AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

The President's News Conference With King Abdullah II of Jordan in Amman, Jordan

March 22, 2013

King Abdullah. First of all, Mr. President, if you allow me, on behalf of myself and all Jordanians, to welcome you and your distinguished delegation back here in Jordan. I fondly remember your visit here several years ago when you were a Senator, and it is a great delight to welcome you back to Jordan as the President of the United States, enjoying your second term.

We are delighted with the in-depth discussions that were very, very fruitful on our strategic and historic partnership, and you have been an old friend, as has the United States, for so many decades. We are very grateful to you, sir, and the administration, as well as Congress and the American people, for the continuous support that has been shown to Jordan over so many years. And the U.S. assistance that has helped us throughout so many years has allowed us to get Jordan to where we are today and, hopefully, will continue to help us advance our shared goals of development, security, and regional peace.

We did have the opportunity to discuss Syria. And obviously, we are all horrified by the loss of life and the brutality of the conflict. We are extremely concerned of the risk of prolonged sectarian conflict that—if it continues as we're seeing—leads to the fragmentation of Syria, which obviously will have disastrous consequences on the region for generations to come. Therefore, it is immediate—it is important to have an immediate need for an inclusive political transition that ends the conflict and the threats that emanate from it.

What we are facing now, today, obviously is an urgent need for the international community to help in humanitarian assistance to catch up to the challenges that we are facing, as the countries bordering Syria. And not only do we need to look at the ability to stockpile humanitarian supplies to the Syrian people inside their country, but also to be able to assist those that have fled.

Jordan today is hosting, by far, the largest number of Syrian refugees. The numbers have just exceeded 460,000 Syrians. That is 10 percent of our population. And the alarming figures—if the rates continue as we're seeing today—will probably double by the end of the year. So for the Americans in the audience, that's the equivalent of 30 million refugees crossing into the United States, the possibility of that going up to 60 million by the end of the year, relative obviously to our populations.

The refugee camp in the north—Zaatari refugee camp—today is the fifth largest city in Jordan. And obviously, this has added economic and financial costs due to the influx, and has further strained the economy that is already under considerable external pressures, with an unstable region, a sluggish global economy that is still recovering.

But having said that, as I already alluded to, we are so grateful to the U.S. assistance in shouldering this enormous responsibility, and together, we continue to appeal to the international community for more help to face this humanitarian calamity.

We had the opportunity obviously to talk about the peace process. And we were very delighted by the vision and the depth of wisdom that the President showed over the past several days in his trip with the Israelis and the Palestinians. Obviously, I reiterate Jordan's

commitment to the peace process and the crucial importance of U.S. leadership in resuming the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations based on the two-state solution.

There is simply no other formula, no other alternative. The two-state solution is the only way to go. And if you compare that also with the radicalization of Syria—together with the impasse in the peace process—this is going to be a serious threat to an already volatile region.

I believe there is a window of opportunity to make a serious push for resuming negotiations on the final status issues. But the window, I believe, is fast closing, primarily due to increasing settlement activities. So there is no time to waste.

And lastly, I had the opportunity with the Prime Minister-designate to share details of Jordan's homegrown reform model and its supporting roadmap. We believe that we have a model that has a clear end goal of parliamentary government, with milestones and prerequisites, built on strong democratic institutions, that guarantees checks and balances of proper democracy, an empowered Parliament, and a new constitutional court.

We also have a new independent elections commission, and we are looking at Jordan as a model that is evolutionary, consensual, and peaceful and ensures pluralism, openness, tolerance, moderation, and unity, and equally as important, a level playing field. This will ensure safeguards for civil liberties and political rights and obviously encourage political participation.

Today, we're looking forward to our Prime Minister-designate forming his parliamentary government, hopefully, in the next couple of weeks. Based on his consultations with Parliament, which is an extension of the same consultation process that led to his designation as a result of receiving the highest number of nominations.

So I'm very proud of the progress so far. The hard work is definitely ahead of us. This is the Jordanian moment, what we're saying is the "third way" in the Middle East. What we are saying that the Arab Spring is behind us; we in Jordan are looking now at the "Arab summer" for us all, which means that we all have to roll our sleeves. It's going to be a bumpy and difficult road, but I am very encouraged with the process, and I am very excited about the future.

So again, Mr. President, very welcome to Jordan. I wish you all the success in what you've been able to achieve in the past several days, and I hope that the success will continue in your visit here to Jordan. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you very much.

Well, it's a great pleasure to be back in Jordan. I'm grateful to my good friend, His Majesty King Abdullah. Thank you for your kind words. Thank you to the Jordanian people for the extraordinary warmth and hospitality that I remembered well from my first visit as a Senator.

The thing I mainly remember when I came here was that His Majesty was kind enough to personally drive me to the airport. I won't tell you how fast he was going, but Secret Service I don't think could keep up. So nevertheless, we're very much appreciative for you welcoming me and my delegation.

The reason I'm here is simple. Jordan is an invaluable ally. It is a great friend. We've been working together since the early years of the Kingdom under His Majesty's great-grandfather, King Abdullah I, who gave his life in the name of peace. Today, our partnership in development, education, health, science, technology, improve the lives of our peoples. Our

close security cooperation helps keep your citizens and ours safe from terrorism. Your military and police help train other security forces from the Palestinian Authority to Yemen.

And I'm especially grateful to His Majesty, who, like his father—memorialized by the mosque I saw when I arrived—is a force for peace in word and in deed. You've invested deeply and personally in strengthening the ties between our countries. And that's why you were the first Arab leader I welcomed to the Oval Office when I became President. And I very much appreciate the work we've done together on a broad range of challenges. And so I've come to Jordan to build on what is already a very strong foundation and to deepen what is already extraordinary cooperation.

As His Majesty mentioned, today was a chance for me to hear from him about the necessary political reforms that are underway here. And I want to commend the people of Jordan on this year's parliamentary elections, which represented a positive step toward a more transparent and credible and inclusive political process. I appreciated hearing His Majesty's plans for a parliamentary government that responds to the aspirations of the Jordanian people, and I very much welcome his commitment to active citizenship, where citizens play a larger role in the future of this nation.

At a time of so much change and tumult across the region, I think His Majesty recognizes Jordan has a great opportunity to show the benefits of genuine and peaceful reform—including stronger political parties and good governance and transparency—all of which makes government more effective and makes sure that the people feel a connection to their government.

Your Majesty, you've been a driving force for these efforts, and you can be assured that the United States will continue to work with you and Prime Minister Nsour as you build on this progress.

We also discussed the economic progress that has to come with political progress. The Jordanian Government is working hard to manage its current budget challenges. I think His Majesty outlined the enormous pressures that Jordan is experiencing, often not because of any factors internal, but rather, a range of external factors as well. And I recognize that while the economic reforms are difficult, they are essential over the long term to creating the kind of growth and opportunity and dynamism in the economy that will help the Jordanian people achieve their dreams. So we want you to succeed.

So my administration is therefore working with Congress to provide loan guarantees to Jordan this year. Together, I believe we can help deliver the results that Jordanians deserve: to see their schools better, their roads improved, health care, clean water all enhanced; the training that I know a lot of Jordanians seek, particularly young people, to get a job or to turn entrepreneurial skills into a business that creates even more jobs.

And I was proud to welcome some young Jordanians to the entrepreneurship summit that I hosted back in Washington. And we're going to continue to focus on creating economic opportunities, because the people here in Jordan deserve the same opportunities as people everywhere.

We spent a good deal of time on regional challenges. And I updated His Majesty on my discussions with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas. As I said in my speech yesterday, I believe there are steps that side—both sides can take to build confidence and trust, and move a serious negotiation forward. We're not there yet, but I'm confident that it can

happen, in part, because it must happen. It will be good for the Israelis, and it will be good for the Palestinians.

I'm very grateful for His Majesty's readiness to advance these efforts. As has been true in the past, His Majesty and Jordan will be critical to making progress towards a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

And we spent a significant amount of time consulting on Syria. I want to commend His Majesty for his leadership, and I want to commend the Jordanian people for their compassion during an extraordinarily difficult time for their neighbors. His Majesty was the first Arab leader to publicly call on Asad to step down, because of the horrific violence that was being inflicted on the Syrian people. Jordan has played a leading role in trying to begin a political transition toward a new government. We're working together to strengthen a credible Syrian opposition.

We share Jordan's concerns about violence spilling across the border, so I want to take this opportunity to make it clear: The United States is committed to the security of Jordan, which is backed by our strong alliance.

As has been mentioned, during this crisis, the Jordanian people have displayed extraordinary generosity, but the strains of so many refugees, inevitably, is showing. Every day, Jordanians are extending a hand of support to neighbors far from home, but this is a heavy burden. And the international community needs to step up to make sure that they are helping to shoulder this burden.

The United States will certainly do our part. We are already the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people. Some of this has helped people here in Jordan, and today I'm announcing that my administration will work with Congress to provide Jordan with an additional $200 million in budget support this year, as it cares for Syrian refugees and Jordanian communities affected by this crisis.

This will mean more humanitarian assistance in basic services, including education for Syrian children so far from home whose lives have been upended. And I think, as parents, we can only imagine how heartbreaking that must be for any parent to see their children having to go through the kinds of tumult that they're experiencing.

Our cooperation on Syria is an example of how the partnership between the United States and Jordan improves the lives not only of the Jordanian people, but peoples across the region.

So again, Your Majesty, I want to express my great appreciation for our partnership. I want to thank you and the Jordanian people for the friendship and hospitality that they've shown me and to my fellow Americans. And just as I visited the Citadel here in Amman on my last visit, I'm looking forward to seeing Petra tomorrow—weather permitting—one of the great wonders of history that the world can experience, thanks to the care and dedication of Jordan and its people.

So *shukran*. Thank you.

King Abdullah. Thank you. Sa'ad.

Syria

Q. Thank you, Your Majesty, Mr. President.

Sir, I want to ask you, Your Majesty, for how long are you going to keep your borders open for the Syrian refugees? Next to you is a land of war, and anything could happen any time. If the regime, let's say, shut the electricity or the water, you are not too far from the Damascus, from the capital. It's, like, less than one hours. You might find a thousand of thousand of refugees, not just the number that you spoke about, Your Majesty.

And, Mr. President, thank you again, and I just want to know—you are a superpower; you are leading the super power, the United States of America. You don't have a plan to put an end for what's going on in Syria: the bloodshed, the killing? And now they are talking about using the chemical weapon. What's your comment about that?

Thank you, Your Majesty.

King Abdullah. Well, first of all, Sa'ad, the problem with refugees comes down to an humanitarian issue. I mean, how are you going to turn back women, children, and the wounded? This is something that we just can't do. It's not the Jordanian way. We have historically opened our arms to many of our neighbors through many decades of Jordan's history. So that is a challenge that we just can't turn our backs on. So that's the reality that we are facing on the ground. So Jordan has always been a safe haven to people around us through many, many decades. So unfortunately, from that point of view, refugees will continue to come to Jordan, and we will continue, within our means, to look after them as best as we can.

The problem is obviously that the burden it's having on Jordan, and we've tried to quantify it as much as possible; the latest figures are it's going to cost us roughly $550 million a year. But if those figures double, as we think they will, by the end of the year, then obviously, we're talking a billion-plus. Not only is that a problem, but it's going to be a tremendous strain obviously on infrastructure, and it's creating social problems and security problems.

And so this is one of the reasons that we're asking for the international community to help. But physically, you can't turn away young children, women, people in desperate need, and the wounded. So we will continue to burden that responsibility.

President Obama. Since the start of the situation in Syria, we have stepped up, as not just a superpower, as you phrased it, but also because of basic humanity, to say that Asad had needed to go. We haven't just led with words, but we've also led with deeds. As I indicated, we're the single largest humanitarian donor to the Syrian people. We have worked diligently in cooperation with the international community to help organize and mobilize a political opposition that is credible, because in the absence of a credible political opposition, it will be impossible for us to transition to a more peaceful and more representative and legitimate government structure inside of Syria.

And that's an area where we have been involved on almost a daily basis. First, Secretary Hillary Clinton helped to spearhead the efforts that formed a coherent Syrian opposition council. Now you've got Secretary Kerry, who's deeply involved in that effort as well. And we are providing not just advice, not just words, but we're providing resources, training, capacity, in order for that political opposition to maintain links within Syria and to be able to provide direct services to people inside of Syria, including the kinds of relief efforts that obviously we've—we're seeing here in Jordan, but there are a whole bunch of people who are internally displaced inside of Syria who need help.

I think that what your question may be suggesting is, why haven't we simply gone in militarily? And I think it's fair to say that the United States often finds itself in a situation

where if it goes in militarily, then it's criticized for going in militarily, and if doesn't go in militarily, then people say, why aren't you doing something militarily?

And my response at this stage is to make sure that what we do contributes to bringing an end to the bloodshed as quickly as possible. And working in a multilateral context, in an international context, because we think our experience shows that when we lead, but we are also working with others—like the Jordanians, like the Turks, like other interested parties in the region—then the outcomes are better. When we are working with the Syrians themselves, so that this is not externally imposed, but rather something that is linked directly with the aspirations and hopes of the people inside of Syria, it will work better. And so we are going to continue to use every lever and every bit of influence that we have to effect the situation inside of Syria.

You mentioned the issue of chemical weapons. We have called for, and we know that the U.N. is now moving forward on an investigation of exactly what happened. We're monitoring the situation ourselves. I have said publicly that the use of chemical weapons by the Asad regime would be a game changer from our perspective, because once you let that situation spin out of control, it's very hard to stop and can have enormous spillover effects across the region.

And so we are going to continue to closely consult with everybody in the region and do everything we can to bring an end to the bloodshed and to allow the Syrian people to get out from under the yoke of a leader who has lost all legitimacy because he is willing to slaughter his own people. And I'm confident that Asad will go. It's not a question of if, it's when.

And so part of what we have to spend a lot of time thinking about is what's the aftermath of that, and how does that work in a way that actually serves the Syrian people and, by the way, serves the Syrian people from all walks of life, from all religious affiliations. Because one of the things that we know is happening in this region is that if we fail to create a model in the Arab world in which people can live side by side, regardless of whether they are Sunni or Shi'a or Alawites or Druze—regardless of the manner in which they worship their God—if we don't create that possibility, then these problems are going to recur again and again and again and again.

I think His Majesty understands that. I think the people of Jordan understand that. And these kinds of sectarian and tribal faultlines are part of what we have to get beyond, because they don't work in a modern world. They don't create jobs. They don't put food in the mouths of children. They don't provide an education. They don't create a thriving economy.

And that's going to be a central challenge not just in Syria, but across the region. And the United States, I think, has something to say about that, because part of what makes us a superpower is because we have people of every walk of life, every background, every religion, and if they've got a good idea and they're willing to work hard, they can succeed. And that's got to be something that's more consistently spoken about not just in—with respect to the Syria situation, but I think with respect to this enormous moment of both promise, but also danger in the Arab world and in North Africa.

Julie Pace [Associated Press].

Syria/Israel-Turkey Relations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned the aftermath of the Asad regime. There's a lot of concern in Jordan and elsewhere that the upheaval in Syria is creating havens for extremism.

President Obama. Yes.

Q. How concerned are you at this point that extremists or jihadists could actually take over in Syria and perhaps be even worse than Asad? And I was also hoping you could give us some insight into how you brokered the call today between Prime Ministers Erdogan and Netanyahu. And how much of their willingness to talk do you think is actually driven by the urgency in Syria?

And, Your Majesty, you have offered Asad asylum, which he rejected. Does that offer of asylum still stand? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, I am very concerned about Syria becoming an enclave for extremism, because extremists thrive in chaos. They thrive in failed states. They thrive in power vacuums. They don't have much to offer when it comes to actually building things, but they're very good about exploiting situations that are no longer functioning. They fill that gap.

And that's why I think it's so important for us to work as an international community to help accelerate a political transition that is viable, so that a Syrian state continues to function; so that the basic institutions can be rebuilt, that they're not destroyed beyond recognition; that we are avoiding what inevitably becomes Syrian—or sectarian divisions—because, by definition, if you're an extremist, then you don't have a lot of tolerance for people who don't share your beliefs.

So this is part of the reason why, for the American people, we've got to recognize, we have a stake here. We can't do it alone. And the outcome in Syria is not going to be ideal. Even if we execute our assistance and our coordination and our planning and our support flawlessly, the situation in Syria now is going to be difficult. And that's what happens when you have a leader who cares more about clinging to power than they do about holding their country together and looking after their people.

It's tragic. It's heartbreaking. And the sight of children and women being slaughtered that we've seen so much, I think, has to compel all of us to say, what more can we do? And that's a question that I'm asking as President every single day. And that's a question I know His Majesty is asking in his capacity here in Jordan.

And what I am confident about is that ultimately, what the people of Syria are looking for is not replacing oppression with a new form of oppression. What they're looking for is replacing oppression with freedom and opportunity and democracy and the capacity to live together and build together. And that's what we have to begin planning for now, understanding that it is going to be difficult.

Something has been broken in Syria, and it's not going to be put back together perfectly, immediately, anytime soon, even after Asad leaves. But we can begin the process of moving it in a better direction. And having a cohesive political opposition, I think, is critical to that.

With respect to the conversation that took place between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Erdogan, I have long said that it is in both the interests of Israel and Turkey to restore normal relations between two countries that have historically had good ties. It broke down several years ago as a consequence of the flotilla incident. For the last 2 years I've spoken to both Prime Minister Netanyahu and Prime Minister Erdogan about why this rupture has to be mended, that they don't have to agree on everything in order for them to come together around a whole range of common interests and common concerns.

During my visit, it appeared that the timing was good for that conversation to take place. I discussed it with Prime Minister Netanyahu, and both of us agreed that the moment was right, and fortunately, they were able to begin the process of rebuilding normal relations between two very important countries in the region.

This is a work in process. It's just beginning. As I said, there are obviously going to still be some significant disagreements between Turkey and Israel, not just on the Palestinian question, but on a range of different issues. But they also have a whole range of shared interests, and they both happen to be extraordinarily strong partners and friends of ours, and so it's in the interest of the United States that they begin this process of getting their relationship back in order. And I'm very glad to see that it's happening.

King Abdullah. Thank you. I think the question about asylum is something that Asad has to answer himself. First, is he interested in asylum, and would he be interested in coming to Jordan?

Obviously, from our point of view, as we were saying, we need an inclusive political transition as quickly as possible, so if the issue of asylum ever came up, that's something that I think all of us would have to put our heads together and figure out whether or not, if that, sort of, ends the violence quickly, is something worth pursuing. So that's a question that's slightly beyond my pay grade at this stage, but something that I'm sure if it ever came up, would be something that we discussed at the level of international community. Samir.

Arab-Israeli Peace Process

Q. Thank you, Your Majesty, last year Jordan managed to break the impasse in the peace process by hosting the Amman talks, bringing Israelis and Palestinians together at the negotiating table. Now, there was no follow-up to that. Do you have anything in mind? Or are you going to have any similar effort?

And, Mr. President, would you support any such effort, particularly that we know that the two sides need to be prodded back to the negotiating table? Thank you.

King Abdullah. Well, Samir, at this stage—obviously last year, we kept Israelis and Palestinians dialogue going simply because we wanted to keep the process alive as much as we could, knowing full well that we were waiting for this opportunity. The President has, I think, finished a very successful visit to both the Israelis and Palestinians. We have been in close contact with State Department leading up to this visit, and I think Secretary Kerry has been very right in keeping expectations low so that what I call the homework stage is still in effect.

Obviously, we're all consulting at this stage of how to build on this visit, and I believe that as we all share notes, we'll have a better understanding, over the next several weeks, what is the next step.

Jordan's role is to be there as a facilitator and a support to both the Israelis and Palestinians, to bring them closer together, so that I believe in the next several weeks to this next several months, we'll have the homework or the framework that allows both sides to come together and move forward.

So Jordan obviously will welcome hosting Israelis and Palestinians together if that's what they want. And we always have been in a support mode for both sides. And as I said earlier, we see a window of opportunity, and I believe the statements that the President has made to the Israeli and to the Palestinian is an opportunity to regalvanize the effort and one that we will stand by in support mode as we compare notes of the President's visit to the three countries.

President Obama. Well, first of all, I think His Majesty described what I've tried to accomplish on this trip very well. This is a trip to make sure I'm doing my homework. We all recognize how vital it could be to see a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We set expectations low precisely because there's been a lot of talk over decades, but it hasn't produced the results that everybody wants to see.

And so my approach here has been, let me listen to the parties first; let me find out exactly what the roadblocks are for progress; let me discuss with them ways that we might move those roadblocks out of the way in order to achieve a concrete result.

And I've also been modest because frankly, peace will not be achieved unless ultimately the parties themselves want peace.

I think all of us in the international community share this frustration: Why can't we get this problem solved? I think the Israeli people are frustrated that they feel this problem is not solved. They don't enjoy the isolation that has resulted from this conflict. I think the Palestinian people certainly feel that frustration.

As I mentioned in my speech yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet with young people who are growing up unable to do the basic things that a free people should expect they should be able to do, simple things like travel or enjoying the kinds of privacy in their own homes that so many of us take for granted. And these are children, these are young people, these are young men and women who, as I described yesterday, aren't very different from my daughters, and they deserve the same opportunities. They deserve this cloud to be lifted from their lives, because they can achieve, and they have enormous potential, and I don't want them living up under a sense of constricted possibility.

I also don't want the Israeli people continually looking over their shoulder, thinking that at any point, their house may be hit by a rocket, or a bus may be blown up. And so part of the tragedy of the situation has been that neither side is getting exactly what they want, but it's not been possible to break out of old patterns and a difficult history.

So my hope and expectation is that, as a consequence of us doing our homework, we can explore with the parties a mechanism for them to sit back down, to get rid of some of the old assumptions, to think in new ways, and to get this done. And I think if it gets done in a timely way, then the Israeli people will be safer and the Palestinian people will be freer. And children on both sides will have a better life. And as a consequence, the region and a whole—as a whole will be strengthened, and the world will be safer.

I can't guarantee that that's going to happen. What I can guarantee is we'll make the effort. What I can guarantee is that Secretary Kerry is going to be spending a good deal of time in discussions with the parties. What I can assure you is, is that nobody feels a greater interest in us achieving this than His Majesty. And so we're just going to keep on plugging away.

The one thing I did say, I think, to both sides is the window of opportunity still exists, but it's getting more and more difficult. The mistrust is building instead of ebbing. The logistics of providing security for Israel get more difficult with new technologies. And the logistics of creating a contiguous and functioning Palestinian state become more difficult with settlements. And so both sides have to begin to think about their long-term strategic interests instead of worrying about, can I gain a short-term tactical advantage here or there, and say to themselves, what's the big picture and how do we get this done?

And that's ultimately what I believe both peoples want—which is why I think—I think it was very interesting that in my speech in Jerusalem, some of the strongest applause came when I addressed the Israeli people and I said, you have to think about these Palestinian children like your own children. It tapped into something that they understood inherently. And that gives me hope. I think that shows there's possibility there. But it's hard. And I—what I also said was that ultimately, people have to help provide the structures for leaders to take some very difficult risks.

So that's why I wanted to speak directly to the Israeli people and to the Palestinian people, so that they help empower their leadership to make some very difficult decisions and tradeoffs in order to achieve a compromise where neither side is going to get a hundred percent of what they want. And so we'll see if we can make it happen.

Jon Karl [ABC News].

Iran

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, King Abdullah.

Mr. President, you have said repeatedly on this trip and before that all options are on the table to stop Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, including military action. Yesterday the Supreme Leader of Iran came out and said that if any action is taken against his country, he will raze the cities in Israel of Tel Aviv and Haifa to the ground. So my question to you is, are you prepared to deal with the retaliation, the fallout that would come after a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities?

And to King Abdullah, if I can ask what you think would happen here: What would be the aftermath of a military strike, whether taken by the United States or by Israel, against Iran? What is a bigger threat to stability in this region: Iran with nuclear weapons or another war in this region?

President Obama. Well, first of all, Jon, I'm not going to engage in a whole bunch of hypotheticals. Because what I've said from the moment I came into office was that the best resolution of this situation is through diplomacy, and I continue to believe that.

We have organized the international community around a sanctions regime that is having an impact on Iran, not because we forced other countries to do it, because they recognize that if you trigger a nuclear arms race in this region, as volatile as it is, if you have the prospect of nuclear weapons getting into the hands of terrorists and extremists, that it's not just Israel that's threatened, it's a whole range of people that could be threatened.

We're talking right now about the possibility of Syria using chemical weapons. What would be the conversation if Syria possessed nuclear weapons?

So this is not just a problem for Israel. It's not just a problem for the United States. It's a regional and worldwide problem. And by the way, we have been consistent in saying that nonproliferation is a problem around the globe, not just with respect to Iran. Now, the fact of the matter is, is that Iran has not been able to establish credibly with the international community that, in fact, it is simply pursuing peaceful nuclear power. There's a reason why it's subject to all these resolutions and violations identified by the United Nations. That's not something we made up.

There are a lot of other countries who have the technical capacity, but for some reason, they are able to get right with the international community. Iran has not been able to do so.

Now, if in fact what the Supreme Leader has said is the case, which is that developing a nuclear weapon would be un-Islamic and that Iran has no interest in developing nuclear weapons, then there should be a practical, verifiable way to assure the international community that it's not doing so. And this problem will be solved, to the benefit of the region and to the benefit of the Iranian people.

The Iranian people are celebrating Nowruz, their most important holiday. And every year, I deliver a Nowruz message. And I remind the people of Iran that they are a great civilization; they have an extraordinary history; they have unbelievable talent. They should be fully integrated into the international community, where they can thrive and build businesses and expand commerce. And there should be exchanges and travel and interactions with the Iranian people and everyone else, including the United States. That should be the vision, not threats to raze Israeli cities to the ground.

Part of the frustration that I think we all feel sometimes is that it seems as if people spend all their time organizing around how they can gain advantage over other people or inflict violence on other people or isolate other people, instead of trying to figure out how do we solve problems. This is a solvable problem if, in fact, Iran is not pursuing a nuclear weapon.

And so we're going to continue to apply the pressure that we have, in a nonmilitary way, to try to resolve the problem. We will continue to try to pursue diplomatic solutions to the situation.

But yes, I have said as President of the United States that I will maintain every option that's available to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon because I think the consequences for the region and for the world would be extraordinarily dangerous.

I—my hope and expectation is, is that, among a menu of options, the option that involves negotiations, discussions, compromise, and resolution of the problem is the one that's exercised. But as President of the United States, I would never take any option off the table.

King Abdullah. There's very little that I would like to add to what the President said. I think, looking from the Jordanian point of view and the challenges that Jordan faces as we look around the region—the challenges of what the Israelis and the Palestinians that we'll be facing in 2012, the instability as you're seeing in Syria, we have the concerns as to what's happening in Iraq—any military action at the moment, whether Israeli or Iranian, to me at this stage is Pandora's box, because nobody can guarantee what the outcome will be.

So hopefully, there is another way of resolving this problem. At a time with so much instability in the Middle East, we just don't need another thing on our shoulders.

Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you to the people of Jordan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:23 p.m. at Al Hummar offices. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey; and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hoseini-Khamenei of Iran.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Jordan, King Abdullah II.

Locations: Amman, Jordan.

Names: Abbas, Mahmoud; Abdullah II, King; Asad, Bashar al-; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Erdogan, Recep Tayyip; Hoseini-Khamenei, Ayatollah Ali; Kerry, John F.; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Nsour, Abdullah; Obama, Malia; Obama, Natasha "Sasha".

Subjects: Arms and munitions : Nuclear weapons and material :: Nonproliferation efforts; Holidays and special observances :Norwuz; Iran : International and U.S. sanctions; Iran : International diplomatic efforts; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iran : Supreme Leader; Iran ; Nuclear weapons development; Israel : Prime Minister; Israel : Relations with Turkey; Jordan : Democracy efforts; Jordan : Economic growth and development; Jordan : King; Jordan : Middle East peace process, role; Jordan : President Obama's visit; Jordan : Prime Minister; Jordan : Relations with U.S.; Jordan : Security cooperation with U.S.; Jordan : Syria, role; Jordan : U.S. assistance; Middle East : Arab-Israeli conflict, peace process; Palestinian Authority and Palestinians : President; State, Department of : Secretary; Syria : Democracy efforts; Syria : Political unrest and violence; Syria : President; Syria : U.S. assistance; Turkey : Prime Minister; Turkey : Relations with Israel.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300174.