Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary William Hague and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton press conference

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SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON: Good afternoon.

And let me again welcome the foreign secretary here to Washington and to the State Department. It is a special pleasure to see him at the end of a year in which we cooperated so closely and constructively together. We've had a very robust shared calendar as we've tackled these global challenges every single day of this entire year, it seems. And we've met on many previous occasions, both bilaterally and then through a multitude of multilateral engagements. So it's good to review and look forward at this time of year.

We will be meeting again, we've already concluded, numerous times in the first half of next year. And obviously, we have a lot to talk about whenever we do meet.

Our meeting today reflected a wide array of shared concerns and challenges, including the economic crisis in Europe, the embassy attack on the U.K. embassy in Iran, the transition in Afghanistan, the situation in Pakistan, the evolving situations in Burma, North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans and so much more. We lost track of all of the matters which we went over today.

We naturally discussed the decisions regarding Europe's debt crisis, and we have a – as we've said many times, a great stake in a speedy resolution. We support efforts to enact pro-growth reforms, and we will continue to work closely with our European partners.

We discussed the ongoing efforts to press the Iranian government to meet all of its international obligations. The attack on the British embassy was an affront not only to the British people, but to the international community. Governments owe a duty to protect diplomatic lives and property, and we expect the government of Iran to do just that, both inside and outside of Iran. That is why we strongly supported the U.N. General Assembly's resolution deploring the plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here in Washington, and we're working together on additional sanctions and the great work that the foreign minister and the government of U.K. has done with us at the IAEA to express nearly unanimous concern about Iran's nuclear program.

Afghanistan was a big part of the discussion today, following up on our meetings in Bonn and the ISAF meeting in Brussels, at NATO. The British and American men and women of our armed forces have literally stood and fought side by side and have reversed the Taliban momentum on the battlefields.

And our diplomats and development experts have likewise stood shoulder to shoulder to try to help the people of Afghanistan realize a better future.

As we talk about transitioning security, we look very clearly at the goal that was set at the Lisbon summit. This transition is a new phase of support for Afghanistan, not the end of our commitment. And we will stay very closely connected as we move through this period as well.

I welcome the news that the foreign secretary will be going to Burma. I think we have a real opportunity, through sustained diplomacy, to test the new government and to work toward the resolution of outstanding problems that prevent that country from achieving its rightful place in the community of nations for the 21st century. And there's a very clear path forward if they wish to follow it.

We of course discussed the Middle East and in particular Syria. We've worked closely together to increase the pressure on the Assad regime. We welcome the recent action by the Arab League. I met with members of the Syrian opposition last week. We encourage other Arab leaders to meet with them as well, and continue our support for peaceful protest and reform inside Syria.

And we compared notes on the parliamentary elections in Egypt. The Egyptian people are justifiably proud to begin the process of choosing their new leaders.

We urge the Egyptian authorities to ensure that free and fair voting continues through the next election rounds and that there be a steady transition toward a new civilian government. And at the same time, we call upon the continued protection of peaceful protesters and holding those accountable for previous incidents of violence.

So this is just a snapshot of our very lengthy and substantive conversation.

So, again, Foreign Secretary, welcome back to Washington.

FOREIGN SECRETARY WILLIAM HAGUE: Well, thank you very much, indeed.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a great pleasure, as always, to be here in Washington with Secretary Clinton. The United States of America is our closest and our indispensable ally in foreign policy. And as ever, we've had a good meetings of minds, as we discussed this very broad range of challenges that we face.

As everyone knows, we've had in 2011 a momentous year in world affairs, and I think we've risen to these challenges with confidence. Our joint efforts in Libya, for instance, to save lives, benefited from the seamless cooperation in diplomacy and in defense which is one of the distinctive hallmarks of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

2012 is set to throw up challenges in foreign policy that could be more demanding and complex still, and we must be ready for those. Britain is determined to play its full part, alongside the United States, standing shoulder to shoulder and building on our shared values, our sense of common purpose, our mutual resolve.

As you've heard from Secretary Clinton, our discussions today have ranged over a very wide range of subjects. We've discussed the economic situation in Europe, in particular in the eurozone.

And in the United Kingdom, as our prime minister has said in Parliament today, we want to see the eurozone stabilized. That involves far more than simply greater medium-term fiscal integration, important though that is. The markets want to be assured that the – that the fire wall is big enough for the eurozone and that banks are adequately recapitalized, that the – that countries like Greece have adequately dealt with their problems.

We cannot sign a European treaty that does not give adequate protection to the single market in Europe, but we're not changing our relationship with the European Union. And we will work with our European partners over the coming months on the need for the EU to remove barriers to trade, to complete the single market, to conclude free trade agreements around the world. These remain the most important way for Europe to compete and address economic problems and generate essential growth.

As you've heard, we share a growing concern with the United States about the situation in Syria and the deplorable violence orchestrated by the regime. We welcome the continued efforts of the Arab League and call on the international community to unite in its condemnation of events in Syria.

Our talks reaffirmed our countries' close understanding of the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. I particularly thank Secretary Clinton for her robust support over the recent attacks on our embassy in Tehran, and we shared our latest thinking on the expansion of sanctions against Iran. This includes European Union consideration of measures against the Iranian energy sector as part of the pressure on Iran to return to negotiations over its nuclear ambitions.

We discussed the Middle East peace process and the need for a return to negotiations that cannot safely be delayed.

I briefed Secretary Clinton on our preparations for the London conference on Somalia in February. We need a stronger international approach to the crisis there and to seize the opportunity now to address the root causes of terrorism and stability, piracy. We will spend a lot of time and attention on this in the early months of 2012 and see it as a key priority for next year, and I look forward to continuing to work with Secretary Clinton on this.

We reviewed progress on Afghanistan in the light of the Bonn conference, which we both attended last week. Ten years on, great strides have been made. Our goal now is to consolidate them so that the Afghan people can take control of their own security from 2014, and Britain will continue to work closely with the U.S. and with our other partners in Afghanistan as we work towards the very important Chicago summit to be held in May.

We've discussed the protests that we've seen in recent days in Moscow. It's clearly important that the – that the Russian government investigates the allegations of alleged abuses, and we welcome the commitment of President Medvedev to do so.

And we also agreed the international community must show strategic patience in the western Balkans, which Secretary Clinton has rightfully described as unfinished business, and we strongly support that region's integration within Euro-Atlantic structures and the resolution of outstanding issues. We share a common commitment to the territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a single, sovereign state, and we discussed ways in which we can intensify our efforts, working with the office of the high representative, the European Union and other nations, to help that country turn a new page in 2012.

We've discussed our diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region and the United States announcements about the region in recent weeks.

And in that regard, I particularly welcome Secretary Clinton's recent visit to Burma. Our common objective is to see political freedom in Burma, and constructive engagement which helps further that goal is very important.

I will visit Burma in early January, and we will remain in close contact with the U.S. on this issue, as on all the other issues that I've mentioned, in the coming months.

In all of these areas, Britain doesn't have a more important ally than the United States, and I look forward to all our work together over the coming year that is as effective and durable in its consequences as it has been this year and in so many other years before it.

Thank you very much, indeed.

SEC. CLINTON: Thank you.

STAFF: (Off mic) – from BBC – (off mic).

Q: Thank you. Two questions for you. First, Secretary Hague, I know you've just said that the U.K. is not changing its relationship with the EU, but do you believe that the British government's decision on the eurozone diminishes Britain's influence in Europe, and perhaps in the world?

And a question for both of you: Secretary Hague, you also just said that you welcome the investigation into the allegations of fraud in the elections in Russia. Do you trust – do you both trust that the results will be what is required, and will it allay the concerns of the protesters? What do you think the Russian authorities should do beyond an investigation to address those concerns?

SEC. HAGUE: Well, on the – taking the second question first, of course, that will depend on the investigation and what it produces and how it is conducted. It's important that such investigations take place. So I think it is right, as I've said, to welcome the willingness of the Russian government to do that. Clearly, as nations that believe in democracy and freedom of speech, in political freedom, we want to see such investigation take place as transparently and as fully as possible.

But I think it – it's impossible to judge them in advance.

On the question of the (European ?) – and no, no, I don't agree with the – with the thrust of your question. On all of the issues that we've just been describing, all the foreign policy issues and dealing with Iran and pressure on Syria, on how to take forward the Middle East peace process, the European Union is an important player, a very important player in the world. And in those – in determining the European Union attitude on all of those issues, the United Kingdom plays an absolutely central and leading role. We also do so in pushing forward the single market in Europe, in championing free trade agreements such as the one we signed with South Korea earlier this year.

And all of that continues. That doesn't change because we choose not to participate in one set of arrangements which are not adequate for it. That's not a new thing to do. The United Kingdom did not join the euro, and we're pleased we did not join the euro. We're not part of the Schengen border (agreement ?), and we're very satisfied that we're not. Europe can develop in a way in which there are overlapping circles of decision-making. And not every nation has to participate in everything. But that doesn't alter our central role in driving forward European policy on a whole range of subjects that I've just described.

SEC. CLINTON: I would just add to what William already said about Russia. We were pleased that the protests yesterday were peaceful. We think that's a very good sign. There were dozens of them across the country. And the fact that the government has announced that it is wiling to investigate allegations of fraud and manipulation associated with the

December 4th Duma elections is a good sign and a reassuring position for the Russian people.

But the proof is in the pudding. We'll wait and see how they conduct such an investigation, what the consequences are. They have a good road map coming from the OSCE, which has set forth a number of recommendations.

So we are – we're supportive of the announcement of investigations, and now we hope that it will be followed through on.

STAFF: Next question, Mike Evans, London Times.

Q: (Off mic) – Evans from The Times. Last week an American journal (sic) in Baghdad said that he wasn't sure what would happen in Iraq after the last American troops have left. After December the 31st your own department, Madam Secretary, will be, as it were, in charge of American interests in Baghdad and in Iraq. How confident are you that Iraq is going to turn into the sort of country perhaps you had in mind when this all began?

SEC. CLINTON: Well, we have been having very intensive discussions with President – with Prime Minister Maliki and various ministers of his government starting last night, going through into the morning in the Oval Office with the president. And we certainly are looking forward to a normal relationship between two sovereign countries.

The outline for our actions was set prior to this administration coming into office in 2008, when the Bush administration agreed that our military presence would end at the end of this year. That is going to happen. We hope, in fact, that our troops will be out in time for Christmas. And then we will be taking on a case-by-case basis requests for additional assistance, of which there are many, coming from the Iraqis.

Certainly in the security and the military training arena, there is quite a long list of requests. And we are looking forward to evaluating those and fulfilling them wherever possible. We are going to be working on police training, which is getting under way. We have a number of agreements that have been worked on under the strategic framework that was adopted back in 2008.

So we're on – we're on the path to meet our commitment to withdraw all U.S. military personnel, even as we maintain a robust civilian presence under State Department leadership that will include diplomats, business and development experts, security assistance experts, law enforcement officers and others from civilian agencies across the United States government. They will be working out of our embassy in Baghdad, out of our consulates general in Erbil and Basra, our diplomatic presence in Kirkuk, and they will be protected, as our civilians are in many places in the world, by contracted security personnel. That's a very common practice.

So again last night and today, our Iraqi partners made clear that they want a relationship that is deeper and broader than a military relationship, and we are working to achieve that.

STAFF: (Off mic.)

Q: Thank you. Madam Secretary, if I could follow up on Iraq, was there any resolution in your meetings about the fate of the last detainee in –

SEC. CLINTON: I can't hear you.

Q: I'm sorry, I'll repeat it. Was there any resolution in your meetings with the (Iraqis ?) on the fate of the last detainee, Ali Mussa Daqduq?

And if I could ask you both, on Iran: With the drone crash, the attack on the embassy, the various assassinations, the explosion at a missile factory recently, with the IAEA findings, is there a risk now that our countries are lurching toward some sort of confrontation with Iran?

And specifically, Madam Secretary, the Senate has voted to expand U.S. sanctions to include the Iranian central bank. Where do you stand on the negotiations?

Thank you.

SEC. CLINTON: Well, Steven (sp), first, you know, with respect to actions regarding Iran, we are very clearly making known our concerns. You know, we submitted a formal request for the return of our lost equipment, as we would in any situation to any government around the world. Given Iran's behavior to date, we do not expect them to comply.

But we are dealing with all of these provocations and concerning actions taken by Iran in close concert with our closest allies and partners, starting with the U.K.

We obviously believe strongly in a diplomatic approach. We want to see the Iranians engage. And as you know, we have attempted to bring about that engagement over the course of the last three-plus years. It has not proven effective, but we're not giving up on it.

And with respect to any actions on further sanctions, we have been very tough. And not only did we work hard to get international sanctions through the United Nations, but we, along with close partners like the U.K., like the EU and others, have applied additional sanctions, and we will continue to do so. I'm not going to telegraph where, when and how. But our view is that the path that Iran seems to be going down is a dangerous one for themselves and for the region, and the danger is compounded, on top of their provocation, their deliberate support for terrorism in many places, by their continuing pursuit of a nuclear weapon. So it's something that the world has to respond to, and I think we've been quite effective in doing so.

With respect to your first question, that is still a matter of discussion between us and the Iraqis.

SEC. HAGUE: And on Iran, as Hillary says, we're not giving up on engagement with Iran. But on a number of occasions, Iran has behaved in a way in recent weeks and months which have intensified confrontation with the rest of the world. We have seen in the plots to assassinate the Saudi ambassador here and the invasion of the British Embassy compound in Tehran – we've seen an increasing predilection for dangerous and illegal adventures on the part of at least part of the Iranian regime. It may not be the work of a united Iranian regime, but from at least part of the Iranian regime such actions have been sanctioned.

And so we will increase the peaceful, legitimate pressure on Iran. We see that not as confrontation, but as a necessary response to the – in particular, to the nuclear program. We adopted in the European Union 10 days ago sanctions on an additional 180 individuals and entities.

We will expand those sanctions further, or we intend to do so, at the end of January, with tougher sanctions on the financial sector, on the energy and transport sectors from the European Union as a whole.

And so we will continue to intensify that pressure while Iran's nuclear program continues with no adequate explanation of a peaceful purpose.

STAFF: Last question – (name and affiliation off mic).

Q: Madam Secretary, can I just ask you, does Britain's new position in Europe concern you, especially given the historic bridge that the U.K. has offered between Europe and the U.S.?

SEC. CLINTON: I have to say it does not. I think that the role that the U.K. has played in Europe will continue. And we of course welcome that.

And our concern has not been over the position that the U.K. has taken, it's whether the decisions made by other members of the eurozone countries within the EU will work. And we want to encourage that. We've – we are very hopeful and supportive that this latest set of actions will send the right signals and have the results that are being sought.

So I separate out the economic issues – which, as William said, the U.K. has never been a party to the euro, so that's not something that's particularly going to change – from the political work that we do almost every day with the U.K. and with the EU. So I don't see any spillover there, at my view.

STAFF: Thank you very much.

SEC. CLINTON: Thank you.

SEC. HAGUE: Thank you.

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