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Remarks With U.K. Foreign Secretary David Miliband After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

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SECRETARY RICE: Good evening. I am very pleased to welcome to the State Department my friend and colleague, David Miliband, Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom. I will be even more pleased to welcome him tomorrow to go with me to California where we will be involved in a number of events to look at clean energy and technology and the role that technology can play in helping us to deal with our energy challenges and also with environmental stewardship.

We've already had an opportunity to talk about a few of the issues on which we're working. Obviously, we have no stronger partner than Great Britain and no stronger global partner than the UK. And we've talked about a number of issues and we will continue those discussions tonight and throughout the trip to California.

I think it is worth noting that we had an extensive discussion of the Lebanese agreement. Great Britain has, as the United States has, welcomed the agreement, which, for the Lebanese, means that they will be able to elect their president. We strongly support the Lebanese people as they try to overcome the difficulties through which they've recently gone. And we strongly support the legitimate Government of Lebanon and the fact that the Government of Lebanon should have full sway over the territory of Lebanon and over all of its arms.

Finally, I want it to be known that I've had an opportunity to speak with Prime Minister Siniora just a few minutes ago and to tell him that we are pleased that the people of Lebanon can now get on with their lives and look forward to continuing to support both the army and the government.

So thank you very much and, David, it's a pleasure to have you here.

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: Thank you very much, Condi. It's great to be back in Washington, and I'm very

much looking forward to the trip that you've put together to the West Coast.

None of the big problems in the world today will get resolved without American leadership. And the leadership that Condi Rice and her team are showing on some of the most pressing problems have been at the heart of our discussions over the last hour and will be tonight and tomorrow. I particularly want to reference the leadership that Condi Rice has been showing right around the Middle East, obviously on the Lebanese issue at the forefront of people's minds today, but the tireless work that she's putting in for a lasting settlement in the Middle East is signal work and very, very important work.

We've also had a chance to talk about the situation in Burma, the natural disaster that is being turned into a man-made catastrophe, and where the efforts of the Secretary General of the UN are especially important as he arrives in Rangoon today.

We're also glad that the EU and the United States are working very closely together on issues like Kosovo, which for Europeans is a major issue on our own borders. And I'm looking forward to taking forward this partnership which is very special for us and which brings together our shared values and shared interests in a very profound way.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for a few questions. Let's start with Arshad Mohammed of Reuters. Arshad.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, on Syria and the newly disclosed information of the indirect talks between Syria and Israel, the White House this morning said it did not object to this. David Welch told us that the U.S. was not involved, had not been asked to be involved, but if it was asked, it would consider it. What explains this seeming lack of enthusiasm for this particular process?

And secondly, it's hard to imagine such a peace agreement being worked out without some -- you know, Israel demanding that Syria cease its support for Hamas, Hezbollah --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm sorry, can you speak up a little bit? I can't --

QUESTION: Yeah, I'm sorry. It's hard to imagine such a - any such peace agreement without Israel demanding Syria cease its support for Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian rejectionist groups. Do you see any reason that Syria might be ready to move in that direction?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first, Arshad, let me note that we knew about these discussions from their inception and we have been kept informed. As we noted at the time of Annapolis, we would welcome any steps that might lead to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Because obviously, we are working very hard on the Palestinian-Israeli track, which is the most mature track and is the track that everyone, including Israelis and Palestinians and Arabs - this was noted at Annapolis, as well as the international community believes that is a track that is now well along in the bilateral negotiations and that we have an opportunity to get an agreement by the end of the year.

That said, it does not mean that the United States would be - would not support work on other tracks, including the Israeli-Syrian track. But also, it will be very important for Syria, as is demanded by UN Security Council resolutions,

Syria demarcate the border with Lebanon, and that there is an opportunity to resolve also the issue of Shebaa Farms. So we would be supportive of a comprehensive peace.

Now, obviously, there is not going to be a comprehensive peace if there continues to be support for terror. There's not going to be a comprehensive peace if there continue to be rejectionist groups that are not willing to accept the principles on which peace might - must be built, two states living side by side, an end to armed conflict which brings death to innocent people in the name of high principles but, in fact, is - as we've just seen in Lebanon, nothing but, very often, a state within a state or an armed group going after its own citizens. And so until that kind of behavior stops, it's going to be very difficult to get to a comprehensive peace.

But we're going to work very hard on the Palestinian-Israeli front. We hope for the best on the Israeli-Syrian side. And we do believe that there is work to be done vis-à-vis the outstanding issues with Lebanon as well.

I should just note, too, Arshad, that we are very pleased that Turkey, a longstanding American ally and friend, is actively engaged in the diplomacy.

QUESTION: Thank you. Sarah Smith from ITN. And Foreign Secretary, what can you tell us about the Senate hearings into the defense trade treaty?

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: Obviously, the UK-U.S. Defense Trade Treaty is an important part of our relationship. The first hearing occurred today. I think that the senators and the Administration representative had a good deal of agreement about the potential benefits of the treaty to the U.S. and to the UK, and something that is in the interest of both countries. There were a range of questions that I think the Administration are answering. And we look forward to the passage of the treaty which has gone through the House of Commons in the UK and obviously would be a major contribution to the relationship between our two countries.

SECRETARY RICE: Let me just say we also very much hope for the rapid passage of the trade treaty. We believe very strongly that this cements, in many ways, one of the strongest defense relationships that's ever really existed between two countries. And it should make easier many of the efforts and transactions that must take place to really help us to stay abreast in terms of our defense industry, in terms of our defense capability as we meet numerous challenges together. So it's a very high priority from the point of view of the Administration.

QUESTION: Foreign Secretary Miliband, when and where are you presenting the offer of refreshed incentives to Iran? And what's your response to the letter that Iran sent to the UN? And for Secretary Rice, the same question, your response to Iran's letter? And also, Senator Obama has called your Iran policy a complete failure, saying that Bush Administration policy, as a result of it, Iran is now the greatest threat to the U.S. and Israel and the Middle East for a generation. What's your response to that?

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: Obviously, the twin-track policy that we've been pursuing together with our American friends, but also with France and Germany and Russia and China in tandem takes form in the UN Security Council resolutions that we are now implementing. It takes form in the IAEA, ongoing discussions with Iran where there remain important issues that have not been explained.

But in respect of the renewed package that we agreed in London on the 2nd of May, we're now in advanced discussions with the Iranian authorities about the transmission of that package. I prefer it to remain a package that's delivered first to the Iranians rather than to the international media, because we do believe that it's very important that the government and people of Iran understand the depth that's -- a feeling on this issue right across the international community, the dangers that we see, but also the potential benefits for the Iranian people of engaging in a serious way with the offer that is going to be made to them, and on the best - on the basis of the package that's being put together.

And anyone who looks at the state of the Iranian economy or the debates that are going on within Iran about the state of their economy can realize that there are substantial costs that the Iranian regime are bringing on their own people as a result of the policy they're currently pursuing. And the offer will make clear there are substantial benefits for the Iranian people from an Iran which fulfills its responsibilities to the international community. And Iran has always asked that its rights be properly respected. And our position, jointly, has always been that as long as Iran exercises responsibilities, then it will be able to forge a more productive and positive relationship with the international community.

SECRETARY RICE: I see no reason to comment on what -- I'm sure, throughout the period of time in which we are entering, our political season is going to be significantly overheated rhetoric about foreign policy. I'm simply not going to comment.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: I'm simply not going to comment. I will note that the Iranian problem is not just America's problem. It is an international issue. And it is an issue on which the international community is united in confronting Iran with the choices before it, either to suspend its enrichment and reprocessing efforts, which would - could lead to the knowledge and the technologies that could lead to a nuclear weapon, or face continued isolation. That policy has resulted in three Security Council resolutions. The United Kingdom, Germany, the - Germany, France, Russia and China have been united in putting forward three Security Council resolutions and they have passed.

Those Security Council resolutions have been augmented by significant designations on a unilateral basis by the United States of Iranian entities which are engaged in proliferation or in terrorism. And the reputational and investment risk of dealing with Iran have caused people not just to think twice about investing in Iran, but to actually begin to take hard choices not to invest in Iran.

You have seen a drying up of investment in Iran's infrastructure. You have seen a drying up of investment in Iran's oil capability. You're seeing a drying up of export credits to Iran and the many problems that David has mentioned within the Iranian economy and the resultant debate about whether Iran is, in fact, on the right course. Now I think this has culled a successful multilateral coalition of states that have the same view, which is that Iran should be offered incentives if it is prepared to live up to the obligations that the international community has put before it, but will face isolation and consequences if it is not prepared to do that.

I would like to see what other options there are for the international community given that this policy is one that I think is the best course for us; give Iran a choice. If Iran cannot make the right choice, then it will face consequences. Thank you.

QUESTION: What about the letter?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, the letter? You mean the Iranian letter to us? Well, again, we're engaged in a multilateral coalition here with five other parties. We have maintained a spirit of and a habit of consultation. Before we speak openly about these things, I'm going to talk to David later about this. I'm sure we will want to talk with our colleagues. Our political officers - our political directors will want to talk. But I don't see anything to be gained by trying to assess this letter without having consulted about it. The important thing is Iran knows what it needs to do in order to get into the good graces of the international community. Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: I think it's exactly rhetorical -- just to address --

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, sorry, yeah.

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: -- that point. It's exactly right, that we're not going to get into a verbal or rhetorical volleyball match about these issues. They are too serious for that. This needs to be dealt with in a substantive and serious way. We will all be looking very carefully, obviously, at the Iranian letter and talking to each other about its contents. But we're also very, very clear that our own package needs to be addressed very, very carefully by the Iranian regime and that's the basis on which we should go forward.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

FOREIGN SECRETARY MILIBAND: Thank you.

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