Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary press conference with French Foreign Minister

2013-08-21

Thank you very much indeed, Laurent. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

It's a huge pleasure to be here with Laurent Fabius tonight and I'm grateful for his invitation to have these discussions here and I pay tribute to him and to the close work that we do together across a whole range of international issues.

I think the Foreign and Defence policy cooperation between France and the United Kingdom is as close as it has ever been at any point in our history and that's something we strongly believe in in the British government. It's true in our cooperation not only on the subjects that Laurent has mentioned tonight, but also on preventing nuclear proliferation. We work closely together on issues such as Iran's nuclear programme. On issues in Africa where I pay tribute to the work of the French government on Mali, helping to bring stability to Mali and the surrounding area where we have supported France's initiatives just as they supported our initiatives on Somalia at the other end of Africa.

So, we work closely together but foremost in our minds today as you have heard is the situation in various parts of the Middle-East: we have heard about a terrible act in Syria which may have involved the deaths of many hundreds, possibly as you have heard, more than a thousand people. Of course, the facts of this are still coming in. The reports of this are still coming in.

But the United Kingdom and France called immediately for an urgent meeting of the Security Council that is about to take place; and we hope that the UN team in Damascus will be given immediate access to this area, unrestricted access to try to establish the truth. There is no reason for them not to be given access to an area not many miles from where they are doing their work now on the North East side of Damascus. This is where these events have taken place. So I hope the other members of the Security Council will join us in pressing strongly for that and I hope this will wake up some who have supported the Assad regime to realize its murderous and barbaric nature: a government that cares so little for the lives of the people of its own country.

We've also been working hard today as you have heard in Brussels on the situation in Egypt, where we have agreed a good position with all of our EU colleagues. That is a position that

supports democratic institutions in Egypt rather than individuals or parties and that is why we've condemned disproportionate violence from security forces, but also condemned attacks on churches and hospitals by those opposed to the authorities and it is why we support political dialogue in Egypt and we left the door open for European countries and the European Union to support that dialogue in the future.

And of course, we want to keep faith with the great majority of people in Egypt who simply want a stable, prosperous, and free future. And so, we will continue to assist those people and not do anything that harms the people of Egypt as they try to bring about a better future for their country.

So, this is what we have been discussing today and some of the things we will discuss tonight, and I'm grateful as always for the strong cooperation of Laurent Fabius and his team here.

Thank you.

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