



Remarks With Saudi Arabia Minister of Foreign Affairs, His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Conference Palace Hotel
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
January 15, 2008

[View Video](#)

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: (As translated) May God's peace and mercy be upon you. In the name of God, most gracious and most merciful, it's my honor to reiterate the greetings of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the government and people of Saudi Arabia, to President George W. Bush. I also welcome Dr. Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State. Naturally, it pleases me to welcome the U.S. media at this meeting with us this night.

The visit of the President of the United States to Saudi Arabia reflects the strong historic relationship between the two countries. This relationship has been exemplified by frankness and transparency, commitment to mutual interests, and diligence in dealing with regional and international problems within the framework of the strategic partnership between the two countries, which is the spirit that prevailed in the serious and in-depth talks held between the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and His Excellency, the President of the United States.

I met with Dr. Rice to complete the talks. We echoed the bilateral relations from all its aspects -- economic, commercial, cultural, education, security and military issues, forming the subject of strategic dialogue established by the then Crown Prince and President Bush in Crawford in 2005. The committees formed of specialists -- (inaudible) -- the two countries to pave the way for -- (inaudible) --

There have been a number of positive issues from the strategic dialogue; most importantly, the increase of students entering the United States from less than 3,000 to more than 15,000 students over the last three years; as well as the record level of trade between the two countries. The United States is the largest trade partner of Saudi Arabia. And the U.S. companies are the largest foreign investors in the Saudi market, in addition to the big volume of Saudi investments in the United States.

I would like also to indicate the close cooperation between the two countries in security cooperation at the best level of fighting terrorism, the security aspects and the mind-set that condones it. Our active efforts in combating this (inaudible) must also redouble efforts on resolution of regional and international crises.

Finally, the Palestinian issue. This creates breeding grounds for terrorist recruitment, and this crisis, as well, form a threat to global security and stability. In our discussion of regional and international issues, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict took most part of the talks. The Kingdom welcomes the U.S. assertions of their commitment to the peace process in the region, the trend towards urging the negotiations and urging the parties to further commitment reaching a peace agreement by the end of 2008, according to the basis and principles of Annapolis Conference, which aimed to reaching a comprehensive, just and permanent solution for the conflict, and creation of the independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian state.

In regards to the continuity of Israeli's expansion in settlements cast doubts on the seriousness of the negotiations, which initially came at end of the occupation, and restoration of the Palestinian lands. Meanwhile, Israel is expanding an acquisition of more lands and building of settlements on them.

On the issue of Iraq, we expressed our satisfaction with improved security situation in the country. We also expressed our hope that improvements in security can be quickly followed by movement towards national reconciliation within the ongoing political process, including amendment of the constitution to ensure social justice, equality, rights (inaudible) and sharing wealth among all Iraqis, regardless of their beliefs, ethnicities, and political affiliations. We also reviewed the responsibility of the Iraqi government to achieve these goals.

We also reviewed the situation in Lebanon. The international consensus and support of the Arab League plan to resolve the presidential crisis compels all Lebanese parties to seek a resolution -- has historical responsibility to respond to these efforts, to giving preference to a national Lebanese interests above all other factional interests, particularly the plan set on an accord which presents nationalistic responsibility on this level and without any foreign interference.

Our talks covered the situation in Pakistan. Both agreed the cowardly assassination of Ms. Benazir Bhutto is a challenge for the people of Pakistan. Pakistani political parties need to be united in order to face this challenge, secure peace and stability throughout the country. Saudi Arabia, on its part, calls upon the international community to stand by Pakistan in such circumstances, support its stability and not to pressure the country in the difficult situation.

Thank you. And it pleases me to give the floor to Dr. Rice.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Your Royal Highness, and thank you for welcoming me again to the Kingdom, and thank you for the really extraordinary welcome that you and His Majesty have given to the President. This is an historic visit for the United States and Saudi Arabia that celebrates our long friendship, and that was demonstrated through the wide-ranging discussions that have been held, the importance of a strong U.S.-Saudi relationship for the resolution of the many challenges that we have in this region.

There have been discussions across a wide range of issues. You have mentioned most of them, Your Royal Highness, and so I'll not repeat. Let me just say that we are especially appreciative of the discussions that we have had about the Annapolis process in Middle East peace. The President was able to report to His Majesty about his discussions in Israel and in Ramallah, and about the hopes for the conclusion of an agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis by the end of 2008.

It is, indeed, not an easy task. It is one that will take not only the efforts of Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community, but most especially the efforts of the countries here in the region -- the Arab states that are committed to the Arab peace plan; the Arab states that are committed to the program of the Annapolis Conference, and to continue the outreach to the parties to let them know that when they resolve their conflict they will, indeed, be making progress toward the resolution of the conflict in the region as a whole.

We also had a very extensive discussion of the issues concerning Iraq. I was, of course, today in Iraq for several hours, and we talked about the progress that is being made there. Fragile though it is, it is very clear that Iraqis, particularly the Iraqi people, are finding their way toward reconciliation; they are finding their way toward workable forms of governance at the provincial and local levels; but they are also putting a good deal of pressure on their national government to make strides toward national reconciliation.

And in that regard, we welcome the passage of the Accountability and Justice Act on the heels of the passage of a pension law that is for all Iraqis. This is a good step forward for reconciliation. Obviously when a law is passed in a democratic fashion, by compromise, it will not be everything that everyone wants. It will be less than some people want; it will be more than other people want, but it is, nonetheless, a very important step forward, and the Iraqis are, I believe, committed to reconciliation.

I want to underscore our discussions on Lebanon, and to just state the outrage of the United States against the terrorist attack that took place in Lebanon today. I want, on behalf of our country, to say to those who were wounded, and certainly to the families of those who were killed, that our condolences are with them. To the degree that there is any thought of intimidation in an attack of this kind, the United States will, of course, not be deterred in its efforts to help the Lebanese people, to help the democratic forces in Lebanon, to help Lebanon resist foreign interference in their affairs, and to uphold the many Security Council resolutions that have been passed on behalf of a stable and democratic Lebanon.

Finally, Prince Saud and I talked about the strategic dialogue that we have. We hope to have another meeting of that dialogue. It covers a wide range of topics, including the human dimension and the efforts at reform here in the Kingdom. And we look forward to the next meeting of that strategic dialogue.

So, again, thank you for the hospitality. Thank you for all of the excellent food that we've had here -- that's why we're late. And I do have to say that -- yes, Your Royal Highness, it is not our latest press conference. I think that was midnight once when I was here, so we're doing pretty well.

Thank you very much.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: Thank you, Madam Secretary. We have two questions from each side.

SECRETARY RICE: Anne Gearan, AP.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, -- (inaudible) -- overdue for the Arab states to reach out to Israel -- (inaudible) --. Did you receive any assurances this week that any of your hosts will, in fact, reach out? And do you understand that to mean an attempt to establish diplomatic relations?

And, Prince, could you follow up on something you said in your opening -- you mentioned the 2008 time frame for the peace process. Do you think that that's realistic?

SECRETARY RICE: On the President's remarks, we have believed that it will be important for the regional states, the Arab states, to do everything possible to encourage the process, and that, yes, there should be efforts to reach out to the Israelis as this process goes forward.

Anne, diplomatic relations, of course, is another matter, and undoubtedly down the road. But there are things that can be done. And I felt very strongly that the strong consensus of the Arab states to attend the Annapolis Conference, to sign on, then, to the agenda that was established at Annapolis, and to support that agenda was a very strong vote of support in the peace process, and a vote of support for the efforts that the United States is undertaking. But we hope that as progress is made between Israelis and Palestinians, that there will be more efforts, that there will be more opportunities for outreach.

But this will move at different speeds for different countries; we understand that. But I think we're off to a good start. And the President and His Majesty have had very good discussions of the peace process, and how to move that forward. I don't think that there is anyone who doubts how important it would be to have a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; to have, as the President has put it, a clear vision of what the Palestinian state will be -- not just a promise that there will be a Palestinian state, but that people actually know what the Palestinian state will look like; that it will be viable and contiguous and capable of delivering for its own people, and that it can be a contributor to security in the region for its own people, for Israel, and for the region as a whole.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: Well, I don't know what kind of outreach we can have for the Israelis but to offer a peace plan for the region; a peace that is based on equity and justice for all, certainly security for Israel. And it is an offer that was given in goodwill and with good intention, to give normalization, and not just a peace that is the end of conflict, but a peace of open borders, of open exchanges.

So I don't know what more outreach we can give to the Israelis. Before that, in the Madrid Conference, we also joined the peace effort, and we joined all the multilateral meetings that were attended by all the Arab countries. And every time there was a need for the Arab countries to show their seriousness about peace, they have not let that opportunity pass without showing their serious intent in this. And they will continue to do so.

QUESTION: I have two questions. The first question is to His Royal Highness. Your Highness, the series of explosions in Lebanon is still in evidence. There are trials to link failure of any development -- (inaudible) --. Are there any external powers which prevents election of the President of Lebanon, and to establish the essential -- that constitute a vacuum there?

Second question to Dr. Rice: A visa for us is a very long procedure matter, and your country promised so many times to facilitate this procedures. Is there any news about this? Thank you very much.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: (As translated.) In fact, the accident, the painful accident in Beirut, all of us condole -- condolences to the victims. This terrorist act, if it is meant with it to prevent the people from continuity of the situation in Lebanon and supporting Lebanon to reach a solution over its crisis, this will not be a success. The Arab initiative is still in place and is still on the table, and we hope whoever has influence in Lebanon to support this initiative, because in it there is salvation for Lebanon.

In response to the Lebanese -- all the Lebanese aspirations, with regard to balanced treatment, legitimacy, and in terms of amendment of the election system required in Lebanon, we hope that this solution, instead of being a barrier, it should be a cause for concerted efforts between the Lebanese to agree on a solution to get them out of this crisis they are in.

SECRETARY RICE: As far as the visas are concerned, I think that His Royal Highness has already mentioned that the number of Saudi students studying in the United States has increased quite dramatically since September 11th. I think it's important to recognize that immediately after September 11th, it was important for the United States to stop, to take a step back, to look at all of the procedures that we had in terms of visas. After all, this was a devastating attack on America, and we needed to make certain that we knew, or that we had the best systems in place to know who was in the country and what they might be doing. It was only natural.

The President was early to recognize that it was important that even if we took those steps, that the United States would still be seen as a welcoming place, particularly for students, for business travelers, for others who wish to visit our country, and we began to work very hard to make it possible to have both security and an openness to the outside world. And some of that has paid off in the way that we worked, for instance, to get the students into the United States.

Now, we have more work to do, but to the degree that we are able to work with the countries of origin to make sure that security procedures are in place -- for instance, when visas are issued, when people are interviewed, and that if there are problems, it's possible to find people -- then I think you're going to see that the United States wants more than anyone to see the visa problem resolved and for it to be easier for people to get into the United States.

It's our firm belief, and the President -- I'm sure you've heard the President say this, Prince Saud -- it's his belief that the best antidote to many of the misconceptions about the United States, much of the propaganda that there is about the United States, is to have people go to the United States and to see who we are, and to work with us and to study with us and to do business with us. And that is the best way for the world to see what Americans are really like.

And so we will continue to work on it. The President and His Majesty talked about it while the President was here, and he promised to go back and take another look at what more can be done.

Mike Abramowitz, Washington Post. Where's Mike? Looking for the mic -- okay. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: First, I'd like to ask about two subjects that both of you can address. One has to do with human rights in Saudi Arabia. And I was just curious to what extent that issue came up during the discussions today between the President and the King, and what the United States said about that, and what the King said about that.

And I would also like to ask --

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: About what?

SECRETARY RICE: Human rights.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: Human rights?

QUESTION: Human rights, sorry, and political reform in Saudi Arabia.

And then the second question was really for the Prince. I was wondering, sir, if you could talk a little bit more about your comments on Iraq today, and whether the King made any commitments to the President about being more supportive of the government in Iraq; whether, for instance, the Kingdom will open an embassy there, whether you will meet with Prime Minister Maliki? I was just curious what kind of support that the Kingdom can give to the situation, the political situation in Iraq.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: Well, for the last question about Iraq, of course Saudi Arabia has made commitments to the Iraqis themselves, in helping -- first of all, in the economic sphere, and second of all in the political sphere. In the political sphere, we have decided to open an embassy in Baghdad, and the Ambassador has been designated who will be going there. And we hope to see the embassy open in the next few months.

Other support in meeting with Prime Minister Maliki -- there is no obstacle to a meeting between the Prime Minister and the leadership in Saudi Arabia. Iraq is a neighboring Arab country, and we have very normal relations with them. So there's absolutely no obstacle to that. But whatever Iraq needs in terms of assistance or help, they will always find Saudi Arabia ready to help.

As to reforms, I think the presence of the President here is not -- better than a question about human rights in Saudi Arabia. He has seen the people, he has met with many people. He has been in the Advisory Council, he has met many officials. He has asked many questions. And I hope that he was satisfied with what he saw in the Kingdom. And I hope that you were satisfied, because I know that all of you have had even a more extensive program than the President had in meeting people and talking to them and seeing what developments are taking place in Saudi Arabia.

SECRETARY RICE: First, just on Iraq, we very much welcome the decision of Saudi Arabia to designate an ambassador for Iraq. And when I was there, the Iraqis were pleased that there has been a Saudi delegation that is going out to make arrangements and the like. So that is a very good step forward. But, of course, Saudi Arabia has been a part of the International Compact for Iraq; Saudi Arabia has been at the neighbors conferences and the expanded neighbors conferences, and has also -- is engaging in debt relief discussions with Iraq, and so has been very supportive of the new Iraqi effort -- new Iraqi government.

As to reform and human rights, as you know, this is always an issue on the President's agenda, and this trip has been no different. The President is interested in and concerned for the course of reform in the entire Middle East, and as he said, most especially with our friends. We have actually a forum with which we discuss issues of reform with Saudi Arabia in the human dimension part of our strategic dialogue. And Prince Saud and I have had a discussion of continuing that and deepening that discussion.

We have the kind of relationship in which we can raise these issues, and we can raise them honestly and we can receive answers. We do it not out of a sense that the United States has all of the answers; all of these solutions will be, obviously, indigenous solutions. But the President has made very clear he is interested in reform. He always follows up those interests.

I know -- I was in Baghdad, but I know today that he met with a group of young Saudi entrepreneurs. They talked; he asked them all kinds of questions. That is the way that he does these things. And you saw that he did the same in Kuwait with women activists, and in the UAE, and so on and so on. And so it's an agenda to which he is completely committed. He made clear in his second inaugural that it would be a part of our dialogue with every country in the world, and it is, indeed, a part of our dialogue with every country in the world.

On human rights, of course, we do raise not just the general issue, but also when there are specific issues. And I must say that I have never, from my colleague, Prince Saud, gotten a stone wall on these issues. He has always been willing to discuss them. And our embassy and our consulates work constantly on these issues.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

SECRETARY RICE: I was not here today, but, of course, we have had this discussion, and I've personally discussed it with the Saudi Ambassador at one point.

QUESTION: One question for his Highness, the Prince. What about Iranian issue? Have you agreed -- the Saudi agreed with the Americans on the threats of Iran to the region?

A question to Doctor Rice: What is the stand of the U.S. on the Arab plan on the table to solve the solution in Lebanon, and electing a President in Lebanon? Will you support this Arab plan?

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: (As translated.) As for Iran, every time you're asking the same question. Iran is a neighboring country and important in the region. Naturally, we have nothing bad towards Iran. We hope that Iran also responds to the international legitimacy requirements and the U.N., and to abide by the IAEA in its nuclear program, and to avoid escalation at any time. It's not in its interests.

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, on Iran, of course, Iran is always a matter for discussion. I think the President has made clear the American position on this. But let me just underscore something that His Royal Highness has just said. Iran has a path to better relations with the United States. It's quite clear. There are certain international obligations that it needs to undertake and live up to. There are two Security Council resolutions that state clearly what Iran must do. There is an IAEA Board of Governors resolution that states clearly what Iran must do, in terms of its nuclear ambitions.

No one, and most especially the United States, has tried to deny Iran peaceful nuclear energy. But enrichment and reprocessing is a part of -- the fuel cycle and the perfection of the technology of that fuel cycle can lead also to knowledge of the technology that can lead to a nuclear weapon. And so we've been very clear on what would change the nature of the relationship. We have concerns about Iranian support for terrorism, Iranian support for special groups -- the militias in Iraq -- but we also don't have permanent enemies, and we've said many times that there are -- there's a path, a pathway that would lead to better relations.

In terms of Lebanon and the Arab initiative, I believe we have much in common -- American policy has much in common with what is in the Arab initiative, most especially that the Lebanese people should be encouraged to, and then, indeed, permitted to elect their President. They have a consensus candidate. This should be a matter of going to the parliament and electing their President. And there should be no interference in that effort, no intimidation in that effort. And everybody ought to encourage and use whatever influence they have in Lebanon to get that done, because the situation in Lebanon currently is not one that can go on indefinitely. Lebanon needs a President.

And so there is much in the Arab initiative that is common with our own policies, and we hope that the Arab mediation in this effort -- the Arab mediation in Lebanon will lead to the election of a Lebanese President.

HRH PRINCE SAUD AL-FAISAL: Thank you, Madam Secretary.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

2008/T1-2

Released on January 15, 2008

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.