



FEBRUARY 13, 2007

FOREIGN POLICY

King Abdullah gives wide-ranging interview to Russia's ITAR-Tass

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz gave a wide-ranging interview to Russia's official news agency, ITAR-Tass, in advance of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Saudi Arabia February 11-12.

In the interview, which was published February 11, King Abdullah welcomed Putin's visit, saying that it would boost relations and deepen cooperation between the two countries. He also characterized it as a good opportunity for Saudi Arabia and Russia to consult on a range of critical regional issues and economic cooperation.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, King Abdullah noted that, as a member of the Quartet, Russia has an important role in reaching a peaceful settlement to the conflict. He expressed the hope that the Quartet's current efforts would lead to a revival of the peace process, focusing on radical solutions to the primary issues of the dispute.

Turning to Iraq, King Abdullah said that efforts to achieve stability in Iraq must involve a comprehensive approach that takes into consideration the country's security, political and sovereignty dimensions.

The security dimension requires eradicating all sources of violence and armed militias without discrimination, the King said. The political aspect will be accomplished through national unity among the various Iraqi factions and an equal sharing of the country's wealth. As for the sovereignty dimension, that is achieved by preserving Iraq's independence, sovereignty and unity of territory.

Failure to address these three dimensions equally will negatively impact the situation in Iraq and any efforts to achieve stability there, the King warned.

Russian President Putin makes a historic visit to Saudi Arabia

Russian President Vladimir Putin made a historic official visit to Saudi Arabia February 11-12, the first to the Kingdom by a Russian leader. After a red-carpet welcome in Riyadh, President Putin and King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz held official talks on regional and international issues, especially Iraq and the Palestinian situation. Crown Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz also met separately with Putin.

During the president's visit, Saudi Arabia and Russia signed several agreements on a range of issues, including a convention to avoid double taxation, an agreement on air traffic, an interbank agreement, and a Memorandum of Understanding on cultural cooperation.

Palestinian leaders announce agreement in Makkah

In the presence of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, Palestinian leaders signed an agreement in principle for a national unity government February 8 after two days of reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who heads Fatah, Prime Minister Ismail Haniyah and Khalid Meshaal, head of Hamas' political bureau, held the talks in Makkah at the invitation of King Abdullah.

Under the agreement, Haniyah will remain prime minister. Fatah and Hamas also reached a deal on the distribution of Cabinet portfolios, with nine posts going to Hamas, six to Fatah and four to other groups represented in the Palestinian parliament. The key position of Interior Minister will go to an independent.

The agreement has received praise from countries around the world.

SAUDI ARABIA-US

Ambassador-designate Adel Al-Jubeir arrives in Washington

Saudi Ambassador-designate to the United States Adel Al-Jubeir arrived in Washington February 9 to take up his new post.

He was greeted at the airport by Chargé d'Affaires ad interim and Director of the Ambassador's Office Khaled Al-Angari, officials from the Saudi Embassy as well as officials from the State Department's protocol office.

On February 12, Al-Jubeir toured the Embassy and met with individual staff members. In the evening, the Embassy hosted a reception in his honor.

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz appointed Al-Jubeir Ambassador to the United States on January 29, 2007.

