

RELEASE IN PART
B6

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, July 10, 2012 8:13 PM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Syria: Report of Asad/Annan meeting

Fascinating and bizarre.

From: Ahmed, Salman (USUN)
Sent: Tuesday, July 10, 2012 03:16 PM
To: Rice, Susan E (USUN); Ryu, Rexon Y; Jones, Beth E; Hof, Frederic C; Ford, Robert S; simon, steven N; Sullivan, Jacob J
Cc: DiCarlo, Rosemary A (USUN); 'Pomper, Stephen' <[REDACTED]>; 'Adam Smith' <[REDACTED]>; 'Hajjar Chemali, Hagar' <[REDACTED]>; 'Stevenson, Jonathan' <[REDACTED]>; Irwin, Matthew T; Conlon, Steven M; Dibble, Elizabeth L; Brimmer, Esther D; Grant, William K (USUN); Finerty, Tressa R (USUN); Ried, Curtis R (USUN); Kornblau, Mark (USUN); Knopf, Payton L (USUN)
Subject: Syria: Report of Asad/Annan meeting

B6

A pernicious "readout" of the Annan/Asad meeting has been posted today on Al Akhbar (Beirut paper close to Hezbollah), apparently leaked by someone close to Asad. The journalist, Jean Aziz, is reportedly known to be close to Syrian intelligence. The piece was drawn to my attention by a member of the JSE's team, who stressed that it refers to several details that were discussed in the meeting but takes them out of context and mischaracterizes them. It also omits any reference to discussion on political transition, which Annan apparently raised (though he focused primarily on the cessation of violence). O/JSE is not yet sure extent to which it will get picked up in the regional (Arabic) press and social media. Annan will provide his own readout of the meeting to the UNSC on Wednesday.

BEGIN TEXT

The meeting between Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the international envoy to Syria Kofi Annan on Monday began with the usual pleasantries. They were joined by the [Head of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria] General Robert Mood and Annan's political advisor Martin Griffith.

The international envoy began by indicating that he had followed the recent media appearances by the Syrian president, from the German television to the Turkish Cumhuriyet newspaper.

"It seems, Mr. President, that you are intensifying your media appearances in this period," he remarked.

It was obvious from the introduction that Annan deliberately left out Friday's opposition "Friends of the Syrian People" Paris conference and the escalation in rhetoric during and after that meeting. "This is true for two reasons. First, I am someone who prefers action and then words. Second, we noticed an extensive blackout of the facts in addition to the distortion and misrepresentation of many matters. So I saw it as my duty to speak," Assad replied, smiling.

Annan understood. He replied saying he completely understands the difference between the events on the ground and the prevailing image that reflects the imagined scenarios of several agendas and impressions.

Annan then turned to the officially prepared statement: "Mr. President, I felt it was my duty following the conference we held in Geneva and a few days before my briefing the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on July 20 and 21, to come to you, meet with you, and present what we have achieved and what should be followed-up," Annan said.

It was obvious from the introduction that Annan deliberately left out Friday's opposition "Friends of the Syrian People" Paris conference and the escalation in rhetoric during and after that meeting.

He even went further, seizing the opportunity of his and the UN's repeated commitment to his six-point peace initiative to stress to the

Syrian president that the outcome of the Geneva convention was out of concern for this initiative, and nothing else.

“No doubt, Mr. President, you know that what happened in Geneva is different from some of the interpretations and explanations, which sought to add issues that had nothing to do with the conference or distorted its decisions,” he added. Annan’s remarkable position seems identical to the Russian stance on Western perspectives that followed the meeting.

Annan then spoke about the situation on the ground and the international monitoring mission in Syria. He pointed out the tragic situation in some regions and the need to practically achieve the essence of his mission, namely the second point concerning cessation of violence.

Assad responded by saying he is fully aware and responsive to the situation. He then presented his guest with a brief presentation of his mission since 12 April 2012. He explained how the ceasefire was reached and respected by the official armed forces for 24 hours, before it was broken by the armed insurgents, as noted in the international observers’ reports. While Assad was explaining, chief observer Mood nodded in agreement several times.

Annan listened to his host’s message, concluding that the truth of the matter confirms the need to work on a ceasefire, since the volatile situation began to spill outside Syria. Then he named Lebanon as a worrying arena for the repercussions of the Syrian situation.

“Let us try again and put a specific mechanism for a ceasefire starting from one of the more volatile regions, then move to the next,” Annan suggested. Again, Assad was completely responsive.

Annan then spoke about the situation on the ground and the international monitoring mission in Syria. He pointed out the tragic situation in some regions and the need to practically achieve the essence of his mission. “We are a state, a government, and official authorities. Therefore, if you agree with us and we gave our word to abide by the ceasefire, we will be responsible for this and you can refer to us for implementation. But who will you negotiate with on the other side?” Assad asked his guests.

Annan replied, aided by Mood. They explained that the international observers, during their mission, were able to conduct a semi-comprehensive survey of armed groups active in those areas.

“We now know the main groups at least and we know those who are responsible for them. It is true that they do not have a unified command or clear structure. But we know the key people. Therefore we believe we could work with them step by step,” they said.

In this context, it was clear that the international officials had classified the side opposing the Syrian regime as an “armed opposition.” This was later indicated in Annan’s official press release. On this point, Annan was reminded that the insurgents were the ones who aborted several similar attempts, especially in Homs.

“Some time ago, your observers witnessed attempts by some fighters to leave al-Khalidiya neighborhood in Homs to surrender themselves and their weapons. But other fighters stopped them from doing so. Your observers also witnessed how armed fighters blocked the attempt to rescue some of the residents trapped in al-Dayyan and al-Hamidiya neighborhoods in Homs,” they were told. This was confirmed by Griffith who had observed these events.

The international officials did not deny their hosts’ words. “Nevertheless, due to the current situation, let us try again. Our observers will reach an agreement with the armed groups in any area where we choose to work. In return, we want you to make a goodwill gesture at any of the mutually agreed starting points. Your gesture would be for a unilateral ceasefire from your side, a short time before the mutual deadline. Even if it is for four hours, for example,” Annan suggested.

Here, Annan was reminded that the ceasefire proposed in his six-point initiative is related to putting an end to the arming, financing, and weapons smuggling. Annan was listening to this sensitive point without reacting, until he was interrupted by a direct question.

Annan was reminded that the ceasefire proposed in his six-point initiative is related to putting an end to the arming, financing, and weapons smuggling. “What do you think of what the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said two days ago [Sunday], when she called on the armed groups to launch an assault on the government’s forces? Is such a position consistent with the substance of your mission?” Annan was asked.

After a few seconds of silence, he replied saying, “Of course not. These are dangerous words. But let us try. Let us agree on this mechanism and proceed to try to implement it on the ground, step by step.”

As for the possible time-frame for such an operation, the two sides discussed several ideas, opinions, and suggestions. They concluded by agreeing on a preliminary deadline of three months, beginning from the first step to be implemented in the plan. In the meantime, both sides will work on releasing a joint statement of progress, once every two weeks.

Annan moved from the situation on the field to discuss the question of a national dialogue between the government and the opposition. "If we moved ahead in resolving the security issue and reached the dialogue phase, can you name your representative in this process to negotiate with the opposition, as a sort of liaison officer to follow the second part of the UN's mission?" he asked.

Assad smiled and immediately replied, "We had decided on this before you asked us. Since the formation of the current government, we named someone to be in charge of the issue. He will be our representative in this process. He is the National Reconciliation Minister Dr. Ali Haidar."

Annan moved from the situation on the field to discuss the question of a national dialogue between the government and the opposition. Annan inquired about Haidar and was told by Assad that he had been chosen for several reasons. "First, he is not from the loyalist camp. He is actually from the opposition. He is also the head of a party known for its honesty in Syria and abroad. Third, he was hurt during the bloody events. His son was killed by the insurgents but he ignored his wound and accepted the mission towards a genuine national reconciliation," Assad said.

Annan acknowledged Assad's explanation, but added that "we would have preferred if you named someone who is close to you and who would be in direct contact with you to follow-up on the dialogue process."

Assad smiled again, saying that "Dr. Haidar and I sat next to each other all through my university years when I studied ophthalmology. Do you need someone closer than this?"

"In any case," he continued, "I think your problem will be on the other side, not ours. Will you be able to name someone who represents the opposition?" Annan could not hold his laughter. He seconded Assad's words and added, "I completely understand this difficulty. I saw them at the last conference in Cairo."

The formal meeting concluded, but there was still time for some closing remarks. Getting ready to leave, Annan asked his host, "How long do you think this crisis will continue?"

"As long as the [...] regime funds it," Assad replied. But Annan was not surprised by the answer. "Do you think they are behind all the funding?" he inquired.

"They are behind many things that happen in our region. They believe they will be able to lead the whole Arab world today and in the future," Assad said.

The international envoy concluded by remarking, "But it seems to me that they lack the population needed for such an ambition." This made everyone laugh.

SBU

This email is UNCLASSIFIED.