



Interview With Ray Suarez of the NewsHour with Jim Lehrer

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
Washington, DC
August 1, 2006

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, welcome to the program.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Nice to be with you.

QUESTION: Just a few minutes ago the Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres was on our program. He said he anticipates Israeli forces being in southern Lebanon for weeks to come. Is the United States ready to support Israel for that long, given the momentum of events?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the diplomacy is moving ahead. During the time that I was in the Middle East I had a lot of very fruitful conversations with both the Lebanese and with the Israelis on what it would take to end this conflict on a basis that would not permit a return to the status quo ante. The last thing that we want to do is to have an unprovoked attack by Hezbollah across the blue line and to have several months from now a situation in which they can do that again.

And so the discussions we've had are about moving the Lebanese armed forces to the south to fill this vacuum that Hezbollah had been using, to extend the authority of the Lebanese Government and to do several other things that would make it impossible to return to the status quo ante. When we've got those conditions in place or when we know that a resolution is in fact going to support those conditions, I think we should move for a ceasefire.

QUESTION: When you were leaving the Middle East you said an urgent ceasefire and a lasting settlement. You were convinced we could achieve both this week. Is that still in the cards?

SECRETARY RICE: I still believe that if we really put our minds to it and work that this week is entirely possible. Certainly we're talking about days not weeks before we are able to get a ceasefire. It's time to end the violence. But the reason that the United States has talked about an urgent ceasefire but one that cannot lead to a return to the status quo ante is that the Middle East has been through far too many of these spasms and we've had littered -- the region is just littered with broken ceasefires. And so this time we have to try and put together a program, put together institutions, that will prevent this from happening again. And I think we can certainly have the elements in any resolution that will tell us the roadmap ahead to do that.

QUESTION: Well, as we've just heard you explain, the United States wants the structure for a permanent ceasefire to be in place. The Europeans say stop the fighting first and that will help create the conditions for that ceasefire to emerge. Just as you're not abandoning the United States position, they're not abandoning theirs either. How do you bridge that divide?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, I really think we're coming together very effectively. We're having very good conversations with our allies, the British, the French, with others, because no one is saying that we're going to have a situation by the time that there's a ceasefire that the Lebanese army is in full control of its territory or that the Lebanese Government is able to extend its authority throughout the territory.

But you have to have expectations that that will be the case. It has to be clear to everyone that that's the basis for a ceasefire or for a cessation of the hostilities. It has to be clear to everyone that armed groups can't just be allowed to operate in the country in the way that they did, by the way, provoking this attack unbeknownst to the Lebanese Government. You have to be clear that you're not going to have violations of the blue line.

Because if you have a so-called unconditional ceasefire, how do you know when someone has violated it? With absolutely clear what the basis is going to be for this new southern Lebanon that cannot return to the status quo ante, you can then begin to build on that towards stable conditions that will ultimately make Lebanon truly sovereign, truly democratic and truly at peace.

QUESTION: But as I just mentioned, the Deputy Prime Minister mentioned weeks to come of Israeli presence on the ground in southern Lebanon. You're talking about trying to stop the shooting within the week. How do you create conditions where it's possible to insert that multinational force? Because they won't go in if the bullets are still flying.

SECRETARY RICE: No, no. Clearly, no one expects an international force to in any way fight its way into the territory. No, of course not. No, there has to be a ceasefire. But my point, Ray, is that we have to have a ceasefire where everybody is clear on what it is that we are building in this region so that this doesn't happen again. Obviously, you're not going to have all of those conditions in place when a ceasefire takes place, but you should know precisely what it is that will prevent the return to the status quo ante. And we're working very closely with allies. I think we're making a lot of progress.

QUESTION: While you were in Israel word came of the attack on Qana. Has that undermined the United States' ability to speak to all sides in this conflict?

SECRETARY RICE: Clearly, the tragedy in Qana was first of all a terrible tragedy for the Lebanese people, for people everywhere, and it was deeply saddening and the United States immediately expressed its condolences. It's the sad truth of this kind of warfare is that civilians very often get mixed up in the fight because the terrorists are very often very intertwined in villages and in towns.

But the United States is still talking to all the parties and we're going to continue to talk to all the parties because everyone recognizes that the United States wants to have an end to this violence. We've worked as hard as anyone to bring an end to this violence, but we want to do it in a way that is going to be stable and enduring and not cause yet another cycle of this just a few months from now or a few years from now.

QUESTION: What do you mean by talk to all the parties? Because three of the main instigators identified by the Bush Administration in this particular conflict -- Syria, Hezbollah and Iran -- the United States doesn't talk to.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, let me put it this way. Talk to all the parties who can be a part of a stable and democratic Lebanon. Now, as it comes to Hezbollah, the fact is that there are two ministers in the Lebanese Government and Prime Minister Siniora has been working through his cabinet to bring consensus for a Lebanese Government on what is acceptable to the Lebanese Government.

We have to remember that the Lebanese Government which was created after the March 14 events after the tragic assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, this Lebanese Government is a democratic government, it's a moderate government. It has Hezbollah ministers but Hezbollah, the armed wing of Hezbollah, without the

knowledge of the government, went ahead and launched this attack. Everything that we are trying to do is to prevent that from happening again. And as you might imagine, that's very much in the interest of the Lebanese Government. And of course we're working with the Israelis and we're working with others.

As to Iran and Syria, I would hope that they would not stand in the way of a ceasefire that could be enduring.

QUESTION: At the very beginning when Hezbollah began its shelling right after the seizure of the soldiers, there was a lot of criticism of Hezbollah from Arab governments in the region. Over the last two weeks that's been silenced and now there's a rising chorus of criticism for Israel and the United States. How do you respond to that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think we have to do what is right. We have to do what we know is going to be enduring. We have to do what we know is going to have a chance at least to keep this country, Lebanon, which has been through so much difficulty, through so much pain, through so much violence, from falling back into it again. A really big first step was taken when Resolution 1559 required the removal of Syrian forces after 30 years of occupation. And then there was a period of building this young democratic government, but it's been undermined by the fact that Hezbollah acts as a state within the state.

That fact has to be dealt with. You can't have a state within the state, an armed state within the state. The Lebanese Government has to have full authority over its territory, it has to have full authority over all arms and armed people, and it has to have help in doing that. And so this resolution in the Security Council which calls a cessation of violence or a ceasefire will have to acknowledge and give international commitment to the Lebanese people and to the Lebanese Government that the international community is not going to permit a state within a state.

QUESTION: Now you say the United States has to do the right thing and your Administration has been saying that all along, but can you continue down this road without also losing a great deal of influence, leverage, ability to be heard on the part of other countries in the region, even while you're doing what you believe is the right thing?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, leverage and the ability to be heard are not a problem for the United States of America. People want the United States to be involved because they know that we bring a stabilizing influence to these issues. They know where we stand. And that's very important.

But most importantly, the United States is really committed to a Middle East that will be at peace with itself, that will be democratic. We have been committed. The President is committed to the creation of a Palestinian state, two states living side by side. We're working with President Mahmoud Abbas in that direction.

The United States also brings to this a kind of clarity of purpose that I think despite what you see and sometimes here people appreciate because you always know where the United States stands. Now, where the United States stands on Lebanon is that we need an end to the violence. There is no doubt about that. There have been too many tragic deaths -- Israeli, Lebanese. But we need an end to the violence that's really going to be an end to the violence, that is going to deal with the underlying political circumstances here that caused this in the first place. The Lebanese Government wants that too because it doesn't want to be surprised again that Hezbollah has crossed the blue line, taken Israeli soldiers and plunged the country into war. Nobody wants that to happen again.

And so what the United States has been insisting on is that we have a ceasefire or a cessation of hostilities that makes very clear the international commitment not to let that happen again.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, thanks for joining us.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Good to be with you.

2006/727

Released on August 1, 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.