

Remarks Following a Meeting With Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani of Qatar April 23, 2013

The President. Well, I just want to welcome the Amir of Qatar and thank him and the people of his country for the friendship that they've shown towards the United States. There's an excellent relationship between the United States and Qatar on a whole range of levels: with respect to security, with respect to our military cooperation, our commerce and our trade.

Qatar has been a center of innovation. We've seen enormous progress within the country on everything ranging from education to health care. And I think His Highness has shown extraordinary leadership over the last many years in helping to guide his country.

Obviously, Qatar is also an important country in the region and has an influence that extends beyond its relatively small population. And so we had an opportunity to discuss a whole range of issues that directly relate to U.S. interests and U.S. security, but more importantly, the security of the entire world.

We had a conversation about the situation in Syria. And obviously, we have been cooperating closely with Qatar and other countries in seeking to bring about an end to the slaughter that's taking place there—the removal of President Assad, who has shown himself to have no regard for his own people—and to strengthen an opposition that can bring about a democratic Syria that represents all people and respects their rights regardless of their ethnicity or their religious affiliations. And I'm very pleased that we are going to be continuing to work in the coming months to try to further support the Syrian opposition, and we'll be closely coordinating our strategies to bring about a more peaceful resolution to the Syrian crisis.

We also had an opportunity to discuss the situation in Egypt, where we both very much want to see success on the part of Egyptian democracy. And both of our countries are committed to trying to encourage not only progress in this new democracy, but also economic

progress that can translate into actual prosperity for the people there.

We had an opportunity to discuss the situation with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and we both agree that peace is in the interests of everyone: a secure Israel side by side with a sovereign Palestinian state. And we exchanged ideas about how we can advance those negotiations, and I've shared the importance of providing support to President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority so that they can be in position to have fruitful negotiations with the Israelis that can bring about, in a timely fashion, a two-state solution.

And I had an opportunity to thank the Amir for the strong support that his country has provided to our efforts in Afghanistan, including the efforts that he has personally been involved with in getting a dialogue between the Afghan Government and the Taliban that might potentially result in some sort of political reconciliation.

These are all very difficult issues, and neither of us are under any illusions that they will be solved overnight. But what we agree with is that if our two countries are communicating frankly and constructively and pursuing common strategies, that we can be a force for good for the entire region and for a vision of the Middle East that is democratic, that is prosperous, that is tolerant, that is representative of all peoples, and that is a force for good around the world.

And so I want to thank the Amir for this visit and for his friendship. And I look forward to working with him and the Government of Qatar for many years to come.

[At this point, Amir Hamad spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were then translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Interpreter. I was delighted to have this very positive meeting with the President today. We discussed several issues of mutual concerns to

both our countries, especially the situation in Syria. We also addressed issues concerning our mutual military relationship, which is good, as you know, and also exchanges in education. As you know, there are several universities, American universities that opened branches in Qatar.

We also discussed our economic relationship. There are joint oil and gas projects between the two countries.

We also talked about the serious changes that are affecting the Middle East, especially countries like Egypt, which we consider to be a very important country and also important for peace with Israel. And for Qatar, it's very important for us to see peace between Israel and the Palestinians, and to see also a good relationship between Arab countries and Israel once a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement is reached.

[*Amir Hamad spoke in English as follows.*]

Amir Hamad. Actually, she meant by “gas and oil” that we will talk with the President, but it's with a relation between us and Americans, with big American companies like Exxon-Mobil, et cetera. They are enjoying working with us in the sector of the hydrocarbon.

The other thing, it's the Syrian issue. As you know—

[*Amir Hamad spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were then translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Interpreter. We also discussed the Syrian issue. What's happening in Syria is a major, horrific tragedy in the region and the world. And we hope to find a solution for the bloodshed in Syria and for this current Government to leave power so that—to give room to others to take over. And we hope that any party that succeeds the current regime would be supportive of democracy and the political process.

[*Amir Hamad continued in Arabic, and his remarks were then translated by an interpreter as follows.*]

Interpreter. We in Qatar support the peace process and finding a political peace, and Qatar supports that.

And we once again would like to thank the President.

[*Amir Hamad spoke in English as follows.*]

Amir Hamad. Thank you very much.

President Obama. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority.

Statement on Senator Max S. Baucus's Decision Not To Seek Reelection April 23, 2013

I want to thank Max Baucus for his nearly 35 years of service to the people of Montana. Max has made small businesses a top priority, often taking “Work Days” to visit local businesses across Montana and spend a day working alongside his constituents to gain perspective and help bolster the local economy. As Finance Committee Chairman

and a senior member of both the Agriculture and the Environment and Public Works Committees, Max has been a leader on a broad range of issues that touch the lives of Americans across the country. Michelle and I commend Senator Baucus on his career and wish him and his family well in the future.