



Interview With NBC's Rosalind Jordan

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Beijing, China
March 21, 2005

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, at the beginning of this trip, eight days ago, you said what President Bush has been saying about the Six-Party Talks: the best, most effective way of trying to resolve this crisis involving North Korea and its nuclear ambitions. Now there is a change, the beginnings of a discussion about what other options should be looked at in order to get North Korea to resolve this matter peacefully. What happened?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there is no change here. We still believe that the Six-Party Talks is the most reliable way to deal with the North Korean nuclear program because it involves all of North Korea's neighbors. What we've been talking about here, and everyone is united in this view, is that the North Koreans need to come back to the talks because that's where they're going to find the respect that they seem to be seeking, the assistance that they need. And what I've been talking about here is the fact that the North Koreans simply need to come back to the table. Yes, if eventually we will have to look at other means, but I think that no one believes that at this point in time we have exhausted the diplomatic options under the Six-Party Talks.

QUESTION: Who brought up the idea that perhaps it's good to have on standby some other options that might persuade the North Koreans?

SECRETARY RICE: It's not a matter of persuading the North Koreans. Other options are always available. But we have been talking here only about the desire to get the Six-Party Talks going again and the fact that the North Koreans need to come back to the Six-Party Talks this time ready to really address the questions of their nuclear weapons programs. So all of my discussions here have been about the North Korean nuclear program, about the fact that the neighbors all agree that there has to be a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula, and about how to use the Six-Party Talks, which are a very good forum in which this could take place, how to get those started again.

QUESTION: So is there any truth to a report in one of the South Korean dailies that the Japanese envoy, in a meeting in Shanghai, said we should give the North Koreans until June and then just take this matter to the Security Council?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it was not said to me. I don't know to what you are referring, but it was not said to me. We have been saying that this needs to happen as soon as possible. I've said that with the Chinese, with the South Koreans, with the Japanese. Obviously, no one wants this to continue to drag out, but the issue is that the North Koreans are being told with a unified voice that it is time for them to return to these talks and to return in a spirit that is constructive toward the resolution of the problem.

QUESTION: The message or strategy which the Americans and the Chinese have agreed to try as the Chinese try to leverage this matter, how might it be effective without revealing the specific details of the strategy?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the strategy is to speak clearly to the North Koreans, and I think we have spoken clearly to the North Koreans. There's a lot at stake for the North Koreans that could be fulfilled for them in the talks. We have said that North Korea is obviously a sovereign state. We have said that the United States has no desire to attack or invade North Korea. There is a proposal on the table from the last round of the Six-Party Talks in which the United States and others have agreed that they will assess North Korea's energy needs and some of the parties are prepared to provide fuel to North Korea.

So the North Koreans have a lot at stake if they come back to the talks and the strategy is to point that out to them and to make clear to them that there isn't any other way to resolve this. We have looked at what the -- in our discussions at what people are saying to the North Koreans and we think it's made very clear to them that the time has come to go back to the talks.

QUESTION: Is there any concern, as I would imagine trying to negotiate involves an evolution of process, is there any concern that the North Koreans might feel, hmm, we have them backed up against a corner, we've been able to say no this far and we can continue to dig our heels in?

SECRETARY RICE: It's the North Koreans who are isolated, not the United States. It's North Korea that has been unable to realize any real assistance for its economic development. It's North Korea that a couple of years ago was talking about a normalization of relations with Japan. That's off the table. It's North Korea that was hoping for a different kind of relationship with the United States. That's off the table. It's North Korea that is isolated. And so if the North Koreans are thinking that, they probably ought to think twice about it.

QUESTION: Let's switch gears slightly. You're going to be discussing human rights, religious freedom, social freedoms, with several Chinese officials this morning, and much has been made of the fact that you attended Palm Sunday services not in Seoul, where it was morning, but an evening service here in Beijing at one of the few churches allowed to operate publicly. Describe that experience.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it was a very moving experience to go to this church. I had a couple of thoughts. First, the service was a really traditional Protestant service: I knew the prayers; I knew the hymns. It was a wonderful kind of energetic service by the minister there. And I felt that it really did, for me, speak to my own religious beliefs.

And in terms of doing it in Beijing, I wanted to go to Palm Sunday service. I'm a minister's daughter. I've never missed a Palm Sunday service in my entire life. But it also just said to me how important it is that people are able -- should be able -- to worship freely, to have those matters of conscience so that there is not interference in religious faith. They need to be able to worship with their own traditions. They need to be able to worship with their own obligations.

And I am talking to Chinese officials about the fate of Protestants here, of the Catholic Church here, of other religious orders, because these believers are not a threat to a society; in fact, religious people are very often a firm foundation, particularly for a society that is in transition. And that is a point that I'm making to the Chinese leadership here.

QUESTION: Will you also draw on your own ancestry, your own history, having come up in the segregated South, having witnessed firsthand the excesses and the successes of the Civil Rights movement, and talk about the transformational role of the Black church in that time?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I always have an opportunity to refer to my own background. In fact, Premier Wen and I talked about it a little bit yesterday.

But I think the main thing is not my experience, but it's the experience of democratic societies broadly, it's the experience of tolerant societies broadly, that churches and the practice of religion is very often one of the most important elements of decency in a society. It's very often a force of compassion in a rapidly changing society. And I can remember President Bush having this discussion all the way back at Crawford with Jiang Zemin. It's a very important message for us to bring here.

QUESTION: Let's talk about some of the other issues that you had a chance to discuss with officials. Was there any one issue where you wish you had been able to make more progress on this initial contact as Secretary of State?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I know that diplomacy is a process. It's not something that happens overnight. I think we've had very good discussions here across the region. The point of this trip was to come and, first of all, to signal very strongly how much we value these relationship in Japan, in South Korea, going back to India, to Pakistan, to Afghanistan, which seems now like a long time ago but was really on a few days ago --

QUESTION: Right, right (laughter)

SECRETARY RICE: -- and to come here and to talk with the leaders of a transforming China about how we can build constructive relations with China. So this was a first opportunity to do that in the second administration, Bush Administration term. But I think we'll build on that now to start to resolve some of the difficult problems that we all face.

QUESTION: Any unexpected success?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think that one expects to sort of wake up one day and think, oh, the North Korean nuclear problem is solved. That's not how we work. You work through these relationships. You strengthen the relationships. We've had very good talks. I am absolutely assured that everybody here understands the danger of a nuclear-armed North Korea on the Korean Peninsula, the dangers for the region.

I did think that in Japan, for instance, we had very good dialogue about development assistance. We came to a decision about a development alliance to better coordinate the development assistance that we provide, about 40 percent of it to -- Japan and the United States account for about 40 percent of it from worldwide.

But this was a chance to strengthen relations and to build a firm foundation for moving forward.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.
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