

Remarks With United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Hague

Remarks
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United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office
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FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a great pleasure to host my great friend and colleague, John Kerry, here in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office once again.

Of course, we have spent most of our time discussing the crisis in Syria. But I want to begin by paying tribute to Secretary Kerry for his work on the Middle East peace process, which has now led to the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. This is a reminder, amidst all the difficulties of the whole Middle Eastern region, of the progress that effective diplomacy can offer. And I will meet President Abbas here in London later today.

The UK will do all it can to provide support to this process. And I will remain in close touch, as we always do, with Secretary Kerry on this in the coming weeks. Achieving a two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a very, very high priority in foreign affairs, and John Kerry has placed it there and given enormous energy to this in the last few months.

We've discussed all aspects of the crisis in Syria. The position of the United Kingdom, following our parliamentary vote 10 days ago is well known, and the government – as you know, in the government, we fully respect the decision made by the House of Commons. But our objectives and efforts between the UK and the U.S. remain closely aligned in four areas in particular: first, working to create the conditions for a Geneva 2 peace process that can lead to a transitional government in Syria; secondly, addressing the desperate humanitarian situation; third, supporting the moderate Syrian opposition and saving lives on the ground; and fourth, mustering a strong international response to the use of chemical weapons.

Our government supports the objective of ensuring there can be no impunity for the first use of chemical warfare in the 21st century. As an international community, we must deter further attacks and hold those responsible for them accountable. We admire the leadership of President Obama and of Secretary Kerry, himself, in making his case so powerfully to the world. This week the European Union, the Arab League, and many of the countries of the G-20 have called for a strong international response. And it is to the credit of the United States that, once again, they are prepared to lead such efforts. They have the full diplomatic support of the United Kingdom. And I welcome the fact that an increasing number of countries have signed up to the joint statement on Syria adopted last week during the G-20 by 11 countries during the G-20, and I urge other countries to do the same.

Secretary Kerry and I share the same revulsion at the utter callousness of a regime that has presided over the deaths of more than 100,000 people and caused more than 2 million to become refugees, among them a million children. The Prime Minister announced an

additional 52 million pounds in humanitarian assistance last week, bringing our total to 400 million pounds. The United Kingdom will be working intensively over the coming weeks, including at the UN, to try to secure unfettered access for aid inside Syria, and to address the aid shortfall, working closely with the United States, which is working, leading by example here, as in many other areas.

I briefed Secretary Kerry on the talks we held last week with the presidents and senior leadership of the Syrian National Coalition. There can't be a political solution in Syria if the Assad regime is allowed to eradicate the moderate opposition. So we discussed ways in which we will continue to coordinate our assistance to them, and we reaffirmed our commitment to a Geneva 2 peace conference, which should create a transitional government leading to elections in Syria, and to continuing our diplomacy with Russia to try to bring about the necessary breakthrough.

At its heart, the U.S.-UK special relationship is an alliance of values, values of freedom, of maintaining international peace and security, of making sure that we live in a rules-based world. So the United Kingdom will continue to work closely with the United States, taking a highly active role in addressing the Syria crisis, and working with our closest ally over the coming weeks and months.

And, as well as addressing all these immediate challenges and crises, we continue to work together on a whole range of issues, from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, to Somalia, to my work on preventing sexual violence in conflict, which the Secretary has strongly supported, and, of course, deepening the economic ties that are indispensable to both nations.

So, John, you're welcome, as always, in London here. And, please, will you say a few words, as well?

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you, William. I'd be delighted to. And I begin by saying thank you to you for another generous welcome here in London. I'm very grateful to you and the government for all of your efforts. And I'm very pleased to be concluding this morning, before I go back to brief Congress this afternoon on the subject of Syria, to be concluding here in London a very productive and fairly quick trip to Europe over the last couple of days. Particularly grateful to you, William, always, for your great hospitality and your personal friendship. And I thank you for that.

The relationship – well, let me just say also last night I had dinner and a long meeting with President Abbas, whom the Secretary will be meeting with shortly. And it was a very productive and informative session as part of our ongoing efforts in the Middle East peace process. The negotiators are negotiating. We have said we're not going to discuss the substance on an ongoing basis, and we're not. But I am encouraged that even though there have been difficulties along the way on both sides in their countries – in their territory and in the country – nevertheless, they are staying at it, and they are not allowing what historically have been disruptions that might have interrupted them from doing so at this time. That encourages me, in terms of the determination and purpose. And so we will continue this process thoughtfully and, hopefully, quietly over the course of the next weeks and months.

The relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom has often been

described as special, essential. And it has been described thusly, quite simply, because it is. It was before a vote the other day in parliament, and it will be for long afterwards after that vote. Our bond, as William has just said, is bigger than one vote; it's bigger than one moment in history. It's about values. It's about rules of the road, rules by which human beings try to organize their societies and offer people maximum freedom and opportunity, respecting rights, and finding a balance in a very complicated world. And we have no better partner in that effort than Great Britain, and we are grateful for that.

Our bond really is a paradigm for international cooperation. And our work together on global issues to ensure peace, to ensure stability, to create economic prosperity, to help others to share in the values that we share, to engage in humanitarian initiatives around the world, and sometimes to stand together against the oppressive steps that tyrants take, all of those things are what tie us together, not just for our two nations, but for the entire world.

So just a few minutes ago, the Foreign Secretary and I spoke about the importance of our continued cooperation on a full range of issues, from climate change, to the pursuit of peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, to our counterterrorism efforts, to our efforts to promote democracy on a global basis, and, of course, to our efforts to bring about an end to the civil war in Syria.

As I drove in here this morning, there were a group of people assembled outside the building, as is their right, and as people should assemble. And some of them – I heard them saying, “Keep your hands off Syria.” I certainly appreciate the feelings in our country, too, about people who have strong feelings about war and strong feelings about not going into yet some other engagement in another part of the world.

But I think it would be good to hear people saying to a dictator, “Keep your hands off chemical weapons that kill your own people. Protect your own people.” I think it's important for us to stand up as nations for civility and against actions that challenge notions of humanity and decency and appropriate international behavior. And for almost 100 years, the world has stood together against the use of chemical weapons, and we need to hear an appropriate outcry as we think back on those moments of history when large numbers of people have been killed because the world was silent. The Holocaust, Rwanda, other moments are lessons to all of us today.

So let me be clear. The United States of America, President Obama, myself, others are in full agreement that the end of the conflict in Syria requires a political solution. There is no military solution. And we have no illusions about that. But a resolution to this has to come about because the parties are prepared to come and negotiate that political solution. And if one party believes that it can rub out countless numbers of his own citizens with impunity using chemicals that have been banned for nearly 100 years because of what Europe learned in World War I, if he can do that with impunity, he will never come to a negotiating table. A resolution will not be found on the battlefield, but at that negotiating table. But we have to get to that table.

And we're in full agreement with our British friends that the humanitarian situation is obviously dire and growing worse: 5 million people displaced within Syria itself; numbers of refugees fleeing from that gas into Lebanon, into Jordan, providing an incredible burden to each of those countries and others in the region. This is a humanitarian catastrophe of global

proportions. And the world needs to focus on it, pay attention to it, or we give license to other dictators or other groups in other parts of the world to engage in similar behavior, and just make things worse for everybody.

The United States is proud to say we've been the largest humanitarian donor. We recognize that responsibility. And we are also proud to say that we stand with our friends here in Great Britain, who are the second-largest donor. So, we don't come to this with a sense that all we care about is some kind of a military response. We come to this with years now of effort – literally years of effort – to try to bring the parties to the table and create some kind of political solution, because that remains our top priority. I – our respective leaders made it clear in St. Petersburg that we believe a strong international response is necessary to ensure that atrocities like the one that Assad committed against hundreds of his own people are not going to happen again.

And our special relationship with the UK is not just about Syria, it's not just about a response to this humanitarian crisis. It's also about the future, in many ways, on climate change, and particularly on economic prosperity for all of our people. We're not only – we are both committed to trying to move forward on a trade relationship to grow jobs for our people. And we are not only each other's largest investors in each of our countries, one to the other, but the fact is that every day almost one million people go to work in America for British companies that are in the United States, just as more than one million people go to work here in Great Britain for American companies that are here. So we are enormously tied together, obviously. And we are committed to making both the U.S.-UK and the U.S.-EU relationships even stronger drivers of our prosperity.

Now, last month the United States held the first round of the negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. And this is something where we will continue to work closely together, because we both believe that working with the UK and the rest of the EU to finalize an agreement is going to create new investments to add to those millions of people in both countries I just talked about. It'll create new jobs and it will create growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

So, as Margaret Thatcher put it pretty bluntly, as she did, the UK and the U.S. are real and true friends. And our relationship, which is grounded in those values and traditions that we both referred to, remains as relevant today as it has been in the past. And we look forward to continuing to strengthen this relationship, and working hard to make real progress on the very many challenges that we face in an increasingly complicated and, in too many places, dangerous world. Thank you, William.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: Thank you very much indeed, John. Now we're going to have a couple of questions from each side of the Atlantic. Carl, you'll pick them out.

QUESTION: James Robbins from BBC News. Mr. Secretary, how seriously do you take the new threats from President Assad of retaliation, including by his allies, if the U.S. does strike? That risks, doesn't it, dragging the United States further into the conflict?

And if Britain had said yes rather than no to strikes, the President would have ordered them by now, wouldn't he? You've now adopted a different tactic, building a different sort of coalition using powerful moral arguments for action against inaction. The logic of that, surely,

is that whatever the votes in Congress, the President will go ahead with strikes. The votes can't change his moral position.

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I'm not surprised to find here a well-put question that basically tries to get me to answer something that the President hasn't decided. So I just have to tell you that the President made a decision based on his gut and his best sense of what was best for the United States of America and our Congress and our democracy. And he knew it would be tough. He didn't – there was no misinterpretation of the vote here. I think that's why the President made a very courageous decision to go to the Congress, notwithstanding what happened here, recognizing that in our democracy it was important to ask for the Congress to also invest in this effort.

And I can't tell you that if the vote had been different the President would have made a different decision at all. I think he was thinking about the best way to proceed, and he made his decision about the best way to proceed. I'm confident the Congress is going to listen very, very carefully. It is listening carefully. Members are doing their homework, their diligence here. There've been a lot of briefings in the course of the last week. We will have a full House briefing later today that I will take part in, a full Senate briefing tomorrow. I believe the President will then talk to the American people.

But what I think is important here – I met with a friend of mine, who is a member of the British parliament, who was telling me that even here, still, there are some people who question the evidence, who aren't sure that, in the post-Iraq moment, we're not going to be confronting a pre-Iraq presentation. And there's a lot of fear of that. I understand that fear. I was in the Congress when we voted on Iraq. And I know the deficits of the intelligence back then. And that's why we took our time very, very carefully. Secretary Chuck Hagel was Senator Hagel, as I was Senator Kerry. And both of us are determined now, as appointed officials of the Obama Administration, to do our utter best not to have history suggest that we were less than thorough with respect to this intelligence.

So we took more time. The President instructed that he wanted this story told as fully as was possible without compromising intelligence sources and methods. The intelligence community was instructed to release more information than we ever have previously in this kind of a situation. And so we declassified things that normally would not be declassified. And there's a risk in that. But the risk of not having people understand the full measure of the evidence, I think, the President decided was greater.

So what have we put out to people? What do we know about this? Notwithstanding President Assad's interview, which has not yet been made fully public, we know that his regime gave orders to prepare for a chemical attack. We know that they deployed forces and put them in the places where this took place. We know, by tracing it physically, where the rockets came from, and where they landed. And it is no accident that they all came from regime-controlled territory, and all landed in opposition-controlled or contested territory. We know this. We know that within moments of them landing in that territory, the social media exploded with videos that we also know could not be contrived. And we've done various means of ascertaining that through technology check-up. So we know that those are real, and we see people dying, children, young kids not old enough to even speak, heaving for breath, spasming, struggling. And we see all of that within instants of this happening in the very area that we traced that the rockets landed.

Then we hear and know the regime is issuing more instructions to stop the attack, and we know they issue instructions to their people that they're worried about the UN inspectors finding out what was going on. And then they shell the area that was attacked for four days with four times – the – I can't remember the exact number of shells that had occurred in the previous 10 days. And we also know, through confirmation through other technical means with other countries, acknowledgement this happened. Syria and Iran have admitted there was a chemical attack. They just try to blame it on people who have no scientific capacity to do this, and where there is no evidence that they have any of the weaponry to be able to do it. And, most importantly, just as a matter of logic, tell me how they would do it from the center of the regime-controlled area and put it into their own people. It defies logic. It defies common sense here.

So, the evidence is powerful. And the question for all of us is: What are we going to do about it? Turn our backs? Have a moment of silence, where a dictator can, with impunity, threaten the rest of the world that he's going to retaliate for his own criminal activity because he's being held accountable? We live in a dangerous world, as it is, folks. And that kind of threat is nothing different from the threat we face every single day. And if we don't stand up to it, we'll face it more, and they will think they can intimidate anybody. I don't believe that we should shy from this moment. The risk of not acting is greater than the risk of acting. And everybody needs to stop and think about that hard.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: And let me just add to that before the next question, and I think Secretary Kerry makes – I think the logic of what he says about the evidence is very, very compelling. But on the BBC's question also about the latest remarks of President Assad, we mustn't fall into the trap of attaching too much credibility to the words of a leader, President Assad, who has presided over so many war crimes and crimes against humanity, has shown such a murderous disregard for the welfare of his own people, often denied events that have happened, refused in the past to admit the existence of chemical weapons now acknowledged. So let's not fall into the trap of believing every word that comes out of the mouth of such a man.

Next question?

MODERATOR: Margaret Brennan from CBS.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, in that CBS interview that you just referenced, Bashar al-Assad said that the presentation that you've made reminds him, quote, his words, "of the big lie that Colin Powell said in front of the world about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq." He says you personally have presented no evidence of a chemical weapons attack, just your confidence and your convictions. And he disputes the argument you just laid out, his argument saying his government relies on reality, not social media, and says Russian intelligence contradicts this false evidence. What is your response?

And secondly, is there anything at this point that his government could do or offer that would stop an attack?

SECRETARY KERRY: Sure. He could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week. Turn it over, all of it, without delay, and allow a

full and total accounting for that. But he isn't about to do it, and it can't be done, obviously.

But with respect to the credibility issue, look, I just answered that. I just gave you real evidence, evidence that, as a former prosecutor in the United States, I could tell you I can take into a courtroom and get admitted. And I believe this man – I mean, I've personally tried people who have gone away for long prison sentences or for life for less evidence than we have of this. So I'm confident about the state of the evidence.

You can go to whitehouse.gov, read the unclassified report, and make your own judgments. What does he offer? Words that are contradicted by facts. And he doesn't have a very strong record with respect to this question of credibility, because I personally visited him once at the instruction of the White House to confront him on his transfer of Scud missiles to Hezbollah, which we knew had taken place and had all kinds of facts, and he sat there and simply denied it to my face, notwithstanding the evidence I presented and what we showed him.

So this is a man who has just killed, through his regime, over 1,000 of his own citizens. Over 100,000, or about 100,000, have been murdered over the course of the last months. He sent Scud missiles into schools. He sends airplanes to napalm children. Everybody has seen that. This is a man without credibility. And so I will happily stand anywhere in the world with the evidence that we have against his words and his deception and his acts.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: Okay. Third question?

MODERATOR: (Off mike.)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, despite all of that evidence and all of the rhetoric you've deployed, the American voters, the British voters, and the French voters all opposed to military action in Syria. Why do you think that is? And what makes you think that you know better?

SECRETARY KERRY: Well, I would never claim personally to, quote, "know better." There's a certain arrogance in that that I learned long ago in American elected life is not – doesn't serve you very well. But I would say that a lot of folks have a visceral reaction to public people presenting evidence post-Iraq, where they have serious doubts without sort of seeing all of the evidence, and not everybody has or does.

And also, there's just an instant reaction by a lot of people to say, "Whoa, here we go again. This is going to be Iraq, this is going to be Afghanistan." And I understand that. I am very sympathetic to that feeling. If I weren't in the Administration and I didn't have access to what I have, I'm sure I would have the exact same reaction. I'd probably be very questioning of public people. That's why I'm standing up here today. That's why I went to the European community. That's why I will be briefing Congress, together with other members of the Administration. That's why the President will talk to the American people. Because our responsibility is to share what we know, and to lead, and to try to bring people to a point where they can agree with us, hopefully.

Now, I believe that the aftermath of the Iraq experience and Afghanistan leave a lot of people saying, "We don't want to see our young people coming back in a body bag," and so forth. But that's not what we're talking about. And what we have to do is make clear to people that this is – we're not talking about war. We're not going to war. We will not have people at risk in

that way. We will be able to hold Bashar Assad accountable without engaging in troops on the ground or any other prolonged kind of effort in a very limited, very targeted, very short-term effort that degrades his capacity to deliver chemical weapons without assuming responsibility for Syria's civil war. That is exactly what we're talking about doing – unbelievably small, limited kind of effort.

Now, that has been engaged in previously on many different occasions. President Reagan had a – several hours or whatever effort to send a message to Qadhafi in the wake, I think, of Pan Am 103 and other terrorist activities. Other times people have engaged in making it clear that you've got to draw a line, and that there are consequences for actions when people step over those lines. If you don't draw those lines, and the civilized world is not prepared to enforce those lines, you are giving complete license to people to do whatever they want and to feel that they can do so with impunity. If you want to send Iran and Hezbollah and Assad a congratulatory message, you guys can do what you want. You'd say – don't do anything. We believe that's dangerous. And we will face this down the road in some more significant way if we're not prepared to take some kind of a stand now.

So that's our argument. It's not that I know better or someone knows better. It's an argument that we believe is based on fact, on evidence, on history. And we ask people to take a close look at it and make their own judgments.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: One more question from the American media.

MODERATOR: Michael Gordon from The New York Times.

QUESTION: Yes, a question for Mr. Hague, the Foreign Secretary: Sir, now that the British parliament has decided against British participation in a potential military strike in Syria, is there any way in which your government might do more in Syria by, say, arming the opposition or upgrading nonlethal material assistance to the rebels? Or, in deference to public opinion at home and your parliament's decision, is your government essentially relegated to standing on the sidelines and providing moral support?

And, sir, would you support military action by the Obama Administration, even if the American Congress does not vote for that action?

And then a question for Secretary Kerry: Sir, would the Obama Administration consider releasing still more intelligence, or perhaps some of the physical evidence of sarin use, which you have not yet provided, to counter Mr. Assad's assertions? And is there any concrete intelligence that links Mr. Assad directly to the attack? Do you have such information or not? And do you think it matters if you don't have such information? Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: On the first part of that question, you can gather from some of my opening remarks that the UK is heavily engaged in many other ways in trying to address the problems of the – thrown up by the crisis in Syria. The Prime Minister convened the meeting at the G-20 of nations and organizations looking at how we seriously ramp up the humanitarian assistance, renew diplomatic efforts on getting humanitarian access, which has been one of the great problems. This is a regime that actually tries to prevent humanitarian aid getting to its own people; in some cases, removes medical supplies or obstructs medical supplies from getting to the right place.

So, the Prime Minister convened that meeting with the strong support of the United States. We have led the way in the latest round of increased donations to the humanitarian effort with that extra 52 million pounds. So the UK is at the forefront, with the United States and others, of that piece of work. And it will become all the more important in the coming months.

We're also doing a great deal to assist the stability of neighboring countries, and particularly Lebanon and Jordan, and the direct assistance we give to the Lebanese armed forces and to Jordan, including equipment to help the Jordanian armed forces cope on their border. We are heavily engaged at the United Nations and in all forums in the continuous efforts over recent months to bring about a Geneva 2 peace process.

And with the opposition with the Syrian National Coalition, who I met last week, and who I – who we can regard – who I – we can regard as a democratic, non-sectarian opposition, we do give them a great deal of practical, nonlethal assistance. That has included the delivery in recent days of equipment to protect against chemical attack, escape hoods, injections, detector paper that will help people to survive chemical attacks. We're looking at doing more of that in the future.

And so, as you can see, the United Kingdom is, in very many ways, trying to bring about a – working with the United States and our other allies – trying to bring about a political solution in Syria and alleviate the suffering of the people there and prevent the spread of the crisis to other countries. So involving all of those ways, while fully respecting the vote in our parliament, on our attitude to a decision of the United States, that is for United States. We have our own constitution and parliamentary complications and rules. We will leave it to the United States to address their issues. These are two – the two great homes, two of the greatest homes of democracy in the world, and they each work in slightly different ways. And that – we each have to respect the way each other's democracy works. And we do.

John?

SECRETARY KERRY: And we do. That's for sure. I don't know – honestly, I just don't know whether the President will make a decision to release more, whether there is a consensus that more needs to be released. We have released an unprecedented amount of information. And obviously, there is a risk in some of this, because you can conceivably, in certain circumstances, compromise your ability to be able to intercept a plot or track what terrorists are thinking about and planning. And so you have to be very, very careful in those judgments, and that's exactly what the intelligence community – that's why it took a while to get to where we are.

But – and this is very, very important – but the elected representatives of the American people, members of Congress, have a right to go to the intelligence committees and to the intelligence community and be briefed. So it's not being hidden from people. And they can be the judges of that additional intelligence that they see or don't see, which is how a republic works.

With respect to Assad directly, et cetera, the chemical weapons in Syria we have tracked for some period of time now are controlled in a very tight manner by the Assad regime. And it is Bashar al-Assad and Maher al-Assad, his brother, and a general who are the three people

who have control over the movement and use of chemical weapons. But under any circumstances, the Assad regime is the Assad regime. And the regime issues orders. And we have high-level regime that have been caught giving these instructions and engaging in these preparations with results going directly to President Assad. And we're aware of that.

So we have no issue about the question here of responsibility. There is none. The Assad regime is the Assad regime. They control these weapons. They have a huge stock of these weapons, a very threatening level stock that remains. And that's why this issue is of such consequence and so important. And there is no issue whatsoever in the mind of the intelligence community or the Administration, or certainly in the minds of all those people like Senator Feinstein, who is the head of the Intelligence Committee and Saxby Chambliss, the ranking member, and others who have come to a conclusion that the regime, in fact, engaged in this activity.

FOREIGN SECRETARY HAGUE: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.