Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Secretary and US Secretary of State press conference

2013-02-25

Speaking at the press conference today in London, Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

“It is a great honour to welcome the 68th Secretary of State of the United States of America, John Kerry, to London today and to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

“Secretary Kerry, we are delighted that you chose the United Kingdom as your first destination overseas.

“My own first visit as Foreign Secretary was to the United States, and each day, and often each hour since then, I have witnessed the importance of our indispensable alliance. When the US and UK act together we make a powerful difference in world affairs, and our partnership in diplomacy, intelligence and defence has no equal in the world.

“Secretary Kerry and I have met many times in recent years - and recent months - but this visit is my first opportunity to welcome him as Secretary of State, and to pay tribute to the immense experience he brings to his new role.

“We have had detailed and very thorough talks covering the full range of global affairs. Top of our agenda was the Middle East, including the importance we both attach to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and I welcome the focus he has brought to bear on this issue since his appointment. There is no more urgent foreign policy priority in 2013 than restarting negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. The region and the world cannot afford the current dangerous impasse in the peace process. For if we do not make progress very soon, then the two-state solution could become impossible to achieve. So there is a burning need for the international community to revive the peace process in efforts led by the United States and supported by European, Arab and other nations. And my promise to Secretary Kerry today was that the United Kingdom will make every effort to mobilise the European Union and Arab states behind decisive moves for peace.

“I warmly welcome President Obama’s planned visit to the Middle East this Spring, and indeed Secretary Kerry’s own travel to the region shortly.

“The Secretary and I will both attend the Rome meeting of the Friends of Syria this week. An appalling injustice is being done to the people of Syria, which the world cannot ignore. So we

discussed the vital need for a political transition, and our firm support for UN and Arab League Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi. We agreed that for as long as a political solution to the conflict is blocked off, the international community has a responsibility to take steps to help prevent the loss of life in Syria. This includes the terrible loss of life in Aleppo. That is why in the United Kingdom we believe we must significantly increase our support for the Syrian opposition, on top of our large contributions to the humanitarian relief effort, and we are preparing to do just that. In the face of such murder and threat our policy cannot stay static as the weeks go by.

“Our two countries agree that Iran’s nuclear programme poses a threat to peace and security of the whole world. Talks between the E3+3 and Iran will take place in Kazakhstan tomorrow. We approach these talks in good faith. However Iran should not doubt our resolve to ensure that nuclear proliferation in the Middle East is prevented.

“2013 will be an important year for Afghanistan, where US and UK troops continue to stand shoulder to shoulder. I briefed the Secretary on the recent meeting between Pakistan and Afghan leaders hosted at Chequers by the Prime Minister, and we discussed the progress we will work for in the year ahead.

“We agreed on the need to continue a robust, intelligent response to the threat from international terrorism, including in North Africa and the Sahel. We reviewed the situation in Mali, and indeed in Somalia, where a coordinated effort by the international community with African nations has led to significant progress on the ground. And I updated the Secretary on our second conference on Somalia in London in May, which will support the rebuilding of Somalia’s armed forces, police, coastguard, justice system and public finances.

“We also discussed the UK’s priorities for our Presidency of the G8, in the areas of trade and tax and transparency. I look forward to hosting the Foreign Ministers, to focus not only on immediate foreign policy threats, but also longer-term challenges including the need to shatter the culture of impunity for those who use rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war - which is my personal priority for the G8 work this year.

“Finally, we reiterate our commitment to a transatlantic Free Trade Agreement, which would not only support jobs and growth in Europe and the US but would be a much-needed boost to the world economy. I welcome President Obama’s endorsement and proposal of a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. For just as our strategic cooperation on foreign policy is intense, so are our economic links. We have almost one trillion dollars invested in each other’s economies, supporting over 1 million jobs in both countries, and the US is the largest single investor in the UK.

“So these have been excellent and productive discussions, which bode extremely well for even closer cooperation between our two countries.

“I look forward to working with Secretary Kerry over the coming months and years, and now warmly invite him to make his remarks.”

US Secretary of State John Kerry said:

“Well thank you very, very much Mr Foreign Secretary. Good afternoon to everybody. I want to thank the Foreign Secretary for the tremendous hospitality that he has shown me here today and my team. And I also appreciated enormously the opportunity earlier to be able to meet with Prime Minister Cameron over breakfast.

“It is always a great pleasure for me to be able to visit London and it is no accident for sure that this is the first stop on my trip as Secretary of State. I came here many, many years ago as a young child, managed to get lost in London Zoo. I want to thank somebody for finding me and this, this day I must say was made much easier and it was impossible for me to get lost Mr Secretary thank you.

“I am particularly pleased to be able to be here with the remarkable partner that is the United Kingdom. When you think of everything that binds the United States and Great Britain, our common values, our long shared history, our ties of family – in my case personal – and friendship, there is a reason why we call this the, the special relationship or as President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron wrote really a partnership of the heart. It is that. And in the Twentieth Century our countries fought for freedom side by side and fought for survival together in war. We thrived together in peace and we stood together time and time again in order to meet the world’s great challenges.

“In the Twenty First Century we may face new and a more complex set of challenges, but I absolutely know Mr Foreign Secretary that we face them together just as we did in the last century and together it is absolutely clear that our partnership remains stronger than ever.

“As the Foreign Secretary made clear we discussed a very full agenda today that reflects the many benefits and the relationships that bring both of our peoples and the world together from countering terrorism to creating jobs, to advancing our shared values and that is no small endeavour or commitment. We discussed our agreement, I think an historic agreement in its beginnings and hopefully historic when we accomplish it and that is to start the work on a US EU transatlantic trade and investment partnership to grow prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic. It is no secret that we both face economic challenges, we all do in this new market place in a global challenged market place. The fact is that Europe free standing alone is the largest economy in the world and when you join that together with the United States of America we have a powerful ability to be able to affect the rules of the road and to be able to raise standards and most importantly create jobs for all of our people.

“Europe is already America’s largest trading partner and this agreement will create more jobs for additional investment and as you know earlier this month President Obama made it clear

this is a top priority for the United States.

“We also discussed the responsibility that we share to support fragile democracies across the world, across the Maghreb from Libya to Tunisia and beyond. I say to our friends here in the United Kingdom it is in our mutual interest to see that these fledgling democracies flourish and I want to thank William for his personal and important leadership that the UK is showing in marshalling the international community’s support for Libya. I think he and the people of the United Kingdom can be proud of their leadership and of those efforts.

“We obviously discussed Syria today and William and I agreed that the Syrian people deserve better than the horrific violence that now invades and threatens their everyday lives, the lives of innocent people, the lives of people who simply want the ability to have their Government be accountable and to be able to be part of the governance of their own lives.

“The Assad regime has rained down rockets on Aleppo in recent days and that is just the latest example of Assad’s brutality. We condemn this indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians and we condemn it in the strongest terms and it is just further evidence that Assad has to go.

“I thank William for the UK effort to help dial up the pressure on the regime for their contributions of humanitarian aid and for hosting the transition conference last month. But let me make clear, we will continue to work closely with our British allies to address the growing humanitarian crisis and to support the Syrian opposition council. We are coordinating with the superior, with the Syrian opposition coalition, we’re coordinating with the UN and with others in order to help get relief to the victims who need that help.

“William and I also today discussed on a couple of occasions Iran’s nuclear programme and tomorrow’s P5 +1 talks with Iran that take place in Kazakhstan. As we’ve said again and again, an Iran with a nuclear weapon in that region and given all that has happened is simply unacceptable and we have stated that they will not obtain a nuclear weapon. President Obama has been crystal clear about this.

“And as we’ve repeatedly made clear the window for a diplomatic solution simply can not by definition remain open for ever. But it is open today, it is open now and there is still time, but there is only time if Iran makes the decision to come to the table and to negotiate in good faith. We are prepared to negotiate in good faith, in mutual respect, in an effort to avoid whatever terrible consequences could follow failure. And so the choice really is in the hands of the Iranians and we hope they will make the right choice.

“We discussed also today our partnership in Afghanistan and I want to thank all of the people of Great Britain who I know been patient and carried this enormous challenge with, with a certain degree of restraint and obviously with a great degree of commitment. We’re grateful to the sacrifices of your people and to the contribution of your remarkable troops. We need to continue to remain in close coordination as we tackle this very important upcoming transition.

“And finally on the Middle East peace process I appreciate deeply William’s and the UK’s unwavering support for that goal. We share a vision as I think people in the world do of two states living side by side in peace and security. Today we talked about how we can support two parties reaching that end because, frankly, that is the only way to achieve a lasting peace.

“So I look forward to continuing to work with William on these and so many other issues including working together on the agenda for the G8 summit later this year, and I might comment I know President Obama is looking forward to his visit to the region in an effort to try to begin to make decisions about the path forward.

“Mr Secretary in the long history of our bi partnership and our collaboration the United States and Great Britain have made our countries both stronger and we’ve made the world more stable and secure. I think we can be proud of that but we also understand and we come here today with a special commitment to the effort to do our work, to make it yet safer and more stable and a place of greater opportunity and peace for all peoples.

“So we look forward to strengthening this relationship in the years to come and I personally thank you for your friendship and look forward to your visiting us in the United States so we can reciprocate.

“Thank you very, very much.”

Further Information

The Foreign Secretary recently announced

UK aid to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Read about the UK policy:

Working for peace and long-term stability in the Middle East and North Africa

Read more about the

UK Presidency of G8

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