



Roundtable With Traveling Press

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Hanoi, Vietnam
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SECRETARY RICE: Okay, shoot.

QUESTION: Could we start with North Korea?

SECRETARY RICE: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION: I was wondering if you could expand a little on what you told us on the plane coming over regarding the additional preparation you think is necessary for the next round. What exactly -- what kinds of issues exactly are you looking at in the preparations? Are you looking at the kinds of -- how you would implement your, meaning the five parties, offers to the North Koreans and timing and details on that, or are you looking more at what you want them to do and the timeline which they might do it when you actually resume talks?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the starting point for the resumption of the talks is the September agreement of 2005 and so the question is how to demonstrate in the next and succeeding rounds of the six-party talks that you're actually making progress toward the principles that were articulated in that statement. And there are principles on both sides of the equation: There are principles on denuclearization; there are principles on movement in the easing of tensions and beginning to move forward on economic and other relations. So I think obviously people will want to look at both.

But I do think that after having set off a nuclear test that the North Koreans need to do something to demonstrate that they actually are committed to denuclearization that goes beyond words that say that they're committed to denuclearization, because after having set off a nuclear test I think there's some skepticism about that. The breakfast this morning was a really excellent discussion and people were very supportive of the six-party talks, but there was around the table for many ministers a very strong statement that the six-party talks need to bear fruit, that it's not just enough to talk, and that the world is waiting to see the six-party talks actually bear fruit. And I think you've heard that in any case publicly from any number of states in the six-party talks. We've said it, the Japanese have said it, the South Koreans have said it -- that we need concrete steps forward. But it was very much shared by countries that are not part of the six-party talks but that given their geographic location feel very much affected by what happens in North Korea.

So you know, the statement is on both sides. It's on the denuclearization side as well as forward movement on economic and political relations. But I think it's really very critical that there be a clear indication that the North Koreans are committed to denuclearization, and I mean a concrete --

QUESTION: Would that be like letting the IAEA back in or --

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, I don't want to pre-negotiate it in the press. I think it's only fair to let the various parties talk about what might constitute an appropriate concrete step. But there are lots of ideas and they're not all our ideas. One thing that we're doing is asking others what to them would constitute a concrete manifestation of that commitment.

QUESTION: What do you hear back from the North Koreans? I mean --

SECRETARY RICE: We have not yet -- you know, I'm sure people are talking to the North Koreans. We have not had any discussions with the North Koreans about it. But I wouldn't rule out that there will be multiple discussions by any and all of the parties within the context of the six-party talks with North Korea. I wouldn't rule that out.

QUESTION: But do you expect to essentially have something cooked before you sit down?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think you just have to have a clear indication that the talks are going to produce something. You don't want to go in and start from the bottom up. I mean, with all due respect to Chris and his colleagues, when they went in to the talks in September it was not at all clear what was going to come out of the talks. I mean, there wasn't even an indication of what was going to come out of the talks and they did an extraordinary job of getting a joint statement in those conditions over -- what, Chris -- three or four days, I think it was.

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: I think it was 10 or 12.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, only seemed like three or four. Okay, 10 or 12 days. They managed to get a statement that was really pretty fundamental. But it's not at all unusual -- as a matter of fact, it is more usual -- when you are in a set of negotiations that have to have a series of outcomes leading to a final outcome to prepare each round in advance rather than just starting out from scratch when you sit at the table. And that's really what's going on now.

QUESTION: Would you put off the next round then until you're certain that they're going to show up ready to sign something?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think it doesn't make sense for us to have talks unless we think that it's going to be fruitful. It certainly doesn't make sense just to go back to talk.

QUESTION: How helpful or unhelpful are the South Koreans being right now?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the South Koreans are being pretty helpful. I mean, they too want to have a round that is successful. I know there's been a lot in the papers about whether or not the South Koreans have been committed to this or committed to that. Their context is different, but on Resolution 1718 I don't think there's any doubt that they believe they have a firm obligation as a member-state of the UN to implement 1718 and that they are doing so. They have, for instance, in their bilateral -- the joint -- what is it called, Chris?

ASSISTANT SECRETARY HILL: Maritime agreement.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, maritime agreement that in effect has many of the elements of making sure their cargo is clean and so forth with the North

Koreans. So some of this they implement within that context. But I don't have any doubt that they are committed to and know that they have to be remain committed -- that they have to be committed to 1718. And everything that they've said to us also suggests that they know that a six-party outcome is needed this time, not just six-party talks.

QUESTION: Do you feel pressure from the Chinese to go faster? Because the Chinese Foreign Minister this morning said that return to the six-party talks as soon as possible.

SECRETARY RICE: I agree completely. As soon as possible. But as soon as possible includes some indication that we can be successful. That's why I think we need to prepare these talks and prepare the groundwork and have those discussions before we sit down. Look, there's nothing wrong with a circumstance in which you expect to have talks. We fully expect them to take place. We are very pleased that all the parties are now committed to returning to those talks. All of that is absolutely true and there is no diminution of U.S. commitment to the talks. But because we are committed to the talks, we also understand that preparatory work is important and we're going to take the time and do that preparatory work.

QUESTION: Are you getting any pings back, presumably via the Chinese, that the North Koreans are willing to take concrete steps?

SECRETARY RICE: I think we've just really begun these discussions. When Nick Burns and Bob Joseph were out in the region, that was just the beginning of -- they only returned at the end of last week -- the end of the week before. So it's probably a little early, but I think we'll probably hear.

And look, we're not opposed to, again, within the context of the six-party talks, people talking directly to the North Koreans about preparations. They are, after all, party to the six-party talks. But they are the party that given the new international context in which this is taking place -- that means after the North Korean nuclear test -- I think will need to demonstrate that they're actually really committed to denuclearization.

QUESTION: You still think the six-party framework is up to the job at this point?

SECRETARY RICE: I think the six-party framework is the only one that's up to the job, because imagine that this were a circumstance with just the United States and North Korea with the North Koreans using the opportunity to separate and, you know, approach this state about that and another state about this. We have really very good -- not just six-party -- I mean not just five-party but also international coherence around what needs to be done. That was what was very close -- very clear about that breakfast this morning. But in that context, the countries that are most concerned as geographic neighbors but also with the most leverage are at the table. And now having those countries, those states, demonstrate that they can mobilize that leverage, both positive leverage and negative leverage, to achieve an outcome is extremely important.

It all takes place, of course, also in the context of Resolution 1718 and its complete and continuous implementation. I haven't heard anyone say that Resolution 1718 ought to be set aside or weakened or anything just because we're back in talks. I think everybody understands that Resolution 1718 is a part of the context in which the six-party talks take place.

QUESTION: Tom Lantos said yesterday that he thinks Chris Hill should go to Pyongyang. I think others have called for you to go to Pyongyang. This comes after, you know, we've had a lot of calls, Jim Baker saying that the U.S. should talk to Iran and Syria. Are you getting sick of hearing this sort of echo chamber that seems to be going on that you should go to Pyongyang, you should go to Tehran, you should go to Damascus?

SECRETARY RICE: Look, it's fine. But I would just ask people to what end. One doesn't just show up someplace just to show up someplace. You go with a purpose in mind and I'm quite certain that on the North Korean issue people need to remember that Chris Hill just met with the North Koreans two weeks ago and we don't rule out that he'll do it again.

But what we are not going to do is let the North Koreans get us into a situation in which this is a problem between the United States and North Korea and the rest of the world is a sort of bystander in what is not a U.S. problem but an international problem. That is, by the way, what multilateralism is all about. Multilateralism doesn't mean that you simply put all nations at the table just because you want to have multi* nations at the table. Multilateralism means that everybody is bringing to the table their capacity, their assets, their ability to effect an actual outcome that is positive. That's why you have multilateral negotiations.

And the wisdom of going this route has been demonstrated by the fact that you have actually now the first -- forget Chapter 7 -- the first sanctions against North Korea for a program that has been underway for nearly 40 years. That says something about where bilateral efforts have gotten you. You finally now actually have both on the missile test, by the way, and the nuclear test itself multilateral efforts that have paid off and a Security Council resolution that does now provide a new context in which we can try to achieve denuclearization. But I'd frankly rather have others involved in this and not just the United States.

QUESTION: David Satterfield said to the Senate yesterday that the U.S. is considering talking to Iran about Iraq; it's just a matter of timing.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, you all have known that forever. Zal Khalilzad --

QUESTION: So there's no different -- there's no -- I mean, because the quote, the way he said it, was sort of weird and seemed a little different. He said this is under consideration right now and it's a matter of --

SECRETARY RICE: It's been -- it's always been under consideration from the time that we -- first of all, we've used that channel in Afghanistan and we -- the ambassador-to-ambassador channel -- and I think I made clear months ago that Zal had -- was able to do that but we wanted to make sure that the conditions were right to do it. That's what's under consideration is when are the conditions are right to do it.

I might note, you know, we also have through the international compact all of the countries that are sort of, so to speak, interested in Iraq's future. You know, the Iranians and the Syrians attended the UNGA meeting that was held back in September on Iraq.

QUESTION: Has Ambassador Khalilzad ever had such contacts?

SECRETARY RICE: Hasn't happened yet even though there was a point in time when it appeared that it might for a variety of reasons, including that the Iranians seemed to not want -- not to want to have the contact as ambassador-to-ambassador but wanted to enlarge those contacts to deal with things other than Iraq, where it seemed that it might start to bleed over into issues concerning the nuclear program where there is also a context in which Iran can talk to the United States. We don't want to start mixing those two.

QUESTION: So did you pull back at that point?

SECRETARY RICE: It just didn't happen because there was just not an agreement on how it would happen.

QUESTION: So I mean, is the ball in the U.S. court or the Iranian court?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't think of it as in either court. I think when it appears that there's an appropriate time to do it, I think that channel is there and we can activate it anytime.

QUESTION: On the other channel, you're going to see both the Russians and the Chinese here. Still a Russian holdup? I mean, how -- what are you going to do about it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you know, the problem isn't the unwillingness to have a Security Council resolution. There is willingness to have a Security Council resolution. So on the strategy there is agreement. The question is what is that resolution going to say and how broad is it going to be, and I think we just have to keep working through it. But I think we will get a resolution and we've just got to come to some conclusion about how broad it's going to be.

QUESTION: Are you going to get a resolution that the Iranians are going to take seriously though?

SECRETARY RICE: I think they have to take any Chapter 7 resolution seriously. You know, Chapter 7 resolutions -- it's a small club. It now includes North Korea, it includes for not much longer Iraq. It's a really small club. And to be in that club has all kinds of collateral effects that I think the Iranians will not be able to ignore. They already have banks leaving Iran and refusing to deal with their accounts. I think that you will see that investment decisions about Iran are affected by the fact that they're under a Chapter 7 resolution with the potential for further sanctions. Whatever this initial list looks like, there's always the potential for future sanctions.

So you know, I know that the Iranians have a tendency to say, oh, well, they really don't care if they're under Security Council sanctions. Well, most people try to avoid Security Council sanctions for a reason, and the Iranians have done everything that they can to avoid Security Council sanctions. It shouldn't surprise anybody that every time we get close to a Security Council resolution, every Iranian diplomat in the world is on a plane somewhere to argue against Security Council resolutions. So I guess they do care what happens.

QUESTION: It's still going to get read though as sort of like the incredible shrinking sanctions. I mean, every time you get close to this, the menu gets smaller, the --

SECRETARY RICE: I just think it's the wrong way to look at it. The fact of the matter is, first of all, sanctions are there to try to convince people to negotiate. They're not there just for the purpose of having sanctions. But if they won't negotiate, then they will live under the specter of a Chapter 7, which is really, you know, opprobrium from the international community that you've done something bad enough to be under Chapter 7 is pretty bad. And then people start making decisions based on your status in the international system, and that's not something that the United States will have to make a very big deal of. People can read the tea leaves. People can understand that if this continues and the Iranians continue to move down a nuclear road that it's entirely possible that there are further sanctions. And they start to make decisions accordingly. So to my mind, the important breakthrough was 1696 when it became clear that the Security Council, in particular the P-5, would come back under Article 41 of Chapter 7.

QUESTION: There was a line in your intervention this morning that interested me and it was the one where you talked about the importance of other members of APEC preventing their financial systems from being exploited by proliferators, weapons proliferators which you didn't name but obviously the most conspicuous one is North Korea. Was that directly aimed at -- primarily aimed at North Korea and did you get much of a sense from the other members that they're interested in doing that, in trying to shut down their banking systems to dealings with North Korea?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it wasn't aimed at North Korea. It was aimed at any proliferator. And we know that we have a proliferation problem with North Korea. We also have a proliferation problem with Iran.

QUESTION: And was there much -- did people respond to it?

SECRETARY RICE: I delivered the line and I left pretty soon after that. (Laughter.) It's not as if people had much chance to respond. Look, Secretary Paulson has -- and Stuart Levey, the Under Secretary, have made presentations to people and the point is only the following. The international financial system has to have integrity to it, and that means that it cannot be used and should not be used for states that are engaged in illicit activities, most especially states that are engaged in activities regarding terrorism or proliferation. And both a formal and informal set of arrangements are emerging to deal with the ability of states to use the legitimate international financial institutions to do illegitimate business.

It's been -- it's far more advanced on the terrorist financing side than it is thus far on the proliferation side, but when you talk about the building of cooperative institutions you don't have to talk about the building of yet another organization. Cooperative institutions also include having rules and understandings about keeping track and monitoring and being vigilant about your own financial institutions and systems so that those systems are not used and those institutions are not used for illicit purposes.

QUESTION: To go back to the six-party talks, what is more important: to have six-party -- a new session of the six-party talks in December or to have them really well prepared?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, they better be well prepared and they ought to still be in December. But they ought to -- they have to be well prepared. I think we are getting them well prepared, by the way. There have been lots of discussions. There are lots of discussions going on here about the preparation. And I think you're going to see that pretty intensively over the next -- a kind of intensity to that over the next couple weeks or so.

QUESTION: We haven't done anything on Iraq. Have you had any back-and-forth with Tony Blair or Margaret Beckett since his testimony or since the speech he gave? And can you just sort of give us your view of his take on it or recommendations?

SECRETARY RICE: No, I haven't had. I thought that he was really eloquent in defending the cause and the necessity of success in Iraq and the stakes that exist in Iraq, and also I thought underscoring something that we feel very strongly, which is that Iran has some choices to make and those choices relate not just to its nuclear weapons program but also to its support for Hezbollah and for terrorists that are trying to undermine Abu Mazen and the efforts that are being made by Syria quite clearly to undermine a legitimate government in Lebanon, which is happening as we sit here. And I thought that Prime Minister Blair was very eloquent in talking about the choice that -- choices that face Iran and Syria.

So the point that he made about the Palestinian issue I don't think is one that anyone would quarrel with, that a comprehensive change in the Middle East, which is certainly needed, would have to include a significant progress toward the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli issue I think goes without saying; that that is something that we should be devoted to and should be committed to and should work urgently for is precisely what the President said at the UNGA and I think you will see even more activity.

Now, the Palestinians are in the midst of trying to come to a resolution on their own domestic crisis. They're doing that under extraordinary pressure because essentially the international blockade, the international financial blockade of Hamas, has worked. And I'm going to pass up the opportunity again to remind everybody who was on that first trip after Hamas won and said that it couldn't have an effect because somebody would break that blockade. Well, in fact, it has had an effect. Listen to what the Hamas ministers are saying about why they are considering a government of national unity.

Now, with that done, if Abu Mazen can find a way to get the Palestinians out of this crisis and to get to a government that respects the international principles that are so important, I think there is the possibility for really pretty rapid movement on a lot of these issues. Everybody wants it to happen and, you know, we're very supportive of an effort to get a government that, as he calls it, would have international acceptability.

QUESTION: But Blair also, you know, said that there should be greater engagement with Iran and Syria. He wasn't real specific about how that should take place, but the implication was that --

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think he first said that Iran and Syria have choices to make. Look, engagement is a tactic, not an end. And you have to recognize, you have to in a sense read the handwriting on the wall when you offer to the Iranians in particular a means by which to engage the United States for the first time in 27 years with a suspension of their nuclear -- of their enrichment and reprocessing activities, something that has been demanded by the international system for a couple of years now, and they don't take you up on it, that says something.

So there are ways for the Iranians and also the Syrians to demonstrate that they have something else in mind other than supporting terrorism, undermining democratic forces in the region, and in the case of the Iranians pursuing a nuclear weapons program about which everybody has concerns and questions. So this is actually really not hard. If the Iranians are interested in a different policy course, there are many ways for them to demonstrate that. And the same with Syria. The Syrians could start, by the way, by not supporting efforts to undermine the Siniora government.

QUESTION: When you said that if the Palestinians get to a government that respected the international principles that there was the possibility for very rapid movement on these issues, what did you mean by that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think you would see -- first of all, people want to help build a Palestinian state. Secondly, people want to see the Palestinians come out of their economic crisis. I think that Prime Minister Olmert has made clear that he wants to engage Abu Mazen in discussions. You know, everybody would like to move toward the development of a Palestinian state and two-state solution. I mean, there is a big agenda out there, but it's hard to pursue with a government that is not -- again, and I'm using Abu Mazen's words -- that's not internationally acceptable.

QUESTION: Beyond the economic stuff, I thought you were also hinting at a broader effort on --

SECRETARY RICE: I think there can be a broader effort. The President has said that he wants to see a broad effort toward the realization of a two-state solution.

MR. MCCORMACK: All right, do you guys have a story out of all that?

QUESTION: Maybe.

SECRETARY RICE: Maybe.

(Laughter.)

MR. MCCORMACK: I figure you can come up with something out of it.

QUESTION: Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: You're welcome.

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