

## **Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq**

In their meeting today at the White House, President Obama and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki reaffirmed the strategic partnership between the United States and the Republic of Iraq and pledged to advance common interests to support a stable, secure, and prosperous Iraq and Middle East. They also discussed their shared commitment to enhance cooperation under the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA).

The two leaders noted that it has been nearly two years since the final American troops departed Iraq and the United States and Iraq entered a new phase of their relationship, based on mutual respect and a shared commitment to build a strategic partnership between two sovereign nations. They recalled the thousands of Americans and Iraqis who have given their lives in our common fight against terrorism and extremism in Iraq. The President and Prime Minister renewed their determination to honor the memory and sacrifice of those killed by strengthening our joint long-term strategic partnership across the fields covered by the SFA, including security, diplomacy, trade, education, energy, culture, science, and justice.

Following the President's meeting with the Prime Minister, Vice President Biden and Prime Minister Maliki convened the Higher Coordinating Committee (HCC). This was the fourth meeting of the HCC since it was established in 2008 under the SFA.

### **Regional Integration**

The U.S. and Iraqi delegations discussed Iraq's position as an emerging democracy in the region, leading energy producer, and a nation representing a diversity of social customs, religions, and ethnicities. The Iraqi delegation described the challenges Iraq faces due to its geography and the legacy of the former regime after decades of wars and international isolation. In this regard, both delegations welcomed the full restoration of relations between Iraq and Kuwait, expanding energy, security, and commercial ties with Jordan, and improving relations with Turkey. Both delegations also welcomed ongoing exchanges of high-level visits with Turkey, as well as a strategic dialogue to be held later this month between the United States, Iraq, Jordan, and other regional partners, with an emphasis on supporting moderates and isolating extremists in the region.

The Iraqi delegation noted that with seventeen Arab embassies open in Baghdad, the Government of Iraq recently renewed an invitation to other Arab countries to open an embassy as soon as possible. In this regard, the United States welcomed the participation of the Iraqi Security Forces in joint exercises with regional partners over the past six months, including the Eager Lion exercise in Jordan, and surface warfare and mine countermeasures exercise in Bahrain. The United States pledged its ongoing diplomatic coordination under the SFA in these and other areas.

## Countering Al-Qaida Affiliated Groups

The two delegations shared an assessment of al Qaida affiliated groups threatening Iraq, with particular emphasis on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

The Iraqi delegation confirmed a comprehensive strategy to isolate ISIL and other extremist groups through coordinated security, economic, and political measures. This strategy includes security operations coordinated with local officials, and renewed efforts to empower local security structures, such as the Sons of Iraq, to mitigate extremist infiltration. Both sides emphasized – on an urgent basis – the need of additional equipment for Iraqi forces to conduct ongoing operations in remote areas where terrorist camps are located. The Iraqi delegation stressed its desire to purchase U.S. equipment as means of strengthening long-term institutional ties with the United States, and confirmed its commitment to ensure strict compliance with U.S. laws and regulations on the use of such equipment.

Both delegations further confirmed the need for aggressive political outreach as a means to isolate and defeat ISIL and other extremist networks. They welcomed the national charter of social peace signed last month by political and religious leaders from across Iraq. Both parties welcomed calls to reject violence and sectarian incitement, and discussed the critical role of religious leaders as a force of moderation in the region.

Both delegations also noted the recent resolution from the Iraqi Council of Representatives, stating that national elections would be held no later than April 30, 2014. The Iraqi delegation confirmed its commitment to holding these elections on time, and its support to the High Electoral Commission to ensure that the elections are well prepared. The United States offered its technical support in full coordination with the Government of Iraq and the United Nations.

## Energy

The U.S. and Iraqi delegations reiterated the importance of Iraq's future energy sector development and economic growth where all Iraqis share equitably from its resources, as well as the valuable role that Iraq plays in providing a steady flow of energy resources to global markets. In this regard, the Iraqi side presented Iraq's new five-year \$357 billion development plan and their long-term vision for developing strategic infrastructure that provides energy system resilience and new commercial opportunities, with multiple oil export routes through the Arabian Gulf, Red Sea, and Mediterranean. The delegations welcomed the opportunity to expand cooperation on energy, including steps to advance these projects, at the next Energy Joint Coordination Committee in early 2014.

## **Syria**

The Iraqi delegation confirmed its support for the Geneva II process and efforts to forge a diplomatic settlement to the ongoing conflict in Syria. The United States took note of the important role Iraq can play in helping to shape conditions conducive to a peaceful political settlement. The Iraqi delegation expressed its increasing concern about weapons coming into Iraq from Syria for use against the Iraqi people, emphasizing the need to take increasing measures to police its borders and airspace against the transit of weapons or cargo proscribed by applicable U.N. Security Council Resolutions, and called on all neighboring states to cooperate fully.

## **Trade**

The Iraqi delegation stressed their desire to harness the U.S. private sector to advance mutual interests in Iraq and the United States. The delegations noted the signing earlier this year of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which will help increase American exports to Iraq and provide more economic opportunities for the Iraqi people. Both delegations welcomed the steady increase in U.S. companies doing business in Iraq – including major corporations such as Citibank, Ford, General Electric, and Boeing. The Iraqi delegation expressed hope that U.S. businesses can have a prominent role in their country’s rapidly developing energy, transportation, banking, and health sectors. In this regard, both delegations looked forward to mutual trade events to be held over the coming months.

## **Education and Exchange Programs**

The Iraqi delegation discussed their vision to strengthen their nation through education and exchange programs with an emerging generation. They noted that twenty-five percent of their population – nearly 8 million Iraqis – was born after 2003, and that the Government of Iraq is determined to give this generation educational opportunities inside Iraq and abroad, including at American colleges and universities. Both delegations agreed that the best way to honor our shared sacrifice over the past decade is to provide these young Iraqis with opportunities never enjoyed by other generations. The U.S. delegation noted that under the SFA and the educational programs established through bilateral Joint Coordinating Committees, the number of Iraqi students studying in the United States has grown to nearly 1,000 – and that a university fair last month in Baghdad attracted 30 U.S. universities and 2,000 Iraqi scholarship students.

## **Conclusion**

The two delegations closed the meeting with a shared commitment to increase the numbers of Iraqis studying in the United States, in addition to strengthening other institutional ties beyond government-to-government ties, to include cultural, artistic, and scientific exchanges. Both sides again reflected on the sacrifice that has made this progress possible, while recognizing the very serious challenges that must be confronted - together.

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