



Remarks by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: All right. Here we are in Moscow.

SECRETARY GATES: Again.

SECRETARY RICE: Again, well, since I was in Latin America two days ago to break out in Spanish.

SECRETARY GATES: Fire away.

SECRETARY RICE: We're principally going to take questions because we have just a few minutes. And we've obviously had a meeting earlier with President-elect Medvedev -- it was pretty wide-ranging -- about issues of today and also a little bit about the future, and then an extended discussion with President Putin, with Minister Serdyukov and Minister Lavrov there. And we talked to them about the potential to look at all of the different issues that the United States and Russia have -- some of them cooperative, some of them in which we have disagreements -- and to try to put this on a firm footing going forward.

I think we had really good discussions. The atmosphere was very good. Bob went through some of the proposals that we are prepared to make. As you know, we came with some conceptual ideas about how to deal with, for instance, missile defense the last time we were here. This is an effort to flesh some of that out. I think the Russians showed interest in those ideas, but we'll get down to try to really discuss them in more detail tomorrow.

So, Robert, you want to --

SECRETARY GATES: Yeah, I would just say I, frankly, was surprised at the relatively positive tone of the meetings, both with the President-elect and President Putin, and I think we have some opportunities here. We'll see.

SECRETARY RICE: Sean, do you want to help us?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah. Anne, why don't you start off?

QUESTION: Can you fill us in a bit about this letter that President Bush sent to President Putin that he talked about a bit today? What -- how would you describe it? How specific can you be about its contents? When was it sent?

SECRETARY RICE: It was sent -- Sean, you'll have to help me with the date. It must have been four or five days ago?

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah.

SECRETARY RICE: It followed a phone call that President Putin and President Bush had that, in effect, set up this trip by Bob and me to Moscow, because I think the President wanted to assess whether there was openness to cooperation on some of the issues that have been difficult, like missile defense, whether or not there might be an opportunity. Nobody can guarantee that there is an opportunity, but whether or not President Putin was really interested in pursuing progress on a number of fronts.

That's really what the letter was to, and it was just a letter from the President that said we have a number of opportunities before us, we have a number of areas in which we already have agreement, we have some areas in which we have not been able to come to agreement; are you ready to sit down and have the secretaries come and sit with your ministers and see if we can bridge those differences. And I think he got a favorable response from President Putin and that's why we're here.

SECRETARY GATES: I would just add to that, that I think that it's really an earnest of the President's desire to try and reach agreement on a bunch -- a number of these things, that we've sort of broken the rotation in the 2+2, but normally, the Russians would have come to Washington right now and I think the President -- our President's offer for Secretary Rice and I to come here was in the hope that maybe -- maybe we're close enough on some of these issues we can bring them to closure if we're here and where President Putin and President-elect Medvedev have the opportunity to engage directly.

QUESTION: If I could ask, Mr. Putin said very clearly some of the issues were so close and it was merely a matter of dotting some i's, some were more distant. Can you walk us through where you're close and where you're not?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, without -- obviously, this is going to go into great detail here.

SECRETARY GATES: I think we've got a whole day to go through -- (laughter).

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, we have got a whole day to figure this out tomorrow.

QUESTION: We want the story tonight, though.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, we have a whole -- a whole day to figure this out. But there are a couple of areas in which I think you could say we've had agreement for some time; for instance, counterterrorism cooperation, cooperation against nuclear terrorism. We -- as you know, the President and President Bush have both been proponents of the idea of assured fuel supply for countries that wish to have civil nuclear power but without the proliferation risk attendant to reprocessing and enrichment. We've had good cooperation on Iran, good cooperation on North Korea. I mean, there are a number of issues where there simply isn't any controversy but we might want to see what -- whether or not we can codify those and push them forward.

We've been very close on, and I think we believe we can make some progress on, the civilian nuclear cooperation agreement that we have been negotiating. And that's an area where it's a pretty straightforward agreement because Russia is an NPT member, Russia is a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There had been some questions that we wanted to have answered. I think we're getting pretty close to getting those questions answered.

Obviously, I should mention also some economic issues. You know, the WTO -- Russia and the United States actually have an accession agreement. The question is: Can Russia make some changes so that that can become full accession to the WTO? So there are a number of areas where we are really either very close or, in fact, where there's no disagreement and we want to see what we can do to codify it.

The two areas where we continue to have some conceptual work to do, both on missile defense and on the follow-on to START, and that's where we'll have to see where we are tomorrow. But I think we were impressed with the favorable atmosphere and receptivity to pursuing these issues and pursuing them in a creative way.

QUESTION: You mentioned codifying a couple of times. Is the President proposing some sort of a formal framework that would be lasting beyond the Administration's --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we'll see. What I mean is that, for instance, some of these already are codified. Let me give you an example. There is a global nuclear terrorism agreement. There is an agreement, but it is not -- we've not put it in a framework that others could associate themselves on the fuel assurances arrangement. Is there some way to do that? I mean, there are a number of elements in this, but we'll see whether or not they might even be tied together in some fashion.

QUESTION: Is this to what the President is proposing or saying in a letter, that the two -- bilateral framework agreement on nuclear issues?

SECRETARY RICE: We are discussing ways to give a clear signal that there's a foundation for all of these issues going forward and we'll discuss what form that might take.

QUESTION: Secretary Gates, can I ask you about missile defense specifically? On the way over, you seemed less optimistic than you are now about Russian rhetoric. Can you talk with any specificity what President Putin may have discussed that raised your optimism a bit?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, I think that -- I think that actually, there were some misunderstandings on the Russian side in terms of what we were proposing and we had the opportunity to clarify that this evening in a way that I think was positively received. And so, you know, clearly, we'll get into the details with our counterparts tomorrow, but I think that, you know, just as President Putin indicated last October that he was interested in what we put on the table, I think he was quite intrigued by what we talked about today. And I think, you know, we'll just have to see as we get into the details.

QUESTION: You're speaking about missile defense and START there, I understand?

SECRETARY GATES: Yeah, in both areas.

QUESTION: Could you be more specific on what was positively received? Was it the bid for more transparency and allowing people to go to the sites or -- maybe if you could be a bit more specific?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, I will give you one example. I mean, of course, all of this -- if we're talking about the sites in the Czech Republic and Poland, everything has to be approved by the Czech and Polish Governments. And what we've stressed was the importance of reciprocity. But I think that they had perhaps misinterpreted what we had talked about in terms of liaison officers being accredited to embassies as all these people just being at the embassies as opposed to being at the sites. And when we clarified that, I think it had a significant impact in terms of their view of it. It -- as I say, it's all dependent on reciprocity and the agreement of the Czechs and Poles to these arrangements. But I think that clarification was perhaps helpful to them.

QUESTION: Was there any movement on the issue of not making the system operational until you have a clear understanding or proof or -- that Iran has demonstrated (inaudible)?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, we -- we basically went through that again and I sort of went through the steps again that we were prepared not to operationalize the sites until we had had flight testing from Iran that showed a capability to threaten Europe.

QUESTION: And how did they respond to that?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, I think they just took it aboard.

SECRETARY RICE: They took it aboard. And they have to have time to study this and to look at it. And the President -- President Putin said several times, "I have to have my experts look at this. We have to have our experts look at how this might work." And that's only natural, but I think that there was receptivity to having experts look at these issues.

And the whole missile defense issue, I think, has to be understood in the context of getting to a point, which we believe is possible, where the Russians understand and have, to the degree that they need it, assurance that this missile defense system is not aimed at them, that this is not the son of strategic defense initiatives of the '80s, but rather aimed at a completely different threat where you are talking about small threats -- small numbers of troublesome states that -- some of which are on the periphery of Russia. And what we're trying to do with these measures is to bridge this conceptual gap as to what this missile defense system is for. And so whether you talk about transparency measures or the ability to have onsite personnel or coming to some kind of common threat assessment, all of that is really aimed at the same thing. And that is to help reassure Russia of what we fully understand and is fully our intention, which is that this is a system that is not aimed at, in any way, degrading the Russian nuclear deterrent.

SECRETARY GATES: And one of the things that I raise now, as I did today, as I did in October, was that I can understand the Russians' concerns for the possibility at some future date of some kind of shift at what we've done and a breakout. And I said we can negotiate limits that make sure that doesn't happen without any kind of mutual consent.

QUESTION: But now that you received optimistic signals today, are you confident to be able to reach an agreement with the Russians on this question before the end of the Bush Administration?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, I think the answer is yes. But I would also say we had a -- the environment in our meetings was positive today. Whether that leads to a positive conclusion remains to be seen. So I think that that's a story that waits to be told. But I think that there was -- there was a sincere exchange of views and I think people were actually listening to each other in terms of what was being said, which gives me some hope. But there are a lot of -- I mean, these are big issues and a lot of problems need to be solved.

QUESTION: When you say that you talked about the fact that limits could be negotiated, are you talking about some sort of missile defense arms limitation treaty that would -- with the Russians that --

SECRETARY GATES: Well, you know, that's way beyond the level of the discussion. But the point was that if the Russians are concerned about breakout from the sites in Eastern Europe, where we would change the character of the system in a way that it would potentially threaten Russia, that those are limits that we would be prepared to negotiate to give them reassurance on that score. I mean, this is not about Russia. This is about Iran principally.

I mean, let's get down to cases. This is principally about Iran. And so if they want reassurance that we're not aimed -- this is not aimed at Russia, then we're prepared to give that, I think, in contrast to dealing with Iran.

MR. MCCORMACK: Let's just do two more questions.

QUESTION: Can I ask -- President-elect Medvedev, since this is the first time a senior U.S. delegation has met him, two Russia experts, any thoughts on him as a leader? I know it was a short meeting, but obviously, back in the U.S., there's a lot of speculation about how he might be different than Putin, how he might be under the control of Putin. Any thoughts that you can give from the short meeting you had?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I've met with him multiple times, I think probably now six or seven times, but the first time in this incarnation. Interestingly, we talked about many of the same issues. I mean, he was very much, I would say, on top of the brief, so to speak, and we talked in greater detail with President Putin, but we were able to talk a little bit about some of the opportunities that we faced.

I would just say that his portfolio, which has been very much focused on the transformation -- particularly the Russian economy, of the Russian regions, he is very interested, obviously, and was interested in today's meeting of, kind of, international economic issues. We were very involved, I was very involved with him at the time that the WTO accession agreement was finally negotiated between the United States and Russia. And so he's interested in that broad set of issues.

I don't expect that there are going to be big changes in political -- or in policy direction. I don't really see it. But I do think that he comes from a set of interests, or he comes with a set of interests about how Russia might really integrate into the international economy going forward. What that will mean for structural and other reform in Russia, that will provide some interesting opportunities going forward.

QUESTION: Did you --

SECRETARY GATES: My first -- my first experience in dealing with (inaudible) in this country was Leonid Brezhnev.

SECRETARY RICE: Bob, you shouldn't tell people that. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY GATES: I'm really old. I found him thoughtful.

SECRETARY RICE: Brezhnev or -- (Laughter.)

SECRETARY GATES: I found Medvedev thoughtful, articulate. As Condi said, he was clearly on top of his brief. Foreign policy and national security issues have not been his thing before, but he discussed them very, very well this afternoon. I was impressed.

QUESTION: How did you find Brezhnev? (Laughter.)

SECRETARY GATES: You don't want to go there. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Did you --

SECRETARY GATES: That's when I knew we'd win. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Did you discuss Kosovo at all and also Tibet and how Russia can use some of its influence with China in urging restraint?

SECRETARY RICE: We've not had a chance to discuss Tibet, but I -- there are a number of issues that Sergey Lavrov and I will have a chance to discuss tomorrow. And I'm quite sure the Russians are as equally concerned.

The -- on Kosovo, we did talk about Kosovo. Obviously, we don't see eye to eye on Kosovo, but the point that I wanted to make is that we all need to act in a responsible and constructive manner here. I do believe that the Kosovars are doing everything that they can to maintain calm. I've been very concerned about what's going in Mitrovica and concerned that the Serbian leadership needs to make very strong representations to the Serbs who are living inside of Kosovo that this is not a time for provocative action. And I have made that clear, but the -- much of the more, kind of, traditional bilateral agenda, I think I'll have a chance to discuss with Sergey Lavrov tomorrow.

QUESTION: Did the President or President-elect make any comment about your meeting with human rights activists tomorrow?

SECRETARY RICE: No. I think it's expected.

MR. MCCORMACK: Thanks, guys.

QUESTION: Can I just ask you to wrap-up one loose end? Do you share the same optimism as far as it goes on the START follow-on as you do on missile defense and would you say you are closer or farther to a deal on START than you are on missile defense?

SECRETARY GATES: Well, let me take this and then ask Condi to -- first of all, I wouldn't say I'm optimistic on any of this stuff. They're very complicated. The Russians hate the idea of missile defense. We are trying to figure out a way to make them partners in it in a way that assuages their concerns and potentially helps them see opportunities for them and cooperation for us on this. We have some challenges on post-START. The United States has already made a major concession in its willingness to consider a legally binding treaty as a follow-on to the Moscow Treaty and START.

I guess I would say that the -- well, I would say that one of the major points that I made today was that I've been involved in this process since the very first SALT treaty in 1972. And with each treaty, the time required to achieve it has been greater. It took 12 years to get the treaty, between 1979 and 1991. And my view is that is not consistent with the uncertain world that we face in the 21st century. And I told the Russians this and I told both President-elect Medvedev and President Putin that we don't have the time to create a telephone book-size agreement on this, that there are ways in which we need to deal with strategic arms, to provide each other with predictability and confidence, but also take into account the uncertainties of a 21st century world.

So, you know, I think this is as complicated, in its own way, as missile defense because it requires a new view of the world and a way of looking at the world that goes beyond the Cold War. And frankly, I find one of the ironies is that we seem more prepared to move beyond the Cold War in dealing with some of these issues than our counterparts here in Moscow.

SECRETARY RICE: I would just underscore -- I would also not use the word, "optimism." I would say that I found an openness to the ideas that we proposed. And again, the purpose here is to try and bridge both the conceptual gap and a confidence gap about what the system is -- the missile defense system is for and to assure, through concrete measures, the Russians that it is not, in fact, aimed at them.

On the START follow-on, the first point I would make is that when Bob said that he had been there for the SALT treaty, the interpreter had to try to remember what was the Russian acronym for SALT. (Laughter.) It had been quite a long time ago that anybody had used that term.

SECRETARY GATES: Ye old --

SECRETARY RICE: But it -- we don't have time for nor I think should we aspire to an agreement that looks like the kind of detail that was needed with the SALT and START treaties when you were dealing with a relationship that was not just based on mutual suspicion. It was literally based on -- despite all the protestations to the contrary, it was based on mutually assured destruction. That's what this was. It was -- strategic stability meant that both sides had to maintain second strike capability in order to retaliate against the first strike, whether it was out of the blue or out of a crisis.

Now if anybody can conceive of a world today in which the threat is the United States or Russia launching a first strike against the other and then having to survive -- to have survivable forces to launch a second strike in a kind of nuclear exchange, it's just not conceivable with this relationship with Russia. And so the strategic arms relationship ought to resemble, at least, the new and changed political circumstances and that's what the Moscow treaty did; the Moscow treaty, first of all, because it was operationally deployed warheads, which is really what matters, after all, but also, it was a very short treaty because it didn't try to do too much.

And so what we're trying to do with the START follow-on is to find a place in between where you could have an agreement that brings forward some of the positive elements of START in terms of verification and the like, but preserves the essential insight of the Moscow treaty, which is that this is a different world in which you don't need the kind of highly articulated, expensive limitations and verification procedures that attended the strategic arms relationship with the Soviet Union. And that's a conceptual issue. We hope to make a breakthrough on that too, but in some ways, it's a little bit a part of the same problem, which is, the missile defenses are not from the 80s and neither are the strategic arms treaties from the 80s.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right. Thanks, guys.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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