



Interview by Khaled Dawoud of Al Ahram

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State

Washington, DC
December 1, 2004

(3:00 p.m. EST)

MR. DAWOUD: Well, I'd like to start with the, you know, first the bilateral relations between Egypt and the United States. I mean, like, Egypt is moving on several tracks right now, both the Palestinian track and the Iraqi track. So I'd like to know your estimate, first of all, with how Egypt is doing if, you know, on the Palestinian track and the Iraqi track.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well first, I think we have to acknowledge our relationship was a little rocky for a year or so. But I think we're in much, much better shape now. The foreign minister and Omar Suleiman as well are working assiduously to try to get the Palestinian situation back on track. We were delighted with the hosting of Sharm meetings by Egypt. We thought it was a very good thing. Secretary Powell had good meetings with the Quartet, and, as you know, en route stopped and saw Israeli and Palestinian friends. Egypt's been helpful with this question of Iraq.

So I think that for a whole host of reasons we're in much better shape with Egypt. The United States is very grateful for the efforts both of the nation, the president, the foreign minister, and the Secretary General and Omar Suleiman.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, the -- I'd like to talk about the Palestinian track now since -- following the death of President Yasser Arafat. I'd like to understand, how do you see linking the Gaza disengagement plan to the roadmap. I mean, what's the U.S. vision on that track?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it's quite simple. We view the Gaza disengagement and Palestinian assumption of authority as a step on the roadmap. It's not to be -- that's just a step, and I emphasize that point. It's not the final destination. And I think through that step, Israelis and Palestinians both can gain some confidence that there can be disengagements from occupied territories, and successful and secure possession of those occupied territories and reposition by Palestinians, that Palestinians can prove by their actions that they are able to govern themselves and provide security and stop terrorism, and Israelis can develop confidence and that will be the case. So we see it as a first step. And that's why, again, the actions of Egypt to bring this about have been so helpful.

MR. DAWOUD: But they're, like, retractable terms. You know, I mean, the Gaza disengagement plan wasn't actually part of the roadmap. I mean, it's -- there are other, other steps mentioned in the roadmap, you know, first stage, second stage, third stage, so, retractable terms. How do you see it?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, but we see it, as I say, as a step in terms of developing confidence that this could happen. I saw one of the Palestinian leaders -- I guess it was Mahmoud Abbas -- who said that he thought that there could actually be peace by 2005. He said that yesterday or this morning.

MR. DAWOUD: That's the establishment of the state by the end of 2005?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah. Well, which was the original timetable that President Bush -- I don't know if that could be realized or not, but if we have a successful disengagement from Gaza, then -- and the confidence that I'm talking about is engendered, I think this will encourage the Israeli Government to realize that peace is possible, and certainly, I think, give the Palestinians a much greater stake and a successful outcome. And a successful outcome would be a realization of two states living side by side in peace and security.

MR. DAWOUD: But, sir, again, I mean, actually, this is one reason why there is such skepticism in the Arab world is that, you know, this date of 2005 was set by President Bush himself, you know, and why not keep that date, you know, if it was set by the President of the United States?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, here is Mahmoud Abbas saying that perhaps that date can be realized. I think as a practical matter, about a year ago, things were so wrong and the situation was so bad between Israel and Palestine that it seemed to be very difficult. And at that time, public officials, myself included, were saying, well, it might have to slip, but the vision remains the same. But as a target, 2005 is a perfectly good year. This is a good future plan. As long as we're on the road, as long as people can see an end point -- the end point is understood to be two states living side by side.

MR. DAWOUD: But the U.S. won't push for a particular date anymore. I mean --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, no, I think, as I say, it's a good target date. You've got an idea, but if you -- I don't want to get into a situation where I say, for instance, December 30th, 2005, and so Al Ahram will -- and if it's 2 January '06, will say the United States failed. I'm not going to get into a situation like that.

MR. DAWOUD: Well, if it's not 2 January '06, we won't say anything.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I know. But if it's January 30th, you might. (Laughter.)

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, there are serious Palestinian concerns about the Israeli settlement issue. I mean, and unfortunately, again, you know, we see why is the United States is so forceful on Palestinian demands, but even on the outposts, for example, Israel does not fulfill its pledges. So, I mean, well, what's the U.S. stand now on the settlements?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, the Prime Minister of Israel has made certain representations to the President of the United States about these settlements and outposts. And we take the Prime Minister of Israel as a man of his word. And the President expects him to live up to those representations.

For our part, I think that the dissatisfaction that you seem to be speaking to, if not directly about, comes because we're not publicly berating the Israelis for this, but we have very intense discussions with our Israeli friends about these matters. You must make no mistake about that. But they're private. We feel that the best way to get things done with the Israelis is in private.

MR. DAWOUD: The private discussions did not result in any tasks on the ground. I mean, no action on the ground. The outposts were not removed. Not even the -- the settlement --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, but wait. But if Gaza disengagement happens and four settlements on the West Bank as a first step, then you'll no longer be

able to say that, will you? There will be big changes. For the first time, Palestinians will take possession of their land.

MR. DAWOUD: No, I'm speaking about the Israeli reports, even Israeli peace groups. They are saying that the settlements continue to expand at a high rate, despite all --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, but I -- I -- actually, in my previous statement, the Prime Minister of Israel has made certain representations. And the President expects him to live up to those representations and we think he will.

MR. DAWOUD: But he didn't so far.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We have had -- there are settlement activities out there we wanted to just to cease, to cease, stop, finish.

MR. DAWOUD: But, many Arabs in the Arab world right now, or even Arab governments, are worried about the Letters of Assurance, the Letter of Assurances that was handed to Mr. Sharon in April, shortly after our interview, actually. And because it basically says that Israel has the right to, you know, annex certain parts of the Palestinian territory with occupancy of dense settlements groups. So, I mean, basically, people fear there is a change of U.S. position about settlements.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: There is no change. But I think that our friends in the Arab world and Arab capitals should spend an equal amount of time thinking about the possibility of housing developments for the Palestinians rather than simply looking for ways to criticize what's going on.

Now, if you look at what happened at Sharm the other day, the Secretary met with the Quartet and explained what he had heard and what he had been told in his meetings in Jerusalem both with the Israelis and the Palestinians. And I think it's fair to say that our Quartet friends will be traveling from time to time to have discussions with Israelis and Palestinians. They seem satisfied that we're on a good track and I would hope that over time Arab capitals will come to the same conclusion, that we haven't given up on this at all; just like we haven't given up on the Palestinians. We have continued to support them at a very high level financially, support more, I think, than any other country, perhaps, except for Saudi Arabia. And we will continue to give aid. We want this thing to be successful.

MR. DAWOUD: What's the state now with the \$20 million, which was supposed by the U.S. to the Palestinians?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah, there has been a suggestion -- excuse me, a discussion with Capital Hill about providing up to \$20 million of aid to the Palestinians to help them pay their bills. This discussion continues and we certainly hope we have a positive outcome.

MR. DAWOUD: Any deadline --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, not a deadline, but I'd like to have it -- we've got the ad hoc liaison committee meeting coming up. It would be nice if this could be done by that time.

MR. DAWOUD: Is it December 8th?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes, the 8th, the 9th? The 8th.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, I'd like to move to the Palestinian elections. You've publicly backed the elections for January 9th. But again, people are asking in the Arab world, what are the practical steps that you're going to take to support these elections on January 9th, between now and January 9th?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, let's let our Palestinian friends come up with what rules, regulations, et cetera, should govern this, and then we'll see if there's national assistance needed to bring it about, or something like that, but we certainly --

MR. DAWOUD: Observers.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: And others. Observers, appropriate observers. These are things that we need to let the Palestinians come to their own conclusions about, and then let us know what they think is necessary. To my knowledge, they haven't done that yet. I haven't seen it.

MR. DAWOUD: Did you get any assurances from Israel they will allow the East Jerusalem people to vote? I mean, there --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: My understanding is that they would allow East Jerusalem to vote. When you say assurances, this is what they told us. They told Secretary Powell. But -- I don't know if that constitutes assurances; this is what they told us, and we -- the Secretary made it public.

MR. DAWOUD: He spoke to Israel, yes?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah.

MR. DAWOUD: But in fact, I mean, there was a report that the Israelis will not allow the opening of the polling, the registration in East Jerusalem.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I'm unaware of those reports.

MR. DAWOUD: I want to move to Iraq now. There is a lot of debate about the elections of January 30th, Allawi is meeting with some opposition figures in Amman today. So I mean, what's the U.S. position seriously on postponing those elections for two months?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: You may not have seen it yet, but Sheikh Ghazi, who will be my guest here for lunch on Monday, the President just announced that in his view, the Interim Iraqi Government had a moral obligation to hold the elections on the 30th of January. We continue to hold the view in the United States that these are imminently doable, and we want them to be the widest possible elections.

The United Nations supervisor of these matters in Iraq, Carlos Valenzuela has said that he thinks these are imminently doable, so we continue on that track.

Prime Minister Allawi is meeting with Iraqis, so it's an Iraqi-Iraqi meeting in Amman to try to get people living outside the country to come back, take a part in their lives. As you know, the Iraqi Electoral Commission has decided that in 14 countries, out-of-country, voting for the Iraqi diaspora will be allowed. So it's a pretty exciting time.

MR. DAWOUD: But there are also many parties that -- opposition parties, that they should poll, including even Mr. Allawi's party, who said they --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, one member. One member. He was not speaking for the party.

MR. DAWOUD: Mr. Pachachi --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes, Adnan Pachachi. By the way, my understanding is most of those, first of all, the Kurds who were there, the Kurdish leadership, Talabani and Barzani, have disavowed that, number one. Number two, my understanding is those who were in attendance who made these comments have found themselves heavily criticized in Iraq, and have lost some favor over this, because the majority of Iraqi people want to hold elections.

If you look at opinion polls now, the numbers are going up rather dramatically, the number of Iraqis who say they have heard about the elections and want to participate, and the numbers are also going up in those who say they definitely will participate.

Now, it's affected by the region and affected by the area, but there seems to be some energy behind this.

MR. DAWOUD: But what if the Sunnis decided to boycott the elections?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Who?

MR. DAWOUD: The Sunnis.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It's highly (inaudible). They've done that; we've seen that before. We've seen that movie before. It wasn't Sunnis who boycotted, it was the Shia at one time, years and years ago, and they thought they were disenfranchised. (Inaudible.) I think the majority of the Sunnis will come to the realization that if they don't participate, if they don't cut out an appropriate political space for them, they're liable to be second-class citizens in Iraq, and they don't want that. And I think that's becoming, over time, a majority view. Now, that's not everybody, but a majority of Sunnis have taken up that view.

MR. DAWOUD: There are serious (inaudible) in the Arab world about the status of Sunnis in Iraq. I mean, there is one kind of, you know, I mean, (inaudible) by reading the U.S. press that the Shiites have 60 percent, the Kurds are 20 percent, so we have a total 80 percent and forget about those 20 percent. The way -- it's artificial calculation, anyway.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, absolutely not. In fact, the United States has recently, in the last couple of days, gone out to all Arab capitals and asked our diplomats to go in and talk with the leadership, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, the President's office, whatever the case may be -- Crown Prince's office -- and to make a point that it's very important that all Sunnis be encouraged to participate. They do have a future in the political life of Iraq and they should take their rightful place in that political life. We've just gone out with a cable from here two days ago, so we are completely of the view that Sunnis must participate, and we want them to participate in the fullest possible way.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, I want to go to Fallujah. I mean, since I came here, now I've been hearing about all these initiatives you've been making to win hearts and minds there, but don't you think that you've lost it, after the Fallujah, I mean, model?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know. It depends on I guess where -- at what point you dial in. The fact that we found more weapons caches in Fallujah than we've found all year in Iraq is interesting, torture chambers which I'm sure Al Ahram, as well as every other responsible organ, would disavow and condemn. Many of those we found in mosques, unfortunately about 60 mosques, that were not only fighting positions, they were storehouses of weapons.

So this all leads us to believe that Fallujah was a really bad place, but that doesn't mean that all the bad -- all the people in Fallujah were bad. There were a lot of bad people doing bad things.

We're involved in pretty heavy reconstruction in Fallujah. As of the, oh, 21st or so of November, we had 54 projects underway, 30 -- a little over \$30 million worth. Our plan, with the Government of Iraq, is to provide \$100 million in construction. That's ongoing. A civilian governor, a deputy governor were appointed by the Iraqi Interim Government. Shortly, people who were out, who left before the fighting, citizens would be allowed to return to Fallujah.

You know, you would understand Iraqis better than I. And I've been told the worst thing for an Iraqi is to be seen as weak (inaudible), and to not act against a stronghold of terror, sub (inaudible) murderers made, would have cause the Interim Government of Iraq to be seen as weak (inaudible). So they made the decision to act. Iraqi troops and U.S. troops did it together.

Time will tell whether it's correct or not, the action. I believe it was. We may have to do it in other areas.

MR. DAWOUD: The same way?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, maybe it won't be as hard next time. But I think time will tell it was the correct thing. One thing I think you can be sure of is should they desire, the people of Fallujah will be able to take part in this election on January 30th.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, I mean, again, I mean, you say all the time that Iraq should be a model for the rest of the region and democracy and (inaudible). I mean, are you setting the model for Arab governments if they hate the rebellion somewhere, that they take their army and tanks and bomb that rebellious town in such (inaudible) -- say, you know, we're going to do reconstruction?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: You know, I think --

MR. DAWOUD: I mean, you already know --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, but I think you'd say --

MR. DAWOUD: -- the record, I mean, so --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: -- here's country X, any country, country X which had a town from which emanated a constant stream of car bombs, videos of beheadings, tortures, kidnappings and murders. How many governments would allow that to continue? Would any government in the Arab world allow that to continue? The answer to that, sir, is hell no.

MR. DAWOUD: Sure.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: And that is what happened in Fallujah.

MR. DAWOUD: But I mean --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We're not setting an example. This is a crack -- if it were Decatur, Georgia, the United States Government couldn't allow it to happen.

MR. DAWOUD: But, sir, I mean, there are some reports in the Arab press and in the Western -- I mean I read it in -- I mentioned before to Frank, I mean, in the *Washington Post*, there has been report on November 10 about the U.S. using some sort of phosphoric bombs to take the body -- phosphoric bombs, to make the body of the insurgents melt. Some of the --

MR. PRICE: Phosphorous.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah, phosphorus. They burn -- it burns.

MR. DAWOUD: Phosphorus.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It burns.

MR. DAWOUD: Yeah, they burn the bodies of the rebels. Doesn't that kind of constitute war crimes, using phosphorous bombs?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, no. Well, think -- I don't think they were -- they may have been phosphorous bombs, but I think they were probably phosphorous grenades. I guess I first -- I used them in the Vietnam War quite a bit. And they're not what they (inaudible).

MR. DAWOUD: So you don't agree with that kind of accusation that the United States might have committed, you know, acts that amounts to war crimes?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, if there are acts that are committed such as the -- whatever occurred in the mosque, one thing that is absolutely crystal clear is it is being transparently investigated. And should wrongdoing be seen then it will be shown to all. That's dramatically different from those who were shot and beheaded and otherwise tortured in Fallujah and other places. If we committed a problem, did something wrong, it will be -- it is being investigated and will be known transparently. And that's one dramatic difference.

MR. DAWOUD: Okay, sir. I'd like to move you to Syrian track. There is a lot of confusion right now about what Syria exactly wants and --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: What they want?

MR. DAWOUD: What they -- I mean, in terms of whether they want to start from the negotiations end date, or if they want to start without preconditions. But generally, my question is, what's your -- what's the U.S. estimate right now about a possibility of resuming talks between Israel and Syria?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I saw some news reports about -- you know, both were disputed on the Syrian side and the Israeli side. And we talked to Israel. I don't think the Syrian Government has made up their collective mind yet about what they want to do. I think they haven't made up their mind yet about just how forthcoming to be on the question of Iraq. And I think they're still reeling a bit from the UN Security Council resolution on Lebanon.

What was that, 1559?

MR. DAWOUD: Yes.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think they were quite surprised at that. So I think there are a lot of things for the Syrians that they have on their mind and that they have to come to grips with before they can sit down, at this point.

MR. DAWOUD: So, but, I mean, are you going to encourage Israel to resume -- I mean, there was an offer from the Syrians to resume talks with Israel.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I saw -- I saw a press report.

MR. DAWOUD: Terry Larsen, you know, he came up -- over to me and said -- you know, Terry Larsen said that Syria is ready to resume talks about Israeli issues.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I haven't seen that from Syria myself. I haven't seen it and I read the traffic pretty carefully. Weeks ago it said that they're going to (inaudible). It's on the small (inaudible).

MR. DAWOUD: So you don't think that Syria is serious about --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I didn't say that. I think they --

MR. DAWOUD: -- about the desire to resume talks with Israel?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't think they have made up their minds yet, which is a different than being serious. I'm making the point that I think Syria has a lot on her mind: Iraq and what to do with Iraq, or how to behave in the Israeli track. Lebanon, they're reeling, I think, a bit, from Lebanon. So I think there is a -- they've got to -- they have got a lot on their mind and they are not able to sort of come to grips with all of this at the same time.

That's quite different from serious about it. I can't say that. I hope they would be serious, but I don't think they're quite ready to make these steps.

MR. DAWOUD: Mr. Powell met with Mr. Shara in Sharm el-Sheikh --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes.

MR. DAWOUD: -- and so, like, didn't some of these issues were raised during their meeting?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: He had a fair discussion with Foreign Minister Shara. He had also met with him in New York where they had quite good discussions. But I think that they were discussions without an end, not without an agreement. There wasn't a disagreement, but there weren't discussions that said, yes, Syria will definitely do X, Y, and Z. And they were primarily, obviously, devoted toward the Iraq situation and the need for Syria to not only talk pretty good about the situation, which they are doing, but act pretty well.

MR. DAWOUD: Did you happen to see any action?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes, I've seen some action. I sure have.

MR. DAWOUD: Which are a better sign?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It's a better sign, but I don't think it's sufficient yet, and we'd hope Syria would do more.

MR. DAWOUD: Like what?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: You know, anyone has to. There are Baathists financing from the Baathists in Syria. That is usually to the detriment of the Interim Iraqi Government in Iraq. These are matters, which the Government of Iraq have taken up with the Damascus. And I think Damascus would do more and can do more. And they know very well what to do. Now, they've done a little better on their border crossings. They seem to be putting some effort into that, and we acknowledge that.

MR. DAWOUD: But sir, I mean, don't you think that that UN case of foreigners infiltrating into Iraq was a little bit overblown? I mean, even by hyped up figures released by Mr., you know, General Richard Myers said that the number of the raids of the foreign fighters was very small, maybe three to five percent.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah. I wouldn't differ. I think the number of foreign fighters -- well, let's put it this way, foreign fighters aren't the major problem in Iraq. Former regime elements, pan-Arab nationalists, et cetera, may be much larger. But I spoke -- when I spoke with Syria -- about financing deliberately, because I think that's a much bigger problem. Money does talk, and Baathist money and former Iraqi -- Iraqi Baathists who are in Syria -- financing, slipping the money across the border, that's an even larger problem.

MR. DAWOUD: And the Syrians said that they have already done their best concerning the curtailing of the Palestinian militant groups: Hamas, Jihad and Hezbollah.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: They never told me that.

MR. DAWOUD: They said they closed the black ops. They are no longer (inaudible).

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: But you said Hamas, Jihad and Hezbollah.

MR. DAWOUD: Hamas and Jihad. Hezbollah is a different story.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, yes, it is, as we know. We have heard the same thing and it looks like they took some action, but on Hezbollah, nothing.

MR. DAWOUD: Okay.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: They've done absolutely nothing.

MR. DAWOUD: And, sir, concerning the Lebanon resolution you mentioned, what's the U.S. readiness to push this resolution further?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, it's a French initiative, which we were happy to cosign and cosponsor. And your question is what are we going to do next?

MR. DAWOUD: Yes.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we have --

MR. DAWOUD: Concerning the Lebanon resolution.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, there is a requirement to report periodically back to the UN Security Council, which will give us all an opportunity to refocus our attentions on Syria. I have spoken many times, and probably April 7th with you, about it. Our own view is that this long after the Taif Accords, it's about time that Lebanon was left to the Lebanese. And though we acknowledge Syrian strategic interest in Lebanon, there's no gain saying that, how they project that strategic interest is a matter of great interest. And by having troops in Lebanon and controlling certainly enormous imports, the government is something of interest to all peoples in the region and is something that, I think, the UN Security Council spoke about. It's time to leave.

MR. DAWOUD: And the timeline again for departure from Lebanon?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I'd say it's been -- how long has it been since Taif? About 15 years?

MR. DAWOUD: Since '91.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Was it '91 or '89?

MR. DAWOUD: I think it was --

MR. ERELI: No, it wasn't '91. It was --

MR. DAWOUD: '89.

MR. ERELI: '89.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It was '89. That would be 15 years. That's long enough.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, now, I want to move to the global meeting, the Forum for the Future and --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Ah, yeah, in Rabat.

MR. DAWOUD: -- in Rabat, which is supposed to be held in December 10th and 11th.

MR. ERELI: 11th and 12th.

MR. DAWOUD: 11th and 12th. Yeah.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yes, the Secretary will be there.

MR. DAWOUD: Yes, I mean, what's the U.S. agenda for that meeting?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, it's quite clear. It's primarily economic transparency, economic revitalization, the majority, but not the exclusive membership of the forum will be finance ministers --

MR. DAWOUD: Foreign ministers?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Foreign ministers and finance ministers who are coming. There's a good article in the *Financial Times* about it today. We're kind of upbeat about it.

MR. DAWOUD: But what exactly are you going to propose at that meeting?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we're going to -- the G-8 and likeminded countries are going to be willing to assist countries who want to make economic transparency and revitalization one of their hallmarks. You know, one of the more interesting things that happened during the Forum in New York during the UN General Assembly was a gentleman -- I think from Egypt, actually -- did you -- I believe it was an Egyptian businessman.

MR. DAWOUD: Businessman.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, no, it wasn't (inaudible). It was a businessman, a private businessman. And he stood up and he said something like the following. He said, we all know what the ticking time bomb is in the Middle East. We all know, he said.

And what do you think he was referring to?

MR. DAWOUD: Unemployment.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Unemployment in every country in the Middle East. He said this is the ticking time bomb. That's exactly right. That's exactly what he said.

MR. DAWOUD: So, I mean, again, any practical initiatives that you're going to announce to even solve the unemployment problems, solve the --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It's not ours to solve.

MR. DAWOUD: -- democracy, deficit problems?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: It's not ours to solve. It is the G-8's view that where countries are making progress and where they have a plan, that we are willing to be of assistance in these matters, whether it's in democratization or whether it's in economic transparency or whether it's in education, which is another big area. In every single country in the Middle East, there are changes coming from within. Voting is being discussed in Saudi Arabia. You happen to have civil society being developed in Egypt. You have it everywhere -- different elements of it in different countries.

And the G-8's view is not to impose anything, but where it's desired by the governments, and where there's a program we can maybe assist them, but not come in and put something on top.

MR. DAWOUD: And what do you respond to this criticism that there is too much (inaudible) for the U.S. to have specific action? I mean --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know --

MR. DAWOUD: Even Israelis have been spending the money that you (inaudible). It's very easy to spend, like, millions of dollars and (inaudible) --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We're the leading aid donor in the world, so, I mean --

MR. DAWOUD: I mean in the democratization, like, of Saudi Arabia and even in Kuwait, which is a very close U.S. ally, women are not allowed to vote, you know? And we don't see any practical action, for example, you know, to do a carrot and stick and maybe the government will change its stand.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, we've had plenty of discussions. You saw in the Saudi situation the other day Secretary Powell stood up publicly after they said that women wouldn't be allowed to vote, and said of course women ought to be allowed to vote. He said it publicly. And by the way, got very good, sort of, echoes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from many quarters. We do put our money where our mouth is. We're not just building bridges and putting roads in. We're helping develop a civil society. We're helping education, particularly education. And where countries are willing to privatize and to get away from state dominance of the economy, we're willing to assist that in education and things of that nature.

But I have to refute any allegation that we don't spend our money. We're the leading aid donor in the world.

MR. ERELI: We're also giving 200 million to the Middle East Partnership Initiative.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah, the MEPI.

MR. ERELI: \$200 million.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: But it's absurd, the suggestion that we talk the talk and don't walk the walk, whether it's in governance or whether it's in health. I mean, who else has health initiatives like the United States HIV/AIDS Day today? We're the leading donor and actually are trying to make a big difference in Africa, in China, in Russia and other places.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, I have two more questions. I know your time is short.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Sure.

MR. DAWOUD: I mean, I'd like to ask about the recent, you know, Red Cross report about the treatment of the detainees in Guantanamo. Again, you know, for me, that kind of -- if the United States is trying to tell the rest of the world and the Arab world you have to respect human rights, and they get involved in these kinds of practices,

don't you think that this is a type (inaudible)?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, let me start before we talk about Guantanamo with Abu Ghraib. I've described that as a stain on our honor and I can't make it go away. It happened. But I want to point out to you that those who perpetrated this, one after the other, are going to jail or being punished at trial and it's being done openly.

MR. DAWOUD: What about the top leadership, sir?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Pardon me?

MR. DAWOUD: What about the top leadership?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We'll let that sort out as we go forward, but it'll go up as high as it needs to go up.

I think the specter of all of the top leadership at the Pentagon, military and civilian, being brought before the U.S. Congress in the wake of Abu Ghraib and having to testify was something that the world took note.

MR. DAWOUD: Sure.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Let's just put that away in one second. Now to your specifics about ICRC: The work of the ICRC is of extraordinary value to the U.S. They've done great work and we've worked very closely with them and we take very seriously anything they say.

It is my belief that we are not involved in torture or activities tantamount to torture. But because the ICRC says that they have these allegations, I take it very seriously. I can't answer your question because it belongs to our colleagues at the Pentagon, but I can assure you that (inaudible) takes the ICRC with the utmost seriousness.

And I would -- I pray that my government is not involved. I don't think we are, but I pray that we're not.

MR. DAWOUD: But don't you think that Guantanamo -- I'm going to Guantanamo, actually, on December 6th --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Oh, are you? Well, you can see for yourself.

MR. DAWOUD: I mean, no, I don't think we'll get to see much because there's too much regulations the (inaudible) Defense (inaudible). But anyway, I mean, don't you think that enough is enough? These people have been held there for three years, almost three years. I mean, in all the kind of intelligence information, it's, I mean, like you've tried the people. You know, I mean, what else?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know. They've had a quite a number of them been repatriated to Afghanistan and they've turned around and been caught fighting us again.

MR. DAWOUD: Two or three.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Or have been killed.

MR. DAWOUD: I mean, if I was held in Guantanamo for three years, sir, I mean --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: How do you know? You might have gained some weight. (Laughter.) You might have learned -- or maybe not you, but one might have learned to read or write.

MR. DAWOUD: Speak better English. That was told about two kids who were held there, you know.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Of course they speak better English.

MR. DAWOUD: I mean, sure.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: But in some cases they read, they learn to read and learn to write. It's not all the story that we see.

But as I say, if there are activities that are outside the bounds, then they should be corrected immediately.

MR. DAWOUD: But don't you think that it's about time to close this case of Guantanamo? I mean, 550 people have been held there for so long?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, we -- and how many have been repatriated?

MR. DAWOUD: Almost 150.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: And they continue to be repatriated. And we try to make out, or make arrangements with their host governments or their host countries to have them on some situation where they won't be able to go jihad again, for those who wish to, and some do. And as we make those arrangements, we empty it. I think we've done a lot better at moving populations out of Guantanamo and I expect that trend to continue.

MR. DAWOUD: But no Egyptians were repatriated. There are about -- I was told by some State Department officials there are less than ten. He didn't give me an exact figure, but (inaudible).

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know how many Egyptians are at Guantanamo.

MR. DAWOUD: Less than ten. Is there any chance of repatriating some of those Egyptians?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I don't know. I can find out for you. Why don't we just take that and ask about it? I don't have that information (inaudible).

MR. DAWOUD: Sure. I want to refer back to one of my last questions.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah, sure.

MR. DAWOUD: Actually, in the interview with Al Jazeera, you said something like -- it was Mohamed Alami, who is a very good friend of mine --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Yeah, he's a great guy. I really enjoy doing his interviews because he --

MR. DAWOUD: Well, we all noted, you know, your last comment, "I like you very much," you know, something like that, so anyway, I wanted to -- you said something like that probably you underestimated the influence of the -- or the strength of the Iraqi nationalism. And, like, did you really expect before the war that you were going to go there and be greeted, you know, without any sort of resistance?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Some said that publicly in the United States. I did not. Secretary Powell did not. There was a reason in 1991, after accomplishing our goals, that is, evicting the invaders from Kuwait and punishing them, that we didn't go on to Baghdad, because everyone knows, or most people know, that Iraq is a very complicated place.

MR. DAWOUD: But did you expect that a government, which has been in power for 30 years just to give up power just like this, I mean, again, at the end of the day --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I did not. Did not expect it.

MR. DAWOUD: -- it's a huge bureaucracy, right?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We did. And the reason I did not expect it is because we did a very large, full report called the Future of Iraq Study here in this Department, which had a lot of participation by Iraqis. And I think a --

MR. DAWOUD: Exiled Iraqis who have never been to their country for over 10, 20 years.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, but they know very well what's going on. And they helped us to understand the complexity, which gets to your question, the complexity of Iraqi society, political society, tribal society, ethnic society, sectarian society. And so you asked me did I expect them to throw roses at us? No. Because I read the Future of Iraq report I told you about.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, I mean, just, again, one last question. What is the future of Iran now after the IAEA (inaudible)?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, our President yesterday indicated that suspension is good, but they need to abandon this program. We're skeptical but we do support the EU-3. And the IAEA will monitor the Iranians and we'll certainly keep our eye on them, and I'm sure it will be discussed further. But suspension is better than non-suspension. Abandonment is the best of all possible (inaudible).

MR. DAWOUD: Some think tanks I went to here are speaking of surgical military strikes against Iran, escalation of some sort, I mean --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I think that's irresponsible.

MR. DAWOUD: That's not on the agenda at this --

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I just said I think it's irresponsible. The United States would never remove something from the table. But I think it's irresponsible to be talking about these matters, particularly when we have diplomatic efforts ongoing.

MR. DAWOUD: Sir, you are about to leave your position. I mean, sooner, I think, than the -- 20th.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: January 20th, I think. Unless you know something I don't.

MR. DAWOUD: Well, but, now, sir, I mean, many people in the Arab world are really worried with the second Bush Administration, with Mr. Powell leaving, with you leaving, saying the moderates are out of the U.S. Administration and they are really expecting the worst. I mean, what would you tell people in the Arab world when it comes to that?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well, I think they ought to look carefully at what Mr. Bush has done, dispatched Secretary Powell, who is the Secretary of State, to the Middle East. I certainly expect Dr. Rice, when the Senate confirms her that she'll be traveling soon to the Middle East. I know the soon-to-be National Security Advisor is on his way to Bahrain. The President spoke about Arab-Israeli issues on his first press conference. He's gone to Canada to try to patch up that relationship; plans to travel a bit in the new year to some of our more traditional partners to kind of fix things.

So I think you're going to see a big effort to shore up relations, and to shore up relations (inaudible) in the Arab world. Second, I would note that our good friend King Hamad was here, Sheikh Ghazi is coming in; King Abdallah of Jordan is coming in soon. We're enjoying visits by many of our Arab friends and they will see firsthand for themselves the that the President is very keen --

MR. DAWOUD: But you don't support the notion that the second Bush Administration would mean more liberation wars are possible?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: No, I don't.

MR. DAWOUD: But, so that's one thing. I mean, we can take for granted, no more Syria, no Iran.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Now, look. You can't take anything for granted because countries have to be on the right path. But you answered my question about the Arab world moderation. I think you're going to find a big effort by the Bush Administration to be very much involved in a positive way in the future of the regions, including the region of the Middle East.

MR. DAWOUD: Thank you very much, sir.

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Thank you, as always.

2004/1346

Released on December 8, 2004

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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