

tween Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov in Geneva bear fruit. But I repeated what I've said publicly, which is that any agreement needs to be verifiable and enforceable. And we agreed that, ultimately, what's needed for the underlying conflict is a political settlement that allows ordinary Syrians to get back to their homes, to rebuild, and to relieve the enormous suffering that's taking place. And I wanted to express our appreciation to the Kuwaiti people for the enormous humanitarian support that they've provided to Syrian refugees.

We also had an opportunity to discuss other regional issues, for example, our continued efforts to facilitate negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians and arrive at a peace deal in that part of the world. We appreciated the Amir's wisdom in engaging with the Government of Iraq and helping to improve and create peaceful relations between Kuwait and Iraq.

And we also discussed ways that we can improve the economic prospects for people in the region in countries like Yemen, for example, that are experiencing great challenges.

So we appreciate the strength and leadership of Kuwait and its friendship. And we are looking forward to extensive cooperation in the future.

Amir Sabah. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to President Obama for the warm welcome and hospitality. I am happy to refer to the productive and constructive talk between myself and President Obama, which included topics related to our bilateral relations where we renewed the determination to achieve what is the best for the mutual interests of our both countries.

We also discussed the continued detention of the two Kuwaiti detainees in Guantanamo, and asked President Obama to speed up the process of releasing them in line with the Pres-

ident's commitment of closing down Guantanamo and also in line with the assurances given by the Kuwaiti authorities.

We also expressed our satisfaction with the positive developments related to the Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations. We also discussed the subject of the security of the Gulf region and our combined efforts to achieve security, stability, and development in this important, active region, especially taking into consideration the current development in the region.

Additionally, we also discussed the harsh humanitarian suffering of the Syrian people and the continuation of the ongoing humanitarian deterioration in Syria and suffering of the refugees and the importance of interlacing all efforts in a speedy manner to reach a peaceful solution and keep the region free from the danger of war.

We also discussed the importance of achieving security and stability in the Arab Republic of Egypt and support all the constructive efforts in this roadmap. We also discussed the peace process in the Middle East and the importance of focusing all international efforts to advance the planned negotiations to create positive elements in this regard and the continued efforts of the United States of America in the peace process. Thank you.

President Obama. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov of Russia. Amir Sabah referred to Faez al-Kandari and Fawzi al-Odah, Kuwaiti nationals in U.S. custody at the Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention facility. Amir Sabah spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Statement on the Resignation of Eugene B. Sperling as Director of the National Economic Council and the Appointment of Jeffrey D. Zients as Director of the National Economic Council

September 13, 2013

Over the past 4½ years, Gene has been one of my closest advisors and a close friend. Gene understands better than anybody that our top priority as a nation is making sure that our economy once again works for working Americans. Gene’s impact in this administration began at Treasury, where he helped us avoid a second Great Depression and led efforts to pass a Small Business Jobs Act to help entrepreneurs grow. He has been a tireless proponent of efforts to strengthen the recovery and make our Tax Code more fair, whether in helping to design the payroll tax cut, fighting for job-creating tax credits for tens of millions of hard-working Americans or developing the “American Jobs Act.” He was central to designing policies to help support the housing recovery and was a driving force behind our manufacturing agenda and our efforts to attract jobs and investment to the United States.

Gene’s relentless work ethic, sharp intellect, and ability to work across the aisle have been instrumental in our efforts to build a better

bargain for the middle class and reduce the deficit while also protecting the most vulnerable. I want to thank Gene and his family for their service, and I look forward to having his counsel for the rest of the year.

Today I’m also proud to name Jeff Zients as the next Director of the National Economic Council. Before heading up the Office of Management and Budget, Jeff spent decades as a successful entrepreneur in the private sector. Jeff has a sterling reputation as a business leader, and he earned the admiration and respect of everyone he worked with during his 4 years in leadership positions at the Office of Management and Budget. I am certain that in Jeff’s hands we will continue to have strong leadership of our economic policy team, and his advice will be critical as we keep moving this country forward and building an economy where everyone who works hard can get ahead.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a biography of Mr. Zients.

The President’s Weekly Address

September 14, 2013

This week, when I addressed the Nation on Syria, I said that, in part because of the credible threat of U.S. military force, there is the possibility of a diplomatic solution. Russia has indicated a new willingness to join with the international community in pushing Syria to give up its chemical weapons, which the Asad regime used in an attack that killed more than a thousand people on August 21. I also asked Congress to postpone a vote on the use of military force while we pursue this diplomatic path. And that’s what we’re doing.

At my direction, Secretary of State Kerry is in discussions with his Russian counterpart. But we’re making it clear that this can’t be a stalling tactic. Any agreement needs to verify

that the Asad regime and Russia are keeping their commitments. That means working to turn Syria’s chemical weapons over to international control and ultimately destroying them. This would allow us to achieve our goal: deterring the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons, degrading their ability to use them, and making it clear to the world that we won’t tolerate their use.

We’ve seen indications of progress. As recently as a week ago, the Asad regime would not admit that it possessed chemical weapons. Today, it does. Syria has signaled a willingness to join with 189 other nations, representing 98 percent of humanity, in abiding by an international agreement that prohibits the use of