



Remarks Following Meetings With Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad and Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara

Richard L. Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State
Damascus, Syria
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DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: We had a series of very candid, realistic and thorough discussions with the President and with the Foreign Minister. The U.S. side stressed the absolute importance of the Iraqi elections on 30 January and the full participation of all Iraqis. We all need to do a lot on border security, and Syria has made some real improvements in recent months on border security, but we all need to do more, particularly on the question of foreign regime elements participating in activities in Iraq, going back and forth from Syria.



Second, we talked about the necessity of full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 and the need to have no foreign interference in the parliamentary elections in Lebanon next spring.

And lastly, the U.S. side pointed out our belief that we have a moment of opportunity in the peace process. After January 9th, we'll have a new Palestinian leadership. We should all support that leadership, revive the political process and not resort to violence, and the U.S. remains committed to a comprehensive peace.

I thank the President, and I thank the Foreign Minister for their very constructive and helpful comments today.

I'll be glad to take a question or two.

QUESTION: What kind of message have you carried from President Bush to President Hafez (sic) Al-Asad, to the Syrian leadership?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: Well I made a point that in our view it is absolutely necessary to have full Iraqi participation in the 30th of January elections, and I believe I found here in Syria the same views. Second, we all need to do more to stop the foreign regime elements operating back and forth across the border between Iraq and Syria.

QUESTION: Has the USA been serious about Syrian support to Iraqi fighters similar to that Colin Powell presented about Iraqi-wide disruption, weapons, positions?

DEPUTY SECRETARY ARMITAGE: I made the point here that we have seen a lot of improvement regarding foreign fighters who were using Syria to enter Iraq, and this is a good thing. But I also made the point that former regime elements of the Iraqi regime sometimes cross back and forth on the border, and that it's very important to have that stopped. We believe it's very important that the new Iraq of the future have a very friendly relationship with Syria, and I hope our Syrian friends are committed to that same type friendship. So I thank you very much.

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