



Remarks With Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Perth, Australia
July 24, 2008

SECRETARY RICE: All right. Well, welcome. And I'm really delighted to welcome Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, my great colleague from Australia. We've already developed not only a very good working relationship, but I think a budding friendship. We find that we've got a lot of interests in common and I'm really very much looking forward to this trip to Perth. I've heard about the legendary Perth for many, many, years. And since I am, myself, a person of the west -- not originally, but somebody who considers myself very much a westerner in the United States the tales of western Australia have always resonated with me. And so I'm very much looking forward to seeing Stephen's home.

We've had very good meetings, as you know, at the Asia⁺⁺ Regional Forum. We've had an opportunity to talk to our colleagues about a wide variety of issues. I want to thank Stephen especially for the support that Australia has been giving to the Six-Party Talks and has been for some time. It's -- one of the first things that we talked about was Australian support for that. We did have good discussions yesterday in the six parties, as I've mentioned. We are looking forward to the completion of the verification protocol expeditiously. We also talked about several important bilateral issues, the importance of the DPRK and Japan getting back into discussions on the abduction issue and progress being made.

And I especially underscored both in the meeting yesterday and today in the Asia⁺⁺ Regional Forum the importance -- the Asian⁺⁺ Regional Forum meeting -- the importance of the resumption of a North-South dialogue, South Korea and North Korea, and especially, I hope that the DPRK will take up the invitation of South Korea to have direct talks concerning the tragic death of the South Korean tourist. There needs to be an investigation of what happened, but principally, so that there can be steps taken so that tragedies like this will not happen again.

So all in all, it was a very good set of meetings and I just want to come back to say that the United States has no stronger friend and ally than Australia, going back now decades and decades. And I'm very proud that Stephen and I can continue the great tradition of cooperation by the United States and Australia on almost any issue that you can think of. And so let me give the mic over to Stephen for a moment and then we'll take your questions.

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Okay. Thanks. Well, thanks very much, Madame Secretary. Firstly, I'm very pleased that you've accepted my invitation to come to Perth and visit my hometown and my home state. I was cheeky enough at our first formal meeting in Washington to not put it at the top of the list, but to make sure it was the last thing I asked you to do. So -- and I've harassed you on that at every meeting we've had since -- Washington, Paris, Kyoto -- so we're very pleased that you're coming. So from a personal point of view, it's a great pleasure to be able to entertain the Secretary in my hometown. It's the second Secretary of State to visit Perth, to visit western Australia. The first was Secretary of State Shultz back in the mid-1980s.

But Perth or western Australia is also, in the eyes of Australia, effectively, the home of the beginning of the alliance between Australia and the United States. It was Prime Minister Curtin who was a western Australian member, the member for Fremantle, who, together with General MacArthur in the darkest moments of World War II, forged the beginning of what we now know as the Australian-U.S. alliance. And I've said many times that the alliance remains the indispensable bedrock of Australia's security, strategic and defense arrangements. And ministers come and go, administrations come and go, governments come and go, but the alliance is enduring and the Secretary and I are both very pleased and very proud to be playing our part as, sort of, modern-day actors in an alliance that served both nations well for over 60 years.

And both in Singapore, on the plane and in Perth, we'll obviously have a -- you know, conversations about serious matters. And the Secretary has referred to the Six-Party Talks in North Korea. The Secretary's quite right, Australia has been particularly interested in the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. We've lent support to the Six-Party Process. We're very pleased that progress is being made. And we hope that genuine, verifiable processes can now be adopted.

We also -- in my own contribution to the regional forum today, welcome very much the resumption of dialogue between North Korea and Japan, particularly on the abductees issue. Australia has lent very strong support to Japan on the abductees issue. And in my own remarks, I also encouraged North Korea and South Korea to recommence its own bilateral dialogue, which has not occurred. You know, often, there are what seem to be intractable difficulties between nation-states. Well, the first way to try and solve them is to have a conversation. So we encourage the resumption of that bilateral dialogue as well.

There's a raft of issues where the views we have are similar or supportive and we're very pleased to work, you know, closely and cooperatively with the Secretary of State, as we do. Apart from that, we're going to have a bit of fun. It's not for me to disclose the Secretary's itinerary, but we will see some of the delights of Perth, and from a selfish personal point of view, we'll also see some of the delights of my electorate. So I think -- we're happy to take your questions on these and other matters.

SECRETARY RICE: Sue, you want to begin?

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you about the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal. What is Australia's view on this, number one? And secondly, will this lead to a change in policy in terms of uranium for India?

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Well, our consideration of the U.S.-India nuclear civil arrangement certainly won't lead to a change of policy, so far as Australia's exports of uranium are concerned. This was a matter that the Secretary and I discussed at our very first meeting. And Australia's position has been consistent throughout and we've expressed it both to the United States and to India and also publicly, is that our longstanding policy position as a political party and as a government in office is we only export uranium to those nation-states who are parties to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. India, of course, is not a party. But we've always made it clear that we regard the so-called 123 Agreement, the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement, as separate from that and we don't regard our policy position on export of uranium as preventing us from joining a consensus in the Nuclear Suppliers Group from supporting the arrangement. What we've always said is that if and when the arrangement proceeded through the Indian parliament, we would then give consideration to it at the appropriate time before the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the IAEA. Well, that time is now upon us.

In the course of my discussions with Foreign Minister Mukherjee in Australia recently, with the Indian Minister of State in Singapore and our own Prime

Minister, Prime Minister Rudd with Prime Minister Singh at the margins of the G-8 meeting, we've made the point to India and also to the United States that we will give very careful consideration to the strategic importance of the agreement, both to India and to the United States, and we're also looking at the arrangement with a positive and constructive frame of mind. We, of course, want to look very carefully at the detail and consider that very carefully in the NSG. But we don't regard in any way our longstanding party policy position on non-exportation of uranium as, in any way, standing between us and joining a consensus to support the arrangement. But we want to give it careful, detailed consideration which, of course, like many other nation-states, we're now doing because the time will shortly be upon us.

QUESTION: Does that mean that you're -- they don't have to sign the NPT?

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: No. Well, there's two separate issues. We've always regarded the issues as being separate. We --

QUESTION: Well, except that the first issue is that you won't export uranium to anyone who hasn't signed it. It seems to me directly at odds with the second statement, which is that you're willing to consider it.

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Well, we don't believe it is. And we don't -- and we don't regard the two as being inconsistent. Other nation-states have different --

QUESTION: So you still won't give them -- you still won't sell them uranium?

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: No.

QUESTION: Oh, okay.

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: No, no. No, no. That policy --

QUESTION: Unless they sign.

QUESTION: But do you welcome the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal? Do you think it's a good idea? Do you think that it's something that is good for the region at all?

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Well, our demeanor, our approach, is that we are -- we're happy to engage in a positive and constructive way. We understand the significance that the arrangement has to both India and the United States. We've listened very carefully and we are listening very carefully to the arguments in support and in favor of the arrangement. But we want to have a very careful look at the arrangement itself, also, listen to any suggestions that we find made in the forums of the NSG and the IAEA. So we haven't made a decision. We're not proposing to make a decision in a matter of days. But I think some time in early to mid August, any nation-state who is a member of the NSG or on the board of the IAEA has to make a judgment or a decision. And our approach is we're looking at it in a positive and constructive way, understanding the very considerable significance that it has for India and the United States.

QUESTION: Would you like to comment on the India civil nuclear deal? You haven't, I don't think, responded publicly since the parliamentary vote.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, right. Well, obviously, we welcome the parliamentary vote. The United States has believed that the civil nuclear deal is important for the United States, important for India, but also important in helping to advance the nonproliferation framework, the regime in which countries are operating. I think that's why the deal has received the support of Mohamed ElBaradei of the IAEA because India has a very good record on proliferation.

We believe that this deal has been negotiated in a way that safeguards the equities of both India and the United States, but also advances the cause of nonproliferation in a time when countries are seeking access to civil nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. India is a country that is -- has a tremendously growing demand for energy. It is a country that, if it tries to meet that demand through carbon-based sources for energy, is going to contribute dramatically to the continued growth of greenhouse gas emissions. So it's important for energy that -- for India to find alternative sources. And it's one reason that civil nuclear power is being sought by the Indians.

So on many grounds -- economic, energy supply, also nonproliferation -- we believe this is a good deal. It also, by the way, will have benefits to the United States and the American economy, and we've made that case. I think it's the reason that the Hyde legislation passed the U.S. Congress. So we obviously will go back to the Congress and we will go back to the Congress once the Indians have gone through the other steps. We'll continue to consult with countries of the IAEA Board of Governors and with the NSG. But I think we can make a very good case that this is a -- not just a landmark deal, but a positive landmark deal.

QUESTION: Do you think it's going to go through before the end of your term?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's certainly our hope that we can get through all of the processes and get this done in the Congress. And we're going to work very expeditiously toward that goal.

QUESTION: Mr. Minister -- yeah, you mentioned the importance of strengthening the alliance, and, of course, Australia pulled its troops out of Iraq. Are you thinking and discussing actively how to send more Australian troops to Afghanistan?

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Well, we came to office with a commitment to withdraw our Overwatch Battle Group from Iraq. And we did that in close consultation with the United States and also Iraq and United Kingdom. And that, from a logistical point of view, has gone very well and we're very pleased with the way in which our allies understood the reasons for doing that.

At the same time, when we withdrew our combat group from Iraq, we also substantially increased our civil reconstruction program and capacity-building program and our civil assistance program in Iraq.

In Afghanistan, we have nearly 1,100 troops in the south, in Uruzgan Province. We've made it clear we're not proposing to increase the amount of troops that we have or combat forces that we have. Our contribution to Afghanistan is the largest non-NATO contribution. They do difficult and dangerous work, and we think they're very effective.

And at the donors conference in Paris recently, I also announced the substantial capacity-building and civil reconstruction contribution from Australia to Afghanistan. We believe that we need to do two things in Afghanistan: make our contribution to the peace and security, combat and military side; but also make our contribution to nation building and capacity building. So we're not proposing to increase the troops we have in Afghanistan, but it's a substantial contribution.

But I do happily make this point: We are in Afghanistan for the long haul. Australia having a presence and making a contribution in Afghanistan is, in our view, unambiguously in Australia's national interest. It's also in our region's national interest, and it's also in the international community's interest. We're very concerned that in the Afghanistan-Pakistan FATA area, that this is where the current hotbed of terrorism is. And modern international terrorism is very mobile, and from that area it can be mobile to the north, to Europe, or to the south and east into Southeast Asia. And Australians have already been on the receiving end of adverse consequences of terrorist activity in Southeast Asia.

So we're in Afghanistan for the long haul. It's hard and difficult and dangerous, but it is, in our view, essential work in the interest of the regional and the international community.

SECRETARY RICE: Matt.

QUESTION: Yeah. I want to ask the question that's been kind of dogging us this whole trip and hasn't -- no one's gotten around to asking it yet, which is -- it appears that you have kind of a shadow government out there, or someone who thinks he's about to be the shadow government running around, talking to foreign leaders in the Middle East and elsewhere. And I'm just wondering, especially because of the cable that went out about the de minimis assistance to -- for embassies for political trips or non-COD -- non -- is it NODEL --

SECRETARY RICE: CODELs.

QUESTION: -- instead of CODEL. I realize you don't want to get into the campaign at all and I really don't want you to ask -- I don't want you to answer to talk about, you know, a specific --

SECRETARY RICE: How do you want me to answer, Matt? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Well, I want -- (laughter). Well, what I do want you to answer, though, is regardless --

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

QUESTION: Regardless -- what's that?

QUESTION: There must be a colorful Australian expression for this wondering.

QUESTION: I'm not trying to wander. I'm just wondering if it's -- if any -- regardless of who it is, it is problematic at all? And does it --

QUESTION: Are there mixed messages?

QUESTION: Yeah, does it result in mixed messages coming out?

SECRETARY RICE: Everybody knows that we are in a presidential campaign. And so this is a part of America's democratic process. I would just note that both Senators McCain and Obama have made very clear that there's one president of the United States at a time, and that they respect that. And I think that foreign governments also understand that there is one president of the United States at any time.

Meetings with foreign leaders will take place. Meetings with foreign secretaries will take place. We obviously have no objection to that. And we're continuing to do the business of government. The Administration has a very heavy agenda between now and the end of the year. We were just there. I think we've demonstrated the efforts that we're making to invigorate the diplomacy on the P-5+1 with Iran, to invigorate and make certain that we achieve as much as we possibly can on North Korea and the Six-Party Talks.

On the Middle East, I will have next week, as will Secretary Gates, who is actually the host, Defense Minister Barak in Washington on -- I believe, Tuesday?

MR. MCCORMACK: Tuesday.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, on Tuesday. And then the Palestinian delegation, for the second time in a couple of weeks, will be in Washington, and then the Israeli delegation. And then we will have a trilateral, because we do have an active negotiations process. We do have an Annapolis process that we'll try to get to an agreement by the end of the year so that Israelis and Palestinians can finally have a two-state solution that will secure them both. The work is not easy to achieve that, but it's very active. It is the most active peace process that they've had in seven years, and we're going to pursue it to its end.

So that's what we're focused on, and we are quite aware that -- you know, all of us -- that there is an election campaign underway, and that's just fine. But we're going to just keep press --

QUESTION: But are you worried at all that the election -- part of the election campaign now has taken -- has moved itself into the foreign policy arena to a point where --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm not surprised that foreign policy is an issue in the campaign.

QUESTION: Well, essentially trampling it. I mean, you have someone who's basically making campaign stops in foreign countries --

SECRETARY RICE: Look, I --

QUESTION: -- speaking with -- speaking with leaders, al-Maliki for one, whose position appears to slide that --

SECRETARY RICE: I think the Prime Minister's position speaks for itself, as well as the positions of General Petraeus and Admiral Mullen. The Iraq situation is one in which we are now talking about how to build on success. Now, that's an extraordinary change from a year ago, when people were debating – some – whether or not we were actually facing failure. And so I think it's really a tremendous step forward that we are talking about how to build on success, how to transfer responsibility to the Iraqis, what roles will the American forces need to continue to play, in what numbers, over what time horizon, conditions on the ground – based on conditions on the ground.

This is a fundamentally different conversation than we were having a year ago, and it is absolutely because the President took a difficult decision to surge American forces in order to support the Iraqis to get the security situation under control so that they could really take on political reconciliation. So I have to say I think the debate that's going on about Iraq now is one that speaks very well for the decision that the President took.

QUESTION: But you don't see Senator Obama as kind of stealing your thunder and, you know, pumping his own agenda?

SECRETARY RICE: No. Senator Obama is also, let's remember, a senator. He's a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. And he's a candidate for president. He is all of those things. But he has said, and we continue to act on the basis, as do our foreign partners, that this government remains in power until January of 2009.

And I think you can see that the agenda remains quite active. You've just asked me about the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Deal. We've just come from the Six-Party ministerial. We've just come from having Bill Burns at the P-5+1 and awaiting an answer from Iran. We're having bilaterals and trilaterals with the Israelis and Palestinians next week. So I think you can see this is an active agenda, and we're going to pursue it right to the end.

QUESTION: But one more question: Are you speaking on a frequent basis to Senator Obama about foreign policy issues, guiding him through this sort of world foreign policy tour that he's doing?

SECRETARY RICE: No. Senator Obama is – first of all, he was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee. He obviously has his own sources. The -

QUESTION: Susan Rice.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. As a matter of fact, Susan Rice is – you know, Susan is a Stanford grad and we knew each other at Stanford.

But look, we are in an election campaign. No one would try to deny that. I remember very well in 2000, when I was serving as foreign policy advisor to George W. Bush, and the Clinton Administration was very actively, right up until the end, trying to bring a peace deal at Camp David. And then-Governor --

QUESTION: And North Korea.

SECRETARY RICE: And North Korea. That's right. And North Korea.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there are a few others, too. Look, there are a few issues that are persistent, but – particularly on the Middle East. And I remember that then-Governor Bush was asked about the Camp David effort and his views of it. And he was very clear that President Clinton was president, and that obviously, any breakthrough in the Middle East would be welcome by any incoming president.

And I think that is the American tradition. When we have big issues like Palestinian-Israeli peace, I think it's – we're – it's incumbent on those who are incumbents to try to bring this to resolution. And I'm quite certain that both Senators McCain and Obama wish us the very best in doing so.

QUESTION: You know in 2000, though, it was a much different situation. Now, there's two wars going on and there weren't then.

SECRETARY RICE: I was speaking about the Middle East and the peace process in the Middle East.

QUESTION: No, I understand. The --

SECRETARY RICE: Look, foreign policy is an issue in this campaign. You're right; the United States is fighting two wars, because since 2000, we have been engaged deeply in a war against terrorism, and this is a post-9/11 world. It is a different world than 2000.

QUESTION: Right. I'm not trying to suggest that anyone's questioning the war. It's just that the situation is different where you have a – where you have – different from 2000, because the stakes are so much higher in foreign policy.

SECRETARY RICE: I frankly don't think the situation is different on Middle East peace. I think on Middle East peace, you have had, by successive American administrations, efforts to try to bring an end to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. And my point about 2000 was that then-Governor Bush recognized the importance of the negotiations that were going on at Camp David and supported them.

And I'm quite certain that we are receiving the support and best wishes of both candidates that we can achieve what was – what we laid out in Annapolis. But as to the two wars, I just want to repeat, the debate that we're having about Iraq is a fundamentally different debate than the one that was taking place a year ago. And that is because this President took a very difficult decision, and this is now a debate about how to build on success in Iraq, not how to contemplate failure. And I think it's a debate we therefore ought to welcome.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, guys.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER SMITH: Thank you.

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