



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Roundtable with Traveling Press

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Jerusalem

November 4, 2007

SECRETARY RICE: Hello, everybody.

REPORTERS: Hello.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. We don't have that much time, so why don't we just get started. Anyone want to start?

QUESTION: Sure.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Time sense.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: It's been 24 hours now. There seems to be -- the talk is starting to sound a little bit more conciliatory coming out of Bhutto who says she's not going to rule out continuing these unity talks with Musharraf. Are you guys looking at ways -- do you see a way out of this in which Musharraf continues with martial law and you still continue to support him?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think we've been very clear that we don't support the action that was taken because it was extra-constitutional. And we've concentrated in the last few hours, since the declaration, on urging that there be calm and restraint in this circumstance, but also making very clear our expectations that this state of emergency needs to be abandoned and return to a constitutional process as quickly as possible.

Because if you get back on a constitutional path, then you can imagine the continued process towards elections and so, that's what we've been concentrating on. We haven't been focusing on the internal politics of Pakistan and who might be talking to whom, but this is really, right now, about setting certain ground rules from our point of view about what needs to be accomplished.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary --

QUESTION: Have you talked to Mr. Musharraf?

SECRETARY RICE: I have not. I've been tied up all morning, but I have --

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, she's got considerable --

SECRETARY RICE: But I have -- I have been receiving reports from our Ambassador. She's in touch with members of the Pakistani Government, but I have not myself talked to Musharraf.

QUESTION: She's got considerable financial leverage, though, I mean, billions of dollars of military aid. Has there been discussion or would you consider either withholding aid or making changes, putting strings on it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, obviously, we're going to have to review the situation with aid, in part because we have to see what it -- what may be triggered by certain statutes, even, so we're going to review aid. But look, we do have concerns -- continuing counterterrorism concerns and we have to be able to protect America and protect American citizens by continuing to fight against terrorists. And we have a significant counterterrorism effort in Pakistan and so we have to review this whole situation.

QUESTION: You said last night that you thought that it would be going to the elections -- went ahead in January as you had mentioned and anticipated.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: It appears today that they're saying that that's unlikely to happen (inaudible) as long as (inaudible) here. Is that --

SECRETARY RICE: I have not heard an official response to the question of when elections will take place. We have a very clear view that the elections need to take place on time, which would mean the beginning of the year.

QUESTION: Excuse me, Madame Secretary, when you said that you have to review the situation, are you talking specifically about financial aid and what sort of financial aid --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm talking about all of our assistance programs. Now obviously, again, I want to underscore the President has an obligation to protect the United States, to protect Americans. That means that we have to be very cognizant of the counterterrorism operations that we are involved in. We have to be very cognizant of the fact that some of the assistance that has been going to Pakistan is directly related to the counterterrorism mission.

So this is a complicated matter. We have to remember that we are -- we're going to continue to fight the war on terror. The President has an obligation to protect Americans. You all know how important the area in and around Pakistan is to the counterterrorism mission. So that's what I meant, Sue, when I said we're going to just have to review things at this point.

QUESTION: Does that mean -- sorry, does that mean that any money or any financial aid involving counterterrorism is unlikely to (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I said we have to review it and I'm just giving you one of the concerns that everybody ought to have at this point, which is that America needs to be able to continue to protect itself and to fight the counterterrorism mission.

QUESTION: You mentioned legislation before. After 2003, the President (inaudible) to weigh the restrictions that followed the 1999 coup. Will he have to do that again or as far as you're concerned, are there restrictions that cover (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I think, Karen, we just have to review the situation. The situation has evolved since 2003 and I think we just have to review the situation. But I would be very surprised if anyone wants the President to ignore or set aside our concerns about terrorism and protecting the American people. We've got to carry out that mission, but obviously, we have to -- the situation has changed and we have to review where we are.

QUESTION: Just to follow up on the conversations with Musharraf, and I understand, with no disrespect to the Ambassador, has anybody in Washington, either at the NSC or in the Department talked to President Musharraf or any senior Pakistani in the last (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I have been -- I don't know the answer to that. I do know -- there have been high-ranking officials who have been in touch with the Pakistani officials.

QUESTION: You were in touch with President Musharraf not too long ago. When was that?

SECRETARY RICE: A couple of days ago.

QUESTION: What's the --

SECRETARY RICE: What day is it now, I've lost track -- okay, so we're --

QUESTION: We're on Sunday.

SECRETARY RICE: Sunday. It was -- it was --

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Thursday night --

QUESTION: We left Thursday night.

SECRETARY RICE: We left Thursday night. I think -- I'll check for you, but I think Wednesday.

QUESTION: I'll check for --

QUESTION: Okay. In any case, what exactly -- the last time you talked to him, this was obviously a possibility. What did you tell him?

SECRETARY RICE: Again, I don't want to get into the details of my conversations, but I relayed the message that I've been giving publicly, which is the United States could not support any extra-constitutional measures.

QUESTION: Are you disappointed in him?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm disappointed at this decision, sure. I think the decision sets Pakistan back in terms of the considerable progress that it had made along the road to democratic change. The situation in which the press, which has been considerably freer in the last few years, is again having restrictions and that's why we're concentrating on hoping to see these measures, that the state of emergency would give way to a constitutional order as quickly as possible.

QUESTION: Does it set the U.S. back?

SECRETARY RICE: The United States has a number of important relationships with Pakistan concerning a whole range of issues. I wouldn't call it -- the United States is not set back, but certainly, we have been proponents of a democratic path for Pakistan and it is a setback on the democratic path for Pakistan, but it does not have to remain one if the constitutional order returns and if Pakistan holds these elections on time.

QUESTION: If you -- when you said the United States does not support it and you told him the United States does not support it, if it doesn't affect the relationship or the key elements of the relationship, what --

SECRETARY RICE: Karen, I didn't -- I didn't say that. I said we have to review where we are. I was asked specifically about assistance programs and I said we had to review that. And I only made the point that the United States continues to have a counterterrorism mission because the President is going to continue to protect the American people.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) How would that lack of support manifest itself beyond public statements and lack of support?

SECRETARY RICE: Karen, I am not going to speculate until we've had a chance to review it.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, did the U.S. make a mistake in putting all of its chips on Musharraf to begin with?

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, the United States has never put all of its chips on Musharraf. What the United States has done is to support policies in Pakistan that had moved Pakistan quite far along, along a democratic path, including significant assistance to educational reform in Pakistan, significant support to economic development in the Fatah region to try and pull the population away from extremist elements, significant support to economic reform in Pakistan.

So the assistance was not to Musharraf; the assistance was to a Pakistan that I think you could argue was making quite significant strides on a number of fronts. Now as I said, it's a setback because it takes Pakistan off the path that we had hoped it would continue on and where it had made considerable progress. But the support was to the Pakistani people and Pakistani reform and the reform of its institutions. I think the most obvious of those cases would be the work that we were doing in supporting their educational reform.

QUESTION: Can we talk about --

QUESTION: Can we talk about (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: About what?

QUESTION:(Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, okay. (Laughter.)

QUESTION:Here?

SECRETARY RICE: If you'd like, sure.

QUESTION:Yeah, (inaudible) this morning that the Israeli Prime Minister -- didn't seem very conciliatory. What's going on? Is --

SECRETARY RICE: People are negotiating. (Laughter.) People are negotiating.

QUESTION:To go back to -- right to the beginning, because it's back against the first -- exactly the same language as when you announced there was a conference or a meeting.

SECRETARY RICE: I think -- I think, Sylvie, that she put it best. They are negotiating. The atmosphere is good. Of course when you negotiate, you run into differences. That's why you negotiate. And they're working their way through those differences, but I think that what is really being -- is -- you're starting to see here is that people are starting to see Annapolis as the beginning of a process, not a single point in time.

And that's extremely important because the more that they talk about the day after Annapolis and that they are going to have to continue their work to the establishment of a Palestinian state, the more likely they are to get to a place where they're actually going to end the conflict. And I think what you're seeing is that people are starting to address really difficult issues that they haven't addressed in a long time. And that means that, you know, they're negotiating and they're trying not to negotiate in the newspapers. They really are, which is remarkable.

QUESTION:Madame Secretary --

SECRETARY RICE: I know that disappoints all of you, but they really are trying not to negotiate in the newspapers.

QUESTION:On that same point, I mean, in Olmert and Abbas, I mean, you have two figures who are clearly (inaudible), but politically weak. And indeed, there have been reports in local media that -- you know, even some understandings that Olmert made, for example, were walked back by Livni, on the other hand, some of the commitments that Abbas made were walked back to some degree by his foreign minister.

Can this really -- I mean, can they really come to an agreement by themselves without a stronger U.S. hand?

SECRETARY RICE: They're not supposed -- look, they're not coming to an agreement about the establishment of a Palestinian state. Let's not --

QUESTION:Even though (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Let's not misunderstand what it is they're trying to do. They are trying to establish that they have a basis for moving forward to negotiate the agreement on a Palestinian state. They're not going to, in the two weeks -- they wouldn't -- in the six weeks before they started it, nobody would have expected that this was going to be an agreement on the Palestinian state. And the more that they look forward, I think, to how they're actually going to get to an agreement, which is what you -- we really want them to do; after all, any joint document will not ultimately be worth the paper it's written on if eventually, they don't get to an actual agreement on a Palestinian state.

So what we've really been trying to be very clear on is that they want to come to Annapolis with some understandings about how they move forward. But increasingly, you hear them talking not so much about specifically what might be in this document, but about how they are going to actually get to the negotiation of a Palestinian state. And I think that's actually a very healthy move.

QUESTION:And that begins at Annapolis? I was wondering where this --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, again, I'm also not going to negotiate in the newspapers, but there is more talk about the day after now than I have heard in any of my other trips here.

QUESTION:And just one more. At that point, then, does the U.S. then play a stronger role in terms of the move beyond bilateral to --

SECRETARY RICE: Let me just go back for a second. Were we in this very room in February?

QUESTION:Yes.

(Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Okay.

QUESTION:Several times.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay? When everybody said, is "political horizon" an empty phrase for "They can't talk about the real issues," everybody remember that?

QUESTION:This is off the record.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. (Laughter.)

QUESTION:We're not at liberty to talk --

SECRETARY RICE: They -- they --

(Laughter.)

QUESTION:We don't negotiate.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. They haven't gotten to where they are now because of the absence of a U.S. role in helping them get there. And what I am doing and what the President has done a couple of times in phone calls and what Steve Hadley was doing when he was out here is that we're helping them vector toward one another in what I think will be a very fruitful outcome, that I think they're going to be able to lay -- let everyone know that they are -- that they are laying a foundation and that they want to move to, actually, the establishment of a Palestinian state. And a lot of that is bilateral discussion, negotiation, understandings. A lot of it is that, you know, when we see problems, we try to help them bridge them.

But you know, I know that there's an image that I think is probably -- by the way, if you actually look at the history, probably not exactly how it happened. But there is an image of the United States just frenetically trying to get the two sides to an agreement. Okay; it hadn't worked. So with all due respect, I'll try it my way because it hasn't worked. In the final analysis, something has always prevented the Israelis and the Palestinians from getting there.

And I think that what they're doing now -- and the work we're doing with the Arabs, by the way, because one of the missing ingredients has always been the Arabs in on the ground floor rather than being asked late in the process to (inaudible). I think that we really are trying to lay the groundwork so that you have a reasonable prospect this time that they'll actually conclude an agreement.

QUESTION:Madame Secretary, I think this morning, it didn't sound like Foreign Minister Livni was talking about understanding. She was talking about potential steps on the ground to control the violence before the Annapolis conference even happens.

SECRETARY RICE: No, no, I think what -- I don't want to put words in her mouth, but when she talks about the implementation of the roadmap as being essential to the implementation of an agreement, that's our position too. You can't imagine the circumstances in which you're actually implementing an agreement for a Palestinian state and you haven't fulfilled the obligations of the roadmap which speak to both sides.

QUESTION:So that comes after?

SECRETARY RICE: It --

QUESTION:What you're saying is that you're comfortable that they will show up in Annapolis even with some rockets flying into (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't want to -- I'm not going to speak for them, but I don't think that they -- anybody believes that the kasams coming out of Gaza are the work of Abu Mazen and his team. And in fact, what you've got here is the Palestinians trying to establish themselves as a leadership -- an administration that can carry out certain security tasks, which is why what is going on with General Dayton and -- you know, the Palestinians starting to take over some security responsibilities is very important. It's why, by the way, the work Tony Blair is doing also in terms of state capacity is very important.

But I think everybody understands who is responsible for the violence now and it's coming out of Gaza and it's not controlled by the Palestinian Authority. That's not what the Israelis were -- are talking about. They're talking about and we are talking about that even if we're fortunate enough to get an agreement, you're still going to have to fulfill the first phase of the roadmap because you can't imagine a two-state solution working without those pieces in place, both on the Israeli side and on the Palestinian side.

QUESTION:Madame Secretary --

SECRETARY RICE: All right, you haven't had a question yet.

QUESTION:Why did you decide now to grant invitations this time? Is the day slipping?

SECRETARY RICE: No, the date is not slipping. It hasn't been set yet, but it's not slipping and -- (laughter) -- and it's just -- it's not quite right yet for invitations, but we'll -- people will -- I don't -- I have a feeling that when we do deliver invitations, we won't find many people who just say, "Well, I'm sorry, I'm busy."

QUESTION:Can I just --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, I think we can -- I think we'll be okay on that front.

QUESTION:Can I just follow up?

SECRETARY RICE: Sure.

QUESTION:I heard from somebody who works for the PLO in Washington that the Egyptians are pressuring the Palestinians not to go.

SECRETARY RICE: Wholly untrue.

QUESTION:You mentioned a phase one of the roadmap. Phase one also mentions -- stipulates that Israelis have to hunt any settlement activity during the phase one (inaudible)? It's getting in it (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: What I've heard is that both parties understand that they both have obligations under phase one of the roadmap and they full well know what they are. They're still valid.

QUESTION:And just looking back to the security, while (inaudible) there, he's more difficult to (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: I think they're all doing hard things in phase one. The real breakthrough, it was actually a few months ago now, is that for a long time, if you remember, the argument was you couldn't talk about the Palestinian state or core issues, which was in phase three, until you had completed phase one, which got us into an extended kind of circular problem for a long time about phase one. Well, that -- now we've broken through and they are, indeed, talking about phase -- what's in phase three, which is the establishment of a Palestinian state.

But it obviously wouldn't work unless phase one is actually implemented and it's just a practical matter. It would not work unless -- if you just read the -- I'd just encourage you to go read the phase one obligations and ask yourself, could you imagine establishing a Palestinian state without having met the phase one obligations? It just wouldn't work.

MR. MCCORMACK: Who wants the final question?

SECRETARY RICE: Nobody.

QUESTION:I'll cover it.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: Just looking ahead to tomorrow just for a moment, are you going to raise with Abu Mazen the meeting he had last week with Hamas officials?

SECRETARY RICE: My --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it would be concerning if -- you know, if it looked like he was -- he said that he's not going to negotiate with Hamas, you know, with Hamas occupying Gaza and current circumstances. And I trust him to keep that obligation. I understand that the meeting yesterday was with some people who sought him out, not Hamas leadership who sought him out. And I -- you know, I will, of course, ask him about it but I'm not troubled by it.

QUESTION: And the final thought?

SECRETARY RICE: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Is that -- have the Israelis today presented to you their proposals on paper? Do you expect the Palestinians to do that tomorrow or not?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't expect that today or tomorrow.

QUESTION: You haven't got --

SECRETARY RICE: I -- no, I -- this is a document that, again, is evolving as people's expectations evolve about what they're going to do after Annapolis. I last spoke with Musharraf on Wednesday, October 31st.

****MR. MCCORMACK:** October 31th.

(Laughter.)

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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