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KEYWORD SEARCH

[Subject Index](#)



[Home](#)

[Issues & Press](#)

[Travel & Business](#)

[Countries](#)

[Youth & Education](#)

[Careers](#)

[About State](#)



You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2007 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [May 2007: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

Interview With Zain Verjee, CNN

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Potsdam, Germany

May 30, 2007

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, lovely to be with you here.

SECRETARY RICE: Good to be with you.

QUESTION: Such an historic place.

SECRETARY RICE: Historic and just beautiful.

QUESTION: You're looking at a third round of sanctions on Iran, but yet Iran is showing no sign of suspending uranium enrichment. What makes you think that a third round of sanctions is really going to make a difference?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the unity of the international community and the desire to show to the Iranians that there are really two paths: One, which is the path of negotiation and perhaps integration into the international system; the other, which is the path of isolation continues -- we've had a discussion of that here at these meetings. Javier Solana is going to meet with Mr. Larijani at the end of the month -- in a day or so -- and we'll see what the Iranians do. But the international community, I believe, is going to remain united on the fact that sooner or later Iran has to realize the course that they're on is destructive.

QUESTION: But even so, Iran has already made it very, very clear that they're just not interested in the offer that's on the table. I mean, even today right before the talks that you mentioned with Solana and the European Union, Iran's top nuclear negotiator said this, "Iran cannot accept suspension." At this point, are you just giving Iran the time it needs to take advantage of the deadlock and enrich uranium?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it clearly, Iran may try to take advantage of that, but it takes --

QUESTION: Which they are.

SECRETARY RICE: -- it takes some time to really be able to master these processes. In the meantime, the Iranian economy is starting to show the strains of international isolation -- export credits are down by European countries and people are concerned about the reputational and investment risk of dealing with a country that's under Chapter 7. Eventually the Iranians are going to have to decide whether this particular nuclear program that they're pursuing -- not civil nuclear power, which everyone would agree they should have. But the program that they're pursuing, which has proliferation risks, if it's worth it. And I think eventually they'll decide it's not worth it.

QUESTION: You said it will tell, but isn't time something that you just don't have? I mean, Iran continues to enrich uranium. And I mean, why not just drop the whole idea of suspension and go to the table like the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed ElBaradei, said?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, if you drop the notion of suspension you'll simply giving the Iranians more possibility to practice and practice and practice without the pressures of saying to them that that's not acceptable. You see, enrichment and reprocessing is a process that takes some time to master and even if they have some breakthroughs, and we don't know how significant those breakthroughs are, there's still a way to go before they could be really capable of this. For the international community to say to them "suspend, and then we will talk" if the proper course is the course we're on and Iran will eventually realize that that's the best course for them.

QUESTION: Iran has detained five Iranian Americans in Iran. Do you believe that it's essentially a response to the U. S. detaining Iranians in Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: These two issues are completely different. In the case of the detentions in Iraq, you're talking about people who were engaged in activities that [were] destabilizing to Iraq and to the coalition forces. We're talking about people -- these dual citizens, Iranian-American citizens, in a couple cases, who simply went back to visit their family. And you're talking about other people who were trying to make a better more open place. They are not linked. They shouldn't be linked. And anyone who suggests that these people who are being held, really inappropriately and without merit in Iran, should simply not be released and (inaudible) they should simply be released because they were doing no wrong.

QUESTION: Should Iranian Americans not go to Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I can't make that decision for people.

QUESTION: Given the scenario right now.

SECRETARY RICE: We obviously have concerns about Iran and we obviously have concerns about the security of people who go there. We don't have diplomatic relations with Iran. But let me remind -- these were dual citizens, so Iran is treating not just Iranian-Americans this way, many of them dual citizens, but their own citizens in this way. It's a time to be careful.

QUESTION: Russia tested a missile on Tuesday. President Putin has said Russian can penetrate any missile defense system --

SECRETARY RICE: I -- I agree with him.

QUESTION: And it's a direct response isn't it to your plans to put a missile defense system in Russia?

SECRETARY RICE: Nobody doubts that Russia could penetrate a missile system that has a few interceptors in Poland and a few radars in the Czech Republic. This is just a -- it's an argument that doesn't even make sense.

QUESTION: What's your response to that test?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, look --

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

SECRETARY RICE: If the Russians are going to continue to upgrade their ballistic missile program that's their choice obviously. They need to realize, of course, that no one is saying that the missile defense system that is being contemplated has anything to do with the Russian nuclear deterrent. And to say it can be overwhelmed simply makes our point.

QUESTION: Are you being perhaps a little bit dismissive, though, of the Russians fear as they see perhaps as a genuine? I mean, they look in their own backyards and they see that NATO is expanding in their former Soviet states and now the missile defense system and maybe there's a genuine sense of concern within Russia. And perhaps there is an action that you could take that would allay their fears and make them a little more comfortable.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the missile defense system is a response to coming threats of long-range ballistic missiles by places like Iran and North Korea.

QUESTION: They think it will pose a threat to them.

SECRETARY RICE: As President Putin said, Russian can overwhelm anything (inaudible). So you can't have it both ways; you can't on the one hand say it's a threat to Russia on the other hand say that you can overwhelm it. Of course they can overwhelm it. That's the point that we've been making. This is not a system that is aimed at large-scale nuclear weapons, the type that Russia is able to deploy. This is against, smaller but nonetheless very deadly threats of countries like Iran. And we hope Russia will join us in cooperating on those threats. In fact, we've had extensive discussions with the Russians about this. We want to have discussions in the NATO-Russia Council as well as with NATO about how we protect everyone against this threat.

QUESTION: Relations between the U.S. and Spain have been pretty frosty since Jose Zapatero has come to power and pulled out Spanish troops out of Iraq. You've cancelled numerous trips to Spain, you're going on this trip to Spain. Does this mean that the U.S. is ready to move on even though there's still serious differences with Spain like on Cuba?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Spain is ally. We are working together very effectively in a lot of places like Afghanistan, but we do have differences. And I suspect we'll have a chance to talk about the difference that we have about Cuba. Spain is itself, a country that came out of a totalitarian past, out of an authoritarian past in order to have freedom and dignity and democracy for its people. The people of Cuba deserve the same thing. And I simply disagree that going and dealing with the current regime in Cuba, which is trying to arrange a staged transition to another dictatorial regime makes -- is what the Cuban people deserve. And so I will make those views known, and make those views known quite clearly in Spain.

QUESTION: There's a strong and growing chorus of both Republicans and Democrats who want to lift the trade embargo against Cuba. And they say really there is no evidence that the embargo in place really undermines Castro.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Castro, there is a transition that's going to be under way in Cuba; that's clear. Now when that transition will come to fulfillment we don't know. But the Cuban regime uses any access to foreign goods, any access to foreign exchange, simply to reinforce this dictatorial policies --

QUESTION: But there's a strong argument to be made of that -- you know, by pushing free trade with Cuba, it would have an impact on democratic forces --

SECRETARY RICE: You know, it's not that --

QUESTION: Why not try something new?

SECRETARY RICE: Zain, if that were the case, then all of those who pursued free trade and trade relations with Cuba like the Europeans, would have an impact on democracy in Cuba. And in fact there hasn't been an impact on democracy in Cuba, Cuba remains a dictatorship. It remains the one country that is unable to take its seat at the OAS, the Organization of American States, because it does not have a freely elected leader. And so I think the burden of proof is on the other side. It's on the side of those who have pursued economic relations with Cuba. To see and to say that that has somehow had an effect upon democratization in Cuba, it clearly hasn't.

QUESTION: Israel is launching several incursions in Gaza. They're talking about going back full force to -- into Gaza. Won't that torpedo all the work that you've done on the peace process if that happens?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the attacks against Israel need to stop. The Qassam rockets attacks need to stop, and they need to stop now. And we understand that there are going to be -- there's going to be need for Israel to defend itself against those attacks. We've urged and cautioned restraint, and we certainly urged and cautioned to all parties to exercise that restraint. Ultimately, though, the best solution here is going to be when there is a Palestinian state that can live side by side in peace and freedom with Israel. That's what we're working on. We're going to continue to work on it. It's not something that can be set aside just because circumstances are difficult in the Middle East. If every time circumstances got difficult in the Middle East, you'd set aside the course of trying to get to a two-state solution, you'd never move forward.

QUESTION: You're going to be attending a women's empowerment conference in Vienna. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're going to say and what you're hoping it will achieve?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it was -- the beginning it was -- to have women foreign ministers, of which there are now quite a few of us, to get together and talk about how we could use our positions to champion women's empowerment, particularly in places where women have not yet gained in some cases even political rights, and talk about the empowerment of business and political leaders in the Middle East, or girls' education. We are all very proud of what's happened to girls' education in Afghanistan, where under the Taliban, girls were not able to go to school, and now they're going to school in large numbers.

We think it's an opportunity to use our networks and also our visibility as women leaders to say to women in places where those rights have not yet [been] secured. People recognize how important it is -- we recognize how important it is that there be the empowerment of women, not just for the good of women, by the way, but in societies where women are truly powerless. They tend to be better off economically and better off and they tend to be more tolerant.

QUESTION: And congratulations also on an award that you'll be getting.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you. I'm sitting here in Potsdam. It's for the work that we did on German unification, and sitting in here in Potsdam, I'm quite aware that things that seemed maybe 20 years ago to be impossible now seem always to have been this way.

QUESTION: Thank you, Secretary Rice.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: It's always such a pleasure.

2007/T9-9

SECRETARY RICE: It's a pleasure.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)



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