



Remarks With UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband at Kandahar Air Base

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Kandahar, Afghanistan
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FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: Good afternoon, ladies and gents. It's a huge privilege to be here as the British Foreign Secretary in front of a multinational force, and it's obviously a huge privilege also to be here with the United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who's going to say a few words in a moment.

We've just had a very, very helpful briefing from your commanding officers about the work that you are doing, which is a source of immense pride to me, to the Prime Minister, to the whole of the British Government. The fact that you are working together as part of a multinational coalition, a coalition that sees itself supporting the Afghan Government, a coalition that wants to put itself on the side of the massive decent majority of Afghan people who want to live a decent life, embodies many of the most important things in foreign policy today.

So the first reason for being here is to thank you for the work you are doing with bravery and skill and intelligence. The second reason to be here is for us to listen and to learn so that as we renew our commitment, which both of our countries are absolutely determined to do, we can give you the support, the better support that you want to see and that you need to help you do the jobs that you have been sent here to do.

I believe that from what I've heard -- this is my second visit to Afghanistan in the last six months -- that 2008 represents an enormous opportunity for further progress. 2007 was going to be a very tough year, but it was a much tougher year for the Taliban than they expected, and I think has established a platform in 2008 that can help make further progress.

I know very, very well from talking to some of our own troops quite how tough it is here, and I think that that is increasingly understood in the UK, to speak from a UK perspective. But I want you to know that as a debate hots up in our countries about what you're doing here and the difference you're making, we will be defending you heart and soul and defending the role that you are playing in helping make a difference in a society that desperately needs the sort of support that we are able to give.

So on behalf of the UK Government, thank you to all of you from all the countries that are here for the intelligence and for the bravery with which you're doing your work. And now I'm delighted to introduce the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Thank you very much indeed. (Applause.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you very much, David, and it is a pleasure to be traveling with the British Foreign Secretary. We had very good meetings in London first to talk about this magnificent effort that is underway here in Afghanistan. You know, for many people, just a few years ago, a few short years ago, Afghanistan was synonymous with failed state, Afghanistan was synonymous with safe haven for terrorists, and for Americans, Afghanistan was synonymous with al-Qaida and the attacks of September 11th.

And when I stand here in 2008, I can only thank you, each and every one of you, for what you have done to begin to turn that picture of Afghanistan around to a better day. And you have done it with skill and bravery, I know with sacrifice. You've lost comrades along the way who gave the ultimate sacrifice. But I hope you know how much the sacrifice and the work is appreciated. I hope you know what a great source of pride your honor is to all of us. And I hope you know as you go out every day and work to help the Afghan people build a decent and functioning and modern society, that you're contributing not only to the security and the future of the Afghan people but to the security and the future of your own countries, your own people, and indeed the security and future of the world.

Because winning here in Afghanistan and turning Afghanistan from that failed state into a functioning modern state, winning here in Afghanistan and turning that safe haven for terrorism into a place from which terrorism can never flow again, and winning here in Afghanistan so that there cannot be the attacks against our cities and against our people that originated here, that's the core of the modern fight. And it's a tough fight and it's a long fight, and this is a very poor country that has had a very terrible and tragic past.

But I think you are also learning that working with the Afghans, who are a decent people, a people who are tough and who want a better future, is really heartening. I know that when they come to Washington or when I come here, I'm just really impressed with their skill and with their extraordinary desire to live a better life.

And I hope, too, that it is really something to work together in this way. I can tell you that the NATO alliance, and indeed our alliances with countries like Australia and others, were never really intended for this purpose. We thought we'd be fighting the great struggle against communism. And we find instead that the fight is a different fight. But it's nonetheless an important fight. It's a fight that is also going to transform history.

So each and every day when you get up and you go to do the difficult work, each and every day when you go to places that it takes courage and skill and bravery to go, each and every day that you spend time here away from your families -- and I want to thank them too for supporting you here in Afghanistan, each and every day I hope you have just one moment to step back and think what an extraordinary, extraordinary experience you're involved in and what an extraordinary legacy of peace and democracy and prosperity you'll leave to the Afghan people, and in doing so a legacy of peace for the world.

So thank you very much. We're very proud of you. And on behalf of the people of the United States of America, thank you, thank you, thank you. (Applause.)

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)