



Interview on CNN With Zain Verjee

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Beijing, China

October 20, 2006

QUESTION: It's so lovely to meet you.

SECRETARY RICE: It's very nice to meet you.

QUESTION: A Chinese envoy was in Pyongyang and met with Kim Jong-il. What exactly was said?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think the message was not unlike the one that the Chinese have been delivering publicly; that Resolution 1718 must be observed and China will observe it. The Chinese obviously wanted to send a message to the North that they had engaged in very serious behavior that China did not support. They also want to very much to try and get a return to the diplomatic path and to the six-party talks.

QUESTION: We heard that the message the Chinese were carrying was very strong. What kind of message was it? We heard also that it wasn't in vain.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Chinese said that it was very strong. I didn't ask word for word what they said. But clearly they went with the backing of the message that China for the first time had backed a Chapter 7 resolution against North Korea with sanctions. That in itself spoke volumes about what China thought of North Korea's behavior.

I think the reason that State Councilor Tang said that it was not in vain was that he felt there was a free airing of the Chinese position where they got some understanding of the North Korean position. But we did not receive a proposal as such about the North Koreans returning to the talks.

QUESTION: So you didn't get a message back or (inaudible) --

SECRETARY RICE: There was no specific message. The North Koreans apparently affirmed that they want to come back to the talks but, of course, they can come back to the talks at any time without conditions.

QUESTION: Are the Chinese going to cut off fuel to North Korea? Are the Chinese going to impose financial restrictions on North Korea? Did they tell you?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Chinese have been very clear that they intend to fully implement 1718, Resolution 1718. That first and foremost obligates them not to allow the trade or financing of weapons of mass destruction, materials, or of a nuclear program of any kind. I think that they will pursue that in various ways, but I'm quite certain that they are going to carry out their obligations and carry them out fully.

We did not -- I didn't come out here with a specific list of what I wanted every country to do in order to implement 1718. Rather this is a discussion of the different authorities that countries have, the different ways that they might implement and the different cooperative mechanisms that we might use to make sure that there isn't trafficking in these dangerous materials.

QUESTION: And China specifically has different strategic considerations in the region. It's worried that if you squeeze North Korea too hard it could collapse and that's an important part of its own calculations. And I'm wondering if you could comment a little bit on how you're calculating with respect to China.

SECRETARY RICE: Each country has different strategic calculations because each country finds itself in different circumstances. But I've found that the one strategic calculation that is shared is the calculation that the North Korean nuclear test changed circumstances in this region, that it had to be responded to, that the potential risk associated with an active North Korean nuclear program would have to be dealt with, which is why the inspections are important, which is why the embargo on arms is important.

QUESTION: But the Chinese said they're not going to interdict ships though.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Chinese --

QUESTION: That's a problem right?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Chinese are going to implement this resolution. But China has the longest land border --

QUESTION: But they're not going to interdict ships.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Chinese have said they will fully implement this resolution. Now, there was some misunderstanding I think about what the requirements of 1718 really are, including talk about it as if it was somehow the Cuban missile crisis all over again, the quarantine of ships or a full-scale blockade somehow of North Korea. And of course that's not what is going on here. I'm quite sure that the Chinese will do what needs to be done because China didn't come to this resolution to please the United States. It came to this resolution because China, too, is worried about the North Koreans trafficking in very dangerous materials.

QUESTION: You were in South Korea. You spoke to the South Korean officials there. It didn't seem as though that they were going to take tough action, at least in the short term, on North Korea. In fact, they appeared to want to pursue their policy of engaging it.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, they said that they are going to review their relationships. They're going to review them for compliance with Resolution 1718. We understand that the South Koreans have a special circumstance being that they are a divided people sitting on the Korean Peninsula. But again, the point that I made to the South Korean officials, which they took on board, is that they also have very strong obligations under Resolution 1718 not to allow North Korea to get financing, for instance, for its nuclear weapons programs.

QUESTION: But the very projects that they have give the North Korean Government -- give Kim Jong-il a lot of hard cash and that's got to be a major concern to you. How are you going to deal with that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, certainly South Korea is going to have to make certain that anything that they do is actually consistent with Resolution 1718.

QUESTION: But they're not changing essentially.

SECRETARY RICE: No, they didn't say that. They said that they are reviewing the way that these projects operate. I didn't go and say close down these projects, but whatever they do has to be consistent with 1718.

The other thing is that the South Koreans made very clear that they have very tight scrutiny of trade with North Korea under maritime agreements that they've long since signed with North Korea. But we expect everybody, everybody, and that includes South Korea, to fully undertake its obligations.

QUESTION: How do you know that in the short term everyone's not just going through the motions making a lot of noise, and in the long term not really put the squeeze on?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the reason that countries have signed on to a Chapter 7 resolution is because they have serious fears about an active North Korean nuclear program. Countries have ways of watering down resolutions, of making it Chapter 6, of not making it obligatory.

QUESTION: They're also afraid of an implosion.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, of course.

QUESTION: Some argue that that's an even bigger concern for countries like China --

SECRETARY RICE: Certainly people are concerned about instability on the Korean Peninsula. But my point is to countries out here is that it's not very stable right now with North Korea having tested a nuclear weapon. The principal concern has to be to deal with the risks associated with that and then to get a path back for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, meaning the dismantlement of the North Korean program.

I did say to everyone that we do not want to escalate this crisis. We want to de-escalate the crisis. But for now, the big problem is that North Korea has tested and changed the circumstances.

QUESTION: And if North Korea chooses to escalate it even further and test again, what more can you do? You've already passed the resolution. You want to carry out these sanctions and enforce them. What more can you do?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the North Koreans, if they test again are only going to deepen their isolation. And --

QUESTION: Will you actually do any more or --

SECRETARY RICE: Well there are other steps that could be taken.

QUESTION: Like?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't want to speculate, but there are broader trade issues that could be dealt with with North Korea. This principally right now relates to their nuclear program, relates to certain arms, heavy arms and relates to luxury goods. And the luxury goods provision is because while the North Korean leadership and nomenclature is very happy to have luxury goods while their people are on the edge of starvation, to be denied those luxury goods is really a blow to the regime.

QUESTION: Do you think that this crisis can be resolved with Kim Jong-il in power?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the entire logic of the six-party talks and of the September statement of 2005 is that in fact it can be resolved with this regime in power. We will see.

The North has said that it wants to denuclearize. There are benefits on the table if they do. We will see if they are prepared to do it, but they have to make a strategic choice to do it, and this time they have to actually begin to dismantle. It doesn't make sense just to continue to talk.

QUESTION: President Bush has said that we're not going to live with a nuclear North Korea. But as the days and the weeks will go by, it may seem as though the world and the United States may have to accept that.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we will not accept a nuclear North Korea. And I think our goal and our job and that of all of the countries that I'm visiting here is to show the North Koreans that they're not going to achieve what they want through a nuclear program. If they're looking for respect, they've gotten isolation and a Chapter 7 resolution. If they're looking for access to the international financial system, they're being cut off from it. They're not going to achieve anything through this nuclear program.

QUESTION: Have you considered going to Pyongyang yourself?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't see that there is a reason to do so. The North Koreans would like nothing better than to have an isolated negotiation between the United States and North Korea, so that they can violate agreements the way that they did in the 1990s.

QUESTION: Well, what do you have to lose?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, what we have to lose is the power of five countries telling the North Koreans their -- that the program is unacceptable. The North Koreans would like nothing better than to divide us so that they can negotiate with each separately and they don't have to face the collective power of the five parties. I just want to note, though, you know, one of the great myths out there is that we don't talk to the North Koreans. In fact, in the context of the six-party talks, we've had many discussions with the North Koreans, dinners between Chris Hill, our chief negotiator.

QUESTION: But it's a lack of perception, too, by the North Koreans. That they feel that six-party talks, even though it's one-on-one on the side, it's still a gauge of the level of hostility toward the U.S. versus direct talks.

SECRETARY RICE: No. This is a North Korean excuse. Come now. If they have anything that they want to say to us, if they really do want to talk to us, they're doing it. Chris Hill has had multiple discussions with his North Korean counterpart. One-on-one with no other countries at the table, he's had dinner with them, all in the context of the six-party talks. This is just an excuse. What the North wants is to have a negotiation with the United States, so that when they ignore the terms of the agreement, they can say, well, after all that was with the United States. What is troubling to the North is that for the first time they're having to face the collective will of China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and now with Resolution 1718, the entire international system.

The North also knows that President Bush has said many times that we have no plans to invade or attack North Korea. And so the idea that somehow this is about security assurances is also an excuse. There is --

QUESTION: Is it?

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, in fact, we're --

QUESTION: I mean, why not give them the security assurances?

SECRETARY RICE: There is an offer of security assurances in the September statement, the September agreement that was signed in 2005. All they have to do is take up that agreement, fully implement it --

QUESTION: They want you to lift financial sanctions they say before they do it.

SECRETARY RICE: We'd like them to stop counterfeiting our money. And if they stop engaging in illegal activities, I can be certain -- you can be certain that the United States has no reason to engage in financial measures. But the President is going to defend our currency. These are legal matters. And again, the North Koreans have any number of excuses for why they can't take up the agreement that they signed in September of 2005. But what this behavior has gotten them now is the collective voice of the international system that a North Korean nuclear weapon is unacceptable, that the only path to gain back what they wish to gain is through denuclearization.

QUESTION: And finally, very quickly, what do you have to show for this trip in tangible practical terms?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, before I came here, we had the first resolution against North Korea in 30 years of bad behavior on a nuclear front. And now we have had -- I've had the opportunity to reaffirm for our allies, particularly for Japan and South Korea, our defense commitments and to say to North Korea that they will never be able to take advantage of our allies. I've had the opportunity to share with the countries here in the region our collective responses to the obligations of Resolution 1718 and we've had a very good security conversation about our joint responsibilities to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and in the region as a whole.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

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