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Remarks With EU High Representative Lady Catherine Ashton After Their Meeting

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary of State

Treaty Room

Washington, DC

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SECRETARY CLINTON: ...

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The United States and the EU are working together already in many important arenas. We are partners in the Quartet and we share a strong interest in direct negotiations continuing between the Israelis and Palestinians. And I want to thank Lady Ashton and the EU for the strong support that has been given to the Palestinian Authority's efforts to build institutions and lay the foundation for a future state. We are working to continue these talks. Senator Mitchell is in the region today and will be meeting with Lady Ashton upon her arrival tomorrow.

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HIGH REPRESENTATIVE ASHTON: Thank you very much. It's a great privilege to be back. And as you describe, we've spent a lot of time over these last months talking with each other and our teams talking, sometimes on an hourly basis, about all of the different issues that we face. For me, my focus for the rest of today and tomorrow is going to turn to the Middle East. Having been in discussion with the Secretary and with Senator Mitchell, I will travel overnight through Europe to the Middle East to have meetings with Senator Mitchell, President Abbas, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and Prime Minister Fayyad to see what we can do to support the efforts to keep the talks moving.

More than anything, we would like to see, of course, the moratorium on settlement building continue, but we are very keen to see the opportunity for President Abbas to stay in the talks and for them to move forward to a successful conclusion. So we'll be doing what we can to do our part in that, and also talking about the work we've been doing to support the building of the Palestinian state, which is an imperative if we're going to see success as the outcome of the talks.

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QUESTION: Thank you. Secretary Clinton, on the Mdeast, a couple of things. There is -- there are some reports coming out of Israel right now that President Obama is offering new assurances on upgraded weapons systems should there be a final solution. Could you just enlighten us; is that correct?

But in a broader sense, when the President was at the United Nations, he really put a lot of political capital on the line, making a major speech and urging Benjamin Netanyahu to extend that moratorium. It didn't happen. In fact, you could say that Mr. Netanyahu blatantly disregarded what the President wanted. Will there be consequences for that?

And then in another sense, was it the wrong strategy to try to push him into the corner? It doesn't seem to be working at this point. And with George Mitchell, now you have Mr. Netanyahu saying that there will be restraint in the settlements. What does that mean? Was that enough to keep people at the table?

And if I could, because you know we always like to add one other thing --

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SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, first as to the multiple questions about the Middle East and the peace process, we are committed to working with the parties so that they will remain in negotiations. We think that is in the best interests not only of the Israelis and the Palestinians, but indeed of the region and beyond, including the national security interests of the United States. There is a great deal of intense discussions occurring between here and Israel and in Israel, as well as with our Palestinian and Arab partners. I'm not going to comment on any specifics. I think that as the President eloquently said at the United Nations, the United States believes in a two-state solution, and the only way that that can be achieved is through negotiations. Therefore, we are committed to negotiations. We understand the difficulty and the obstacles that this path holds for us, but for the same reason that Lady Ashton will get on a plane and make a long journey to meet with the leadership of the Israelis and the Palestinians, the United States will continue to push forward on a return to the negotiations and, more importantly, within those negotiations, the substantive discussion and resolution of the core issues.

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