



Joint Press Availability With Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
June 20, 2005

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Ladies and gentlemen, we welcome the Secretary of State to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on her visit as Secretary of State. It is a pleasure to have the Secretary here and we especially appreciate the fact that she arrived during the summer months. We always know someone is serious when they visit us during the not-so-mild weather.

Our two countries share a long and deep history of friendship. We are allies in war on terrorism and partners in the search for peace and stability in the region. We also have strong and mutually beneficial commercial and economic relations that we both are trying to enhance.

The discussions with His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince were deep and mutually beneficial and focused on several issues.

The bilateral relationship and how to further grow and deepen it.

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians and how to move it toward the just and comprehensive settlement that we all seek.

The situation in Lebanon in the wake of the tragic murder of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.

The situation in Iraq and the attempts to bring order and stability to that country and ensure its unity and territorial integrity.

We expressed our appreciation to the President and the Secretary of State for their position, which they publicly stated, that reform must emanate from within a particular country and be in accord with the history, tradition, culture and be at the pace of that country. Therefore, I was very much pleased to brief the Secretary about the reform efforts of the Kingdom.

At the summit meeting in Crawford between Crown Prince Abdallah and President Bush, our two countries agreed to establish a committee co-chaired by the Secretary of State and myself to review the relationship, exchange views and share opinions on future developments, to ensure understanding and cooperating between us. Today, we explored some of the mechanisms for doing so and we will continue to consult in the next few weeks to finalize the framework.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia appreciates the support of the United States for the Kingdom's accession to the World Trade Organization. We are ready to sign a bilateral trade agreement with the U.S., which we believe would pave the way for membership in the WTO.

We also discussed ways to enhance interaction between citizens of our two countries, whether businessmen or students or medical patients. We both believe that the future of our relations depends on the interaction between our respective citizens and we are working to ensure that the openness which existed between our two nations continues into the future.

As you know, hundreds of thousands of Saudis have visited the U.S. from the Kingdom for education, health care, tourism, business and investment; and tens of thousands of Americans have come here in search of job opportunities. This human traffic over the past seven decades has helped nurture and solidify the special relationship between our two nations and we hope it will continue to do so in the future.

Once again, we welcome the Secretary of State to our nation and we wish her all the best in her future endeavors, and we hope that the next time she visits will allow us to show her more.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much, Minister. It's a delight to be here with my colleague, the Foreign Minister. We've worked together many years now in my time as National Security Advisor and I'm glad to be here on my first visit as Secretary of State.

The United States, of course, enjoys a long and deep strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia. President Bush and Crown Prince Abdallah had an opportunity to deepen that relationship further with their very good summit at Crawford. As the Foreign Minister said, we have agreed to a committee, a strategic dialogue committee, that will allow us to work on the many issues before us.

First, we are going to intensify our discussions of regional security. Tonight, we discussed the developments between Israel and the Palestinians. We are both supportive of the process of disengagement because successful disengagement will energize progress on the roadmap toward a viable two-state solution.

And I want to thank the Saudi Government for what it has been doing and will continue to do to help the Palestinians as they try and prepare for that disengagement.

We discussed Iraq and we both support a strong and viable government in Iraq that is unified and has territorial integrity. The Saudi Government is encouraging Sunni Arabs to join that process, and we appreciate that. And, of course, I will see the Minister again in just a day or so when we are both in Brussels for the international conference that will support the people of Iraq as they try to build a democratic future.

Second, we will be working together on our economic issues. Saudi Arabia has on, energy issues, agreed that it will increase production to help with world oil supplies over time. We know that this is a long-term problem, not a short-term one, and so we appreciate that Saudi Arabia wants to do something about the structural issues here.

And Saudi Arabia has also made good progress in negotiations to join the World Trade Organization. Joining the WTO can help open the Saudi economy and release more the creative work of its people.

Third, we will continue to discuss our strategies to combat violent extremism. In the years since 9/11, Saudi Arabia has become an ally in the war against terrorism and it is definitely a tough battle. But a number of Saudi policemen and soldiers have given their lives in this struggle and we honor their courage and their sacrifice.

Fourth, we will strengthen our dialogue on bilateral topics. We talked about, as the Minister said, exchanges, ways to bring more Saudi businessmen and students to the

United States and more Americans here. And I have to say that it was a great pleasure to meet the ministers, many of whom have studied in American universities, including one who studied at my alma mater, the University of Denver. And so I think it just shows that it is very important that we keep the flow of people between our two governments and between our two nations over this period of time.

We did talk about reform, and I want to thank the Minister and the Crown Prince for their openness in discussing the course of reform here in Saudi Arabia. The United States, of course, approaches this topic as a friend. It is, of course, an issue of deep conviction for the President. The President has made clear that he believes that the values of democracy and liberty are universal values, and also that we know that there is no way in which the United States wishes to impose its own system or its will on others, but rather to help others in their efforts to choose freely. As I said in Cairo earlier today, successful reform must be homegrown and it should grow because it is good for a country. And, of course, we believe that more freedom is the best long-term cure for the ideologies of hatred.

We talked, as friends do, about the progress of reform here in the Kingdom. The Saudi national dialogue and municipal elections were important events for the Kingdom. And I note also that as this process goes forward, we who believe that democracy must have two hats, not one, will continue to hope for further progress on the rights of women.

The reason that the U.S.-Saudi relationship remains strong is because we are focused on the future. We both seek moderation and we seek peace and we will work together, Minister, to achieve that goal.

Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you, Madame. We'll take questions on the right side, which just happens to be the Saudi side -- (laughter) -- and the left side, which is the American side.

QUESTION: First of all, we'd like to welcome -- we'd like to say welcome to Riyadh. (Inaudible) would like to know what the American Government official (inaudible) evaluation regarding the Saudi -- the Saudi Arabian achievement in the following issues: fighting terrorism and human rights side and interior reforms.

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. We have excellent cooperation on counterterrorism, on fighting terrorism. We share the same goal that al-Qaida and extremism of that type must be defeated. And indeed, we have very close counterterrorism cooperation. We cooperate through our services, through our military training, through every means that we have, to make certain that the people of Saudi Arabia and the people of the United States and the people of the world are safe from the kind of horrors that happened in the United States on September 11th and that happened in Riyadh in May of last year. And so we have very close counterterrorism cooperation.

We believe that the Saudi Government is making progress on reform. We noted the municipal elections that took place. We note that there is a national dialogue underway. Obviously, countries will do this at their own speed, but we encourage reform to go forward as quickly as possible. And as I said, we believe that any reform will expose the fact that there are universal values and freedoms that people aspire to. And as I've said to the Minister, we believe that the people of the Middle East, including the people of Saudi Arabia, are no different in that regard.

This is a very strong relationship, and on the basis of that strong relationship we can talk about anything at any time. And we have tonight talked about just about everything, which is why you're here at a midnight press conference.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: May I add to that that I really don't understand what the row is about asking for what type of reforms and what speed the reform is taking in our country or the other. After all, we speak to you about it. I don't see why it would be strange to speak to the State Department or the Secretary of State about it. So the row is really meaningless. The assessment is important for any country in the development of its political reform, in the development of its own people, and that is, in the final analysis, the criteria that we follow.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you said in Cairo today that many people in this country pay an unfair price for exercising their basic rights. Did you raise those concerns here today and did you get any sense that things would change on that score?

And, please, to the Foreign Minister, how could Saudi Arabia put people in prison simply for petitioning the government? And also, can you give us your reaction to the Secretary's speech today in Cairo?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I did raise the issue of the three people who were imprisoned that I raised earlier in Cairo. We have raised it with the Saudi Government in the past and I raised it again tonight. And the Minister will give his own answer, but we will continue to follow the progress of this case. We think it is an important case. And I said exactly to the Minister what I said in Cairo earlier, that the petitioning of the government for reform should not be a crime. The Foreign Minister is open in the way that he discusses these things with us, but I will let him speak for himself.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you. And we did talk about the three prisoners. We don't have any -- and I told the Secretary that they have broken a law; they are in the hands of the court. The government cannot interfere until they -- the court action is taken in this regard.

As to the reaction to the speech, I was so busy in arranging the welcome to the Secretary that I'm afraid I haven't read it, to my eternal shame.

SECRETARY RICE: But he'll tell me what he thinks when he sees me in Brussels, right? (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: I will, indeed. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Good morning, Ms. Secretary of State Rice. (Inaudible) from the Arab news. Have your discussions with the Crown Prince and the Foreign Minister touched on the Saudi detainees in Guantanamo Bay? If so, what is their fate and when will they be returned?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have had these discussions in a fairly steady fashion over time about Saudi citizens who have been detained at Guantanamo. We have arranged from time to time for there to be access so that people can assess the situation there. Of course, the International Red Cross has access to Guantanamo.

The point that I would make is that the United States and Saudi Arabia share a common problem, and that is how to deal with the terrorist threat that emerged so dramatically -- it had been there before, but emerged so dramatically on September 11th and then struck here in Riyadh. These are very dangerous people and we need to remember that the people who are being detained were on the battlefield, many of them in Afghanistan fighting with al-Qaida, fighting with the Taliban; that when interviewed, many of them say that the first thing they would like to do is to go back to killings Americans or others. And in some cases, we've actually released people that we've met again on the battlefield.

The President has been very clear that the United States will live up to its international obligations, its treaty obligations, within -- taking into account military necessities, but always to live up to our obligations, including on conventions like the Convention Against Torture. And so we are -- these are not prisoners of war because they don't deserve that status, but we are treating people in accordance with the requirements of the Geneva Accord, although we do not believe that -- the Geneva Convention -- although we do not believe that they enjoy that protection as prisoners of war.

And so this is the kind of issue that we've talked about from time to time, and when the Saudis have had concerns, we have tried to answer them.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, Mr. Minister, turning to the Middle East for one second, a couple of hours ago, the United States, through your Spokesman, issued a statement condemning and singling out Palestinian violence right now and asking the Palestinian Authority to take immediate action. What is the purpose of this statement right now? Is there a particular problem right now that is the Palestinians' fault in this circumstance?

And, Mr. Minister, can you also please react to the statement?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't know if the Minister has heard the statement so let me just describe the event that led to this. There was, as I understand, an incident in the Gaza today with the killing of a settler, which Mahmoud Abbas himself has said was intended by someone who was outside the Palestinian consensus to try and derail the progress that is being made. And as you know, Prime Minister Sharon and President Abbas are to meet tomorrow.

And so quite clearly, from the point of view not just of the United States but of the Palestinian Authority, this was an attempt, which is very often the case with terrorists, to try and derail this process. So that was the reason for the statement, because we felt it very important that the United States be on the record as saying that this kind of thing cannot be tolerated.

I welcome the fact that the Palestinian Authority has also noted that this was not inside their consensus and I hope that the Palestinian Authority will act in any way that it can to find the perpetrators of this. We're going to go through a period of time now where the Palestinian people have a real opportunity with the Israelis to try and make progress through the kind of confidence and trust that could be built up during the disengagement. There are undoubtedly going to be people outside that consensus who try and literally blow up or destroy the possibility for that progress, and we have to speak out against it when we see it.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Well, I haven't heard this statement, but I can talk about violence. The Palestinian consensus is to stop the violence at this time and enter into negotiations, so any Palestinian who causes violence is certainly against the Palestinian consensus.

But one has to remember in this regard the violence that the Palestinians have been meeting at the hands of the Israelis. Even during periods of ceasefire, the Israelis give themselves the right to maintain or break a ceasefire on their own consideration, and this is what has brought the instability into the region.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, good morning. I'd like to ask you, Ma'am, how do you see the possibility of having an independent Palestinian state before 2008?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, was that date chosen for any particular reason? 2008? I'm only kidding. I know the date. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Well, you know, before the elections --

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, I understand. I understand.

I'm not one to set timetables and deadlines. I do believe that we should work as hard and as quickly as possible to create the conditions in which a Palestinian state can emerge. And again, I think we have a very good opportunity right now with the Gaza disengagement for the parties to work together on something consequential, for Israeli forces and settlers to leave the Gaza, for the Palestinians then to have territory where they can begin to establish and strengthen the institutions -- political, economic, security institutions.

I just want to note, we talk about Gaza, but of course there is a link to the West Bank in that there are four northern settlements in the West Bank that will also be evacuated. And so this is a very important step that's about to take place. I hope we can then accelerate progress on the roadmap. And because I've sometimes seen events move more slowly than we'd hoped, but I've also seen them move more quickly than we might have thought, I'm not one to set timetables. We'll work just as hard as we can and as fast as we can.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: We'll take two more questions, one from each side, because the Secretary, I am sure, is very tired.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you and the President and other members of the Administration have been asked a number of times in recent months about the role of Hamas and Hezbollah potentially in the political situation in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories. And the answer has been pretty consistently that the U.S. is not going to deal with these groups because they are terrorist organizations. And you were asked questions about that today as well.

When you were asked today at the Cairo address about the Muslim Brotherhood, your response was also that the United States will not engage with this group. Yet, the Muslim Brotherhood has, for a generation now, renounced terrorism and, in fact, last year issued an 11-page statement of principles in which it embraced parliamentary democracy, free elections and even universal suffrage.

So how can you reconcile the refusal to engage at all with this group with the reasoning that you give for not engaging with, say, Hamas -- Hamas and Hezbollah?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I have said also that the United States is going to engage the Palestinian-elected leadership on the course ahead. We now will have a Lebanese-elected leadership that I'm sure that we will engage on the course ahead. And we are engaging the Egyptian Government about reform. The Egyptians -- we will respect their laws.

We are in a long-term process in which there are -- in which civil society is developing, in which opposition is developing and finding voice, and that is a process that the United States will support as a process. It does not mean that we can turn our backs on the determinations that we have made about the past or the present of certain groups concerning their activities. That's not something that we can do.

But what we can do is encourage a process that is going to lead to greater and greater openness and where legitimate opposition groups will emerge and where legitimate opposition, if it comes from any of these groups, will eventually have a voice.

But I, today, was in Egypt with opposition leaders, with people who are really part of the political process, opposition from within the party of the government, from without the party of the government, and it seems to me that there's a healthy civil society in Egypt. Our task now has to be to focus on sustained encouragement and a sustained spotlight on the Egyptian Government so that the elections that are about to take place can be free and fair and transparent. This is a process that we're involved in, not a moment in time.

Last one from the Saudi side?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: We have to do the lady (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Alright.

QUESTION: Former President Bill Clinton has said in an interview with the *Financial Times* published today the United States should either close down or clean up the Guantanamo Bay prison for world terrorism suspects; American or British troops would be at much greater risk if they have the reputation for abusing people. What is

your comment?

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Well, a lot of changes have taken place at Guantanamo and in the detainee system as a whole. And as the President said, we are constantly reviewing alternatives and changes to the system as we go forward because we are not where we were three and a half years ago at the time of September 11th.

But I just want to repeat that the detention of people who were caught on the battlefield engaging in extremist acts with some of the most extreme elements that have existed in modern times, al-Qaida or the Taliban, can simply not be let out onto the streets. These are people who have bombed, or people of this persuasion, who have bombed subways in Madrid, who have held hostage schoolchildren in Beslan, Russia and killed innocent people, who set off bombs here in Riyadh, who drove airplanes into buildings in New York.

I know that with the benefit of time, it's sometimes easy to lose your fire about what happened with these killings of innocents, but we can't afford to forget because the war on terrorism continues and these -- many of these people would go right back to fighting in the war on terrorism were they released. Some have said as such and some have actually done it.

And so the detention system, which is intended to be in conformity with America's obligations, international obligations, and where I think the great, great majority of American men and women in uniform have tried to deal with this very difficult situation in a dignified and humane way, that system has to exist because these are not people who you can simply let out onto the streets.

So again, we continue to try to improve the system and to look at alternatives, but let's remember that the first obligation of the American President or the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia or any other leader is to protect their citizens from the kind of extremism and wanton terror that these groups practice.

Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Madame Secretary.
2005/T10-16

Released on June 21, 2005

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