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10/06/2003

### **State's Burns Cautions Israel, Syria against Escalation of Hostilities**

**Reiterates U.S. concerns about Syria's ties to terrorism**

Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns has called on Syria and Israel to "avoid actions which escalate tensions."

In an October 5 interview with Abu Dhabi Television, Burns said, "Syria and Israel should both avoid actions which escalate tensions, because ... this is an extremely complicated time in the region."

Burns acknowledged that the administration has persistent doubts regarding Syria's commitment to eliminating terrorism. He noted that Secretary of State Colin Powell outlined several specific issues in his meeting with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad last May.

"Syria's support for various Palestinian terrorist groups as well as some of its actions regarding Iraq since that time have fallen short of those points which Secretary Powell laid out very clearly," Burns asserted.

The assistant secretary also highlighted the administration's concerns with regard to Israeli and Palestinian actions in the context of the Roadmap.

With regard to the security fence Israel is erecting, Burns stated, "we've made very clear our concerns about construction which tends to incur further and further into the West Bank, construction which in our view, prejudices the outcome of future permanent status negotiations and more broadly than that, reduces the hope of Palestinians that an independent viable Palestinian state is going to emerge in the future."

Burns also underscored the importance for the new Palestinian government to deal with security issues "to ensure that there is only one authority for Palestinians." Burns conveyed the administration's hope that the new government will show its commitment to the Roadmap "not as a favor to the United States or anyone else, but in the self-interest of Palestinians to move ahead in the direction of the two-state vision which President Bush has laid out."

"I think what remains clear is that it is deeply in the self-interest of Palestinians and Israelis alike, to see progress resumed towards a two state solution, because that solution contains the best basis providing the security and the acceptance that Israelis need and deserve, and the dignity and the statehood that Palestinians need and deserve," Burns stated.

Following is a transcript of Burns' interview with Abu Dhabi TV:

(begin transcript)

Transcript of Interview of Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Burns with Abu Dhabi TV, October 5, 2003

Q.: About the bombings of the camp in Syria, aren't you concerned this can lead to a regional confrontation that might target Syria and Iraq?

A/S Burns: We are still sifting through the details of what happened today. The United States has made very clear our concern about Syrian support for various violent extremist groups and its harboring of those kind of groups. At this point, what I would say is that Syria and Israel should both avoid actions which escalate tensions, because as you said, this is an extremely complicated time in the region. It is in the interest of the United States and all of its friends in the region to try and

find ways to avoid further complicating the situation.

Q. What should the Syrians do meet the American standard?

A/S Burns: There is no secret about the concerns we have raised with the government of Syria. Secretary Powell met with President Assad last May and outlined a range of concerns about our relationship with Syria and different aspects of Syrian behavior. He made clear at the same time that the U.S. remains committed to comprehensive peace and to resumption of negotiations on the Syrian-Israeli track. Syria's support for various Palestinian terrorist groups as well as some of its actions regarding Iraq since that time have fallen short of those points which Secretary Powell laid out very clearly. So we do have some clear differences with Syria and we have tried to be very direct in explaining our concerns to the Syrian government and explaining the kinds of behavior which we hope to see.

Q: Abu Ala is expected to present the new Palestinian government to the Parliament today. Are you going to back these governments?

A/S Burns: Well, the issue is very clearly their commitment to the new Palestinian government, to implementation of the road map, and to discharging responsibilities and obligations which will be in the interest of Palestinians. And they have to deal with security issues, and most importantly, how the Palestinian security services are organized according to the Roadmap, to make clear their strong commitment to ensure that there's only one authority for Palestinians, and that's critically important. The Roadmap also lays out obligations for Israel as well, and it is very important that both sides perform their obligations. But as we look at the formation of the new Palestinian government, we're going to be concerned first and foremost about the commitment of that government to implement the Roadmap and to fulfill Palestinian obligations, again, not as a favor to the United States or anyone else, but in the self-interest of Palestinians to move ahead in the direction of the two-state vision which President Bush has laid out.

Q: When we ask Palestinians who are officials, they say, we're expecting the Americans to say to Israel, "enough is enough". Events may trigger bloodshed in the region and may be a stumbling block against all these hopes.

A/S Burns: Well we've made very clear, the United States Administration has our concerns about the course of this operation, the fence, and we've made very clear our concerns about construction which tends to incur further and further into the West Bank, construction which in our view, prejudges the outcome of future permanent status negotiations and more broadly than that, reduces the hope of Palestinians that an independent viable Palestinian state is going to emerge in the future, and so we've made no secret of those concerns. We're engaged, and I'm going into quite serious discussions with the Israeli government about these concerns.

Q: You say that Arafat should go, aren't you concerned that this may distance you from the support of many Arabs and Arab governments that think for the moment that, yes, Arafat is still a living symbol of the Palestinian people?

A/S Burns: Well, what we've very clear is our commitment to help Palestinians, not only to achieve the goal of the viable independent Palestinian state using the Roadmap as a way of getting from here to there, but also helping Palestinians to build strong political institutions in preparation for statehood, institutions that don't depend on any one person, and so what we've tried to focus on, and it's what Palestinians are as capable of as anybody I know in this region, and that's building those institutions, drawing strength from all the skills Palestinians have to offer, and not focusing on any one person at all.

Q: Last summer the prospects of peace were very high in the region, and you were very hopeful you may be able to put the peace process on track again. Now the region's much more chaotic than ever; the region is in bloodshed. Do you think that your mission's going to be very complicated?

A/S Burns: Well there's no doubt that the situation is extremely complicated. None of us had any illusions, whether it was at the summit in Sharm al-Sheikh or any time since then, about how difficult the situation was. I think what remains clear is that it is deeply in the self-interest of Palestinians and Israelis alike, to see progress resumed towards a two state solution, because that solution contains the best basis providing the security and the acceptance that Israelis need and deserve, and the dignity and the statehood that Palestinians need and deserve. And it remains the commitment of President Bush and all of us in the American Administration, to work

hard toward that goal. As I said, we have no illusions about how difficult the task is going to be before us, but the alternatives are much much worse, and so we are determined to try with a very real sense of hope and adopt the Roadmap, and to try and remind people of what's at stake here.

Q: Many Palestinians and Israelis have a sense of disappointment in the Roadmap. Do you have any fresh ideas, or do you think we just stay in operation within the same framework of the draft you presented last time?

A/S Burns: No, we'd like to try and make the Roadmap a reality, a living reality, and as President Bush has said, the Roadmap is still a great map; there is no doubt about that. I don't believe it's dead. I don't believe that there are a lot of other solutions that people are offering now. And I think that what's important for us to do, is to remind both sides, Palestinians as well as Israelis, of their obligations, but also of their self-interest in resuming progress along the lines of the Roadmap towards a two state vision, and that's what we're determined to do everything we can to achieve, working with our partners in the quartet as well as with our friends in the region. Because we understand very clearly the centrality of the Palestinian issue in the minds and emotions and the interests of the people in this region, and it's very important to American interests as well as the interests of others, and to try and move ahead in a more hopeful direction.

Q: Do you think that when we wake up on a day in 2005 there will be a Palestinian state?

A/S Burns: I'm still very hopeful, and I still realize that the United States is going to have to do everything it can to help make that a reality, to help make tangible progress in that direction.

Q: Thank you very much indeed.

A/S Burns: Thanks.

Further Questions from Al-Sharq Al-Awsat:

Q: inaudible

A/S Burns: Well I had an opportunity to talk in the Emirates about a whole range of issues, our bilateral relationship which is very strong and I think, growing stronger. We certainly talked about the situation in Iraq as well as the Palestinian/Israeli issue. I again underscored the importance the United States attaches to the very important humanitarian contributions that the United Arab Emirates and Sheikh Zayed himself in particular have made, both for Palestinians as well as for the Iraqi people, and expressed on behalf of the United States, our determination to move ahead in Iraq in a direction that's going to restore full authority to Iraqis just as quickly as we possibly can.

Q: Did you ask the people here to support the participation of multinational forces in Iraq? I mean, do they have any commitment to participate?

A/S Burns: Well, we had a broad discussion about Iraq, and I think the United Arab Emirates has done an enormous amount in supporting the Iraqi people and the interests of Iraqis in ensuring a stable, unified, prosperous Iraq. There are many very concrete contributions that the Emirates has already made as I said, in the humanitarian area in terms of their future commitment to economic reconstruction, and in a number of other areas, so I think we'll continue these conversations and look forward to continuing to cooperate.

Q: How would you face the people here who are against the kind of escalation in Iraq? How do you value the position of these people in the Emirates and the other countries in the area?

A/S Burns: In terms of?

Q: Escalation.

A/S Burns: Well I think our commitment is obviously to help stabilize the situation in Iraq, to help ensure security for Iraqis, and that's why we're trying to train Iraqi police forces just as quickly as we can. And we're also interested, very much in helping to restore basic services for Iraqis, electricity, water, and we're making progress in that direction. And as I said, at the same time, we're committed to helping Iraqis set up a political process that's going to bring about the elected fully

sovereign government that Iraqis deserve.

Q: Did the Emirates make any commitment to --- in the Madrid conference?

A/S Burns: Well, we, as I said, very much appreciate the role that the United Arab Emirates has played as helping to organize as a member of the core group of the Madrid Donors Conference, and we see that conference as one step in a very important process to help solicit international contributions to help Iraqis rebuild their economy.

Q: Do you expect any contribution from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia?

A/S Burns: Well, the Emirates have already contributed as I said in a lot of important ways, and I'm certain that they will continue to again, in the interests of the Iraqi people, and I'm confident that others in the region will as well. As I said, I think that Madrid is one step in what is going to be an ongoing process to help the Iraqi people. Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you.

(end transcript)

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