



Remarks with Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski After Their Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Benjamin Franklin Room
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SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I'm delighted to welcome my colleague, the Foreign Minister of Poland, Minister Sikorski. Radek, it's good to have you here. We have had a number of opportunities to meet in the past and we've just had an extensive discussion of the many issues and challenges that Poland and the United States face together. It is a discussion that is befitting an alliance and a relationship like ours which is deep, based on values and in which we are engaged together, both in protecting our own security through our alliance as members of NATO, but also in extending the benefits of freedom and democracy to other places in the world. And in that regard, I was able to thank the Foreign Minister for the contributions that Poland is making in Afghanistan and in Iraq and, in particular, to recall the tremendous admiration that our forces, the American forces, have for their Polish colleagues when they fight around the world. The Polish forces are very good and our forces always welcome working with them.

We've had an extended discussion also of the deepening of our strategic cooperation about missile defense. It is an important step forward, as we try and find a way to deal with the challenges of the 21st century that emerge from places in the world like Iran. We believe very strongly that we have some momentum and we will resume our negotiations as soon as possible on missile defense.

We want to note that – I would like to note that the Prime Minister of Poland will be coming to the United States early in March and that he and the President will be able then to go forward with some of the larger issues. But we will, of course, also be going to Bucharest for a NATO summit and our allies have quite a lot of interest in this issue as well.

We had also a discussion of the importance of the alliance and the modernization of the forces of the various countries of the alliance and in that regard, the United States is very committed to the modernization of Polish forces and we will continue that dialogue as well. So thank you very much for being here and I look forward to our continued conversations and I guess I will see you, in any case, in about a month at the NATO ministerial.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: Thank you, Secretary Rice. I was able to thank the Secretary of State for the way that she has invigorated the Atlantic Alliance, but also for the way she made a contribution to my own country Poland in the early 1990s when she was an advocate of reducing debts for Poland. And it was those actions which laid foundations for Poland's prosperity and economic success today. Poland and the United States are allies. We are together in Afghanistan and Iraq. We prove to be allies in need and I'm delighted that we'll also be collaborating on a new project and that the future and modernization of Polish air defenses have become of friendly concern to the United States.

If you will allow me, I'll say the same in Polish for our media. (In Polish.)

MR. MCCORMACK: We probably have time for two questions per side. Let's start with Sylvie Lanteaume with AFP.

QUESTION: A question for Madame Secretary. You spoke about the presence of the Poles in Afghanistan. Would you like them to do more in the south to send more troops?

And a question for you, Mr. Minister. You spoke about the modernization of your air defense. Did you get all the assurances you were looking for on that topic?

SECRETARY RICE: Sylvie, in terms of Afghanistan, as you know, NATO as an alliance has been looking at what it needs to do and what more needs to be done to fight the Taliban, to permit the Afghan people to have security so that reconstruction can take place. And as an alliance we are all looking at what more can be done. Poland has been active in Afghanistan and we look forward to continued conversations with Poland and with all members of NATO. We will meet, as I said, as foreign ministers in about a month and NATO defense ministers have a meeting and, of course, then we have the Bucharest summit.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you're not only Secretary of State but one of the best American experts on missile defense in Russia. And it will be up to our Minister of Foreign Affairs to convince Polish parliament to accept the deal concerning missile defense. But how would you, Madame Secretary, convince my fellow countrymen that are watching you right now, thanks to the live broadcast of this conference, that it is in our benefit to accept a third missile defense site in Poland, keeping in mind that we should assume the worst case scenario, that Russia will be still strongly against that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first, I obviously would not presume to speak in any way for the Polish Government, but yes, I think there is a very good case for the proposal that Poland and the United States and, indeed, the Czech Republic go forward to put together an architecture for limited missile defenses, very limited missile defenses, that will protect the alliance and ourselves and, frankly, anyone else who is concerned about the emerging threats of the 21st century; for instance, the threat of missile – the missile threat from Iran.

I would also just like to talk about how different a strategic context we are in than in the 1980s and it is, in a sense, the case that I've made when talking to my Russian colleagues. This is a very different world. It is true that the United States once had a strategic defense initiative, a program that was intended to deal with the question of the Russian strategic nuclear threat. This is not that program. This is not the son of that program. This is not the grandson of that program. This is a very different program that is meant to deal with limited threats. There is no way that a few interceptors in Poland and radars in the Czech Republic can degrade the thousands of nuclear warheads that the Russians have and there is no intent to do so.

Indeed, we are having discussions with the Russians that President Putin and President Bush have wanted to go ahead about how we can cooperate in missile defense because the Russians face some of the same threats; how can we talk about joint threat assessment, how can we talk about a system that would take advantage of the full geography so that we could have a way to counter these 21st century threats. So we're in a completely different environment and I would hope that everyone would understand that.

And the other major change in the environment, of course, is that Poland is a member of NATO. Poland has an Article V guarantee from its alliance partners and that includes the United States of America. And that means that we have a deep alliance relationship. We, of course, have deep bilateral relationships and deepening defense cooperation. But missile defense will help us all to be safer. It will be a – it is an obligation that I think that we have to future generations to make sure that we are addressing the threats of the future.

And I think that it is possible and it is likely that it will lead to even deeper cooperation between the United States and Poland in a way that is completely defensive in character, that threatens no one, but that allows us to protect ourselves. And there is no higher calling for the President of the United States or for the prime minister or president of Poland than to make sure that their people are protected.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: May I add?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: (In Polish.)

SECRETARY RICE: I know that our press would appreciate it if you would say so in English.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: (Laughter.) Alright. I was just saying that just as you underlined that the proposed anti-missile base in Poland is not directed against Russia, is only directed against those that could choose to be our enemies. And just as much, the reinforced Polish air defenses are not directed against anybody. They are to enable Poland to be a stronger NATO ally with the United States, they are to enable Poland to take part in operations, in out-of-area operations, in joint operations. The idea is that America and Poland, thanks to what we are discussing today, can do more together in the future.

MR. MCCORMACK: The next question is from James Rosen.

QUESTION: Thank you, James Rosen with Fox News. First, for the Foreign Minister, the question was put to you earlier in this briefing, but I don't think you had an opportunity to respond and that is: Did you receive the assurances you were seeking on air defenses?

And then for you, Madame Secretary, I'm sure by now you are familiar with the news reports about today's events in Iraq, in which two – apparently two developmentally disabled women were equipped with explosives that were triggered by remote detonation devices leading to some 90 deaths or so at pet bazaars, no less, and thereby triggering the largest number of casualties on a given day since the surge began last spring.

Does this tactic represent, as Ambassador Crocker has stated, a new tactic? Is it one with which we are equipped to come back? And lastly, does it show weaknesses in the coalition defense posture in Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: You wanted to talk about --

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: And I guess you want that in English, don't you? We are not at the end of the road as regards on negotiations. We are in the middle of the road. We have an agreement in principle. There is still a great deal of work to do for our experts and, as I mentioned, the Prime Minister and the President will approve of whatever is done in the meantime, but yes, I am satisfied that the principles that we have argued for have been accepted.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. On Iraq, the terrible events really do underline – they underscore a number of points, but most importantly, the absolute bankruptcy and brutality of the enemy of the people of Iraq who would do such a thing. And yes, the presence of suicide vests in this way is a very difficult challenge. It is one that the coalition forces, along with the Iraqi forces, will be responding to. In part, you must simply continue to break up the networks, you have to continue to arrest the leaders to bring them to justice, to break up the cells that would do such a thing.

It says to me, though, that the Iraqi people have been right to turn against these terrible, violent people in their midst who will do anything. And I hope that it affirms for them how right they are to have turned against the foreign fighters of al-Qaida, whether it is in Anbar or through the local citizens committees that are taking back their streets in Baghdad. And unfortunately, there will, from time to time, we have said that the struggle is not over and there will, from time to time, be terrible days like today.

But it certainly underscores and affirms the decision of the Iraqi people that there is no political program here that is acceptable to a civilized society and that this is the most brutal and the most bankrupt of movements that would do this kind of thing. And I think that will underscore for the Iraqis and it will make them tougher in the fight.

MODERATOR: We have time for one more question, (inaudible.)

QUESTION: Hello. Madame Secretary, the current Polish Government has, on several occasions, clearly stated what are its expectations related to hosting the base in Poland, namely U.S. helping modernizing the Polish defense capabilities and some kind of bilateral security agreement. I wonder if you could elaborate on – you've already mentioned modernization, but I wonder if you could elaborate a bit on both of these issues.

And Foreign Minister Sikorski, I wonder what's – how do you see the response you got on both of these issues here in Washington? Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Look, we've had a very good discussion. And I want to make

clear that our cooperation, our relationship is a strategic relationship and there are many components to our strategic relationship. Missile defense is one component of our strategic relationship that will help us if we are able to go forward and I believe that we have made some progress. It will help us to confront a certain kind of threat of relatively small, but nonetheless very lethal, missile threats from rogue nations. That is a part of our strategic landscape and it is something we need to address.

Similarly, the United States very much supports the modernization of the forces of the alliance. We understand that there is a desire for defense modernization in Poland, and particularly for air defense modernization in Poland. This is something that we support because it will make our ally, Poland, more capable. It will make Poland, as the Foreign Minister has said, more able to operate with us. NATO is operating out of area, NATO is operating in ways that were never anticipated before, and modernization helps Poland to be a more capable ally, so why would we not be for modernization?

And of course, our commitment to Poland's security and to Poland's defense is unassailable and it should be fully understood that the United States takes its obligation to Poland as exactly as it is stated in Article V, that an attack upon one is an attack upon all. There is no more solemn obligation. And I just want to say, you know, when Poland joined the alliance, the alliance and the United States knew that we were, in fact, taking on an Article V commitment and so this is not an empty commitment. This is a real commitment. And in the context of the protection that NATO provides, but also in the context of Poland's deepening integration into Europe, a full member of the European Union, a full member of NATO, this is a relationship that is between the United States and Poland that has also deepened as well as broadened. So I think we want to think about the entirety, the totality, of the U.S.-Polish relationship which is quite remarkable, particularly when you think of what this would have been like, say, 20 years ago.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: (In Polish.)

SECRETARY RICE: In English? (Laughter) -- would you say it in English for our --

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: Sure. I was just saying to (inaudible), who is an old friend, that he knows my position and this has been an important conversation for Poland, for the Polish-American relationship, and that I am coming out of this conversation satisfied that our arguments got through, that we have reached a position in which we -- a situation in which we can intensify our dialogue about both issues that are separate, both on the missile defense base and on the modernization of the

Polish armed forces. And that in the -- (inaudible) to the Prime Minister's visit we have much work to do and I'm hopeful that the Prime Minister will be able to make a final and positive decision.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

FOREIGN MINISTER SIKORSKI: Thank you.

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