

**Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi of Iraq
and an Exchange With Reporters**

April 14, 2015

President Obama. It is good to welcome once again Prime Minister Abadi to the United States and to the Oval Office. Prime Minister Abadi, when he came into the office, was already facing significant challenges. And obviously, the incursions of ISIL, also known as Daesh, into Iraq pose not only a humanitarian threat, but a strategic threat to the country.

Thanks to his leadership, as well as the partnership and sacrifices made by over 60 members of an international coalition, we are making serious progress in pushing back ISIL out of Iraqi territory. About a quarter of the territory that had fallen under Daesh control has been recovered. Thousands of strikes have not only taken ISIL fighters off the war theater, but their infrastructure has been deteriorated and decayed. And under Prime Minister Abadi's leadership, the Iraqi security forces have been rebuilt and are getting reequipped, retrained, and strategically deployed across the country.

Now, this is a long process, and in our discussions, Prime Minister Abadi made clear that success will not occur overnight. But what is clear is that we will be successful. And part of that success is Prime Minister Abadi's commitment to an inclusive Government where Shia, Sunni, and Kurds and all the peoples of Iraq are unified around that nation's sovereignty and its ability to control its own destiny.

And in a significant change from some past practices, I think both Sunni leaders and Kurdish leaders feel that they are heard in the halls of power, that they are participating in governance in Baghdad. And although there is the natural back-and-forth that exists in any democracy, Prime Minister Abadi has kept true to his commitments to reach out to them and to respond to their concerns and to make sure that power is not solely concentrated within Baghdad, but also that there's local governance that has the opportunity to respond to the specific needs of the people in those communities.

So we had an in-depth discussion about the ways in which we continue to partner together with the international coalition to push out foreign fighters who are encroaching on Iraqi territory and sovereignty and perpetrating terrible acts across the country.

We discussed how we can be supportive of the progress that's being made in shaping an inclusive governance agenda. I emphasized that the United States prime interest is to defeat ISIL and to respect Iraqi sovereignty, and that will continue to be our policy. And we discussed how we can be helpful in making sure that as security improves inside of Iraq, we're also paying attention to the economy of Iraq, the ways in which the country can not only maximize the efficiency of its oil resources, but diversify its economy so that it presents more opportunities and jobs and prosperity for the Iraqi people.

And finally, I complimented the Prime Minister on the outreach that's taking place throughout the region so that countries that previously have been suspicious of Iraq or had not established the kinds of diplomatic relations that are necessary for good, neighborly relations, I think, are seeing that Prime Minister Abadi is, in fact, committed to all the people of Iraq. And he's gained the respect of other leaders in the region. That ultimately is also going to be

extremely helpful in us defeating ISIL and allowing Iraq to move forward and fulfill the promise that its people represent.

And finally, in recognition of the terrible hardships that so many Iraqis have gone through as a consequence of ISIL's brutal activities and the displacements that have taken place, we are committing an additional \$200 million in humanitarian aid to help stabilize communities and to help those who have been displaced from their homes, have lost their jobs, have seen their property destroyed. I think it's very important for us to remember that this is not just an abstract issue, that there are individual families and children who have suffered as a consequence of ISIL's activities. And we need to make sure that we're paying attention to them as well.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your leadership, and thank you for honoring the sacrifices that so many of the U.S. Armed Forces personnel, our men and women in uniform, have made to ensure a sovereign Iraq that can make its own decisions and shape its own destiny. That is our primary goal, and we feel we have a strong partner in you.

Prime Minister Abadi. In the name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate, I would like to thank President Obama for this opportunity to be here so that we can enhance the bilateral relationship between our two countries, which is framed by the strategic partnership agreement that has been ratified by the Iraqi Parliament and the U.S.—and the U.N. and the U.S. And it represents also and embodies the interest of both countries.

Mr. President, as you know, Iraq is today facing fierce attack by terrorists. And this is not only undermining the security in the region, but also in the world. And so far, Iraq has managed to make great strides in this regard and to liberate a large part of its territory with support from the coalition, but especially from the U.S. And this has had the greatest impact.

I am certain, Mr. President, that the American people have made great sacrifices for the sake of Iraq, and the blood of its sons and daughters is mixed also with the blood of the Iraqis. But I can assure you that these sacrifices will not go to waste. Iraq has made great strides so far in achieving democracy and establishing its sovereignty. And this—and now we have a very strong relationship against terrorism.

Today, Mr. President, in spite of the war that we are facing, there's a real working democracy in Iraq. We have political parties, we have a Parliament, we have a national unity Government that is unique in the region, and I don't—I can't think of any other country in the region that has a similar government. These are real successes, and they make all the sacrifices of the U.S. worthwhile.

Today, we are facing the challenge that is before us, and we have to face it. We are working together with countries in the region and with our neighboring countries, also the—with the international community and the U.S., so that we can face this evil. Today, Daesh, or ISIL, is committing heinous crimes in Iraq. It's killing the Iraqis and the minorities and also desecrating holy places in Iraq. Today, also, in this fierce war against ISIL, or Daesh, we still respect human rights, and we make sure that they are well respected.

I have to admit that there are some violations—human rights violations being committed by some criminal parties and outliers, and—but we have zero tolerance for any violations of human rights. And we—when we manage to capture these people, we are bringing them before the judicial system, and we punish them. And indeed, we have arrested many Iraqis who have been involved in this. We are engaged in the war against Daesh, but—and the security forces and the Iraqis are all engaged in this effort. But unfortunately, there are some criminal

elements and some individuals—it's not an institutional approach; rather, it's individuals. So once we manage to capture them, we bring them to the judicial system, and we try to prevent them from committing any transgressions.

We are also keen to bring all fighters under the control of the state and under the command of the chief—the commander of the armed forces. We have tens of thousands of volunteers who have volunteered to defend their country and fight ISIL. Unfortunately, some of them commit acts that harm the reputation of Iraq, but the general mobilization is not responsible for these crimes, and these are also just individual instances of people who are trying to undermine the reputation of Iraq.

Mr. President, I wanted to thank you for your support for Iraq. Whether it's through training or the provision of weapons or even the air cover that you have provided to the Iraqi security forces in their fight against ISIL, you have helped our forces in this national liberation war that it's engaged in.

And I also want to thank you, Mr. President, for your emphasis on the importance of the Iraqi sovereignty. This is a matter that is reflected in our dealings with U.S. officials in Iraq and through your own—whether through its—the military or U.S. officials there, they all exhibit serious commitment to Iraqi sovereignty, and I want to thank you for that.

I am aware that regional countries have their own interests, and I respect these interests, and—but I also welcome any assistance that they would provide, and we would like—I would like to thank them also for any assistance they have provided. However, we do not accept any intervention in Iraq or any transgression on Iraqi sovereignty. This is a war that is fought with Iraqi blood with help from the coalition forces and regional countries.

Certainly, the region is experiencing serious turmoil. There are serious problems and numerous problems in the region. We are hopeful that they will be resolved peacefully. Iraq, for its part, does not intervene in other countries, and we hope that for their part, they would also respect our sovereignty. We also have to respect the humanitarian aspect of these wars, and we hope that there would be more cooperation to minimize crises in the regions.

Iraq has paid dearly with the blood of its own sons and daughters for these wars and also the—also for the factional wars that have raged in the region. And we hope that the region will experience peace and that the specter of war would recede from this region, which has affected all aspects of life, but also resulted in poor economic performance. And also, I believe that the absence of good governance has been one of the main reasons for these wars.

Mr. President, we have a common enemy in fighting terrorism, which is threatening Iraq, U.S. lives, the West, and the entire world. And—but I'm certain that we will be able to defeat this enemy and minimize the losses that will be incurred as a result. And this can be done through cooperation and respect for sovereignty. And once again, I would like to thank you for this invitation to be here.

Iraq-Iran Relations/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Terrorist Organization/International Assistance to Iraq

Q. Mr. President, are you—

Q. Mr. President—[inaudible]— of Iran's involvement in Iraq, and are you comfortable with the level of coordination that's been going on with Iran, even if it's through a third party?

President Obama. This is something that we discussed extensively. I think that—I've said before, and I will repeat—we expect Iran to have an important relationship with Iraq as a close neighbor. And obviously, the fact that Iraq is a Shia-majority country means that it will be influenced and have relations with Iran as well. And at the point in which Daesh, or ISIL, was surging and the Iraqi Government was still getting organized at that point, I think the mobilization of Shia militias was something that was understood to protect Baghdad or other critical areas.

Once Prime Minister Abadi took power, once he reorganized the Government and the security forces, once the coalition came in a—at the invitation of and in an agreement with a sovereign Iraqi Government, then our expectation is, from that point on, any foreign assistance that is helping to defeat ISIL has to go through the Iraqi Government. That's how you respect Iraqi sovereignty. That's how you recognize the democratic government that was hard earned and that is being upheld in the work that Prime Minister Abadi is doing in reaching out to all the various factions inside of Iraq.

And so I think Prime Minister Abadi's position has been that he welcomes help, as you just heard, but it needs to be help that is not simply coordinated with the Iraqi Government, but ultimately, is answerable to the Iraqi Government and is funneled through the chain of command within the Iraqi Government. And that's what we've been very careful to do. I've made clear from the outset that ISIL was an enemy, and we will make sure that they do not threaten the United States, and we will go after them wherever they are. But when we are working with a strong ally and partner like Iraq, it is very important for us to coordinate our activities so that the impression is not that the United States is somehow moving back into Iraq, but rather that the United States is doing what's ultimately best for the Iraqi people, even as we join in fighting a common enemy.

I realize I probably should have had a translation break there. [*Laughter*] I feel bad for our translator. [*Laughter*] Why don't you go ahead, and then, maybe I'll add something right at the end.

And that's why Prime Minister Abadi's clear statement—both inside of Iraq and to the world community—that it is important for all fighting forces to be under unified control of the Iraqi Government is so important. And I think it's particularly significant that that view is shared among a wide range of political parties inside of Iraq and was echoed by Grand Ayatollah Sistani just recently. It sends a clear message that ultimately, Iraq is in control of its own destiny. And part of that means that those who possess arms and have the ability to apply force and defend their country have to be under a single Government.

As Prime Minister Abadi mentioned, that's particularly important in order to ensure that the Government is accountable for the actions of armed forces so that if there are criminal acts or sectarian retributions that are carried out, that ultimately, Prime Minister Abadi is able to call those forces to account and to control them, to make sure that you don't have a backlash as a consequence of the efforts to clear territory from ISIL's control.

So our coordination, I think, has consistently improved over time as Prime Minister Abadi has gained greater control over Iraqi security forces, as the training efforts and equipping efforts that we're engaged in continue to improve. Coordinating how our air power can support and expand into a more effective Iraqi security force deployment is going to continue to be critical. But none of this works unless there is a perception among all the parties involved—Shia, Sunni, Kurd, and others inside of Iraq—that this is an inclusive Government that is listening to the voices of all the people and including them in decisionmaking. And the fact that

Prime Minister Abadi is doing that makes our job and the coalition's job of coordination much easier.

Thank you very much. Okay.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Abadi spoke in English as follows.*]

Prime Minister Abadi. Just one question. Just one. Just one question from Iraqi.

[*A reporter asked a question in Arabic.*]

President Obama. Why don't we have the question translated?

Iraq-U.S. Security Cooperation

Interpreter. She is asking questions about whether there will be support in the effort to liberate Al Anbar and Al Mosul.

Prime Minister Abadi. Certainly, part of the reason for this visit is to coordinate this important work. This will be the last step and to liberate the rest of the areas remaining under Daesh's control, especially in Mosul, which ISIL considers to be its base and its capital and the capital of the so-called Islamic caliphate. We have plans to liberate Al Anbar and Ninawa and, of course, we need high-level coordination for this effort. And we need support from the U.S. and the coalition forces and regional governments. And President Obama and the U.S. administration has—have expressed full readiness to provide support for our security forces in our effort to liberate all of Iraq.

[*A reporter spoke in English as follows.*]

Q. But would you give them additional weapons, Mr. President, like Apache helicopters and drones and F-16 that the Prime Minister has been asking for? At least, it's been reported as asking.

President Obama. I think this is why we are having this meeting to make sure that we are continually improving our coordination to make sure that Iraqi security forces are in a position to succeed in our common mission.

Okay? Thank you so much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Grand Ayatollah Al-Sayyid Ali Al-Husseini Al-Sistani, Iraqi Shiite leader. Prime Minister Abadi and some reporters spoke in Arabic, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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

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