
U.S. Policy in the Middle East

By

Edward P. Djerejian
Assistant Secretary of State
for Near East Affairs

[The following is a reprint of a statement which Mr. Djerejian presented to the Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington, DC, on March 9, 1993. The text was originally published in *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, March 15, 1993, pp. 149-152.]

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to meet again with you and the distinguished members of the subcommittee. As you know, Secretary Christopher returned 11 days ago from his first journey outside the United States as Secretary of State, a trip that took us to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Cyprus, Lebanon, [and] Israel; to Geneva, where he met with Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev; and, finally, to Brussels for meetings with the North Atlantic Council.

President Clinton asked Secretary Christopher to travel to the Middle East with several important objectives in mind:

First, to demonstrate his belief that the Middle East peace process presented an opportunity for real progress in the period ahead and, conversely, to signal our awareness that this is a region which, if left unattended, can do much harm to vital U.S. interests; [and]

Second, to promote other important objectives of our policy, namely:

- Concern about human rights and broader political participation in the region;
- Promotion of American business and commercial opportunities abroad and the need to end the secondary and tertiary aspects of the Arab economic boycott;
- Reassurance to allies that we would expect Iraq's full compliance with all UN Security Council resolutions; (and)
- Recognition of the importance we attach to Lebanon's continuing to make progress toward full independence and economic recovery.

The Secretary returned from the trip satisfied that we made some progress on these issues, which enables us to move forward in meeting these objectives in the period ahead.

With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to briefly review for the subcommittee the status of our relations and interests in the Middle East following the Secretary's trip, after which I will be happy to take your questions. I will endeavor to bring you up to date on the peace process, on our bilateral relations with some of the countries in the region, on our efforts to maintain peace and stability in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, and on broader concerns such as our economic and commercial interests and the prospects for democracy and human rights.

PEACE PROCESS

On the peace process: since the eighth round of bilaterals adjourned in mid-December [1992], there has been a hiatus in the negotiations. President Clinton sent Secretary Christopher to the Middle East last month not only to re-energize and reactivate the peace talks but also to assess the determination and commitment of the parties to the goal of a negotiated peace.

The President and Secretary especially wanted to emphasize the commitment of the United States to a full partnership role in this complex and difficult process if, and this is important, the parties come to the table prepared to engage in serious and meaningful negotiations in order to narrow the substantive differences between them.

Much work needs to be done. Not only are the substantive positions between the parties still far apart, but the political environment has been made more difficult by the resurgence of violence directed against Israel by terrorists and by the deportation of *Hamas* activists.

DEPORTEES

The Secretary recognized and acted on the specific challenge of the deportees issue in the earliest days of the new Administration. He engaged in intensive discussions with (Israeli) Prime Minister Rabin to move the issue off dead center.

In this regard, the understandings reached with Israel and announced by Prime Minister Rabin on February 1 and the Security Council's endorsement of the process for carrying out [U.N.] Resolution 799 were positive steps forward to resolve this issue. Further, while the Secretary was in Jerusalem, he worked closely with Prime Minister Rabin and the Palestinians, represented by Faisal Husseini and his colleagues, to determine what more could be done to move the parties to resume negotiations at the earliest possible date. As a result of these close consultations and discussions, more progress was achieved which allowed the Secretary and Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev to announce in Geneva the intention of the co-sponsors to extend invitations to the parties very soon for a ninth round of negotiations in Washington in April.

DISCUSSIONS WITH ARAB LEADERS

The Secretary's discussions with Arab leaders were positive and substantive. Each of them emphasized privately their commitment to the negotiating process and their strong intent to return to the table of negotiations as soon as possible. Equally important, each said the same thing publicly and, thus, placed their countries squarely behind an early resumption of the bilateral negotiations.

In delivering letters to each of the leaders from President Clinton, the Secretary focused on the key elements of the President's policy:

- The United States remains committed to the process of peacemaking launched at Madrid, including the terms of reference for the negotiations and the letters of assurances provided by the U.S. Government to each party.
- Our policy remains directed at the achievement of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement, achieved through direct negotiations based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.
- The United States is prepared to play an active role to help narrow and overcome substantive differences if, as I stated earlier, the parties, on their part, are prepared to come to the table and engage in meaningful negotiations. In playing this role, which the Secretary

characterized as "full partner," he stressed that in no way would we substitute ourselves for the parties themselves; but, rather, we would assist the parties who are engaged in direct, face-to-face negotiations as an active intermediary—an honest broker and facilitator—in helping to move the talks forward and to narrow substantive differences.

The parties appreciated the continuity in U.S. policy which this approach indicated; they were buoyed by the willingness of the United States to play a more active role they indicated their understanding that such a role would not substitute for the direct talks between themselves.

DISCUSSIONS WITH ISRAELIS AND PALESTINIANS

The Secretary's talks in Israel on a range of bilateral, regional, and peace process issues benefited from his previous engagement with Prime Minister Rabin in arranging the process for dealing with the deportations issue. Through that effort, a positive relationship was begun, characterized by mutual trust and personal rapport that, as a result of this visit, has intensified and provides an excellent basis for Prime Minister Rabin's meeting with President Clinton this month.

The Secretary's discussions with Palestinian leaders were also frank and substantive. The Palestinians expressed their continued concerns about the human rights situation in the occupied territories, and there was an extensive discussion of issues involving the negotiations on interim self-government arrangements and final status talks.

After these detailed exchanges with both Israelis and Palestinians, we left the region persuaded that there was broad agreement in principle on the steps that were needed to restart the peace negotiations. In sum, the Secretary's trip allowed us to refocus the parties on resuming the negotiations and to sensitize the parties that it is time to delve into substance and that the United States will be there to assist them to reach agreements.

BILATERAL RELATIONS

A primary aim of the Secretary in undertaking his trip was to get to know the region's leaders, to listen and to learn of their concerns, and to establish good personal relationships that would facilitate the conduct of our formal bilateral relations. In this respect, we were very encouraged by the results.

Egypt. In Cairo, the Secretary renewed the friendship and cooperative relationship the United States has enjoyed with Egypt for many years. Recognizing the "pivotal role" Egypt plays in the region, the Secretary saluted Egypt's invaluable leadership under President Mubarak in the search for peace and expressed his appreciation for the "wise counsel" proffered by Egypt's leaders on issues of mutual concern.

Jordan. In Jordan, the Secretary noted substantial progress toward democratization and King Hussein's commitment to [the] protection of human rights. Jordan is taking concrete steps toward economic reform and a strengthened free market economy. Of course, Jordan has been a key participant in the peace process, and we look forward to its continued positive role. King Hussein also assured the Secretary that Jordan would continue to adhere to U.N. sanctions against Iraq. To support Jordan's positive role in the peace process and its adherence to U.N. sanctions, we will recommend soon to the Secretary that he release [to Jordan] the remaining \$50 million in FY 1992 security assistance funds. We will, of course, discuss our plans with you and other Members of Congress before disbursement.

Syria. In Damascus, the Secretary consulted extensively with President Assad on the peace process and a wide range of bilateral issues. The Syrian President assured the Secretary that he

remains firmly committed to the peace process and to re-engaging as soon as possible in the next round of bilateral negotiations.

The Secretary also established with the Syrians the basis for continuing our dialogue to address high-priority bilateral concerns, including terrorism, narcotics, and human rights, with a view toward obtaining positive results. In this latter respect, the Secretary raised the issue of Syrian Jewry, and President Assad reconfirmed his decision to allow Syrian Jews full freedom of travel. Secretary Christopher also made clear the importance we continue to attach to the redeployment of Syrian forces in Lebanon.

Lebanon. The Secretary identified as one of his objectives the recognition of the progress achieved by the Lebanese Government in reconciling and reconstructing that war-torn nation. His dramatic visit to Beirut—the first by an American Secretary of State since 1983—underscored our continuing support for Lebanon's efforts to restore its economy and to regain full control of its territory and its political independence and was welcomed by the Lebanese leadership—President Hraoui, Prime Minister Hariri, and Foreign Minister Buouez—as a powerful symbol of the U.S. commitment to Lebanon.

We continue to support full implementation of both the letter and the spirit of the Taif accord and the withdrawal of all non-Lebanese forces from Lebanon, and the Secretary made this clear during his trip.

In Lebanon, a key to the extension of government authority throughout the country is the maintenance of strong Lebanese armed forces. The Lebanese army has traditionally sought training for many of its soldiers in the West, including in the United States. It remains our hope that we can resume accepting a number of Lebanese officers and enlisted personnel for training in this country under the IMET [International Military Education and Training] program, and we would appreciate Congress' support in this endeavor.

Israel. Upon his arrival in Israel, Secretary Christopher reconfirmed the special relationship, based on shared democratic values and common interests, that exists between Israel and the United States. Citing President Clinton's determination to make the ties binding our two countries "even stronger and more resilient," the Secretary also reaffirmed the United States' unalterable commitment to Israel's security and its qualitative military edge, a commitment based on our recognition of Israel's continuing security challenges.

The Secretary observed that real security for Israel can only be brought about by real peace—not just the absence of war but peace reflected in lasting treaties, normalized relations, and genuine reconciliation with her neighbors and with the Palestinians. To that end, and recognizing that obstacles still existed, he reiterated the U.S. commitment to the role of full partner in a reinvigorated peace process.

GULF SECURITY

Turning now to the Persian Gulf, we continue to work on two fronts to assure the security of this economically vital region. Those two fronts are our continuing efforts to encourage and help provide a credible defense of our friends and allies on the Arabian Peninsula, and the full enforcement of U.N. resolutions on Iraq.

The Arabian Peninsula. In helping provide for the defense of the Gulf states, it must first be noted that the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries—allies and important trading partners of the United States—remain vulnerable to aggression from an unrepentant Iraq or a rearmed and ideologically assertive Iran. Secretary Christopher reaffirmed the U.S. position on

Gulf security when he told the Saudi and Kuwaiti leaders that, "President Clinton's commitment to the security of friends in the Gulf, like that of every President since Franklin Roosevelt, is firm and constant." As you know, the U.S. Government has encouraged regional security cooperation and collective defense arrangements within the GCC and has been engaged in our own bilateral security agreements with the individual Gulf states. Further, we have made arms sales to those states to satisfy their legitimate defense needs.

Iraq. The Baghdad Government has lately been trying to convince anyone who will listen that it seeks a more amicable relationship with the Clinton Administration and that there is no longer any reason for the United Nations to retain sanctions against Iraq. This has been characterized as Iraq's "charm offensive." Let me make clear, as President Clinton and Secretary Christopher already have, that we are not charmed. Iraq must comply with all U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In his semi-annual report to Congress on the Iraq sanctions, released just 3 weeks ago [*Dispatch*, Vol. 4, No. 8, p. 97], President Clinton reaffirmed the continuity of our policy toward Iraq. He noted that the Iraqi regime's continued refusal to accept the U.N. resolutions has perpetuated the suffering of the Iraqi people. The President stressed that Iraq must fully comply with the U.N. resolutions, which mandate an end to repression of the Iraqi people as well as measures designed to achieve the security of Iraq's neighbors, before the lifting of economic sanctions can be considered. Recent incidents of Iraqi threats against U.N. helicopters are further examples of Iraq's non-compliance with the most basic of its obligations—to permit full and free access to U.N. inspectors seeking to destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs and to establish long-term monitoring of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities.

In Riyadh [Saudi Arabia] and Kuwait 2 weeks ago, the Secretary stressed yet again the importance the Clinton Administration attaches to the full implementation of all U.N. resolutions on Iraq and of implementing the means chosen by the coalition to do so. He emphasized that "we bear no ill will to the suffering people of Iraq The pain inflicted on the Iraqi people is the responsibility of Saddam Hussein's regime." In fact, we continue to fund relief programs in northern Iraq to support U.N. efforts to establish relief in central and southern Iraq, and to support the recent recommendations of U.N. Special Representative Max van der Stoep that the United Nations should station human rights monitors throughout Iraq.

We also support the work of the opposition Iraqi National Congress to draw all Iraqis into the creation of a future and, hopefully, democratic regime that can allow the Iraqi people to live in peace. A future Iraqi Government which is representative of all the people of Iraq, which is committed to the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq, and which does not threaten its neighbors or its own people remains a key U.S. foreign policy goal.

Mr. Chairman, the message is clear: No one should doubt the continued and undiminished resolve of the U.S. Government under the leadership of President Clinton to see that the will of the international community, as defined by the U.N. Security Council, is heeded and fully complied with.

ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL INTERESTS

The United States has important economic and commercial interests in the Middle East, and especially in the Gulf region, which we continue to pursue actively. Throughout his trip, the Secretary raised with several of his interlocutors the Administration's support for U.S. companies that are bidding on significant local contracts. Regarding American business interests in Saudi Arabia, I am pleased to report that, as Secretary [of Defense] Aspin has written to you, we are achieving progress in resolving a number of the commercial disputes with that country.

Several have been concluded recently, and Saudi Ambassador Bandar is working to conclude agreements with the remaining claimants. We will continue our strong efforts in this regard.

During his visit, the Secretary strongly urged the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to work to eliminate the Arab League boycott of Israel. Since the Gulf war, these countries have quietly reduced enforcement of the boycott against American companies. The Secretary emphasized clearly that more needs to be done, however. We continue to press Arab states hard to end these anachronistic measures, and we have urged immediate action to eliminate the secondary and tertiary aspects of the boycott, especially as they affect American companies. We are also working with our trading partners, and the European Community and Japan have both made their own demarches.

DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND ISLAM

I have previously mentioned, Mr. Chairman, that we have been encouraged to see concrete steps being taken toward expanding political participation in a number of Arab countries. During his trip, Secretary Christopher applauded [Jordanian] King Hussein's ongoing process of democratization and, in Kuwait, the reinstatement of its parliament. He encouraged the Kuwaiti Government's consideration of expanding suffrage and specifically raised the right of women to vote in Kuwaiti elections. We also note that Yemen is scheduled to hold its first-ever parliamentary elections in late April, and we are encouraging the Yemenis in this effort. We have encouraged American bipartisan and non-governmental organization observers to be present during the polling, with the endorsement of the Government of Yemen. In keeping with Muslim tradition, the other Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, are in the process of creating or reviving appointed consultative councils, which is a step toward broader political participation. As Secretary Christopher stated before his visit, we hope the respective governments will move forward on these intentions and will use these councils to provide broader and more formal public access to and participation in the process of governance.

Several of the region's governments are struggling to cope with rhetorical, political, and sometimes violent challenges justified on the basis of religious precepts. While we recognize the seriousness of some of these challenges and have stated our position on Islamic and extremist groups in the speech I gave at Meridian House last June—and which you were kind enough to enter into the *Congressional Record*—we call on all concerned—secular or religious activists and governments alike—to practice the respect for human rights, pluralism, and tolerance of others inherent in the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. These are values we Americans cherish and, without attempting to impose our own model on other governments, these are values we are convinced will well serve the peoples of this turbulent region.