

*Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009*

**Remarks During a Meeting With President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and an Exchange With Reporters**

*August 18, 2009*

*President Obama.* Well, let me, on behalf of the American people and my administration, welcome President Mubarak for his first visit since I've taken office. I want to publicly thank him for the extraordinary hospitality that he showed us when I traveled to Egypt and delivered my speech at Cairo University. It was an extraordinary visit, not only because of the great welcome that I received from the President and the college students who were in attendance, but also having an opportunity to visit the pyramids was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for me.

The United States and Egypt have worked together closely for many years, and for many of those years, President Mubarak has been a leader and a counselor and a friend to the United States. We obviously have a lot of great challenges that have to be dealt with, and we are continuing to work together to find those areas where we can find common ground and to work in concert to bring peace and security to the region.

The Arab-Israeli situation is something that has been of ongoing interest, and we had an extensive conversation about how we could help to jump-start an effective process on all sides to move away from a status quo that is not working for the Israeli people, the Palestinian people, or, I think, the region as a whole.

We discussed our common concerns about the potential proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region, including the development of nuclear weapons by Iran, and how we could work together on those fronts. We discussed Iraq, and I want to thank the Government of Egypt for being an Arab country that has moved forward to try to strengthen Iraq as it emerges from a wartime footing and a transition to a more stable democracy.

And we continued to talk about how we can work together on economic development issues, education issues, health issues that can promote the interests of both the American people as well as the Egyptian people. Just to take one example, we've agreed to work together with the Organization of Islamic States to eradicate polio, something that we've been able to successfully deal with here in the United States but still has an impact on populations throughout the Muslim communities around the world.

And so these are the kinds of partnerships that we want to continue to build. There are some areas where we still have disagreements, and where we do have disagreements we have a frank and honest exchange.

And so I just want to say once again that I am grateful to President Mubarak for his visit, for his willingness to work with us on these critical issues, and to help advance the interest of peace and prosperity around the world.

Thank you very much. Welcome.

*President Mubarak.* Thank you. I'm going to speak in Arabic—[*inaudible*].

*President Obama.* Yes, please.

[*At this point, President Mubarak spoke in Arabic.*]

*President Obama.* Here, we'll have her translate. That way the—

[*The interpreter translated President Mubarak's remarks as follows.*]

*President Mubarak.* First of all, this is the third time that I meet with President Obama. The first time was in Cairo, when he came to give his address. It was a very strong address, and it removed all doubts about the United States and the Muslim world. The importance of the Cairo visit was very appreciated by the Muslim and Islamic world because the Islamic world had thoughts that the U.S. was against Islam, but his great, fantastic address there has removed all those doubts. That was the first time.

Now, the second time where we met was in Italy during the G–15 summit. We didn't have much time to go in depth into discussions, but we did have some quick discussion.

The third time I meet with President Obama is here today at the White House. We have discussed an array of issues, from our bilateral relations to the issues of the Middle East, the region, to the Palestinian issue, to the issue of Iran, Somalia, and the Africa Horn. Also, several other issues—even we discussed the issue of reform inside Egypt. And I told to President Obama very frankly and very friendly that I have entered into the elections based on a platform that included reforms, and therefore, we have started to implement some of it, and we still have 2 more years to implement it.

Our relations between us and the United States are very good relations and strategic relations. And despite some of the hoops that we had with previous administrations, this did not change of the nature of our bilateral relations.

We have perhaps focused greatly on the Palestinian issue because it's the pivotal issue, as the Palestinian issue has impact on the world, on the region, for—whether for the West or also for the United States.

We have also discussed the issue of Iran and the issue of nuclear Iran, and we talked about these issues very frankly.

And in conclusion of my remarks, I would like to thank President Obama for his welcome to me here at the White House, and I also salute him—this is since 5 years—I also salute President Obama for all his efforts with regard to the Palestinian issue. Since his first day at the White House, he started working on it. And I assured him that we will cooperate with him, and we will be very strong in these efforts, whether with regard to the Palestinian issue or the other regional issues.

And I thank him again.

*President Obama.* Okay, we got one question each.

*Middle East Peace Process*

Q. Both Presidents, if I may. Reports from Jerusalem today that the Israeli Government has not given permission for any new settlements to be built, although ones that were in process are still in process, and I'm wondering if you have talked about that issue and if that's the sort of thing—

*President Mubarak.* In Jerusalem?

Q. —that goes at least partway to meeting what you're asking the Israelis to do.

*President Mubarak.* Concerning Jerusalem, you mean?

Q. And all settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

*President Obama.* There has been movement in the right direction, and I came in from the start saying that all parties concerned had to take some concrete steps to restart serious negotiations to resolve what has been a longstanding conflict that is not good for the Israeli people and is not good for its neighbors. And I think that the Israeli Government has taken discussions with us very seriously. George Mitchell has been back and forth repeatedly; he will be heading back out there next week. And my hope is that we are going to see not just movement from the Israelis, but also from the Palestinians around issues of incitement and security, from Arab States that show their willingness to engage Israel.

If all sides are willing to move off of the rut that we're in currently, then I think there is an extraordinary opportunity to make real progress. But we're not there yet. I'm encouraged by some of the things that I'm seeing on the ground. We've been seeing reports in the West Bank in particular that checkpoints have been removed in some situations. The security forces of the Palestinian Authority have greatly improved and have been able to deal with the security situation on the West Bank in a way that has inspired not just confidence among the Israeli people, but also among the Palestinian people.

There's been some increased economic activity on the West Bank. All of this is creating a climate in which it's possible for us to see some positive steps and hopefully negotiate towards a final resolution of these longstanding issues. But everybody is going to have to take steps; everybody is going to have to take some risks. It's going to require a lot of hard work, and the United States is committed to being a partner in this process.

And Egypt will be as important as any other party in helping to move the process forward because Egypt is uniquely positioned in some ways having very strong relationships with Israel, with the Palestinians, and with other Arab States, and President Mubarak has as much experience in the region as anybody.

*President Mubarak.* I would like to add on what President Obama has just said, and I say that we are trying and working on this goal to bring the two parties to sit together and to get something from the Israeli party and to get something from the Palestinian party. If we perhaps can get them to sit together, we will help.

And also, I have contacts with the Israeli party. I have received calls and contacts with the Prime Minister of Israel, with the head of the state, and also with the Minister of Defense. We are speaking in a good manner, and we are moving into the right direction. But the two parties need to sit together, and this then will give hope that that is a possibility of finding a solution to the Palestinian issue, because it has been ongoing since 60 years. And with this issue ongoing, we lose a lot, and also, this will increase violence. So we support the efforts of the United States to move towards finding a solution.

If this is the issue of Jerusalem that you are asking about, I tell you this is a complicated issue. Then—back then, a time ago, when we—during former President Clinton's era, we almost neared finding an equation, to find a solution for this issue. But afterwards, 8 years afterwards, there was nothing, and this issue moved very slowly. However, if we can find some solution to this, this would be helpful.

*President Obama.* Okay.

*Middle East Peace Process*

Q. President Mubarak, you just mentioned about the 60 years conflict. You have been in that conflict as a warrior and as a peacemaker together for a long time. What's different this

time? It has been ups and downs, disappointments and achievements. What's different this time? And are we going into another peace process, or are we going again heading for a final status kind of negotiations that finish that business?

And for President Obama, if you care to comment, as President Mubarak said, we cannot afford failure this time. What stand between us now and success?

*President Obama.* Okay.

*President Mubarak.* As I said before, this is a complicated issue. I have worked a long time ago when I was in the army, and afterwards during my access of Presidency. This issue has been ongoing 60 years. And we cannot afford wasting more time, because violence will increase, and violence has increased. The level of violence is now much more than it was 10 years ago. Therefore, we need to find the—to move to the final status solution and level.

And I have contacted the Israelis, and they said, perhaps you can talk about the temporary solution or perhaps the final status. But I told them, no, forget about the temporary solution and forget about temporary borders. That's why I came today to talk to President Obama and to see that if we move forward on this issue, it will give more hope and more confidence to the people about this issue.

The negotiations of the final status will not be easy, and it will be fraught of complications. This issue contains the issue of Jerusalem, the issue of the refugees, the issue of the borders. But I believe that, in cooperation with the United States and through our relations with Israel, I believe that we can reach a solution, because the Arab people wants peace and want a better life, and the Israeli people also want peace and stability in their lives.

*President Obama.* Well, I think President Mubarak said it well: It's going to be difficult. I do believe that what may have changed—and this is what we have to test—is a growing realization on the part of the Palestinians that Israel is not going anywhere and is a fact, a reality that has to be dealt with, and a recognition on the part of the Israelis that their long-term security interests require finding an accommodation with the Palestinians and, ultimately, with their Arab neighbors. So the interests on both sides are towards peace.

Now, one of the things that you discover in studying history and being a part of politics is just because something makes sense doesn't mean it happens. And we are going to have to work very hard. And ultimately, there's going to have to be some courageous leadership not only from the Palestinians and the Israelis but also from the other Arab States to support this effort. And the United States is going to devote time and energy and resources to try to make this happen.

And what I can say is different from the United States perspective is that even in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, we started dealing with this issue on day one. We didn't wait until year 6 or year 7, after I had been reelected, before we started taking this on. We started dealing with this issue immediately, precisely because it's a difficult issue that requires a lot of groundwork to be laid and sometimes proceeds in fits and starts. But with the partnership of countries like Egypt, we think we can make progress.

Okay, thank you, everybody.

Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead, please.

*President Mubarak.* I believe that President Obama is talking about support from the Arab States to this issue. I would say here that if negotiations start, this will lead to the Arab State to

support the peace process and to move it forward, because I can tell you that the Arab people are fed up with the lengths that this issue has taken and the issue of the displaced people. So I believe if the two parties sit down, this will lead to have Arab State support moving the peace process forward.

*President Obama.* Good. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to George J. Mitchell, U.S. Special Envoy for Middle East Peace. President Mubarak referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, President Shimon Peres, and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak of Israel. President Mubarak spoke partially in Arabic, and those portions of his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

*Categories:* Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : Egypt, President Mubarak.

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