

Middle East Peace Process

Mr. Kalbasi. Yesterday you talked about the naysayers when it comes to the Middle East peace process. But, Mr. President, a lot of this pessimism comes from people who want peace, but they're looking at the makeup of the Israeli Government, they're looking at the divisions on the Palestinian side, and they don't think it's possible at this stage for them to take that bold step. What makes you so confident that this time is different? And if so, how would that geographically change the region, including Iran?

The President. Well, let me say, I wouldn't consider myself so confident that we can get this done. I think it's necessary. I—and the point I was making was for decades now, we have seen this conflict not only consume the politics of the region, but also hamper the ability of Israeli children to feel safe, Palestinian children to succeed and thrive.

And if we cannot begin to actually move towards a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with a Jewish—the Jewish State of Israel, then what we are going to see, I think, is more and more conflict, more and more bloodshed, and the prospects of any peaceful resolution will dissolve. So I'm moving on the—out of a sense of urgency, not because it's easy. I think it's going to be very difficult for us to achieve these goals.

What I am optimistic about is I think that President Abbas is a man who sincerely desires peace as well as a sovereign Palestinian state. I think Prime Minister Netanyahu has undergone an evolution in his thinking, and I think that he genuinely would like to see a peaceful Palestinian state and a secure Israeli state that's at peace with its neighbors.

We, as an international community, then have to support those efforts, acknowledging that it's very difficult. It may not be possible, but we have to try. And now's the time to try.

And I think that if we were able to achieve the goal of a peaceful settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, then that would change the dynamic of the region in a very positive way. What I think most Iranian people are looking for is that Palestinians have their right to a sovereign state. Well, there's only one way to achieve that, and that is by peace through Israel. It's not going to be achieved through violence.

And again, this is an example of where the Iranian regime has a choice. It can be supportive of peace efforts that result in concrete benefits for the Palestinian people, or it can choose to engage in rhetoric and fund terrorist activity that ensures continued conflict, which may serve their political interests, but certainly doesn't serve the interests of a Palestinian family on the West Bank who would prefer to have a country of their own in which they can start a business or send their children to school. That's, I think, the vision that we have to keep in mind.

Mr. Kalbasi. Thank you so much, Mr. President.

The President. I enjoyed it.

Mr. Kalbasi. Thank you for your time.

The President. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The interview began at 10:08 a.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia in New York City

September 24, 2010

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome President Santos here. This is the first time that we've met face to face, although we had a wonderful conversation on the phone.

He has already, I think, in the short time that he's been in office, shown remarkable leadership. Yesterday was a big day for the people of Colombia and those who are seeking peace in

the region. Because of outstanding work by Colombian security forces, they were able to embark on a mission that resulted in the death of the leader of FARC.

The people of Colombia have been plagued by this terrorist insurgency for a very long time, and as a consequence of the success of Colombian security forces, I think we now have the chance to see continued stability in Colombia and in the region. And that will create the prospects for peace and development under President Santos's leadership. So we want to congratulate him.

The friendship between our two countries is extraordinarily important to us. We are working not just in dealing with things like drug interdiction, but we're also interested in figuring out how we can continually improve our economic cooperation, our political cooperation, and our people-to-people exchanges so that we continually deepen these bilateral ties.

And I think that President Santos also likes to boast about the fact that his Kansas Jayhawks have won a number of championships in basketball. And I was a little disappointed with them last year because I bet on them winning it all, and they lost. [Laughter] But he's already apologized to me for that. [Laughter]

So I want to welcome the President. Again, congratulations on a great start. We are confident that you're going to do well and we'll be able to strengthen the cooperation between our two nations.

President Santos. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you.

President Santos. All right, I want to thank President Obama for his warm welcome and his generous words. We value in Colombia very

much our very special relations with the United States. We're coming, ourselves, into a new era. Now that the security problem is more or less solved, we can now turn to a more progressive agenda. Social development, the prosperity of our people, climate change, the environment, those are the type of issues that we can now include in our agenda. And we want to enhance our relation to a true partnership where Colombia and the U.S. can work together in the region and outside the region for our mutual benefit.

I am proud of being a graduate from the University of Kansas. [Laughter] As President Obama knows that we are very good in basketball. But I told him, when he called me, what the Republicans say about my education, that I was—afterwards, I went to Harvard. And they say I was educated in Kansas and corrupted in Harvard. [Laughter] And I think that's something that we both are—also graduated from Harvard, and I'm sure that that's only a Republican point of view, not a Democratic one. [Laughter]

President Obama. Well, actually, they all—they think I was corrupted somewhere. [Laughter]

Welcome. Thank you so much.

President Santos. Thank you very much.

President Obama. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:26 p.m. at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Victor Julio Suarez Rojas, chief of military operations of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), who was killed by Colombian military forces on September 23. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a United States-Association of Southeast Asian Nations Leaders Meeting in New York City September 24, 2010

President Obama. Well, good afternoon, everyone. To all the leaders who are here as well as the delegations, welcome. I want to thank my fellow leaders for being here and for making this the first U.S.-ASEAN leaders meeting to take place in the

United States. This reflects ASEAN's growing importance and the unprecedented cooperation between ASEAN and the United States.

As a Pacific nation, the United States has an enormous stake in the people and the future of