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## Remarks Following a Meeting With King Abdullah II of Jordan and an Exchange With Reporters

*April 21, 2009*

*President Obama.* Hello, everybody. Take your time, guys. We're going to answer a few questions.

First of all, I just want to welcome His Majesty King Abdullah to the White House. This is a first visit by a leader of an Arab state. In part, it's reciprocity for the extraordinary hospitality that the King and Queen showed me when I visited Jordan prior to the election, in which the King personally drove me to the airport. And I won't tell you how fast he was going. [*Laughter*]

But more importantly, it's representative of his excellent leadership internationally as well as a unmatched friendship with the United States on a whole range of issues. I think that King Abdullah represents a modern approach to foreign policy making in the Middle East, a approach that is able to see many different sides of an issue, that is, obviously, constantly mindful of Jordanian interests, but also seeks to resolve issues and conflicts in a peaceful and respectful fashion.

We are very pleased to have been able to work so closely with his Government for many years. It is a great friendship between two great countries and two great peoples. And I am confident that that friendship will only be strengthened.

Very briefly, we spoke, obviously, about a Middle East peace process, my commitment as well as his to moving that process forward with some sense of urgency. We spoke about the broader whole range of issues related to Iran and Afghanistan, the issues of terrorism in the region. We spoke about the impact that the economic crisis may be having on both our countries and the need to promote effective international cooperation around those issues. And I'm confident that in the months and years to come our partnership and our friendship will continue to grow. So I'm grateful to him for having visited and look forward to seeing him back in his own country sometime soon.

*King Abdullah.* Thank you. Mr. President, again, thank you very much for this very kind welcome. We had a wonderful meeting just recently, and I believe it was a meeting of the minds. We are both committed to bringing peace and stability to our part of the world. The President again reaffirming the need for a two-state solution and to move both parties to good negotiations as quickly as possible. He has the full support of my country and the Arab League on this issue. We believe that it is important for all of us to keep our eyes on the prize, and the prize is peace and stability, finally, for all the people of our region.

I'd also like to extend a warm thanks on behalf of many Arabs and Muslims that have really had an outstanding response to the President's outreach to the Muslim Arab world. It has gone down extremely well and really begins, I believe, a new page of mutual respect and mutual understanding between cultures. And I will continue to commit Jordan and myself to working with you, Mr. President. You have given us hope for a bright future for all of us. And America can't be left by itself to do all the heavy lifting, so a group of countries, including Jordan, will do all it's can—we can to support you, Mr. President, in your endeavors. And hopefully, under your tremendous leadership we will finally see peace and stability in our region.

*President Obama.* Thank you.

*Middle East Peace Process*

*Q.* Mr. President——

*President Obama.* Yes.

*Q.* Mr. President, you've raised a lot of positive signals and interest in your commitment to peace and to a two-state solution. What other actions will you be taking to bring about peace, and when do you expect that action to happen? And how does the Arab Peace Initiative feature in such a plan?

*President Obama.* Well, first of all, we have gone out of our way to complement the efforts of those Arab States that were involved in formulating the Arab Peace Initiative as a very constructive start. And obviously, King Abdullah has taken great steps to ensure that that sustains itself, in terms of Arab support, even while we have seen a breakdown in negotiations. And that's a significant achievement for which King Abdullah and others deserve credit. So we want to continue to encourage a commitment on the part of the Arab States to the peace process.

I have assigned a special envoy, George Mitchell, who is, you know, I think, as good of a negotiator as there is, and somebody who through assiduous work was able to accomplish or help achieve peace in Northern Ireland. We want that same perseverance and sustained effort on this issue, and we're going to be actively engaged.

We have, obviously, seen the Israeli Government just form recently. Prime Minster Netanyahu will be visiting the United States. I expect to have meetings with him. I've had discussions with the Palestinian counterparts as well as other Arab States around this issue.

My hope would be that over the next several months, that you start seeing gestures of good faith on all sides. I don't want to get into the details of what those gestures might be, but I think that the parties in the region probably have a pretty good recognition of what intermediate steps could be taken as confidence-building measures. And we will be doing everything we can to encourage those confidence-building measures to take place.

*Q.* Can I follow up on this one, please?

*President Obama.* Okay, the—I actually have a list, guys. I'm sorry. [*Laughter*] We've got to be fair. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press], you always get a question, so you're not getting one today.

Steve Collinson, AFP [Agence France-Presse].

*Q.* Mr. President.

*President Obama.* Go ahead, Steve.

*Iran*

*Q.* What are your—what is your comment on the rhetoric yesterday from the Iranian President directed towards Israel? And given that kind of talk and the recent imprisonment of the U.S.-Iranian journalist, do you think that will make it more difficult for you to push forward your diplomatic outreach to Iran?

*President Obama.* Well, sadly, the rhetoric is not new. This is the kind of rhetoric that we've come to expect from President Ahmadi-nejad. When I said, during the course of the

campaign and repeated after the election, that we were serious about engagement with Iran, it was with no illusions. I was very clear that I found many of the statements that President Ahmadi-nejad made, particularly those directed at Israel, to be appalling and objectionable.

As I've also said before, Iran is a very complicated country with a lot of different power centers. The Supreme Leader, Khamenei, is the person who exercises the most direct control over the policies of the Islamic Republic, and we will continue to pursue the possibility of improved relations and a resolution to some of the critical issues in which there have been differences, particularly around the nuclear issue.

But there's no doubt that the kind of rhetoric you saw from Ahmadi-nejad is not helpful; in fact, it is harmful, not just with respect to the possibility of U.S.-Iranian relations, but I think it actually undermines Iranians' position in as the world as a whole. We weren't at the conference, and what you saw was a whole host of other countries walking out and that language being condoned by people who may be more sympathetic to the long-term aspirations of the Iranian people. So I think it actually hurts Iran's position in the world.

But we are going to continue to take an approach that tough, direct diplomacy has to be pursued without taking a whole host of other options off the table.

Okay. Look, is there somebody you'd like to call on? Go ahead.

*Middle East Peace Process*

*Q.* I just want to follow on the previous question. You sent Senator Mitchell to the region to listen. Is he done with the listening now and—because all the signals we have from the Israeli Government basically that they are not in favor of the two-state solution. The opposition is strongly advocating that.

So I wanted to ask also His Majesty, President Obama said that there is positive elements within the Arab Peace Initiative, but he didn't say what he disagree about. Can you tell us if you have noticed any tangible results, what the disagreement with that, and can the Arab Peace Initiative be the base now for a peace process in the Middle East?

*President Obama.* Okay. Well, first of all, I think it is very important to recognize that the Israelis now have had a government for a few weeks, and it was a very complicated process for them to put a coalition together. So I think more listening needs to be done. They are going to have to formulate and, I think, solidify their position. So George Mitchell will continue to listen both to Arab partners, to the Palestinians, as well as the Israelis.

But I agree that we can't talk forever, that at some point, steps have to be taken so that people can see progress on the ground. And that will be something that we will expect to take place in the coming months, and we will help, hopefully, to drive a process where each side is willing to build confidence.

I am a strong supporter of a two-state solution. I have articulated that publically, and I will articulate that privately. And I think that there are a lot of Israelis who also believe in a two-state solution. Unfortunately, right now what we've seen, not just in Israel, but within the Palestinian Territories, among the Arab States, worldwide, is a profound cynicism about the possibility of any progress being made whatsoever.

What we want to do is to step back from the abyss, to say, as hard as it is, as difficult as it may be, the prospect of peace still exists, but it's going to require some hard choices, it's going to require resolution on the part of all the actors involved, and it's going to require that we

create some concrete steps that all parties can take that are evidence of that resolution. And the United States is going to deeply engage in this process to see if we can make progress.

Now, ultimately, neither Jordan nor the United States can do this for the Israelis and the Palestinians. What we can do is create the conditions and the atmosphere and provide the help and assistance that facilitates an agreement. Ultimately, they've got to make a decision that it is not in the interests of either the Palestinian people or the Israelis to perpetuate the kind of conflict that we've seen for decades now, in which generations of Palestinian and Israeli children are growing up insecure, in an atmosphere of hate. And my hope is, is that the opportunity will be seized. But it's going to take some more work, and we are committed to doing that work.

*King Abdullah.* I couldn't have said it better myself, Mr. President. I think we're looking now at the positives and not the negatives and seeing how we can sequence events over the next couple of months that allows Israelis and Palestinians and Israelis and Arabs to sit around the table and move this process forward.

*President Obama.* Good. Now, did I already—are one of you Nadia [Nadia Bilbassy Charters, MBC TV]?

*Q.* That was me.

*President Obama.* That was you. Okay. Nadia, I was going to call on you anyway. The——

*Q.* Mr. President——

*President Obama.* Jake [Jake Tapper, ABC News], you always get questions, so I'm going to try somebody else.

*Q.* Mr. President——

*President Obama.* But I'd better give an American—since—you know, so that we're going back and forth. And Sheryl [Sheryl Gay Stolberg, New York Times], you always get in, so——

*Q.* I do not always—[*laughter*]——

*President Obama.* I'm just trying to see if there's anybody unusual. All right, you know what, I'll go back to Jennifer then, since she had her hand up before Sheryl or Jake.

### *Terrorist Interrogation Procedures/Legal Action*

*Q.* I appreciate it. I want to ask you about the interrogation memos that you released last week—two questions. You were clear about not wanting to prosecute those who carried out the instructions under this legal advice. Can you be that clear about those who devised the policy? And then quickly on a second matter, how do you feel about investigations, whether special—a special commission or something of that nature on the Hill to go back and really look at the issue?

*The President.* Well, the—look, as I said before, this has been a difficult chapter in our history and one of the tougher decisions that I've had to make as President. On the one hand, we have very real enemies out there. And we rely on some very courageous people, not just in our military but also in the Central Intelligence Agency, to help protect the American people. And they have to make some very difficult decisions because, as I mentioned yesterday, they are confronted with an enemy that doesn't have scruples, that isn't constrained by constitutions, aren't constrained by legal niceties. Having said that, the OLC memos that were

released reflected, in my view, us losing our moral bearings. That's why I've discontinued those enhanced interrogation programs.

For those who carried out some of these operations within the four corners of legal opinions or guidance that had been provided from the White House, I do not think it's appropriate for them to be prosecuted. With respect to those who formulated those legal decisions, I would say that that is going to be more of a decision for the Attorney General, within the parameters of various laws, and I don't want to prejudge that. I think that there are a host of very complicated issues involved there.

As a general deal, I think that we should be looking forward and not backwards. I do worry about this getting so politicized that we cannot function effectively and it hampers our ability to carry out critical national security operations.

And so if and when there needs to be a further accounting of what took place during this period, I think for Congress to examine ways that it can be done in a bipartisan fashion, outside of the typical hearing process that can sometimes break down and break it entirely along party lines—to the extent that there are independent participants who are above reproach and have credibility, that would probably be a more sensible approach to take.

I'm not suggesting that that should be done, but I'm saying, if you've got a choice, I think it's very important for the American people to feel as if this is not being dealt with to provide one side or another political advantage, but rather is being done in order to learn some lessons so that we move forward in an effective way.

And the last point I just want to emphasize, as I said yesterday at the CIA when I visited, what makes America special in my view is not just our wealth and the dynamism of our economy and our extraordinary history and diversity. It's that we are willing to uphold our ideals even when they're hard. And sometimes we make mistakes because that's the nature of human enterprise. But when we do make mistakes, then we are willing to go back and correct those mistakes and keep our eye on those ideals and values that have been passed on generation to generation.

And that is what has to continue to guide us as we move forward. And I'm confident that we will be able to move forward, protect the American people effectively, and live up to our values and ideals. And that's not a matter of being naive about how dangerous this world is. As I said yesterday to some of the CIA officials that I met with, I wake up every day thinking about how to keep the American people safe, and I go to bed every night worrying about keeping the American people safe.

I've got a lot of other things on my plate. I've got a big banking crisis, and I've got unemployment numbers that are very high, and we've got an auto industry that needs work. There are a whole things—range of things that during the day occupy me, but the thing that I consider my most profound obligation is keeping the American people safe.

So I do not take these things lightly, and I am not in any way under illusion about how difficult the task is for those people who are on the frontlines every day protecting the American people. So I wanted to communicate a message yesterday to all those who overwhelmingly do so in a lawful, dedicated fashion that I have their back.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:23 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Queen Rania of Jordan; George J. Mitchell, U.S. Special Envoy for

Middle East Peace; Prime Minster Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini-Khamenei and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran; and Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. A reporter referred to journalist Roxana Saberi.

*Categories:* Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Jordan, King Abdullah II.

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