



Roundtable with Press

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Singapore
July 24, 2008

SECRETARY RICE: All right.

MR. MCCORMACK: I thought what we would do, everybody, is start with the our -- some of our local journalists, and then we'll get some of the imports after that. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Imports? (Laughter.) Imports and --

MR. MCCORMACK: Yeah, I'll leave it with imports.

SECRETARY RICE: Imports.

MR. MCCORMACK: Is there somebody who'd like to start off with a question?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, who'd like to start?

QUESTION: Let me start question.

SECRETARY RICE: All right.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.) I wonder the relation -- I mean, the -- what your stand now between Thai and Cambodia coming to Europe. (Inaudible.) I don't know if this premature for the two countries to discuss in the UNSC and I want to hear from you what your -- timing.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, well, thanks a lot. It is something that has been a subject of discussion. We're concerned about it, and there needs to be a way to resolve it peacefully. My understanding is that there is an effort to -- it hits by the bilateral discussions, but that ASEAN is also taking a role of watching and trying to help where necessary. We'll continue to consult with the regional states. It hasn't really been taken up before the Council yet, although there's been a potential request passed. But I made very clear to all of my ASEAN colleagues that the United States will be very much interested in and, in fact, guided by the regional assessment of what needs to be done here.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it -- right now, because there are bilateral discussions going on and because ASEAN is taking a role. But again, we're going to be guided very heavily by the views of the countries in this region. And I've had a chance to raise it with several of them.

QUESTION: I have two questions for you, actually. The first one is, what is the U.S. Government response to the recently released report by the Commission of Truth and Friendship between Indonesia and Timor-Leste? It concluded that Indonesian military and police committed a systematic -- gross violations of human rights. Do you think (inaudible) should be held responsible?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, I was heartened by the rapid response of the Government of Indonesia and by President Yudhoyono, who immediately -- I don't want to put words in his mouth, but talked about the deep pain that it caused him to have this report, promised that the Government of Indonesia would be, certainly, implementing the recommendations of the report. And so this is a good democratic government that has a strong record of wanting to work and to be responsive on human rights issues.

We've known for a long time that there are concerns about reform in the military, need for reform in the military. The United States has been active in helping and to -- encouraging that agenda with Indonesia. I do believe that the military-to-military contacts which the United States restarted some three, three and a half years ago with Indonesia, are helpful in what has been -- what is a not always smooth transition from military rule to civilian rule in a democratic society.

So we're going to continue to work closely with the Indonesian Government. We will help in any way that we can. But I'm content to leave to the Indonesians and Timor-Leste, which put together the commission, how to carry out its recommendations. But I think the spirit in which it's been received and the seriousness with which the government takes the report and its recommendations is a --

QUESTION: Do you think that an international court could be an outlet for this issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I can't speak to that. I think the recommendations of the commission, I'm sure, will be implemented. And that the government and -- both governments will find a means to make certain that justice is done.

QUESTION: Okay. One more question.

SECRETARY RICE: Uh-huh.

QUESTION: Are your government and Indonesia in talks about the Naval Medical Research Operations in Indonesia? And your government insists that all the American crew be given diplomatic immunity and privileges and --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States has standard practices about this worldwide. And so we will have to decide -- and we'll, with standard practices -- well - look, we and Indonesia are good friends, and we'll work this out.

QUESTION: Okay.

QUESTION: Good morning.

SECRETARY RICE: Good morning.

QUESTION: I'm from Malaysia, so I hopefully (inaudible), I support this relations, (inaudible) sense that the U.S. has been interfering with domestic criminal case of -- from Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. So Washington seems to make (inaudible) remarks against the case. To us, Malaysia -- it's just local, domestic, criminal case.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the United States has long spoken and will continue to speak about cases that we think need to be thought about in terms of the political circumstances. We are always going to speak about human rights cases, about political cases. But again, we do so in a spirit of respect for Malaysia, and it's -- the United States doesn't recognize this very firm barrier, but there are certain things that are simply internal affairs when a case of this kind comes up. But we're going to continue to work with the Malaysian Government. And I'm going to see my Malaysian counterpart in a little bit.

QUESTION: But Mr. Anwar is going through all the local due process of law.

SECRETARY RICE: And we look for -- one of the things that we've said is that we want to see a transparent and -- rule of law to be completely followed here, and that part of the comfort level or the confidence that states need to bring to the international system is that their systems are -- their judicial systems are, indeed, responsive to rule of law and transparent and fair. That's been (inaudible).

QUESTION: But you must remember the -- our police and our --

SECRETARY RICE: I think I've answered your question.

QUESTION: Majority of them are trained by the Americans and the British.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, yes.

QUESTION: (Inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: No, no -- but the evenhanded application of rule of law is very important.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: We are from the Straits Times, in Singapore.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: I just have two questions. Number one is, do you have anything arising from your discussions with our Foreign Minister George Yeo? And number two is whether the U.S. intends to institutionalize the Six-Party Talks and make anything that arrives from it into a more formal system?

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm. On the second point, the September 2005 agreement foreshadows the idea of a Northeast Asia peace and security mechanism. I think we -- the Russians are the co -- are the chairs of the working group that is working on that issue. And we had some discussion yesterday about the principles. It wasn't a very long meeting, so we didn't have an in-depth discussion, but I think it's something that, at an appropriate time, the parties will want to establish.

Right now, the work of denuclearization takes precedence. And certainly, it's the most urgent work, being able to do it verifiably and to do it as rapidly as possible. But there's a great deal of interest among the parties. I think one of the points that was made was that we've developed a kind of habits or patterns of cooperation about an issue that really could have pulled the parties apart. And I don't mean here the North Koreans. I mean the -- when you think about the kind of variable interests of China and South Korea and Japan and the United States and Russia concerning the North Korean nuclear program, to have a forum in which this has become a reason for cooperation rather than for conflict, is pretty rare. And so I think we will want to build on that, but there -- it's going to have to come at an appropriate time.

As to my meeting with my colleague, George Yeo, it was a very good meeting. We -- you know, we have an excellent relationship with Singapore. We talked mostly, frankly, about the region and about the ASEAN agenda, because I wanted to make sure that I fully understood what was on the minds of my colleagues. It was a meeting that took place just shortly before I had the U.S.-ASEAN ministerial. And so we talked principally about regional issues, and about Burma and about the Thai-Cambodia issue. I asked for some -- about them and --

QUESTION: Can I ask just one more follow-up question?

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: P -- our PM, on the first day of the meetings here, was talking about ASEAN and a possibility of it losing relevance in the region. And I wanted to see, from an American view, whether you concur or you (inaudible) view on that issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, any organization, if it doesn't keep moving forward, can be subject to losing relevance. But I have the sense, at least, that ASEAN is an organization that has an agenda for moving forward. I know of some of the larger-scale plans on integration and the difficulty that those may – some of that may encounter. But for instance, we had an interesting discussion yesterday about the full integration of the new members, which come in at lower standards of economic development and prosperity, because there is a concern, I think, that some of the countries that are new to ASEAN – you don't want, in effect, two speeds within ASEAN. This is a debate that the European Union, of course, went through. They put together funding to be able to support the integration of states that are new members. I think one of the real miracles, for instance, was what happened with Ireland, where the EU support for Ireland brought it very quickly up to the level of the other EU states.

And I know that ASEAN is looking at questions like that. One very interesting suggestion was made by my colleague from Laos, who suggested that one of the problems is that the new states' English language capacity among the diplomatic corps, among the civil servant corps, is not as strong as some of the longer standing members. And we even talked about whether the United States might want to participate in trying to help on capacity-building. So I think there are a lot of ways for ASEAN to have a very active future, but any organization has to keep moving forward. And to the degree that there are problems like Burma, I think that if those problems are not ultimately resolved with a Burma moving closer to the general values that are there in the ASEAN charter, then you really are going to have problems for the organization. And so it's not an organization without challenge, but I think it's an organization that's got a very, very good future, and certainly, the United States has been very active in our own engagement.

QUESTION: Madame, before moving into the other region, just a point on Burma, I read somewhere that you said earlier that you would put pressure to ASEAN to do more about Burma. Have you done or -- what about that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we had a good discussion on Burma. Of course, the Burmese Foreign Minister was there. The ASEAN charter aspires to rule of law, human rights, development of more pluralistic political systems, integration into the international community states. And Burma is out of step, badly, I would say. And when you have a situation that you've had with the cyclones, where days and weeks go by with an international community sitting literally off-shore -- France, Great Britain, the United States sitting off-shore, willing and ready to help, but the Junta refusing to let people in need be helped, you wonder what – how does this – how can the international community stand by and let that happen?

Now I give a lot of credit to ASEAN for developing the mechanism for assistance and for speeding up assistance after a period of time and becoming a kind of international clearinghouse, if you will, for contact with Burma, and that was a useful role. But it should never have happened in the first place. And now the question is, given the slight opening that this has provided, is there a way to move Burma to a political track that would finally make something of what is right now a kind of mockery, which is this roadmap to democracy which is going nowhere, and would it be possible for regional states and neighbors to press the regime to release Aung San Suu Kyi, to allow real opposition to get on a pact.

So that's what I meant by pressing to do more and we had a good discussion.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, guys.

QUESTION: On Korea, on your – (laughter) --

SECRETARY RICE: Now all the good questions are (inaudible).

MR. MCCORMACK: Now the move to a parallel universe. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Or is it the real one? But on the – on your meeting yesterday with your colleagues in the Six Parties, this was the first time the ministers have met since the Six-Party Talks began in 2003, and now the issue is verification. You know, it's political season in Washington, there are a lot of people saying a lot of things about this protocol that you're working on, that you proposed to the North Koreans.

Could you address the issue of how strong this protocol will be? Could you speak to what you're going to leave? It seems you'll have – this will have to also be continued by the next administration, and so there are people concerned that there might be some holes in this protocol entrance of being able to really verify whether the North Koreans (inaudible).

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, it is a protocol that we have shared with and worked some with our other Six-Party colleagues – or Five Party colleagues. And the meeting was about verification yesterday, overwhelmingly. And I think you will note that the – that Minister Yang noted that the discussion about acceleration was about the verification protocol. And so I don't think the North Koreans left with any illusions about the fact that the ball was in their court and that everybody believes they have got to respond and respond positively on verification.

We will try to do several things. The first is that this declaration has left some questions. And we have to have a way to add to those questions, we have to have a way to – nobody is going to trust the North Korean number on how much plutonium they need. Fortunately, there are very good, tried and true, as one of my colleagues called it yesterday, international – internationally recognized methods to verify the number of kilograms of plutonium make.

So this will be – will have to be specific. It'll have to have specific measures. It'll have to have means for access. And it will also have to have means to continue this process as new information becomes available. One of the facts is that in this process, thus far, we have learned more about some activities, questionable activities in North Korea than, frankly, we had learned before we engaged in this process. And so I – this will be a strong protocol, that all of the parties yesterday talked about a rigorous protocol, talked about one that is to international standards. So I think we'll – we have to have a protocol that allows us to know what has happened there and is – still has to be.

Now we have to recognize that the achievement thus far of essentially setting back, if not ending the North Korean capacity for the production of plutonium is important. It may have been an oil reactor, but it was by no means obsolete, given that it was making plutonium up till very recently. And given the proliferation risks of plutonium in the hands of a opaque, nontransparent regime, particularly in ever larger quantities, it is very important to shut down that capability. And having done it now with four other parties who have the right mix of incentives and disincentives, I think it makes it more difficult for the North Koreans to start reversing themselves.

But the ball is in the North Koreans' court and we'll see what they come up with.

QUESTION: And in the 45 days, just to follow --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: -- on this, the President said that the terrorism list -- he notified Congress there is a --

SECRETARY RICE: Right.

QUESTION: -- 45-day period.

SECRETARY RICE: There's a 45-day notification period, which is a minimum notification period. I think it should be very well understood that unless we're satisfied that we can verify the declaration, we've been very clear that we're taking that into our assessment of when to go forward.

QUESTION: But does that mean that you want the protocol to be agreed on and accepted by the North Koreans by this 45-day deadline?

SECRETARY RICE: Nick, as I said, it's a 45-day minimum notification, but we certainly expect, and we're watching very carefully, to see whether or not North Korea is going to come through on the essential issue, which is verification, and to act accordingly.

QUESTION: One question on --

MR. MCCORMACK: Nicholas, we got five minutes left, so why don't we give some of your colleagues --

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, (inaudible).

QUESTION: My question wasn't right. No, I meant are you still going to delist North Korea before it (inaudible) the protocol? That's my question.

SECRETARY RICE: As I said, we will have to know about the prospects for verifying this declaration, because the President's made very clear we're going to take that into account before we make any decisions. But I just wanted to clarify it's a 45-day minimum notification, not maximum.

QUESTION: You've said that you'd be looking for a very strong protocol on all the parties. You're talking about this vigorous protocol. Could you be a little bit more specific as to what this protocol would entail, the IAEA inspectors, how many of them on the ground doing what?

SECRETARY RICE: No. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Could you be so specific as to what --

SECRETARY RICE: Sue, a lot of this is still to be worked out. But first of all, I expect that there would be -- and we'll have to work out what IAEA -- you all remember that this is verification under a Six-Party framework, and the verification of the disablement was actually carried out by the United States, Russia and China. So I can't get into details about it, but it'll be -- I think the best line that was used about it was it has to be an internationally acceptable standard.

QUESTION: I have an --

MR. MCCORMACK: Guys, we can do some pictures right now.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: I have an extremely easy question, which is --

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Can you give us five minutes on the plane to Perth to ask because I don't -- I'll let someone else go.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: I have a non-trip question --

SECRETARY RICE: A non-trip question?

QUESTION: -- that I would like to ask.

SECRETARY RICE: All right.

QUESTION: Yes, is that possible, Sean? Can we do that?

SECRETARY RICE: I'm going to have the Australian Foreign Minister with me.

QUESTION: Well, we would do both.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Just like with Miliband.

SECRETARY RICE: Okay, yes. All right, all right, we'll -- yeah.

QUESTION: Okay?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: So then I can --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah.

QUESTION: I don't want to take away from these guys. (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: I'll ask about Foreign Minister Lavrov and Foreign Minister Yang. Did you discuss any sanctions regime for Iran during your talks here, given the response you've seen so far?

SECRETARY RICE: We've reviewed that Iran has to come forward in two weeks and that everybody's committed to both tracks. But frankly, in this context, we spent a good deal more time preparing for the Six-Party bilateral. And the Foreign Minister and I were also -- you know, we also had a number of other issues that we needed to talk about, including some work that we're continuing to do on the -- on Georgia, on the 123 Agreement, I'll -- you know, so big agenda with Russia.

QUESTION: So Foreign Minister Lavrov didn't come out and say, yes, I'm -- you know, I'm with you and your comments on let's go to the Council if they don't make this --

SECRETARY RICE: I didn't ask him that.

QUESTION: No?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, I didn't ask him that. You know, as I said, we didn't -- we didn't need to have a very long discussion on Iran. Everybody knows what the Iranians did and we'll see what they do in two weeks. And I'm pretty confident that people are not prepared to let them stall.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right?

QUESTION: You haven't (inaudible)?

QUESTION: Could you (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, it's a tremendous, tremendous step forward for Serbia and its European identity. It's tremendous -- it's kind of hard to use the word, "victory," given the harshness of what he's responsible for. But for all of the people who perished as a result of his policies and -- it's -- I hope it provides an opportunity for some healing from those scars.

The Balkans is trying to -- the whole region is trying to overcome this -- a long, long history that has been (inaudible) unkind, but one that, as most of Europe was moving forward and after the Cold War, the Balkans, of course, fell into extreme darkness. And this is an end to one more step in an end to that great nightmare. We have been active with the Europeans and with others for years in helping to cooperate to try to locate him. And it showed tremendous will on the part of this new Serbian Government. And I just hope that there will be accelerated efforts to reach out to this Serbian Government. I think the European accession -- European association agreement is a good step.

We, of course, some time ago, even before this government, made Partnership for Peace available for NATO. But the Serbs are making a step forward and closing an ugly chapter in their past. And I just hope that (inaudible).

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, guys?

SECRETARY RICE: All right. Thank you. Thanks very much.

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