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Hotel Okura

H.R.H. Prince Turki Al-Faisal,
Chairman, King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies
“Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament”

My purpose in visiting Japan this time was to attend the 4th Meeting of the International Commission on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament in Hiroshima (October 18-20). Convened at the initiative of Japan and Australia, the meeting was an extremely valuable opportunity to engage in discussions on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament with interested parties and experts.

As you know, the Middle East has been a scene of conflict for many years. Nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament have become extraordinarily important issues for those of us living in the Middle East. The Arab countries have long considered the denuclearization of the Middle East to be a primary objective and have regularly called for efforts toward the total elimination of nuclear weapons; indeed, this year's Doha meeting of the Arab League urged support for a Middle East denuclearization initiative. I have frequently spoken about this approach since my time as Ambassador to the UK (2002-2005) and explained the need for providing technical and financial support as well as security guarantees to countries participating in this initiative. Delineating between participation and non-participation in this initiative to denuclearize the Middle East, I have also talked of the need to employ military force under the UN Charter against non-participating countries and countries seeking to manufacture or acquire weapons of mass destruction.

The reaction of many people to the views I expressed while Ambassador to the UK was that Israel was unlikely to accept this initiative. If the international community, e.g., the permanent members of the UN Security Council, were to issue a proclamation supporting the Middle East denuclearization initiative, however, this would provide an impetus its realization. The negotiations involved in implementing this initiative would also likely create an opening for resolving various issues between the Arab states and Israel. Furthermore, it would be necessary for Iran, too, to be on board in realizing this Middle East denuclearization initiative. Of course, this initiative will not be realized simply by calling on states to join in, but it could undoubtedly be viewed as a future option for the countries of the Middle East.

The other day I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and my conviction was reaffirmed that freedom from the fear of nuclear weapons is essential for humanity. The Middle East in which we live is subject to frequent conflicts and is more exposed than other

regions to the threat of potential nuclear weapons development. I presented a proposal on the Middle East denuclearization initiative at the Hiroshima Conference, which met with the same response as my earlier recommendations in the UK: Israel would not likely accept the proposal and the US would in all probability exercise its veto power. I pointed out to the Conference members that President Obama himself has clearly called for a world without nuclear weapons and that the Middle East denuclearization initiative had become a topic of discussion for both the UN Security Council and the IAEA. I believe that this initiative is feasible and that an accord on the same among the international community is possible. As one of the countries of the Arab League and as a member of the international community, Saudi Arabia remains committed to this idea.

In Beirut in 2002, King Abdullah (then Crown Prince) of Saudi Arabia offered a Middle East peace initiative under which Israel would exchange “land for peace.” This proposal sought Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and recognition of and normalization of relations with Israel by the Arab states, and was a straightforward and noteworthy plan offering a resolution to the refugee issue agreeable to both sides. The 22 countries of the Arab League expressed approval of the Crown Prince’s initiative but, upon its announcement in 2002, the Israelis declared it to be the most dangerous proposal yet. There have still not been any calls for peace from Israel, which continues to construct new settlements and maintain its occupation. No serious response to the initiative was forthcoming from the international community either, in particular the US and other major powers, but Japan did offer its support early on. I think that realization will require real action and not merely words. The US is a principal actor in the Middle East peace process. The US also wields influence on Israel and thus can urge the Israeli people to seek peace. The Arab states, too, have accepted US leadership in the process, and we long to see Obama’s campaign slogan of “Yes, we can” be translated into action, even on those thorny issues that appear beyond resolution.