



Interview on ABC's This Week With George Stephanopoulos

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Crawford, Texas

November 11, 2007

QUESTION: Good morning, Madame Secretary.

SECRETARY RICE: Good morning, George.

QUESTION: A mixed message this morning from General Musharraf. What's your reaction?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, my reaction is that the positive element here is that elections are going to be held and held very soon, and also that the President said he was going to take off his uniform. These have both been essential to getting Pakistan back on a democratic path. Obviously, we are also encouraging that the state of emergency has got to be lifted and lifted as soon as possible.

QUESTION: The President has been encouraging President Musharraf to take off his army uniform, as you point out. I know he spoke with him earlier in the week. Did President Bush speak with General Musharraf this morning before his press conference?

SECRETARY RICE: No, the President spoke last with President Musharraf just a couple of days ago. We've been in very close contact, as you might imagine, through our Embassy, through our Ambassador there, with all parties in Pakistan -- people who are trying to get Pakistan back to a moderate center. This is a country that's going through extraordinarily difficult circumstances but it is an ally, it is a friend, and we believe that at a time like this our best role is to counsel and indeed persuade that Pakistan has got to get back on the democratic path that it had established.

QUESTION: Why is it enough for General Musharraf to take off the uniform and remain president? It appears that he's only been able to take the office of president because he fired the chief justice of the supreme court and the majority of the supreme court, and the supreme court that will now install him as president or certify his presidency is hand-picked by Musharraf.

SECRETARY RICE: George, this is not a perfect situation. Pakistan is a country that has come a long way from 1999 and the military coup. It's come a long way from 2001, when it pledged to try and root out extremism. But it's not a perfect situation, and nobody would suggest that it is.

But the key is to take this in steps, and the first step is to make certain that the state of emergency ends, to make sure that people can compete for free and fair elections for the parliament, to start to establish that there is a moderate center in Pakistan that will be equally committed to fighting terrorism and fighting extremism, which by the way has hurt the Pakistani people more than it's hurt anyone else. The number of Pakistanis that have died at the hands of extremists ought to be noted here. But they need to equally do that and to continue to move this country along a democratic path. And I just have to note that it is far closer to that path, or it was far closer to that path, when this happened than it had been in 1999 or 2001.

QUESTION: Not all of your -- even your allies in the Congress agree. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher of California, a Republican from California, was very tough on Deputy Secretary Negroponte this week, and he said it's not enough for General Musharraf to take off his uniform. Listen:

"Who cares if General Musharraf takes off his uniform? It's time for him to go. He's been a political juggler instead of a leader. He's been a chameleon instead of a bold opponent to radical Islam --"

Time for Musharraf to go?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, it's very easy to speculate and to make snap judgments in a difficult time like this. Let's concentrate on the basics here and what really needs to be done. First and foremost, Pakistanis need to see that there is the reestablishment of a road to a democratic path. And President Musharraf, if he carries through on his obligations that he has made to us and that he's made to his own people, that road will be reestablished -- the lifting of the emergency, the taking off of his uniform which signals a return to civilian rule, and then the holding of free and fair elections. That's the path that we need to insist on from Pakistan.

But this is not a personal matter about President Musharraf. This is about the Pakistani people. And the United States has been dedicated to helping the Pakistani people come to a more democratic path.

QUESTION: I'm sorry about that fly that's in your --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, me, too. Sorry about that. We seem to have a visitor. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Let me continue on this path. It's also Democrats who have been very tough. Democratic leadership in the Senate last night sent out a letter to the President saying he should review the entire aid situation with Pakistan, said right now we have to make sure that our aid -- \$10 billion dollars since 2001 -- goes to fighting counterterrorism and not to this process of derailing the democratic effort.

Can you assure that? And is the aid still under review?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we certainly are reviewing our aid in terms of statutory requirements. But let me just note what the aid has largely been for. First of all, I don't think anyone wants the President to do anything that would compromise the counterterrorism mission which, in fact, goes to the training of Pakistani forces to be able to deal with extremism. That's extraordinarily important to American security interests.

Secondly, we have had assistance to Pakistan to reform its economy, to help it become a more open economy. That's ultimately going to help in the development of a more open political system as entrepreneurs and civil society emerge.

We've also been very effective, I believe, in helping the Pakistanis to reform their educational system. After all, this is a country that has many madrasas that were teaching curricula that were feeding extremism. And President Musharraf and his Ministry of Education had a program to try to reform those madrasas. We've been involved in helping with educational reform.

I would think that those are the kinds of programs that we would want to continue in Pakistan because we're trying to build a foundation for a more democratic Pakistan. And I would just note too, George, that the last time, after the war in Afghanistan -- or the Soviet war in Afghanistan was finished and the Soviet Union was defeated, we left the Pakistanis, we left the Afghans. We got a failed state in Afghanistan and we got in Pakistan a more extreme circumstance. We have to have a longer-term view of our relationship with Pakistan and the Pakistani people, despite the difficulties that they're going through right now.

QUESTION: And a lot of people agree with that, but say that what we may be doing now is something analogous to what the United States did when the Shah was in charge in Iran; we stood by him too long, despite the fact that he was very unpopular with his own people and that it cost us for a generation. Are we making the same mistake with General Musharraf?

SECRETARY RICE: We're standing by Pakistan and the Pakistani people at this extraordinarily difficult time. Now, President Musharraf still has extremely important steps to take beyond the ones that he talked about. He needs to make sure these elections go forward. He needs to lift the state of emergency. But we're standing with democratic principle in Pakistan when we say there have to be free and fair elections. We're standing with principles of moderation when we try to work to bring moderate forces together. We're standing with principles of fighting extremism when we help allies create forces that can actually beat back these very violent people who have tried to kill President Musharraf, who took the Red Mosque and killed many Pakistanis. So this is a broad program.

I want to repeat, George, the road to democratic development is not smooth and even. This is clearly a situation that is not perfect. But if the suggestion is that we somehow now abandon a course that could lead back to a path of democracy for Pakistan, I think that would be mistaken at this point.

QUESTION: But if free and fair elections were held in Pakistan, wouldn't President Musharraf lose?

SECRETARY RICE: Let's hold free and fair elections and see what the outcome is. That's what free and fair elections mean. And the -- it's interesting because it was a couple of years ago when I was in Pakistan -- I'd not been Secretary very long -- that I stood with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan and for the first time they really said openly that they were going to be committed to free and fair elections. And that has been our goal now for a couple of years with Pakistan.

In that period of time, I can tell you that the press has become freer, I can tell you that civil society has become more active. And so it's all the more sad that this clearly bad decision about imposition of a state of emergency has made a detour for Pakistan off the path of democratic development. But because they are currently in this difficult circumstance, I don't see anything to be gained by the United States abandoning what is the proper course, which is to help Pakistan move back to that path, and that means holding those free and fair elections, ending the state of emergency as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Let me turn to the issue of Iran. Many Democrats out on the presidential campaign --

SECRETARY RICE: Sorry, George, I have to get rid of my little friend here.

QUESTION: You've got to tell the President to do something about those mosquitoes down in Crawford. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it's the Texas fly. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: We've made a lot about this resolution by Senators Kyl and Lieberman, supported by an overwhelming majority of senators. But others, particularly on the presidential campaign trail, including our next guest, Senator Christopher Dodd, have said it's a backdoor authorization for military action in Iran. Here's Senator Dodd:

"I'm very concerned that we're going to see those 76 votes come back, being waved in front of us here as a justification for the Bush Administration to try to take military action in Iran."

Does the Administration believe that this resolution gives the President the authority to take military action against Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, George, I'm not going to get into a constitutional argument about the President's authorities. That stands on its own: the President's authority to use whatever means he needs to use in order to secure the country. However, there is nothing in this particular resolution that would suggest that, from our point of view. And clearly, the President has also made very clear that he's on a diplomatic path where Iran comes into focus. Obviously, it can be the case that he will never take his options off the table, but this particular resolution has nothing to do with that, from our point of view. This resolution is saying that there need to be strong measures taken against Iran, which we have definitely done.

QUESTION: How about on the other side? Senator Obama has suggested in recent interviews that he'd be willing to offer Iran positive benefits along with the threat of sanctions if they were willing to make some progress on their nuclear program, might even be willing to take the idea of regime change off the table. Is the Administration open to providing carrots as well as sticks to Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, in fact, we've put forward a proposal with our allies -- the Europeans, the three European countries, Germany, France and Britain; Russia and China -- the six have put together and put forward a package of incentives for the Iranians if they will suspend their enrichment and reprocessing activities, if they'll come to the table and negotiate. We've said that we could look at trade issues, we could look at political issues. We have not even rejected the idea that Iran should have civil nuclear power and, in fact, would be prepared under certain circumstances to participate in that. They just have to give up the fuel cycle, the enrichment and reprocessing that can lead to the technologies that can lead to a nuclear weapon.

So, in fact, that's been precisely the Administration's policy that we, on the one hand, tell the Iranians there's a path out, it's a path of trade and aid and civil nuclear power; but if you can't accept the just demands of the international community, just demands that have been in two Security Council resolutions that were unanimous, then we will have to pursue further sanctions.

So, frankly, that is the Administration's policy. I've even said, George, that we would reverse 28 years of policy, and if the Iranians suspend their enrichment and reprocessing, I'm prepared to meet my counterpart anyplace, anytime, anywhere. So the question isn't why will we not talk to Tehran; the question is why will Tehran not talk to us.

QUESTION: You've also been working very hard on the Middle East peace process, gone to the Middle East eight times in the last year, three times in the last two months. And you're trying to put together at least a preliminary peace conference in Annapolis, Maryland, either later this month or early next month. Have the invitations gone out? Will the conference take place?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, the invitations have not gone out. We still expect the conference to take place. The President has said this fall; that means by the end of the year. We're working very hard with the parties and with the regional actors to prepare the conference. And so we will take our time in preparing the conference, but I have to say that the parties are exhibiting seriousness of purpose. I think they want to end their conflict. And if we can, as Prime Minister Olmert said, use Annapolis to launch the negotiations for the establishment of a two-state solution, that will be a very, very good step for the people of Israel, the people of the Palestinian territories and for the international community as a whole.

QUESTION: You said you wanted to include the neighbors of Israel and Palestine. Does that include Syria?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've not sent any invitations, but we did make clear that it would be likely that members of the Arab Follow-up Committee, the committee that

was appointed by the Arab League to follow up on the Arab Peace Initiative -- it was originally proposed by the Saudis, this peace initiative -- that those members would likely be invited. Syria is a member of that committee.

And let me just say something, George. Nobody would even think of trying to hide that there are other tracks that ultimately lead to a comprehensive peace. Now, in this case, the Israeli-Palestinian comprehensive peace -- the Israeli-Palestinian track is the most mature. It's the one that's moving forward. This meeting is about Israel and the Palestinians. But we understand that ultimately there has to be a comprehensive peace and there has to be progress on the other tracks as well.

QUESTION: Boy, that is one persistent mosquito. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Actually, George, just to be fair, it's a fly. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Well, you go pull out your fly-swatter. Thanks very much for your time this morning.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

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