

Press conference at the State Department with U.S. Secretary of State H. R. Clinton and French FM Bernard Kouchner

By Edward Campbell

Missoula, Feb. 5 (Al-Masakin)—Secretary of State Clinton met with French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner at the State Department today. The Secretary of State said that the United States was committed to its transatlantic alliance with the country which she called “oldest and closest that the United States has in the world.”

She praised French President Nicolas Sarkozy for helping achieve a ceasefire in the Republic of Georgia and said that the United States was both “proud and grateful” that France was a coalition partner in Afghanistan, noting that the Foreign Minister had “longstanding work in that country, going back many years,” and stating how impressed she was as the new hospital France has built in the capital Kabul.

She went on to say that France was working closely with the United States in the process of closing the American prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba; and said France and America have mutual concerns over the possibility that Iran may build a nuclear weapon pledging to use “smart diplomacy” to engage the international community, including Russia, to prevent Iran from achieving that aim, and said there was much

ahead of the two nations with respect to “global financial reform.”

Foreign Minister Kouchner said that although he saluted President Obama’s victory in the election “we are not always a hundred percent in agreement,” but the relationship between the two countries is “a very sound friendship.”

The Foreign Minister went on directly into the question of the Middle East saying that



the French government is “really very anxious about the situation of the people of Gaza, and we were in agreement together with Madame Secretary of State to make pressure on both side[s] to open the crossing.” He went on to stress the need to strengthen Abu Mazen in order to establish a “a government of national unity,” in Palestine.

He went on to assert that the French were in complete agreement with the Egyptian initiative.

At the press conference which followed the opening remarks of the Madame Secretary and the Foreign Minister, the Secretary of State said that Ambassador Holbrooke was on his way to London then Munich where he will meet with Foreign Minister Kouchner tomorrow, then on to Pakistan, then Afghanistan, with a stop in India, hoping to overcome an impasse with Kyrgyzstan over the possible closure of the NATO air base there which is badly needed as a line of communication to Afghanistan especially after the NATO supply line was cut by Islamic militants at Khyber near Peshawar

Feb. 3. She went on to note that she was especially thankful to be working with FM Kouchner who was a doctor in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion and therefore had a great deal of first hand experience in the region.

Her French counterpart went on to say that “Afghanistan will be the hardest and the most important task of President Obama’s...However, I think that the key word about Afghanistan is what I call “Afghanization.” That means we must give the people in Afghanistan control of their own destiny in the sense that with the progress that has been made already, it’s there. They have elected their own government. They have a parliament that has been elected, with women in the parliament, two members, which we didn’t dream of some time ago. So we need to make it known to the Afghan people that they are in control of their own progress and their own future, and that they have something to look forward in terms of their family and their future in one of the poorest countries of the world, where 80 percent of the population works in farming. I think that this is what we need to do.”



The French Foreign Minister went on to say that although France has indirect talks with Hamas through other nations such as Turkey in the process of supporting the Egyptian Initiative, it does not have direct talks with the organization because France feels that Hamas is “not part of the peace process.” He went on to say that France would

consider talking to Hamas only after Hamas recognized the signatures of the PLO on the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Secretary of State went on to stress that the United States “will not in any way negotiate with or recognize Hamas until they renounce violence, recognize Israel, and agree to abide by, as the foreign minister said, the prior agreements entered into by the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.”

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