



Remarks With Saudi Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud After Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
February 22, 2006

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: I welcome Dr. Condoleezza Rice and her accompanying delegation. If I remember well, today's meeting is our fifth meeting during the last six months, which reflects the deep friendship between the two countries and the current strategic relations and the determination and resolve to promote the relations in all fields as well as exchanging the views and coordination on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

In this regard, I would like to note that King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz, as the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, received a letter from President Bush shortly before the visit of Dr. Rice to Saudi Arabia. In his letter, President Bush stressed the depths of bilateral relations and the importance attached to developing it as being agreed between the two leaders in Crawford in the United States.

These meeting developed into the formation of the Strategic Dialogue Committee which aims at putting the bilateral relations within an institutional framework. Strategic Dialogue Committee, at the level of the two foreign ministers, held its first meeting in the United States and second meeting in Saudi Arabia. The Subcommittee of Cultural Affairs and Human Resources has started its business and the subcommittees will commence their meetings later according to schedule. The main committee will get together for its third session in the United States in a few coming months, *Inshallah*.

The meeting of Dr. Rice with the Custodian of the Holy Mosques today was a good opportunity to review these issues and to exchange views on regional and international developments, including the Palestinian issue and the peace process in the region. Saudi Arabia assured its full commitment to the peace process in the Middle East and the importance of respecting the free will of the Palestinian people without hastily prejudging the situation. We denounce Israel's withholding of the due funds of the Palestinian Authority. We wish not to link the international aid to the Palestinian people to considerations other than their dire humanitarian needs.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia hopes for continuation of the peace process in compliance with the resolutions of the international legitimacy, Arab Initiative for Peace and the roadmap.

With regard to the situation in Iraq and the terrorist act which happened there, we generally denounce, naturally, against terrorist actions targeting sacred places. We are looking forward with the coming Iraqi government will manage to stop such criminal actions and to achieve security and stability, consolidation of its national unity securing equality among all factions of the Iraqi people before long and maximizing benefit of its resources and wealth.

I welcome again Dr. Condoleezza Rice and she may have the floor right now.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you very much. I want to thank Foreign Minister Saud al-Faysal for hosting me here. I especially would like to thank His Majesty King Abdallah for spending time with me. We had a very good and wide-ranging discussion.

This is indeed our fifth meeting and I was last here in November. I remember because you gave me a birthday cake, so thank you very much for that. It's good to be back.

This is an important time, of course, to engage in dialogue. It has been -- we've had a good set of discussions on regional issues, on the challenges facing the Middle East, on Syria and Lebanon, on Iraq, on issues concerning Iran and of course on the situation in the Palestinian territories.

We also had an opportunity to renew the importance of our dialogue about bilateral issues. We are hoping that the United States and Saudi Arabia can increase the contacts between its peoples. This is something to which King Abdallah and President Bush have been very much dedicated, and we talked about how to do that.

We also talked about the course of internal reform here in Saudi Arabia and the importance of continuing our dialogue on those issues.

Let me close before taking questions by just commenting on the incident today in Samara to which the Minister referred. This is, of course, a tragic incident and one, I am sure, committed by people who wish to tear the Iraqi people apart. There have been other incidents, other attacks committed by people who wish to tear the Iraqi people apart.

I noted that Ayatollah Sistani and many others have called for calm in Iraq. This is a time for the Iraqi people to draw together to renounce -- to denounce terrorism against any peoples and against holy places. Our thoughts and our prayers are with the Iraqi people that this is a crucial time for Iraqis and we hope that they will rise to the occasion to restate again their unity as a people and their determination to proceed with their democratic development.

Minister, do you want to call on a Saudi?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: We'll take your question.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, you're going to go first? All right. Anne Gearan.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, today Iran offered to finance a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority. What implications does that have and does it lesson your leverage over Hamas to moderate its policies?

And to the Foreign Minister, if I could ask you to expand a bit on your comments on the Palestinian (inaudible) statement. Saudi Arabia gives several million to Palestinians each month. Do you intend to continue that funding under a Hamas-led government? And more generally, do you agree with the U.S. position that Hamas should be isolated diplomatically or commercially if it does not moderate?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, let me state that the U.S. position is, of course, the position of the Quartet, which is the United States, the EU, the UN and Russia, which is that there are certain requirements of governing that need to be met by Hamas now that it has been elected by the Palestinian people who are voting for change,



that we believe were still voting for hopes of a peaceful and better life. And it's simply the case that the international community is united in its view that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can only be resolved by peaceful means, that violence and terrorism are not permissible in that context or any other context, that it is necessary to have a two-state solution. This is embodied in any number of agreements to which the Palestinians themselves are committed. It is embodied in Arab League and Arab proposals that have been put forward, including that of Crown Prince Abdallah a few years ago.

And so the issue is that there is a commitment and a consensus about a peace process, a two-state solution, the recognition of two parties to that process and the need to renounce violence. And that is the standard I think against which any Palestinian government has to be measured. The United States has made very clear, and we've made clear again in our discussions with our colleagues here in Saudi Arabia as well as with our colleagues in Egypt that the United States is aware of the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and wants to continue to find a way to meet those needs. The Palestinian people will continue to need help. The United States is not going to fathom the -- stopping the immunization of Palestinian children or not getting food assistance to Palestinians who may need it. This is a population that has vulnerable people and in accordance with our longstanding tradition of compassion and meeting those needs, we want to continue to meet those needs.

We are also supportive of helping the interim government of Abu Mazen and he has worked with the international community to try to meet those needs. The question, though, is really one for Hamas. I think it is not a question for the rest of the world; it's a question for Hamas. And that is whether it intends to join the international consensus for peace and to deliver therefore on the promise of a better life for the Palestinian people by being able to give them a more peaceful life. We would like nothing better than to see the Palestinian government take -- make the right choice.

QUESTION: And on Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I'm sorry. Well, the Iranians can promise to do whatever the Iranians would like to promise to do. I would just note again that there is a very large need of the Palestinians for assistance, but it is not just a matter of assistance. A good life for the Palestinian people requires cooperation with Israel. It does. It's simply a fact of life of the way that the Palestinian economy and the Israeli economies work. And so there needs to be a recognition on the part of any Palestinian government that the best way to pursue a peaceful and better life for their people is to do it within the context that the international community has been following for all of these years, which is that there has to be a renunciation of violence, there has to be a two-state solution and there is a peace process that is embodied in the roadmap that needs to be followed.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: We do aid the Palestinians. As a matter of fact, we just presented them with some aid and the aid that we sent is for the Palestinian people. They are people living on subsistence level. They are human beings who are educated and who look for a life for themselves and for their children. We think it will be the ultimate of irony that at the time when we need to take care of these people who are seeking peace that we should fall short of doing so.

How do we distinguish between humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid? Is a festering sewage in (inaudible) an infrastructure project or a humanitarian aid project? They need both infrastructure and humanitarian aid. And that is why we are continuing to help the Palestinians.

QUESTION: (In Arabic.) Welcome to Riyadh, Madame Secretary. How it's possible to harmonize the U.S. position as a nation supporting freedom of expression and the right of people to practice democracy with your effort to curb the will of Hamas and put pressures on other countries in this regard? In addition, your visit here is probably meant to urge Saudi Arabia to stop its support to Hamas, bearing in mind that the friendly countries will not stand as onlookers in face of adopting a starvation policy against the Palestinians. My question, if you allow me, Dr. Rice, why don't you give Hamas a chance to express the will of people? Achieving this will reduce tension and would attract Hamas to peace, calm, instead of isolation policy. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Fine. First of all, I have been here to talk with my colleagues about what we need to do to make certain that there is a peace process to be continued. That's been the nature of our discussion. Different countries will have different modalities in how to deal with this. The United States -- for the United States, Hamas is a terrorist organization. We cannot give funding to a terrorist organization. It's really that simple. We will do everything that we can to meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people because we are a compassionate people and we want the Palestinian people to have food and to have medicine and Palestinian children to be immunized and not to have to live in squalid conditions. So we will do everything we can to meet those humanitarian needs.

The issue is: How do we keep a peace process alive if one of the partners is not committed to peace? That's the issue. And the Palestinians, through a variety of agreements, have been committed to peace. The international community, through a variety of proposals and agreements, including the roadmap, have been committed to peace.

This is not an issue of the democratic election of Hamas. We congratulated the Palestinian people on having carried out an election that was free and fair. And we understand that they voted for change. But there are certain responsibilities with governing, and one of those responsibilities is to act in a way that is peaceful and to seek peace. And so that's the discussion we are having and I think we are all in agreement that the Palestinian people will be better off, the Israeli people will be better off, this entire region will be better off and the whole world will be better off, if everyone is committed to the roadmap, if everyone is committed to the search for peace. And that is the question that we are putting before Hamas: Are you committed to the search for peace?

Oh, sorry. Elise.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, are you afraid that threats by U.S. legislators to block this deal on the ports with the United Arab Emirates is Arab bashing and are you afraid it could undermine what you're trying to do in the region? Are you concerned that the UAE could retaliate by blocking U.S. naval bases and access to ports or withholding cooperation in the war on terror?

And Mr. Foreign Minister, Secretary Rice and the U.S. say that Iran's nuclear program is a threat to the whole region, destabilizing the region, if you take into account its support for terrorist groups and its interference in Iraq and Lebanon. Do you agree that Iraq is -- excuse me, that Iran is trying to destabilize the region and do you support U.S. calls to further isolate Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Elise, how many questions were in there?

On the question of the port, the President spoke to this yesterday. This was a process that was very thorough concerning the questions of security. Whenever there is a proposal by a foreign company to be involved in or to purchase an asset that has security concerns for the United States, there's a very thorough process of vetting that deal. And that thorough process was carried out. Experts were asked and there was agreement that this was a sale that could go forward with absolute -- with security for the United States unimpaired.

We have to maintain a principle that it doesn't matter where in the world one of these purchases is coming from; if it meets the standard of meeting the security standard that we need to meet, then it ought to go through. And that should be the case if it is from Great Britain or if it is from Germany or if it is from the UAE.

And so as the President said, we shouldn't want to turn down a deal of this kind just because it happens to originate in the Middle East. The UAE is a good partner in the war on terrorism. It has been a stalwart partner and we believe that this is a deal, a port deal that serves the interests of the United States, serves our security interest and serves the commercial interest as well.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Iran is an important and large country in the area and it certainly has its responsibilities for the stability and security of the region. It is a country that we hope will work towards carrying those responsibilities to their fullest.

In this regard, we think -- and this is our thinking -- that there is no proof here that they are producing atomic weapons. They deny this. They have denied it many times to

us. They say they need the technology for its own purposes and there are accusations that are being -- we are being told about that they are, they're in the process of developing atomic weapons. We hope -- we ardently hope -- that they would follow our policy and the policy of the GCC of making the Middle East an area free of atomic weapons. That is the more stable policy, the more effective policy and the more peaceful policy. And we hope that they will play the role of a stabilizing country in the region and not a country that would add to the already volatile situation in the Middle East.

QUESTION: (In Arabic.) And Madame Secretary, you know that cutting the aids to the Palestinians and not contacting with an elected government democratically can push the Palestinians towards hedonism and hardlining and resorting to Iran.

And the question to the Prince: What about the Lebanese/Syrian file? Were there agreements with, cooperation with, the investigating committee?

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: The United States believes that Hamas is a terrorist organization. Hamas has engaged in terrorist acts and Hamas does not recognize the right of Israel to exist. It is difficult to imagine a peace process, or the roadmap, or a two-state solution, in which one of the parties does not recognize the right of the other party to exist.

The roadmap requires a renunciation of violence and a disarming of militias. And so if we are committed to the roadmap, which we are committed to the roadmap, then we have to require of any Palestinian government that they would also be committed to those same principles of the roadmap if we are going to have peace. And peace is, of course, the only way that the Palestinians are going to have a good life.

So we understand that the Palestinian people voted for change. We understand that they carried out an election that was, by all accounts, free and fair. And we congratulate them on that. But we do not believe that they voted to abandon a road toward peace. They voted for change because they saw a government that was not meeting their needs, in which there was corruption. But the Palestinian people, by all accounts, want peace. The question really is one to Hamas: Are they prepared to take up the requirements of government, governing, and to deliver peace to -- are they prepared to live up to the commitments that Palestinians have taken over the last decade, more than a decade? Are they committed to Abu Mazen's program, which is one that is based on peace and a two-state solution?

I hope that Hamas makes the right choice because we're talking here about the lives of the Palestinian people. It's very easy to get caught up in the politics and the high politics and the diplomacy, but the lives of the Palestinian people will be immeasurably better if there is a peaceful environment, if there is a renunciation of violence and if there is cooperation under the roadmap toward a two-state solution. And so that is really the question that we are placing and that the international community and that the Quartet is placing before Hamas.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: With regard to the file -- Lebanese file, on those -- the situation there at this region, we hope for -- we are acting upon it, correcting the situation. But who can do this from the Syrians -- are the Syrians and the Lebanese. We are waiting their opinions on how to avoid the condition and to avoid instability. We know that what happened, there is instability. If there is instability in one of the two countries, it will move on to the second country. We hope that (inaudible) will take place and that they agree on the procedures and measures to absorb this crisis. All the parties know what it knows from the other party. We are ready if we are asked to do any duty.

SECRETARY RICE: We're done, right? (Laughter.) All right. We'll take one more. Glenn. I'm sorry. Who? Glenn, you had a question and so, pass the microphone. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: I'll ask the Secretary.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, just if I could quickly talk about the broader theme of democracy in the region. You sent a clear message shortly after you became Secretary of State when you canceled the trip to Egypt, you sent a message about the new tone at the State Department and then you gave an important speech in Egypt a few months after that. On this trip, your first meeting in Egypt was with the intelligence chief of a government that's probably an autocratic government and under a lot of definitions and it left an impression that now that we need their help in dealing with Hamas, issues of democracy might not be as important. Can you comment on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, certainly. I don't think that there can be any doubt that the United States remains strongly -- and I want to underline "strongly" -- committed to democracy. Sometimes it produces, by the way, outcomes that are not outcomes that we would have preferred, but we believe that people ought to be given a choice and that when they are not given a choice, the pressures fill in unproductive ways. And so we will continue to press for people to have more open political assistance.

In Egypt, I think I was very clear with every member of the Egyptian Government with whom I met, including an extended discussion with the President, that the United States believes that the course that Egypt set out on when it believed -- when it decided on multi-candidate elections for the presidency and parliamentary elections is the right course. And I think I was very clear as well that there are -- there have been setbacks and there have been disappointments. Some things have gone well and some things have gone wrong in that process.

But Egypt is never going to be the same after the full-ranging debates that took place in their presidential elections. They have a parliament that is fundamentally new from the parliament that they had in the past. And so I do believe that Egypt is set on a course and it's our responsibility as a friend of Egypt to continue to press the case for democratic change and for greater openness in the political system.

People have to find their own indigenous solutions for democracy. Democracies around the world are not going to look like American democracy. And obviously, countries start at different places and the pace is different in different places. But the one thing that you can be certain of is that wherever we are, under whatever circumstances, we will continue to raise the issues, we will continue to press the case forward.

We had the -- I had the opportunity to meet with people in Egypt today who are trying to press that case and I think that's important. But you can be certain the United States is going to continue to press the issue of democracy because we believe that the non-negotiable demands of human dignity demand it of us and of everyone who has the opportunity to rule. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Last question.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) In the name of God, most gracious, most merciful. Custodian of the Holy Mosques made the round visiting countries, how do you see the outcome of this round on the local side? Is there a message in this round to some countries who feel that there is a need of the Saudi people to other countries, particularly the Western side, as if pressurizing the Saudi negotiators. There are news that the U.S. completed his mission to all the world countries, African and Asians. What is the strategy of Saudi Foreign Affairs Ministry?

My second question to Madame Secretary, on the situation of the Danish newspaper abuse -- refuses to apologize for abusing the prophet of Islam. What are the international efforts in this concern? Do you have any clear situation in the United States with regard to these abuses to the figures of Islam and figures of religious at a time you are encouraging the dialogue between the civilizations?

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: The visit to the Asian countries is not to replace relations between any other part of the world. These are countries that numerically account for half the world, really. And that is a shortcoming on our part that we have only taken interest lately and we think we are late in the game. And it was a successful trip. It has opened many avenues of cooperation between the two sides. Growth is -- involves everybody. If Asian markets grow, if Middle East markets grow, if development happens in both, it adds to the benefit of all over the whole world. We are not isolated: Asian, European and Americans and so forth. We are all one economy and an

expanded economy is to the benefit of everybody. So that was the reason for the trip.

May I comment on one of the issues you raised with -- for Dr. Rice to answer? The newspaper did apologize. It apologized twice, not only once, and a very clear apology was made.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. Well, the United States has spoken to this issue at various levels. The President himself has spoken to it. We value press freedom. It's our First Amendment in the United States -- Freedom of the Press. We recognize, too, that with that freedom comes a certain responsibility. And the United States -- we believe very strongly that this is a time when we should try to build bridges between cultures. I have said and I will say now that I found some of the cartoons personally offensive. I'm a religious person myself. But the real issue here is that now how people react to this is extremely important and there really isn't any justification for violence and for using violent protests mostly against innocent people. There are ways to protest. There are ways to protest peacefully. But what was unfortunate is that it became a way of violent expression, which was unwarranted. But I hope that everyone is going to reach across religious and ethnic lines. There have often been in various parts of the world statements or pictures or cartoons that have been offensive to many different religions. And I hope that across all lines, people will seek to respect one another's religious traditions and one another's religious sensibilities. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SAUD: Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

2006/T3-4

Released on February 22, 2006

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.