



Remarks After Meeting With German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon, or almost afternoon. Allow me to welcome warmly here to the State Department my colleague, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of Germany. Frank has become not only my great colleague, but my good friend. And we are often together, as we were just in Bucharest. We always have stimulating discussions. And today, we had a very stimulating discussion of the work that remains ahead of us, particularly coming out of the Bucharest summit.

We have talked to some about the importance of continuing to develop the alliance. I had an opportunity to talk a little bit about the President's trip to Russia. We've had a chance to talk about the challenges that we face on Iran, about the Middle East, and also, of course, about our bilateral relationship. We spent a good deal of time on the circumstances in the Balkans and, in particular, Kosovo, about the importance of making certain that 1244 is carried out, and that it is carried out by all of the institutions that are involved there.

Both Germany and the United States have, of course, recognized Kosovo. And we want to see a Balkans that is stable, where the Serbs recognize that they have a good friend – good friends in the United States and in the European Union, but where we can allow the development of the newly independent state of Kosovo. And so we have talked about that. And Frank, I'm very glad that you are here and I look forward to seeing you again, I think, I hope very soon, perhaps in London concerning the AHLIC and the Palestinian conference.

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter.) Thank you, Condi. The United States is our most important ally, and I have to be very clear about that, because this is expressed by the density of the meetings that we've had. I think it's the seventh time that I have been here to talk to you and see you in the State Department since I assumed the office of Foreign Minister. Thank you for inviting me here and thank you for providing me with an opportunity to talk with you about a number of international conflicts where we have common concerns and are interested in seeking solutions together. I was very happy to have a chance to talk to you about these.

Right now, we are confronted with the stabilization of the Kosovo, which figures very prominently when we talk about the Western Balkans. We're very much still under the (inaudible) of the parliamentary elections in Serbia where, of course, nationalists are going to focus on this particular topic, as became clear when one took a look at the outcome, the results of the presidential elections. These people are trying to use the European issue to foster their own – to promote their own objectives, and I very much expressed my hope here that they're not going to be successful in doing so.

Now, we're going to work with the United Nations and within the European Union in order to help stabilize the situation in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans also figured on the agenda – prominently on the agenda of NATO's summit in Bucharest. When we take a look back and – at the summit in Bucharest, it's fair to say that we have achieved good, far-reaching results that will take us to the future not only with respect to the Western Balkans, but also with respect to all the other issues on our agenda, all of them being anything but easy issues: Ukraine and Georgia membership action plans; yes-or-no issues like missile defense; disarmament issues.

And I think it's fair to say that following the intensive discussions in the run-up to the summit and the discussions at the summit itself, we've been successful in achieving reasonable, forward-looking results. We are preparing for another trip – rather, you are preparing for another trip to the Middle East. And as far as we are concerned, we're preparing ourselves for another international conference on the Middle East and the situation there.

And I very much hope that if and when we join our forces, we will succeed in getting the – committed to succeed in encouraging the Israelis and the Palestinians in taking the necessary steps in drawing closer to each other in order to reach agreement on the important issues that will lead us to a settlement of the issue that allows for two independent countries and states. We have to make it very clear to the peoples in question here that it's worthwhile to make an effort to achieve peace. The United States is doing a very good job here, but the Europeans are also trying to do their bit.

We also had a chance today to talk about recent public statements on the part of Iranian leaders. I made myself very clear on where we stand. We're listening to what the Iranians are saying. We think it's another provocation of the international community and I expect Iran to comply with the demands of the international community. We will continue to talk about the implementation of the sanctions that have just been agreed in the Security Council of the United Nations.

That's all I have to say for the time being. There might be time for one or two questions, though, I think.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

MR. MCCORMACK: We have time for two questions per side. We'll start with Sue Fleming from Reuters.

QUESTION: This is a question for both of you. The political directors are meeting next week to discuss Iran. Are you going to be looking at any new incentives to get Iran to change your way – their ways and, if so, what will those incentives be? And also, are you looking at additional sanctions, such as those that might target the oil industry, which would have a real impact? And Iran is boasting of installing more centrifuges. Do you believe them and do you think that they are getting closer to building an atomic bomb?

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter.) Now, as to the latter, I'm in no position to assess or to judge whether they are moving closer to achieving that objective. We have no recent indication of them doing that. But as far as our joint strategy is concerned, I think it's fair to say that we have succeeded, during difficult times, to maintain a united front of the international community. And I think that that is the decisive aspect and is exactly what we need in order to exert pressure on the leaders in Iran to comply with our demands and to set out on the right course.

It's not always an easy thing to achieve, but discussions that take place prior to the passing of Security Council resolutions are time-consuming. I think we have every reason to very much focus our efforts on maintaining the cohesion of the international community and its efforts. Sanctions have been agreed – enhanced sanctions, that is, that are being implemented. All that takes place as part and parcel of a framework of a general approach that includes sanctions on the one hand, but also keeping open chances or opportunities for continued negotiations with Iran, but only, only really, if Iran changes its position and its approach. Right now, we're talking amongst the Europeans about taking additional sanctions. We have not yet reached agreement on that, but intensive negotiations are going on.

SECRETARY RICE: I would just underscore what Frank-Walter has said, which is that we have a dual-track approach with Iran. We've obviously offered Iran, I believe, a very good package of incentives to do what it should do, which is to adhere to the international obligations that are there as a result of the Security Council resolutions. We will always continue to consider refreshing both tracks. But this is not the time, I think, to expect major changes. We have just passed the Security Council resolution and we will see how Iran responds.

I also can't verify, one way or another, what President Ahmadi-Nejad has said. The Iranians make all kinds of claims all the time, and I think we'll just have to rely on the IAEA. It would be better if the IAEA had better access for the Iranian nuclear program so that they could verify some of these claims.

But Germany has been a stalwart in our policy, the dual-track policy. And I think it's also worth noting that there are many financial institutions, many companies that are considering and reconsidering their engagement with Iran on the economic side because there are very strong investment and other risks associated with dealing with a country under UN Security Council resolutions.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

SECRETARY RICE: No. Back here.

QUESTION: May I just -- a question to both (inaudible) as well. May I just continue on Iran? A Swiss company has just concluded a new contract with Iran concerning gas supply. What do you expect -- how the Swiss Government should act? Should it convince this company to stop these negotiations or not?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I am not going to try to advise the Swiss Government on this matter. I will just say the following: Iran is a destabilizing force in the international community and a particularly destabilizing force in the Middle East, where we have just talked about trying to help the Palestinians and the Israelis come to peace.

Obviously, companies and countries make their own decisions. But I would just note what my colleague, Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, said not too long ago: When you're doing business with Iran, one isn't ever certain with whom you're doing business.

And the United States maintains certain obligations legally to examine each and every foreign company's engagement with Iran under our own laws. We will have to do that in every case. But I'm not going to tell the Swiss Government or the Swiss company what to do.

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter.) Of course, I cannot say whether there have been talks between the business community and the Government of Switzerland. But the fact that they were present there when the signature was made in Iran, in Tehran, I just assumed that that was the case.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I'd like to ask you about the progress Ambassador Hill has made on North Korea. Are you now willing to accept that the North Koreans only acknowledge a previous existence of an HEU program without a public -- and proliferation without a public declaration? Is that not letting them off the hook?

And for both of you, on the issue of Hamas, Madame Secretary, you told President Carter, or the State Department told President Carter, that a meeting with Hamas would be ill-advised. Why would a meeting with Hamas be detrimental to your policy to advance the Mideast peace process, especially in light of this upcoming peace conference that President Bush is trying to arrange? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Let me speak first to Hamas. Hamas is a terrorist organization. Hamas has been offered many opportunities to come into line with international standards concerning the Middle East. That means accepting the obligations and the agreements that Palestinian leaders going back for more than a decade have actually signed, and Hamas has been unwilling to do that.

The legitimate President of the Palestinian Authority, Abu Mazen, has made very clear his conditions for any discussion with Hamas, including the fact that Hamas launched a coup against the legitimate Palestinian institutions in Gaza and are now the principal reason that Gazans are suffering under really deplorable circumstances. We certainly continue to try to do everything we can from a humanitarian point of view, but let's point the finger exactly where it belongs. It belongs on Hamas for having caused that coup against the Palestinian Authority, and it belongs on Hamas -- the blame does -- for continuing rocket fire against innocent Israeli civilians. So I find it hard to understand what is going to be gained by having discussions with Hamas about peace when Hamas is, in fact, the impediment to peace.

Now, as to the North Korean situation, we continue to work through the six-party process to try and achieve the goals of this second phase. In that second phase, there are obligations on both sides, and the United States is absolutely prepared to undertake its obligations should the North Koreans fulfill their obligations. But we are still in the process of trying to determine if the North Koreans are going to fulfill their obligations. We are determined to have an outcome to the second phase that would have the North Koreans account for all of their nuclear programs, and that means their HEU program, their plutonium program, which, after all, is the one that has actually produced material, and their activities in nuclear proliferation. Any document that we get, any declaration that we get, has to be verified and it has to be verifiable. And we have to make certain that we have means to assess what the North Koreans tell us, and we have to have means to verify what the North Koreans tell us.

Now, you can't verify overnight some of these complicated programs that the North Koreans have been engaged in. But we have to be absolutely certain that we've got means to do it. And by the way, it's not just the United States. It is all of the members of the six parties that have to be a part of this process of accounting for the North Korean programs and then verifying what we've been told and then finding ways to dismantle them.

The North Koreans, of course, also have obligations in terms of disabling the Yongbyon facilities, and so we are not yet at a point where we can make a judgment as to whether or not the North Koreans have met their obligations and we are therefore not at a point at which the United States can make a judgment as to whether or not it's time to exercise our obligations. But when we have made that judgment, we will be prepared to exercise the obligations that we've undertaken.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) Foreign Minister on Hamas?

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: On Hamas? Yeah. (Via interpreter.) Of course, politicians have to take decisions what they are working towards. We've taken a decision in seeing that we are in favor of negotiations between the Israeli Government and President Abbas. If that's the right decision, then we have to stand by it. And then, of course, you cannot continue to add artificial reasons to making that process even more difficult than it already is.

For me, it's quite obvious, you know, that the room for maneuver for President Abbas will decrease, will become even more limited, if you add partners to him who quite obviously do not want peace, but want to increase instability on the ground. And as far as that is concerned, I'd like to ask you to tackle the question of whether we want to talk to Hamas or not, not as a purely ideological or technical issue, but to be aware of the fact that it does have very practical consequences for the ongoing peace negotiations. I am very much in favor -- I, for one -- for helping the Palestinian President and the Israeli Government to use the means that they have at their disposal right now. We hope that the negotiations will continue. And as far as the Europeans and the American are concerned, we wish them every success.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) from the German press agency. First, a question to you both, please. Did you have the opportunity to talk about the situation in China? And what is your common message, maybe, to Beijing, especially when it comes to the situation in Tibet?

And maybe, if I may, a second short question to you, Madame Secretary. Your colleague is -- tomorrow will have a very, very important task and he will do the opening pitch in a very important baseball game. So could you give him any advice? (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Inaudible) (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: I would tell him not to do that. But other than that -- (laughter). This is risky, Frank. (Laughter.)

On Tibet, do you want to go first?

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Via interpreter.) Of course, we also briefly touched on the situation in China and Tibet. I continue to stand by the view that we have to continue to point out to China that following the unrest of the last few weeks -- the casualties, the dead people that resulted -- that they now make sure that they pursue a policy that aims at calming down the situation that is a nonviolent approach. I don't see an alternative (inaudible) to doing that. In my eyes, China has to enter into a dialogue with the representatives of the Tibetan culture and the Tibetan government, and that it is transparent about what it does, transparent towards Western journalists but also towards Western governments in order to make it very clear to them what the situation in Tibet is like right now.

SECRETARY RICE: Completely, that the Chinese should take this opportunity to reach out to those Tibetans who are willing to say strongly that violence is not an option and those Tibetans who are willing to say that they do not seek independence and the Dalai Lama and the representatives of the Dalai Lama are in that category. Now, we have been very concerned about the closed nature of all of this, the lack of transparency. It's important that journalists be able to get in, it's important that diplomatic personnel be able to get into Tibet, so that there can be independent reporting on what is going on there. But I believe that China would really do itself a great service and -- not to mention the people of Tibet, if it were willing to have a more open attitude toward responsible Tibetan cultural and religious authorities.

Finally, I just want to say good luck, Frank. I will be looking for the YouTube version of that.

FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER: (Laughter.) Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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