



Briefing En Route Moscow, Russia

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

En Route Moscow, Russia
October 11, 2007

SECRETARY RICE: We're on our way to Moscow and I will meet up there with Secretary Gates, and we intend to initiate a forum called the 2+2, which is the foreign ministers and the defense ministers getting together to talk about a variety of security and political-military issues. I think it's going to be a very good format. We've not done this. I think it may have been held at one point in time earlier in the first Bush Administration, but I've not done it and Bob Gates has not done it.

We have a range of issues before us. We are cooperating very well on a number of issues, including counterterrorism cooperation, and I (inaudible) that we will have some discussion of that. We'll also talk about the continuing efforts to find a cooperative path on missile defense, something we very much want to do and that the Russians have signaled that they want to do. And when President Bush and President Putin were at Kennebunkport, they said that they would like to pursue the various elements of missile defense that have been put on the table by both sides, and so we'll look at how those discussions are going from our political officials.

We'll also discuss, of course, continued efforts to make certain that we take advantage of those elements of the old arms control treaties that we had without falling back into the kind of extensive arms control negotiations that were really more appropriate to a time when the United States and the Soviet Union were in an adversarial relationship. And so we're looking for ways to continue the elements of START that are of very great use to everyone, but without again trying to go back to the days of arms control treaties that were many, many telephone books large.

I am certain we'll also discuss various regional issues, the Middle East. I expect to have an extended discussion with Sergei Lavrov myself about our Quartet responsibilities, about the Middle East, about the upcoming meeting, about the bilateral discussions that are going on between the parties. And of course, we'll discuss Iran, although our course on Iran was set at New York and I don't expect that there's any deviation from that course at this point. So those are some of the issues, perhaps a little bit also on the six-party talks (inaudible) Russia is a party to that.

QUESTION: And Kosovo?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, and Kosovo, yes. Although again, that's something that's in train. It's a process that the troika is working. So we'll have discussions of it, but there's not really very much an outcome that one could expect.

QUESTION: Do you see any kind of a path forward on missile defense? The Russians, as recently as this week, have talked about Gabala being an alternative to the Czech installation, but not an addition to it. They don't seem to be moving off that position.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't want to try to prejudge the discussions. We've been very clear that we need the Czech and Polish sites. This is an appropriate discussion between allies as to how to bring about security for the allies. We've talked a lot with our NATO allies about the indivisibility of NATO and American -- of European and American security. But I think we ought to look at all the possible elements of what the President and President Putin called a kind of regional architecture for missile defense. And there is considerable interest in both Azerbaijan and some of the possibilities in Russia itself. So I think we ought to look at all the possible elements.

QUESTION: You said that the course was set on Iran, but Putin is saying now that he doesn't -- there's no evidence that there is a nuclear weapons program. He's heading to Iran next week. What are you going to tell him -- what are you going to encourage him, what kind of message you want him to bring to Iran? And also, do you plan to talk to him about his latest decision to run for prime -- to become a prime minister (inaudible) his latest suggestion?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'll certainly be interested if he wants to talk about it. I wouldn't turn down that opportunity. (Laughter.)

Look, on Iran, what I mean when I say the course is set is we agreed in New York that we were going to continue to pursue the two tracks: one, to try and see what comes of the El Baradei efforts and the Solana-Larijani efforts, and I think they're going to try to meet in the next week or so; and on the other hand, to prepare and finalize the text of the Security Council resolution, and that work is going on. Nick Burns will have a meeting next week. And we've all agreed that in the timeframe in which the El Baradei and Solana reports would be made, those are (inaudible) November events and we are going to go back and, if they are not satisfactory, then we'll pursue the Security Council course. So I -- we know what the course is for that.

As to what Iran is up to, of course, the concern all along has been that Iran's secretive nature, its well-established history of misleading the IAEA, and the fact that these are technologies that they are pursuing that have the capability to lead to nuclear weapons grade material, that's the concern of everybody in the international community and that's why we're pursuing the course that we are.

QUESTION: And you're convinced Putin -- you're convinced Putin is concerned about that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I just laid out what I think is a very factual case. There is an Iranian history of obfuscation and indeed lying to the IAEA. There's a history of Iran not answering important questions about what is going on. And there is Iran pursuing a nuclear weapons -- nuclear technologies that can lead to nuclear weapons grade material. I think that that concern was seen, for instance, in Russia's offer to Iran to enrich and reprocess on Russian territory and to bring back -- or to enrich and reprocess in a joint venture and to bring back any spent fuel, so that the fuel cycle wouldn't be available to Iran. And I think there's a reason for that and it's suspicions about Iran's intentions.

QUESTION: How much of this stuff -- I'm sorry, this is kind of a technical or logistical question. How much of this stuff comes up in the 2+2? How much -- do you have any side meetings that you're going to do while you're (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I'm sure a lot. I think most of this will come in the 2+2. But I believe we're scheduled to have a kind of plenary and then also -- and a smaller session, the 2+2, as well. And Sergey Lavrov and I will have, as I -- I believe we're going to have a one-on-one session, some of which will be devoted to the Middle East.

QUESTION: Do you think that the Russians see the missile defense issue and cooperation on Iran linked; i.e., that if you show some accommodation on missile defense that they might be more cooperative on Iran? Do they see it that way?

SECRETARY RICE: No, I don't see it as a kind of quid pro quo because I think the Russians have concerns about what Iran is doing as well, as they've made clear. No --

QUESTION: But do the Russians see it that way? Have they indicated that to you?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, I mean, no, they haven't indicated it. And I can't speak for them. I know that there's a logic to the Iran issue and there's a logic to the missile defense issue. Now the one way that they are actually linked, of course, is that the threat that one has to consider when you look at missile defense is the threat that comes from states like Iran that are developing first medium-range and then longer-range missile capability with potentially nuclear technology. So that's the link. But I haven't -- we've never picked up any quid pro quo.

QUESTION: One more question. And are you and Secretary Gates bringing any new ideas, you know, in response to Putin's, you know, proposal at Kennebunkport?

SECRETARY RICE: I'll let you know after we talk to the Russians. We hope we're going to keep exploring ideas, of course. We want to explore ideas. I think there are some basics that are -- that remain stable. We really do have to pursue missile defense and we have to pursue it in a way that our technical experts say it's going to work. And for the threats that we see coming, that means the kind of sites that we've been talking about with Poland and the Czech Republic. But we are interested in other potential sites as well and, you know, we may be able to find ways to put that together.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) assess the Russia-U.S. relationship right now, and one aspect, the kind of increased assertiveness of the Russian military? You have these Bear bomber flights that they have resumed, a pretty steep increase in defense spending over the last few years. What's the status of the relationship?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think the relationship is actually pretty good. We've worked -- we work together on most issues. We have our differences. We have our differences on issues associated with internal developments in Russia and problems of an independent press. We've made those very clear. And the treatment of nongovernmental organizations, in general, we can have very good discussions about those that are pretty open and candid.

We have, I think, strategic agreement on what needs to be done on countries like North Korea, Iran. Sometimes we have tactical differences about timing of a resolution, how tough a resolution ought to be. But the fact that we've had two unanimous Security Council resolutions on Iran and had on North Korea one of the toughest Security Council resolutions I think ever, shows that there is considerable cooperation there.

As I said, on the Middle East, we have very good cooperation. On counterterrorism, we have very good cooperation. We don't see eye to eye on everything, but in juxtaposition to the way the relationship was with the Soviet Union, where I really do think the only thing that we saw eye to eye on was that we didn't want to annihilate one another, this is a very different relationship. It's a maturing, complex relationship which is probably going to be likely with two countries that are as big and as multifaceted as the United States and Russia.

Now, as to, you know, issues like military spending, of course we want to talk about transparency in that. Perhaps Secretary Gates will raise the Bear run. And the Russians have said that their defense spending in the '90s dropped to dangerously low levels. They've been transparent about that. But the real central point is that there isn't a threat from the United States to Russia, and from Russia to the United States, any longer. There are disagreements and differences -- sometimes quite wide, sometimes pretty narrow -- but this is a relationship that has a lot of benefits as well.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Can you talk a little bit about the transition and the uncertainty surrounding who is going to be the president, or are you going to be dealing with a newly empowered prime minister? It's only a couple months out. Does that at all affect the relationship, the talks that you have now?

SECRETARY RICE: I haven't seen it affect the discussions that we've had. And Russia will -- the internal Russian political situation will play out. And we know they have Duma elections coming up, we know they have a presidential elections transition coming up, and we understand that. But I haven't seen an effect, really, because I think the players are there and continuing to act in their capacity. But you know, it's an interesting time in Russia. I'm looking forward to some discussions that I'm going to have with some members of nongovernmental organizations and civil society. I'll be interested in their take on the political situation in Russia and the kind of internal politics there.

QUESTION: Can I follow up on that? You said you wouldn't turn down an opportunity to discuss with President Putin his thoughts about being prime minister. But do you not plan to proactively raise that with him? And does it not give you pause, the notion, even if it's constitutionally permissible in Russia, that one man would be president for two terms and then potentially take on another very powerful position?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not going to speculate about something that is speculative, as to what President Putin will or will not do. You know I have a deep interest in Russian politics that goes back a long way, and so it's great to have a chance to talk about those things. But in terms of speculating about what he'll do or having a view based on that speculation, I don't -- I just don't think that's appropriate.

QUESTION: Are you going to ask him what he plans to do?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not going to tell you what I'm going to ask him. (Laughter.) What we have talked about is the need for there to be vital and viable political institutions in Russia, kind of competitive political institutions. You know, we've made -- we've had those kinds of conversations. But this is a political system that's in transition, and so I -- no, I'm not going to get into speculation with President Putin about what he will or will not do.

QUESTION: Israel announced this week the confiscation of Palestinian land between Jerusalem and Ma'ale Adumim in West Bank, which appears to be a fait accompli before your arrival. What are you going to do about that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I called the Ambassador to -- their Ambassador to the United States yesterday and asked for a clarification. I'm awaiting one.

All right.

2007/T17-1

Released on October 11, 2007

 [BACK TO TOP](#)