Lebanon in coordination with the American Administration? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think we are excluding Syria. I think Syria's behavior is excluding Syria. This is a time in the Middle East in which extremism is threatening the seeds of progress that are there with a young and rather fragile democracy in Iraq, a democratically elected government in Lebanon of Fuad Siniora. Obviously, President Abbas in the Palestinian territories faces constantly the threat that extremists will undo his efforts to make peace with Israel.

And so all of those forces find support in Syria -- those extremist forces -- particularly in Lebanon where the Syrian forces left Lebanon because of the pressure of the Lebanese people and the international pressure, and where I think Syria remains unreconciled to the fact that it is no longer in Lebanon.

And so it is not the U.S. position or U.S. policy to try to exclude any state that would be a positive force in the region and that would be dedicated to the goals of building a Middle East in which people can live in prosperity and peace and democracy, but Syrian behavior thus far has really not been on that line. It's been quite the opposite.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: (Via interpreter.) As for Lebanon, both of us suggest and welcome the endeavor of the Secretary General of the Arab League to find a

solution. We are looking forward to the response of the Lebanese factions to this solution, all of us, and previously held in Lebanon and we believe in the necessity to help Lebanon for many objectives. This country first of all represents a model for the coexistence between the segments and factions, different factions. Maintaining the entity of Lebanon and stability, sovereignty and security, it has a feedback on the region and the entire world. Lebanon represents this peaceful coexistence between the different segments.

In addition to both of us will have participation caring for the success Paris III conference, consequently we will participate in this effort. I hope it will have -- will support the Lebanese legality to do its duties to maintain peace and stability in the region. But likewise, like Iraq, we cannot help -- outside interests cannot help. The final answer will be for the Lebanese factions. We hope that Lebanon will not be an arena for conflict related to issues for external countries. It is enough for Lebanon the internal problems to try to solve them. We hope that all who wants for Lebanon the good to do good or not to do evil.

Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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