



JORDAN IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 2012
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTRODUCTION

Jessica Tuchman Mathews
President

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

MODERATOR

Katherine Wilkens
Deputy Director of Middle East Program
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

SPEAKERS

Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh

Transcript by Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

JESSICA MATHEWS: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment. It's my great pleasure to welcome you this morning and to welcome our distinguished guest speaker, Nasser Judeh, the foreign minister of the Kingdom of Jordan.

A year and a half after the beginning of the demonstrations in the Arab world in Tunisia, what we do know is that we have seen only the very beginning of a profound and very long-term transformation that is underway. From the very beginning, Carnegie scholars have avoided using the word Arab Spring in favor of Arab Awakening because of our conviction, shared by Jordan's King Abdullah in a speech he gave to the European Parliament a few weeks ago when he said these events will not be over in a season, not even a year, and as I think he would probably agree, probably more like decades. It's going to be the work of a generation, at least, to build a new order in the Middle East and one in which we hope will be built on participatory governance, respect for the rights of others, tolerance and pluralism.

[00:01:28]

As that process unfolds, Jordan finds itself at the heart of a – of a cauldron. To the north, there is the conflict in Syria that's already claimed 10 (thousand) or 15,000 lives and shows, far from signs of abating, shows signs of intensification. To the east, Iraq's fragile political balance is once again threatening to come apart. To the south, Sunni monarchies in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are engaging – are struggling to respond to the forces of change that are sweeping the region. And to the west, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process remains as intractable as ever.

From a distance, these challenges are daunting and difficult and – for our – for the international community, but for Jordan, they are the daily fact of life unfolding on its borders. So Jordan has, I think, a unique perspective on the – on these events. And so we are very pleased and lucky to have with us the foreign minister to share his assessment.

[00:02:48]

Before assuming his current position, Nasser Judeh was – in 2009, Nasser Judeh served as the Jordanian government's official spokesman and minister for media and communications. And we've just been enjoying a conversation about the new world of media and communications as we shared a cup of coffee and, as he pointed out, everybody now has their own press conference, their own television show and their own – their own – all their own media channels. At an individual level, it's changing things in a – in a kind of a big way.

The foreign minister is a seasoned veteran, also, of the Middle East peace process and of the scene in general. He's played an important role in efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the peace table to – so that there's a great deal – in fact, most of what's happening in the region – that he can speak to in a – with firsthand knowledge. So we're delighted to welcome him here to Carnegie to discuss the challenges and opportunities that

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

are facing the Arab world and to engage in Q&A with you afterwards. So please join me in welcoming the foreign minister of Jordan, Nasser Judeh. (Applause.)

MINISTER NASSER JUDEH: Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jessica. It's a great pleasure to be here. And thank you all for inviting me and for being here for what you're about to put up with in terms of listening to me. But I just want to say that it's a real pleasure and privilege to be here with you and Catherine, of course, and everybody.

And I can't help but agree with the premise that you started with, which is we do refer to what's been happening in the Arab world over the last 13, 14 months as Arab – the Arab Awakening – or I see it as an Arab awakening, because the common denominators are very few in some – in some cases. So it is, at the end of the day, an Arab awakening that has translated itself into several Arab awakenings in different – in different countries.

So allow me at the beginning to say what a – what a great honor it is for me to be here. And it is always useful to have the opportunity to exchange views and ideas about the Middle East, particularly with distinguished thinkers and scholars such as those here at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Never has such a dialogue been more valuable than it is today, when the region is in the midst of unprecedented change. And as you said, his majesty the king's position is that we have only seen the beginning and that it is up to leaders to react and interact with the need for change and with the events that have taken place in order to ensure that future generations benefit from this gateway to dignity, one would hasten to say.

[00:06:00]

Two years ago, none of us – no think tank, no scholar, definitely no politician – (chuckles) – could have imagined the extent of – extent of change that has taken place in the Arab world in such a short period. I keep referring to a panel discussion that I took part in on the margins of the World Economic Forum in Jordan in October 2011. And the title of the session was “Geostrategic Scenarios for 2012.” And I walked in and Tony Blair was there and Amr Moussa, and I said: You know, forget this title, because had we been sitting here in October 2010, none of us could have predicted what was going to happen in 2011. So it's better to talk about today and how we can build on today rather than try and predict what's going to happen next year. The dynamics of change are in motion, and there's no way to stop them.

So change has taken place. Change is taking place. And we all knew that the situation in many Arab countries was unsustainable and that change was and is inevitable. But the magnitude and speed of the change that has occurred exceeded even the bravest of predictions. Things have changed quickly, and like I said, it was not totally unexpected. The events over the last 18 months are obviously the result of reaching a tipping point on a course that was set in motion nearly two decades ago.

[00:07:37]

What set this change in motion was probably the rise of two concomitant phenomena. The first of these phenomena was the expansion in the field of higher

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

education in the Arab – in the Arab world. With higher qualifications came higher hopes and expectations and the quest for better and equal opportunity. And the second was the global revolution in information and communication technology – social media, the ability to interact with the rest of the world in an instant. People in our part of the world – and we keep reminding the world that the majority are the youth. In every country in the Arab world, I think you will see facts and figures that point to the fact that 70 percent, 75 percent of the population is under a certain age. So you invest in education, whether it's primary, secondary or university, higher education, and then in many countries you leave the youth in a situation where they don't have jobs, high unemployment, they're not empowered, they're not able to participate in the shaping of their own futures and destiny and they're certainly not even remotely close to taking part in the politics of their own country.

[00:09:00]

So together, I mean, these two factors – and of course being aware through information communication technology – fueled these grievances. And the two of them put together, I think, provided the elements of the perfect storm. And that's why you saw what we have all seen in the last 13, 14 months and will probably continue to see in many countries.

Again, social media has enabled the youth of our part of the world to experience and be exposed to firsthand participatory politics, meritocracy, opportunity and dignity in other countries around the world. And I think social media has presented itself as a potent tool, an effective and efficient means of political and social mobilization. And we say that very, very clearly in Egypt in particular, not to mention other countries. No longer could the security apparatuses in the countries of the Arab Spring prevent or even contain or curb the sharing of news, ideas, or more importantly, calls for action.

And the evolution of society was confronted by the political reality. The reality was not nearly stale and stagnant. Worse, it was regressing. Instead of incrementally expanding the participatory base for power, as was the evolution of the franchise in much of the develop world, the Arab world was shrinking it. The base of power was devolving from the single party to cliques within the party or often – and worse – from a single party to groups from the same town, sect, village or tribe. Some Arab countries had given the world its first experiment with monarchical republics and where power is inherited and shared only by the few who control the scene or who run the show or impose their will on the many.

Needless to say, with this regression from bad to worse came the end of opportunity and the end of dignity and perhaps the end of hope for betterment. This despair manifested itself most pronouncedly in the lack of economic advancement and ability to attain financial affluence for those outside the narrow and limited circles of power. With this concentration of power in few and fewer hands, already weak checks and balances were now shattered. And what little transparency and accountability there was vanished completely. The inevitable outcome was corruption on a scale never before seen or imagined and, just as importantly, a public perception that held corruption to be the source of all economic woes and economic hardship.

[00:11:55]

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

So fueled by higher education, enhanced by information technology and driven by the quest for dignity, change was on its way long before the events of the Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening. The question was what form it will take. Ultimately, the form of change was and continues to be determined by the ability of the political systems to respond to and be ahead of mobilized public opinion. In countries with systems that confused resolve with stubbornness, the gales of the Arab Spring swept away what stood in its path. However, in ours, I'd like to say my country included, Jordan, where this inevitability of change has long been recognized, the breeze of the Arab Spring breathed new life into a reform process that needed new impetus to move forward. So it was a gentle breeze that came to a system that was already on its way towards a future that was brighter.

Distinguished friends, aside from the fact that there has been a long-held belief in Jordan by the leadership, by his majesty the king, of the inevitability of change, there are other factors that make the Jordanian situation unique. These components of increased higher education, improved information communication technology and a shrinking power base were either not present or were of an entirely different nature in Jordan. I'm sure some will find this difficult to accept, so allow me to expand on this point in more detail.

Jordan was an early investor in education. This translated into an education boom that occurred much earlier in Jordan than many other Arab countries. This created opportunities, both inside and outside Jordan, that come with such levels of education. In addition, Jordan by and large and, in particular, when compared to certain neighbors has always been a country open to most forms of ideas and ideologies.

[00:14:09]

By virtue of this, Jordanians have always been aware of and exposed to global values, practices and principle, and these values and principles which were not totally absent from the country's political life. This openness made the boom in information technology a positive tool rather than a threat to the system. In certain countries, they were prohibited and often oppressed. Most importantly, there was no contraction in the power base, no concentration of decision-making and wealth in a chosen few or party or group.

No doubt there are many imperfections and deficiencies in Jordanian politics that require reform and improvement. But the system remains proactive, functional, credible. And most importantly, the political system was always in close touch with the people of Jordan and was thus fully aware of the social, economic and political dynamics that occurred in society. No barriers; contact is always there.

And so like I said, fully aware of the social, economic and political dynamics that occurred in society, and is fully cognizant of the legitimate grievances that exist. The king and the political system at large had a complete understanding of the state of affairs at home and in the region, as well as of the challenges ahead. And accordingly, Jordan had always had a reform process at any given moment in time, be it political, economic, social or administrative.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

Dear friends and colleagues, the advent of Arab Awakening or Arab Awakenings gave Jordan under the king the opportunity that he had awaited to jump-start reforms again. And I will get into that, I'm sure, with the questions and answers. Some people will say, when did the reform process actually start? Why was it delayed? Why did it suffer from so many setbacks? Why did it take so many hits?

[00:16:17]

And you know, I'll just say very briefly here that it's easier said than done when you're embarking on political and economic reforms and having to deal with three wars in the region at the same time, or in a country like Jordan, having to deal with rising prices of oil or be totally reliant on the Egyptian gas pipeline and then be required to – (inaudible) – and I see Dr. Sultan Mutvi (ph) in the back, so I hope he doesn't check me on my economics. But all I want to say is that at least the progress of reform is in a – in the form of a steady pace forward. Because of Jordan's new strategic position and because of some of the events that are beyond our control – sometimes, as the king said, two steps forward, one step back, but at least heading in the right direction.

So let me – let me reiterate again that the Arab Spring has allowed Jordan – again, allowed the king to jump-start reforms come what may, in spite of all that's happening in the region, especially on the political front. And accordingly, the king instantly expedited the reform agenda, taking advantage of this new momentum. And let us not be in denial. While Jordan is different, while the reform process in Jordan had begun before the Arab Awakenings, the general mood of the Arab Spring has affected all the countries. And so when it came to Jordan, because of a process that had already been undertaken, I think the equation was more balanced.

[00:17:56]

The pivotal and most challenging aspect in the process of political reform is to have clarity of vision with regards to the form and shape of the country in the post-reform era. Jordan has overcome this obstacle. The king led the – led the consensus in identifying the ultimate gain for political reforms and clearly articulated through an unequivocal commitment to the formation of governments and designation of prime ministers by the king from the party or coalition that has a majority in the house of representatives in parliament.

Of course, this must be within a framework that is inclusive and in which there are appropriate checks and balances. To reach this end, an all-encompassing national dialogue was established and was tasked with producing recommendations and guidelines for new legislation to govern elections and promote political parties. These guidelines for the legislation required to govern elections and promote political parties will stem from the aim at producing a more represented and more representative and better-functioning parliament and at galvanizing and empowering political parties in a way that would allow for true parliamentary democracy.

The goal is to have the requisite laws – all the requisite laws in place by this summer and the elections before the end of this year. There will be challenges, and the result may be

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

far from ideal. But then again, we cannot underestimate the importance of having a clear and articulated goal. And we do. And the elections will bring us one step closer.

Dear friends, the first step in this process of establishing a new framework for parliamentary democracy has not only been put in motion; it has been completed. Specifically I speak of the review – comprehensive review of our constitution that took place last year. As you know, Jordan's constitution was drafted in its modern, contemporary form in 1952. And between 1954 and 1984 we had 29 amendments to this constitution. And last year some of the demonstrations that were taking place were by some opposition groups who were calling for a review of the amendments to the 1952 constitutions.

[00:20:36]

And when we say the king was ahead of the curve, people sometimes say, well, this is a cliché; what do you mean by that? And I give them this example. When the opposition was asking for a review of the 29 amendments, the king came and said, no, we would like to review the entire constitution, the entire document. And as a result, the royal commission that was established by the king ended up submitting recommendations for a – for amendments to 42 articles out of a 130-article constitution.

So you're talking about a third of the Jordanian constitution, and that was what was ratified by parliament later. So in that – and many of these amendments had to do with the redefinition of the powers of the – of the king and the separation between the different branches of the – of the state and the checks and balances that are required. So the emerging consensus in Jordan was that this was a milestone in terms of the constitutional amendments. And as a result, the constitution is now in its – in its new format, heralding a new beginning for Jordan, a new political reality on the ground.

[00:21:59]

But the constitutional amendments not only were comprehensive and substantive. They centered on a few fundamental areas: first, guaranteeing and announcing the freedoms, rights and liberties of Jordanians; second, establishing a constitutional court that is entrusted with safeguarding the constitution and ensuring that legislation and decisions are in conformity with the constitution; third, establishing an independent elections commission that will not only oversee, but it will manage and conduct and administer parliamentary elections and ensure the credibility and integrity and transparency and fairness of these elections.

And by the way, I think this is probably one of its kind in our region, an independent election commission that is totally independent from the government, from parliament, from the judiciary. In fact, it is the body that will set the dates for the election. And it is involved already in the preregistration, registration of voters and then at the end of the day the conduction of the – of the election – the elections themselves.

And the fourth area would be to restore the balance between the executive authority and the legislative authority through making the absence of parliament for more than four months almost an impossibility, coupled with eliminating the government's discretion to

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

pass provisional laws, temporary laws. This is a major, major undertaking and a major achievement. No more temporary laws in the absence of parliament, except in three specific cases: war, natural disaster or the need to disburse (aid ?) urgent funds. Apart from that, no temporary laws from now on.

The independent election commission has now assumed its responsibilities and has begun preparations for the upcoming elections. The legislation for the constitutional court just came into force a few days ago. The political parties law was enacted, and the elections law will be passed and enacted in the very, very near future. It is in its final stages of debate in the parliament.

[00:23:59]

In this context, I must point to the fact that election laws are all – and I’m pre-empting some of the questions that I’m probably going to receive – but election laws are always controversial. And a full-fledged consensus around them is almost an impossibility, given the fact that any change will produce winners as well as losers. Parliament has been conducting consultations with stakeholders and civil society over the past few weeks since the draft law was submitted and will be debating the draft bill – is debating it, actually, as we speak and will be finalizing in the next few days. And we hope that the law that will emerge will be inclusive and representative if we want our efforts to succeed.

These foundations – but I mean maybe – on the – on the elections law, I would – just as a – as an anecdote – say that we have had several attempts at election laws. And we had the 1989 election law, for example, that produced a very vibrant parliament at the time according to a one-person, multiple-vote system. And in 1993 we changed that to one person, one vote. In 2010 we had one person, two votes – one person, one vote in a virtual district. And now the draft law that’s in parliament today is one person, three votes; two plus one; two for the district, one for (a national list ?).

[00:25:28]

And like I said earlier, election laws – electoral laws will always be controversial. And you will never find an electoral law that pleases everyone. I use – I apply what I’m about to say to the Middle East peace process. And I always say that you’re never going to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that leaves everybody equally happy, because people have to make compromises; they have to make concessions. What you’re looking for is a solution that leaves everybody equally unhappy. (Chuckles.) So – and that same notion applies to electoral laws. So long as the process is transparent, so long as the process is fair, so long as the elections are representative and so long as the end result is a truly representative parliament, then the conscience should be clear.

So I would say here that the foundations for parliamentary governments in Jordan have been laid. And skeptical or pessimistic voices that emerge tend to focus on a particular element and overlook the full picture and the accomplishments on the ground. Jordan has come a long way in the past few months. And progress is still under way. Inevitably there are delays. But they are measured in weeks, not in years. And they are largely due to procedural bureaucracy.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

For those – and I'm not trying to sound defensive (or anything ? [26:45]). I'm just stating facts as they are. But they are measured, again, in weeks. And for those who want to evaluate progress, this evaluation should be based on the advancements reached towards the defined goal. And for those who want to be skeptical, their skepticism should be based on our alteration of the defined goal or steering away from the – from the path that we have set for ourselves.

[00:27:08]

Now, on the facts on the ground show – the facts on the ground show nothing of the sort for either group. They show the opposite. And I think that it is very, very important when engaging Jordan, when one wants to analyze the discourse in Jordan or where Jordan's heading in terms of the political, economic and social reform, to engage everyone in order to get an insight or to get some elements of analysis; to try and talk not just to the vocal far right and the vocal far left, but to the critical mass in the middle, which happens to be the center and which is a vibrant center in Jordan. And it's in the – in the process of reforming and redefining itself.

And it is sometimes – I see from people who visit the country or are interested in Jordan that the first port of call is usually the far right or the far left, because they make the loudest – the loudest noise. And they have every right to be heard, and they have every right to be part of the national discourse and the national debate on this. And sometimes they do enrich the conversation and enrich the process. But they are not the only ones.

And you tend to see a lot of skepticism sometimes by people who are completely detached from Jordan or by people who have been involved in attempting or taking a shot at trying to produce an electoral law – as happened with the national agenda, for example, in the – in the past, where consensus was reached on everything except elections law because of the absence of engagement – proper engagement between civil society and the government at the time and the legislature.

Again, I would say that the smoothest of transitions will have its ups and downs, pauses and accelerations, as well as evaluations and examinations. Jordan is no different. And despite the obstacles we confront, we remain steadfast in heading towards our defined goal. And we make missteps sometimes, as in any process. But we are the first to identify the misstep and to bring it back in line.

[00:29:16]

At the end of the day, we've had – we've had our version of the awakening or the Arab Spring; that has been change without chaos, change that was led from the top. No violence. By and large, when you see protests in Jordan – and protests are not a new thing in Jordan. Deep rooted in history, I think it's a(n) established – it's an established culture and tradition to have Jordanians protest and submit – and present their opinions and criticism to the government freely. But the – this is taking place without earth-shattering violence, without fatalities, without people being shot, and we don't do this sort of thing in Jordan. And the most important thing is that in any demonstration that you see on the street, there

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

will – that will not happen in the absence of a dialogue. And you will see that those – in the – in the street. Maybe on an economic platform, mind you, we'll have representatives talking to the government inside. So it's a – it's a parallel track.

I'm sorry if I'm speaking too long. I'll need another four or five minutes just to address other issues, if I may. I would say that this Arab Spring or the series of Arab reawakenings that I referred to earlier should not make us lose focus on a core problem and challenge in the Middle East, come what may, regardless of the events of our part of the world: the Palestinian problem. And this problem is not removed or detached from the current upheavals in the Arab world. Arabs who took to the street across the entire spectrum of the Arab world to uphold the values of freedom, dignity, equality, human rights, justice and equal opportunity will and are already demanding the same for the Palestinian people. The Arabs will calibrate their dealings with Israel on the basis of justice being done to the Palestinians, as well as freedom, dignity and equality through enabling them to have their own sovereign independent state. And this has got to happen soon and according to the parameters that we all know, international legitimacy and the points of reference to the peace process as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

[00:31:30]

For Jordan, it is important to have this two-state solution. For Jordan, it is important to have peace and security in the Middle East. And the two-state solution means an independent, viable contiguous Palestinian state and security for Israel and, by extension, security for the whole – for the whole region.

It is, again, of primordial interest for Jordan. It is something that I always repeat when I say that establishment of the independent Palestinian state is as much a national interest for Jordan as it is for the Palestinians themselves and as it is, perhaps, for many countries around the world. And I keep saying peace in the Middle East is peace of mind for the rest of the world, because this is not a local or regional conflict. This is a global conflict with global ramifications, and everybody knows that.

[00:32:19]

And the resolution of this conflict also affects our domestic dynamics, including the base and scope of reform. We are major players and the most affected stakeholders in and by core issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, water, borders and security. So we're not – when we – and the reference was made to my personal involvement at the beginning of the year with the Palestinian-Israeli negotiators. But I remind them all the time that we are not just a mediator or an honest broker; we are a stakeholder, and it is very much in our interest and according to our national security concerns that we do this.

So on the basis of our deep conviction and full understanding that stagnation and stalemate on the front of the Palestinian-Israeli peacemaking would give the upper hand to the radicals in the new emerging orders in the Arab world and the chance to shape this new emergent order – and because we are, in our own right, stakeholders, as I mentioned earlier, in resolving this Palestinian-Israeli conflict peacefully and through direct negotiation.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

So I think you all know the obvious – I don't need to repeat it – but we began a modest effort in Jordan at the beginning of this year. His majesty the king felt that the stalemate, the absence of face-to-face discussion for over 16 months was not only not helpful, was extremely dangerous and quite – and is of quite serious concern to us, especially given the mood of the Arab world at the time and the preoccupation of many countries with their internal affairs.

So we brought the Palestinian and the Israelis to Jordan in what we describe as exploratory talks. And there's never any shortage of creativity in our part of the world. They're sometimes referred to as direct negotiations or indirect negotiations or proximity talks or by proxy or – you know, we wanted to join the club and call them exploratory talks. And it – and it worked. I'm sorry, I'm being cynical, but – (chuckles) – it worked in the sense that it provided the negotiators with a positive atmosphere, and perhaps as a result, we had a conducive environment that led to the continuation of contacts between the two sides and led to a positive exchange of letters between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. And I think now we're in – all in “wait and see” mode to see if that positive atmosphere and if that useful exercise that took place in Jordan at the beginning of this year will result in the resumption of direct negotiations.

[00:35:00]

We have something very solid to fall back on, which is the Quartet statement of September 2011, which for the first time set a timeline, put timelines on the issues: 30 days to have a preparatory meeting, 90 days to exchange comprehensive proposals on borders security, 180 days to achieve progress and a framework agreement by the end of 2012. This is – well, and we're halfway through 2012, and we bickered for many weeks as to when the 90 days kicked in. Was it the Israeli interpretation of the 26 of October or the Palestinian – I'm sorry, the Palestinian – (chuckles) – 26 of October, or the Israeli interpretation, which is 3rd of January. But I think the – with a conflict that has gone on for many decades, a week or two are not going to make a difference if there is a process in motion. And we always try to avoid the word “process” because there's been – as King Abdullah II of Jordan says, there's been too much process and not enough peace. And sometimes we have processes for the sake of processes, but to have a substantive, substantial process is extremely important.

[00:36:16]

Everything is interconnected in our region. And inherently, all these issues of – in the region are self-contained – are not ones that are self-contained and almost have a spillover effect, if not the entire – to the entire region and other parts of the world, then certainly to some parts of the region. We have closely monitoring the developing situation in Egypt. We're really bracing ourselves for the period before the elections. There are different dynamics in place, as you all know, and I don't want to say anything – this is an on-the-record session – to pre-empt what's happening in Egypt. But of course, Egypt is a very, very important country, the most populous Arab country, and it is of concern to all of us that this democratic process bears fruit in the very, very near future.

We are, of course – and I'm not saying anything in a particular order, but we're concerned about Iran's interference in the affairs of the Gulf Arab countries, and we're

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

concerned about this continuing nuclear file, and we're hoping this third round of discussion between the P-5 plus one and Iran that will take place in Moscow next week will really show seriousness of intent and produce results, as we do believe that the diplomatic solution to this file is all-important.

We are – in Jordan, we are pursuing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes because we have an energy bill that's breaking our back, and there's no natural resources to speak of, and we import 96 percent of our energy requirements. So when we embark on a nuclear energy program for peaceful purposes, it is because we need that. That's a question of survival. But we make sure that – and we're trying to make sure that we are a model in that sense by having it according to international standards and under all our commitments to IAEA and the NPT. And we are always calling, when it comes to military nuclear programs, for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. That's been our position, and we have maintained it all along.

[00:38:40]

Syria – we're all hearing the news, and we're seeing the headlines, and we're seeing the killing continuing, and we're seeing the violence, and we're seeing that there's only one game in town at this stage, which is the Kofi Annan plan. He's a joint special envoy with the Arab League and the United Nations, and his plan comprises six points. And so far we have seen emphasis on one point and one point only, or one component of the plan, which is the end of violence, important as it is, and the monitors. But there's a political component that needs to kick in in order for all of us to pursue the political solution that we all seek for Syria so that Syria does not slide into a situation of chaos and anarchy. We are a neighboring country, and we are concerned over what's happening in Syria. But you know, we are – we are waiting to see if there's any new traction in the Kofi Annan plan in the next few days, and we keep saying that it's important to engage everyone, to have a process that's all-inclusive, including the Russians and the Chinese, because at the end of the day, this is a question that concerns all of us.

We today host about 122,000 Syrians in Jordan. One hundred and five thousand of them crossed the border in the last – in the last 12 months without a visa requirement because there are no visa requirements between Jordan and Syria, and about 15 (thousand) or 16,000 crossed the fence running away from political situations where they're being shot at, seeking shelter, medical assistance or food and water. And the total, like I said, today in Jordan is about 122,000, pooling into an already strained economy. But Jordan has always been a haven, and we welcome them, and we share with them what little we have. But that's not to say that it's not taking a toll on what I described as an already strained economy. We will continue to support a political solution to the crisis in Syria, and we continue to say that Syria, again, is a geostrategically important country and it shouldn't be a battleground for influence by anyone from outside the region.

I wish to conclude by stating that political reforms can only evolve in a healthy way in a conducive and enabling economic and fiscal atmosphere. Jordan is determined to press on with comprehensive reforms on the political as well as the economic and social fronts, and I must stress that we are facing major challenges. I described some of them earlier on the economic and fiscal fronts due to the sharp rise in energy prices. I mean, I just want to give you two examples, very quick examples. The price of a barrel of oil rose by \$50

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

between September 2010 and April – March or April 2011, if I remember correctly, a \$50 increase at a cost to – extra burden on the Jordanian economy of about \$25 million per \$1 increase per year. So 25 million times 50 – you do the math. In the same year, we had to suffer from 14 interruptions to the Egyptian gas supply, totaling about 144 days of interruption at a cost of \$5 million a day for Jordan.

[00:42:07]

So between that and this, we had a pretty bad year in 2011, energy-wise. And I think this is what keeps us up at night: how to tackle our energy requirements, how to ensure that our political and economic reform plans are not affected by that. But we are committed to continuing with our reforms. We are committed to being an example of what a solid, steady-paced reform process is like, and we are blessed, once again, that we have a leadership, a king who is not only spearheading reform, but doing it in such a way as to ensure that Jordan not only becomes the example of everything that is good about the Arab Spring, but that Jordan always looks inwards as well as outwards.

Thank you very much.

MS. WILKENS: Thank you. (Applause.)

So I guess you're all probably familiar with our rules here. I'm Katherine Wilkens, the deputy director of the Middle East Program. And our vice president, Marwan Muasher, was unfortunately not able to join us today.

MIN. JUDEH: Did he do that on purpose?

[00:43:22]

MS. WILKENS: He's in Egypt overseeing the Carter –

MIN. JUDEH: Now you're talking.

MS. WILKENS: – election monitoring mission for the Egyptian elections. So he's doing his own political foreign efforts.

MIN. JUDEH: Can we have a live feed from – (inaudible) –

MS. WILKENS: Yeah, right. (Chuckles.) So I don't know if I should begin and then – there are several mikes around the room, and people will bring – if you raise your hand and you're called upon, the mic will be brought to you to ask a brief question, and then to give the mic back. (Chuckles.)

[00:43:53]

So I think perhaps since you were kind enough to begin with the issue of political reform, which is obviously the – one of the issues of the day, I'm wondering if you could share with us, what do you think is the most critical aspect of the reform process under way that will help to develop robust political parties in Jordan? Because right now much of your reform, as I take it from your remarks, is sort of top-down reform; it's led by the king, it's

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

encouraged by the king. But at a certain point, to have reform, it has to be bottom-up reform. And I'm wondering if you could just comment on that.

MIN. JUDEH: Of course. Well, I mean, I thank you for the question. When we say it's led from the top, it doesn't mean that it just stays at the top. I mean, this is led by the top, but it certainly filters across the entire spectrum of our society, the entire mosaic.

You touch on something that's very, very important, which is political parties and the political parties' culture. And I think, you know, we're caught between a rock and a hard place, because on the one hand, you want to nurture a culture of political parties, and on the other hand, if you're going to wait for that to happen, then you're going to be accused of delaying the process. So I don't think that one is dependent on the other. I don't think it's a – it's a sequential thing. It can be a concurrent thing.

[00:45:09]

People have traditionally – and we were in conversation yesterday about this at the State Department – people have traditionally and historically in Jordan steered clear of political party activism because of the – of the remnants of the '50s and the '60s. I mean, the '50s and '60s, if you were a member of a political party, you were either a Communist or a Baathist, and subsequently a Nasserite. I mean, so – I mean, my parents' generation stayed away from political parties because, like I said, particularly in the '50s, you were either a Baathist or a Communist.

And I think we're trying to re-establish that culture and really, you know, breathe new life into it, because again, when you're talking about 70 percent of the country being under 30 and highly educated, highly motivated, extremely politically aware, you want them to be involved in political – but you want them to set up political parties. We hope that this new political parties law that has just been passed will encourage the youth to form their own party.

We don't want – of course, but it's up to the people – but if you ask me, we don't want to see political parties that are just political. In other words, you know, they have a platform that is either related to the Arab-Israeli conflict or to regional politics or to the politics of the domestic scene. But no political parties – as his majesty the king says, you know, when you talk to the youth, they're very opinionated on the Arab-Israeli conflict; they're very opinionated on what's happening in Syria, extremely opinionated about the regional politics. But you have to ensure that they have clear views on the economy, on health, on education, on tax reform, on – and it's very, very important that you nurture that culture without being patronizing. I mean, you know, you –

[00:46:57]

MS. WILKENS: (Political ?) views and political parties don't always go together. (Chuckles.) But anyway –

MIN. JUDEH: (Chuckles.) But it's happening. I think it's happening; it's under way.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

And like I said, in Jordan today, you've got many political parties. It's not that you don't have them. It's just trying to rebrand them and redefine them and inject new life into them. You have the largest party in Jordan today – and the most organized – is the Islamic Action Front.

And by the way, you know, I get hit with a lot of questions when I'm traveling, is that what do you think, what about Islamist participation in the – in the politics of Jordan? And I keep telling them, you know, I don't know about other countries, but in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood and the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the IAF, has been part of the system, part of the political system for many, many years. The Muslim Brotherhood as a social organization has existed in Jordan since the mid-'40s; the AIF as a political party for more than two decades. It contested the elections of – in the elections of 1989. They had a 22-seat bloc in that parliament plus affiliates, they had the speakership of the lower house at the time, and they had five cabinet portfolios. So it's not a new thing in Jordan. I mean, maybe a new thing in other countries, but it's not a new thing in Jordan.

[00:48:19]

And at the same time, just because the IAF is the largest party and most organized in Jordan, it doesn't mean that the remaining 29 or 30-odd parties that we have, which admittedly have no clear political – by and large no clear political programs – doesn't mean that they're not given a fair chance just because they're not the most organized or the – or the – or the oldest. So we want the political parties – we want an elections law that reflects all these realities and then gives a fair chance to everybody.

MS. WILKENS: Let's start with Fodeh (ph). You can stand; here is the mic. And introduce yourself.

Q: Mr. Minister, welcome back to Washington.

MIN. JUDEH: Thanks a lot.

Q: You have given us an eloquent presentation of the challenges – the economic, the political, the social.

MIN. JUDEH: But – (chuckles) –

MS. WILKENS: You know.

Q: And in the end, you said something which is very, you know, logical. These crises interact with each other. In view of the fact that they interact with each other, and the time horizon in my view is short, are you optimistic or pessimistic?

MIN. JUDEH: On the overall picture?

Q: Yes.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MIN. JUDEH: You know the definition of a pessimist? A well-informed optimist. (Laughter.) So I'm neither this nor that, and I try to avoid saying if I'm an optimist or a pessimist, even when it comes to a certain specific situation. All I can tell you is I'm very optimistic about Jordan. I mean, I don't know about the overall picture, and we have yet to see. I mean, there are some people who say, well, you know, the first clear success of the Arab Spring has been Tunisia. And Tunisia is a – is a success story, and I hope that it is heading in the right direction. But I think the big test will be in Egypt and in other – and in other countries. And Egypt is an important, an all-important country.

[00:50:15]

Am I – am I hopeful that this Arab Spring – this is our declared position in Jordan, that the Arab Spring – first of all, as we all said in the introduction and in my modest intervention, that it's not the end. I don't think we're even halfway through. I think the search for dignity is the right of not just the youth, but any population. So I think that change has come. Change is coming. You're either – you either resist it and suffer the consequences, or you interact with it, or you try to pre-empt it and lead it. And that's positive; when I say pre-empt it, I don't mean that in a negative sense.

So I'm very hopeful that the model that we're setting in Jordan, the example that we're setting in Jordan, the change without chaos – again, as my good friend and – Lady Ashton of the EU described it – the reform that is led from the top, the confident strides, the ability to have the – not only the confidence, but the courage and the boldness to say, well, I want to do this, even if it means redefining my own role as a monarch, for example, or redefining the system of government or redefining the system of representation. But the end result is clear, and that is to have a representative government. And we can be a model; we can be a monarchy that has a parliamentary democracy and a model in the region, so –

[00:51:43]

MS. WILKENS: I think over here, Dr. Asali (ph), did you say –

Q: Mr. Minister, it's good to see you again –

MIN. JUDEH: Good to see you again.

Q: – and I hope your visit is very good and yet to get better.

I want to congratulate you and the Kingdom of Jordan on the active role – on not giving up at a time of great temptation to give up the last few months on the Palestine-Israel negotiations. And you have alluded to return back to some form of a dialogue. A lot of people are convinced in this town that nothing much is going to happen in a serious way, a strategic way, till the elections in November – here, this election. What I seem to have understood you to say is that there may be something going on. Could you give us a glimpse into the future of at least those negotiations?

[00:52:46]

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MIN. JUDEH: If I hinted that there is something going on, that means I, you know, don't want to elaborate too much, but – (chuckles) – no. There's nothing of earth-shattering importance that's taking place behind the scenes, except attempts to try and bring everybody back to a discussion.

I can't call it direct negotiation at this stage; you know the parameters that were set by Israel for direct negotiation. But the effort continues. I mean, what you don't see in public does not mean that there is not something happening behind the scenes in terms of effort. And there isn't. I mean, I'm speaking to everybody every day to try and get them all together.

Let me – let me just to back to the – to the milestone that you said, and very, very correctly, which is the U.S. election. I mean, a couple of months ago you were talking about the U.S. election and a possibility of an early Israeli election. And then, you know, Prime Minister Netanyahu completely circumventing that by, you know, creating this broad coalition that is unprecedented in Israel's history. He is now probably the most powerful if not the most powerful prime minister in the history of Israel with the broadest coalition, and he is able to do things. He is able and he is enabled to do things; he has the mandate. And I'm – and I'm hoping, and we're all hoping that the government of Israel led by Prime Minister Netanyahu will realize that Israel's ultimate security will come through peace and nothing else. And I'm hoping that the two sides, the Palestinians and the Israelis, will go back to the table.

[00:54:25]

We were involved behind the scenes with the preparation for the atmosphere of the letters – Abbas' letter to Netanyahu, Netanyahu's letter to Abbas. And I think, to a certain modest degree, we were able to influence the fact that the atmosphere was positive. By that, I mean that the letters may not have produced much, but it could have been – it could have had ugly results. Had there been, you know, an exchange of fiery letters, we could have had ugly results.

There's of course always the concern over settlement building and unilateral action. And these recent announcements are just not only damaging but extremely harmful to the – to the process. You can't continue building new facts on the ground. I mean, I know we keep saying it while it goes on, but we have to say it and we have to condemn it and we have to say that this is illegal and cannot continue. And that's why our position for the last two years has been one of expediting and fast-tracking discussions on borders and securities so that you can get rid of this issue of settlements that lingers and sometimes obstructs negotiations every single time. Once we define the border – even if it's virtual at this stage – but once you define a line that is going to be the border, the border between the would-be state of Palestine and the state of Israel, then I think the whole world can act as a watchdog and say, well, you can't build beyond this line. That's – you know, that's a virtual line that has been agreed on. A discussion – a speeded-up discussion on borders and security is very, very important. We maintain that if you remember the – in the – our discussion three years ago when we were here in Washington, it didn't happen. And we were extremely hopeful that when the Quartet statement came out in September 2011, with the timeline that it had

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

set, it would herald a – something on the ground. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened. But there is still hope; it hasn't been lost altogether.

[00:56:19]

I – my – I'm sorry for the long-winded answer, but the short summary of it is there is a lot of diplomatic – a flurry of diplomatic activity behind the scenes, directly, indirectly, just trying to get that positive atmosphere to continue, because there was a positive atmosphere after the Amman exploratory talks, after the exchanges of letters. And I hope – I hope that this atmosphere is not poisoned by these settlement announcements or expansions or by anything else. It is important that the mood is maintained, that momentum is maintained. You don't want to get to the U.S. elections without something in motion, without something substantive in Washington. You don't want to reinvent the wheel after the U.S. elections. You just want to make sure that the wheel is rolling before and after.

MS. WILKENS: To follow up on this, how would you characterize Jordan's relations with Israel today?

MIN. JUDEH: Well – as in cool, warm or lukewarm, or – (chuckles) –

MS. WILKENS: The ambassador – there's no ambassador, correct? There's –

MIN. JUDEH: But an embassy.

MS. WILKENS: Right, correct.

[00:57:24]

MIN. JUDEH: Yeah. I mean – I mean, sometimes people come to me and say, well, you know, you – when are you sending back the ambassador to Israel? You know, I have four or five capitals in the world that have not had an ambassador for over a year now, and none of them have complained to me. (Chuckles.) But we have a functioning embassy. I mean, I don't understand. It's a symbolic thing, I agree, the presence of the ambassador. But, I mean, I haven't had an ambassador in Turkey for a year. And it's just procedural, completely procedural. An ambassador will go, eventually. But I know the symbolism that you're referring to. But we have a functioning embassy – I mean, every day, there is contact between our diplomatic mission in Tel Aviv and various Israeli authorities, ministries. And at the same time, I think that really, what we're – what we're all looking for is a positive atmosphere, a development in the peace process and no more settlement building, no – it's – you know what I mean.

MS. WILKENS: Do we have – go ahead, in the back?

Q: Hello. Thank you. My question is regarding the Jordanian Independent Election Commission. What, in your opinion, is the greatest challenge that the commission is going to face? And do you think that the commission is well-positioned for the elections later this year?

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

[00:58:47]

MIN. JUDEH: One of the biggest challenges that the IEC faces is that it's a new setup. First time ever in the – in the history of elections in Jordan that you have an independent commission – like I said earlier, totally independent from the executive, the legislative and the judiciary.

So the biggest challenge is going to be in six short months or whatever date – I mean, I don't want to pre-empt the commission itself because it is the one that sets a date for election. But we're assuming, since the king is always saying before the end of this year that it's going to be within the next six months.

So one of these strategies is, how can it within six short months devise mechanisms to run a fair and transparent and free election while not entirely relying on existing structures? I mean, for many, many years elections were held by the Ministry of Interior, by organs, you know, under the Ministry of Interior, and this – (inaudible) – has to either invent or create or be very creative about setting up an entirely new structure. It's a massive exercise. They're probably going to have to hire, you know, tens of thousands of people to help them, I mean, who in the past were hired by the Ministry of Interior.

So my thing would be – in answer to your question, the biggest challenge is how to rely on existing structures as minimally as possible in order to run a fair and free election, and in such a short time. That's number one. Number two, I would say that we've had – we have problems with elections in Jordan, I mean in the last two, three elections. And some of the procedures surrounding the elections are criticized by – even by the king himself. Usually, you know, when the election takes place and we see that, you know, it's either not an entirely representative parliament or some of the procedures had certain flaws and all that, usually, you know, the king is the biggest critic of anything that goes wrong. I mean, he does not mince his words.

[01:01:08]

So how is this election commission – independent election commission going to produce an election that will be subject to scrutiny? And it's up to them – I don't know if they're going to be inviting international observers or regional, domestic observers or whatever. But this election is going to be subjected to much scrutiny. And how do you conduct an election that is really beyond criticism in the future? Because that's going to be a big test for Jordan.

So I think they have serious – and not to mention, of course, the electoral model itself. It's being debated in parliament now, and I think some of the procedures will come out of that – of that – (inaudible) – the IEC will have to deal with it. They'll have a serious set of challenges. I'm pretty sure that they're well-positioned to deal with these challenges. Six months is a short time; five months is a short time, but it's not – it's not – it's not impossible to do what they have to do.

MS. WILKENS: We have one up here and then here.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

Q: Mr. Minister, I'm Jim Seevers from Georgetown University. It's always a pleasure to see you back in Washington.

MIN. JUDEH: A fellow Hoya.

MS. WILKENS: (Inaudible.)

Q: (Chuckles.) You had mentioned the key role of higher education in the developments in the last 18 months. I just wonder, looking forward, what you see the role of higher education – if there are more reforms, if there are more developments that you see going forward. Thank you.

MIN. JUDEH: If I understood your question correctly, I mean, how are we going to basically utilize the outcome of higher education into society? But I would tell you that – I don't know if I made my point clear in my intervention, but we had invested in education many years – many years ago, way before anybody else did in the – in the region. And we had to. I mean, in the '50s when people were saying, you know, Jordan doesn't make sense – no natural resources, it just lost a huge war – or the Arabs had lost, and Jordan didn't – in 1948, but – (chuckles) – 1967 was a different story.

[01:03:38]

But at that time it was decided that Jordan would invest in education, and our biggest capital is the human capital, so we decided to invest in that. And today I think, you have the highest ratio in the world, highest university – ratio of university graduates to the rest of the population. We're always competing with Sweden. I think they're usually number two and we're number one, or vice versa – 6 ½ million people in Jordan today, with about 30 universities. So the investment is there.

At times it was counterproductive, because – I mean, I remember in the '70s and '80s we had, you know, an oversaturated market when it came to engineers and doctors. And in the '90s I think we had too many engineers, and in the – it's fine, and that helped us also to export talent, Jordanians who have gone to our brothers and sisters in the Gulf and helped them and created – helped created infrastructure, institutions – was good for us, because we also rely on the remittances that come back from these Jordanian expatriates – (inaudible) – a solid backbone to our economy.

But the most important thing in this day and age, in the context of the Arab awakenings, I would say, that you educate people, and you have to empower them. You educate people, and you have to provide them with job opportunities. You educate people, and you have to respect their intelligence and respect the work that you have – that you have provided for them and allow them to not only express their opinions freely, but to take part in the shaping of their future. I mean, that's what I would say.

[01:05:17]

MS. WILKENS: Mr. Minister, can I – can I follow up on – it's a very good question. I mean, you were all familiar with the work pioneered by Ria Muhalif Khaneidi (ph). And the issue, of course, is the quantity of education, which is what you're discussing, the availability of education – you have now a proliferation of private universities in Jordan

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

that are trying to sop up the demand for higher education – versus the quality of education and the gap that’s been identified of educating students to be able to take the jobs that are needed. And to what extent is there a reform in that area, addressing the quality issue and sort of keeping more oversight of the proliferation of private universities that, for some people, are just money-makers?

[01:06:06]

MIN. JUDEH: I don’t know if that is restricted to Jordan.

MS. WILKENS: No, it’s regional. That’s regional –

MIN. JUDEH: No – yeah, it’s an international thing. It’s an international thing. It was not just a – yeah.

MS. WILKENS: An international phenomenon, that’s true. You’re right. Here too it’s a big issue.

MIN. JUDEH: Yeah, yeah. (Chuckles.) But I would – I would say, first of all, education reform is very much under way, I mean, in Jordan. We are looking at – we’re looking at reform. I don’t know if I would call it a proliferation of private universities. I mean, you make it sound like a nuclear fire. (Chuckles.)

MS. WILKENS: The demand is high.

MIN. JUDEH: Yeah. I think we are, you know, fully aware of the potential problem, which is twofold, in my opinion. Number one, how do you ensure that the product of your higher education is one that meets the demands of the market and the domestic scene? And two, how do you – how do you make sure that the quality that you’re producing is the quality required?

I mean, I don’t know if I would agree – if that’s what you were hinting at, if I would agree that by and large in the quality – the quality seems to be the victim there. I think that Jordanian university graduates are not only well-sought-after in different countries, but when it comes to ICT in particular, I think – (inaudible) – some of the best talent in the whole region.

MS. WILKENS: I mean, it’s an issue everywhere – (inaudible).

MR. JUDEH: I mean, it could be specific cases of that. I don’t know if I would –

[01:07:33]

MS. WILKENS: You raised the issue of joblessness among graduates, and so that’s the gap issue.

MR. JUDEH: It is – it is – it is true, but it’s not related to the quality of the education. I mean, it’s probably related to larger-picture policies. And you’re absolutely right we have to look at that. Career placement, for example, I mean, is something that is not very common in our part of the world. We’re starting now with the university – I mean, identify, you know, your – the potential for what it is that you’re studying and the potential

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

availability of jobs or of opportunities. It's happening. It's slowly happening. But the quality, I think, of Jordanian education remains probably among the best in the region. I say that with, you know, with all objectivity.

MS. WILKENS: Abdulsah (ph).

Q: Thank you very much for an excellent presentation. I have two questions, but they are interrelated. You said that the Kofi Annan plan is the only game in town.

MIN. JUDEH: For now.

Q: To now. I was wondering how long people are going to wait to say if it failed or not. What did you hear from the Americans on this? I mean, when would the international community say we have to move to something else? Second question is concerning Russia. You said Russia has to be part of the – of the effort to implement the political part of the plan, which is basically transition. So far the Russians have been saying they don't see any transition for, you know, Araby, a Yemeni model or something like that. I understand that the king will see the president of Russia this month. I don't know if it's true.

MIN. JUDEH: Our king is seeing who?

Q: The president of Russia, Putin.

MIN. JUDEH: Oh, yes. Sorry. President Putin is visiting Jordan, yeah.

Q: Yes, yes. I was wondering if – because I think –

MIN. JUDEH: Well, he has a reason to.

Q: I think he would be the first leader who will – Arab leader who will see the – Putin, actually, since the beginning of the crisis in Syria. I was wondering what kind of message you will have for – with him. Do you think we can convince the Russians to be on board in transition? Thank you.

[01:09:46]

MIN. JUDEH; OK, regarding your first question, ma'am, I said very clearly that Kofi Annan plan is the only game in town as – you know, right now, that there's nothing else, I mean, apart from us all turning a blind eye and letting the events take – without any attempt to try and resolve them. How long does that apply? I think we made it very, very clear in the last Arab League foreign ministers' meeting and in the core group of ministers' meeting in Istanbul recently that this mission should be timelined. It cannot just be open-ended.

[01:10:16]

I think we're looking at two milestone dates. I know I call them milestone, but you know, significant dates. Number one would be the Friends of the Syrian People meeting in Paris, which is expected in early July, and number two would be the set date for the expire of the Kofi Annan mission, which is around the 19th of July or 20th of July, if I'm not mistaken, and will it be renewed. I think if there's enough traction on the ground between now and

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

then, then, you know, it would make every sense for a renewal of the mission if the political dialogue has begun, if – my three questions are the following. I wish I could say don't quote me on this but – (laughter) – but just between the hundred of us is, number one, who speaks for the Syrian opposition? And we have different factions of the – so who speaks for the Syrian opposition right now – all the Syrian opposition?

Number two is, who speaks for the regime in terms of the dialogue? Who's the interlocutor on the regime's part with the – with the – with the opposition? Number three is, if they're going to talk, then where? So – because where is important. I would – I think these questions needs answers, and I think there are answers in the making.

[01:11:34]

And yes, second part of your question, we – we're all engaging with the Russians, his majesty the king, so former President Medvedev; in Seoul end of March, in Korea, we were all attending the Nuclear Security Summit. And I received – Foreign Minister Lavrov and I went and visited him, and I would probably being see him again in a few days. And you're absolutely right: President Putin is visiting the region and will be visiting Jordan at the end of the month.

So when we say engaging the Russians, it's important that the Russians are part of this all-inclusive – Russians and the Chinese, of course – all-inclusive effort. And I believe that some of the statements of the – of Russian officials have been to the effect that, you know, they don't mind difference in – (inaudible) – although, you know, the parameters and the specifics are different.

The most important thing is that, you know, this is a Syria thing. There is violence continuing. There's a process of systematic killing that's continuing, and that a massacre is being committed. There's also an infiltration of terror into Syria, and we worry about that in the region. So that's why we need to have the component that has not been tackled yet in the Kofi Annan plan, which is the political component, the dialogue. It has to start. Otherwise, as Kofi Annan himself said, it is doomed to lack of implementation or absence of implementation, which takes us into another field.

MS. WILKENS: OK. We'll do these last two questions, one here and then one in the back. Yeah.

Q: Thank you for your comments today. You mentioned the unpredictability of Egyptian natural gas imports. And I was wondering if you –

MIN. JUDEH: I'm sorry. Come again?

Q: You mentioned the unpredictability of Egyptian natural gas imports.

MIN. JUDEH: Yeah.

Q: And I was wondering if you see opportunity for Jordan in Israel's new natural gas finds.

[01:13:45]

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

MIN. JUDEH: The problem with the Egyptian gas is that the pipeline gets blown up every – it's not a – it's not a commercial problem, by the way. Fourteen times it was blown up in 2011, and I think two or three times in 2012. So far so good in the last few weeks. You know, that's (good ?). But look, I mean, we're following the news of all these new discoveries in the Mediterranean of Gaza, of Cyprus, of – and we're following with concern. And as you know, energy is a huge concern for us. I mentioned that and I discussed it in detail, and I remind everybody again of the figure of 96 percent of our energy is imported. And it is a nightmare scenario when an Egyptian gas pipeline gets blown up and the flow is interrupted or when the price of oil, you know, rises sharply. We – believe me, we stay up at night, and we start wondering, you know, how we're going to cover the shortfall.

So again, Israel – Israeli gas – I mean, I don't know the details of that, where and how and all that, but I see that Israel is pursuing vigorously the exploration of gas off the Mediterranean. I hope that – I mean, at one point we were all talking a few years ago about the need to get this peace process under way so that we can really concentrate – start concentrating on regional cooperation, on – not just on gas but on transport, on energy in general, on water in a region where water is so scarce. I think it only makes sense that all the countries cooperate. And for many years we've been saying that Israel has got to resolve the Palestinian issue so that Israel can become part of the region, not just in the region.

[01:15:35]

MS. WILKENS: You have time for one more question?

MIN. JUDEH: Yeah, sure.

MS. WILKENS: I think there's one in the back.

Q: Thank you very much. Now – (inaudible) – I was actually going to ask about the Israeli natural gas. Would you consider at any point purchasing the Israeli natural gas?

MIN. JUDEH: Do you guys represent the company or what? (Laughter.)

Q: (Off mic.)

MIN. JUDEH: I'm just kidding. I really can't – that's hypothetical, sir, and I – right now there's none of that. But of course we – you know, as I hope that the political environment in our part of the world would allow for all of this to happen in the future.

[01:16:16]

MS. WILKENS: Well, thank you very much for joining us today, and it's been a pleasure. Thank you all.

MIN. JUDEH: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

(END)