



## Press Briefing With Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**  
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia  
March 19, 2004



**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** (In Arabic) In the name of God, the Graceful the Merciful. First of all, I would like to welcome His Excellency the Secretary of State for his visit, and His Excellency provided extensive, important and constructive discussions with the Crown Prince, which included many subjects. That's why my comments are going to be short because His Excellency was supposed to fly out at 9 pm. To give the journalists a chance, we are going to have two questions from each side. Two questions from the American press, and two questions from Saudi press. And when I say two questions, I mean two questions, not two questions made of five parts.

**QUESTION:** (In Arabic) Ayman Sultan, Al-Nadwa newspaper. I would like to ask the Secretary of State about the nature of the Saudi-American relationship, and is it true that there is tension between the two countries?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** No, and the cordiality of conversations, both my conversation with the Minister and the very extended conversation I had with the Crown Prince, demonstrated to me once again that the relationship is strong. We're united in the war against terror. I expressed my appreciation to the Foreign Minister and the Crown Prince for all they have been doing in the war against terror and we've seen some real successes here recently in the destruction of cells and in dealing with those terrorists who are trying to take advantage of Saudi Arabia's hospitality and some very significant individuals were killed recently who were bringing terror not only to Saudi Arabia but to other parts of the region. So our relationship is strong and we're able this evening to talk about what we are doing in Iraq and I gave the Crown Prince and the Foreign Minister a briefing on that. I briefed them on my trip through South Asia and we talked about a number of bilateral issues in the candid way that we always do. I think the relationship is quite strong and will continue to be so.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** And I confirm that. Ladies first.

**QUESTION:** Intesar Al-Yamani, Saudi Gazette. Mr. Powell, what is your view on the issue of reform in the Middle East, and in particular in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia? And have you discussed this with the Crown Prince, the issue of reforms?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We had a very long discussion on reform in the Middle East. I discussed with the Foreign Minister, and then in an extended session with the Crown Prince, the President's vision: a forward strategy for freedom, a forward strategy for democracy and how we had ideas and we have experience and we have means to help nations who are interested in reform and committed to reform. But essentially reform has to come from within the region, it can't be imposed from outside. And we talked about the reforms that are taking place in Saudi Arabia. Municipal elections that are coming up. Working on the legal systems and other things that are taking place. Each nation has to find its own path and follow that path at its own rate of speed. But the United States, and I think many of the other nations of the world, industrialized nations especially, stand ready to help the nations in the region at the pace at each nation decides it should move and with any assistance it asks for. Not something to be imposed, something to be partnered with our friends on.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** In other words, these reforms are not what the papers said they were and the efforts of the United States is not what was presented by the papers. We understood that, and you are sitting in the wrong place, by the way.

(Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, what is your view of the arrests of the roughly 10 reform-minded Saudis this week? And are you aware of any evidence that they were indeed involved in acts of sabotage, as the Saudi government has said?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I had a conversation both with the Foreign Minister and the Crown Prince on this subject. I expressed our concerns over the detentions. I don't think the number is that high any longer: it's fewer people, some have been released. And the issue of sabotage was discussed. There were some procedural and legal issues that the Saudis were concerned with, with respect to these individuals, and the Minister may wish to speak to it, but, yes, it did come up and was discussed rather thoroughly.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** Friends can discuss anything, from our point of view what happened was something that concerned this country and for the benefit of this country. These people sought dissention when the whole country was looking for unity and a clear vision, especially at a time when it is facing a terrorist threat. This is not the time to seek dissention. They did so by using also the names of respectable and reputable people who objected. And were adamantly decided on raising the issue and the legal consequences to those who put their names on the statements that they had no right to do so.

So these people were asked to come for questioning, they were questioned, those who said...who promised that they would not use the names of other people were immediately let go. The others who refused that are going to return to the legal courts to see what needs to be done about it. But it is an internal issue and this is what we told our friends, in essence.

**QUESTION:** (In Arabic) My question is to Mr. Colin Powell. His Royal Highness Prince Saud Al-Faisal said that there are those who want to separate us, and we heard that they also want to tear apart our national unity. Does Mr. Powell think that the statement of the official in the Department of State supports their intention?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** I'm not sure I could understand the question.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** He said, these people who are (inaudible) don't you think (inaudible)?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Well, as you know from statements we've made in Washington, as well as what I've discussed this evening with the Foreign Minister, we have concerns when people who are trying to express their views and do it in an open way, and a democratic way, are unable to do so. And we had a good candid open debate about this issue. And you have heard the Foreign Minister's response. And I accept the response. I'm pleased that the number of detentions is down and most have been released. And what happens to those who remain we will see in the days ahead. But we have expressed our opinion on this one.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** Last question.

**QUESTION:** Yes. Mr. Secretary, if the Arab League adopts a resolution calling for reform in the Middle East, would that satisfy the interest of the Administration for, as

you said, reform coming out of the region? And do you have any ideas of what should be in that reform initiative?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** It's not a matter of satisfying the United States, it's a matter of satisfying the aspirations of the people in the Arab world. And so, I have been in touch with a number of the Foreign Ministers in the Arab world over what might be in such a document. But they have been really telling me what they think should be in such a document. And I think if the Arab League could come to some conclusion that everyone agrees to, we would certainly respect that statement of vision from the Arab League. But I couldn't say anything further about it until I actually see such a resolution.

But I am encouraged, very encouraged, that the League is taking up this issue and such conversations are taking place. When our ideas were first made known to the press, there was a great deal of angst in the region and people were wondering what are we all about, what are we doing, what are we trying to impose. But as a result of consultations and the visits of a number of members of my staff, as well as consultations in Washington, I think we've demonstrated to our friends in the region that we are here to assist and work, but the momentum, the incentive, really has to come from within the region. It has caused a great deal of debate, a lot of argument in the press, and that's good. That's part of the democratic process. But what's particularly encouraging for me to see is that the League is now taking it up as a formal matter to see if they can get agreement on a resolution. I don't know whether they can or cannot. But the fact that it is being discussed within the Arab League, I think is encouraging.

**FOREIGN MINISTER AL-FAISAL:** Permit me to make a comment, Mr. Secretary, on this. This country is undergoing a process of reform that started some time ago. It is doing it to please the people of the country, to respond to the needs of the country. It is not doing it to get a report of good behavior or anything of that sort. Our country needs reforms and they are needed for serving the people of this country. This is the only basis that we work as a government, to serve the people of this country. And so the reforms are indigenous, they are inclusive of the needs of the people. The timing of their implementation depends on what is possible and what is achievable according to the ability and the consensus that we can achieve for this reform, so it becomes a unifying force for the country and not a divisive aspect for the country. We want to maintain the unity and the cohesion of our society. Thank you very much.

Released on March 20, 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.