



## Press Briefing With Lebanese Foreign Minister Jean Obeid Following Meeting With Lebanese President Lahoud, Speaker of the Parliament Berri, and Prime Minister Hariri at the Presidential Palace

**Secretary Colin L. Powell**  
Beirut, Lebanon  
May 3, 2003

**SECRETARY POWELL:** Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. It is a great pleasure for me to be back in Beirut again. I am very pleased to have had useful exchanges with President Lahoud, Prime Minister Hariri, Speaker of the Parliament Berri, and of course my colleague the Foreign Minister. Mr. Minister, no nation in the world is as committed to global justice as the United States of America. No nation has demonstrated more to the world how many people and many religions and many cultures can blend together to be one people, one culture, resting on common values, the values which include democracy and commitment to free market systems and above all a commitment to the individual worth of every man, woman, and child on earth - all descended from Abraham.

I share your desire to see peace in this part of the world. That is the President's commitment as well. The President's vision as outlined in his 24 June 2002 speech is clear. It asks for the end of terror and violence. It asks for the transformation of leadership in the Palestinian Authority. We are now seeing that transformation of leadership with the appointment and confirmation of Mr. Abu Mazen as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. With his appointment and confirmation we presented a roadmap to the two parties. It points a way forward.

It also points a way forward, not only for the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also for a more comprehensive settlement. The United States is committed to a comprehensive settlement that would include the interests of Lebanon and the interests of Syria as well. Peace must come to the whole region.

The United States supports an independent and prosperous Lebanon, free of all, all foreign forces. Lebanon has great potential. It could be a model for democracy and free trade in the region. Close ties between the people of the United States and the people of Lebanon give a strong mutual impulse to help each other.

We have emphasized strongly our concern about the continuing terrorist activities of Hizballah in the region and around the world. We have emphasized as well the importance of maintaining calm along the southern border of Lebanon. It is time, we believe, for the Lebanese Army to deploy to the border and end armed Hizballah militia presence. As always, I admire the impressive strides the Lebanese people have made to rebuild. I am proud that we are helping through our Embassy and USAID Programs.

I had an opportunity to brief the Minister and the other leaders here of my conversations earlier with President Asad in Damascus and I discussed with them, as I did with President Asad, the strategic change that has taken place now, not only with the appointment of Mr. Abu Mazen and with the delivery of the roadmap, but especially with the change in the regime in Iraq. Saddam Hussein and his terrorist regime are now gone. The people of Iraq now have an opportunity to build a better future for themselves. The coalition forces that are present will rapidly restore security and stability throughout the country. We will make sure that the needs of the people are taken care of. We will make sure that the wealth of Iraq, its oil, is protected and preserved to benefit only the Iraqi people. It is their oil.

We will also assist the Iraqi people as we are already doing in creating a new government through political processes that you can see underway now with meetings of leaders coming together to decide what form of government they would like to have - but a government that is democratic in respecting the will of all of the people of Iraq. We will stay as long as it is necessary to make sure that the job has been done well and we can turn things over to the Iraqi people.

We will solicit the help of nations from around the world in the peacekeeping and rebuilding effort. We are especially interested in the neighbors in the region, doing everything they can to assist the new Iraqi leadership - and so Mr. Minister, Lebanon has a role to play in all of this and I look forward to working with you and colleagues in the months ahead as we move forward together. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** How long can we keep ignoring the United Nations resolutions regarding the Middle East crisis, and would the international conference that is suggested have any chance of success if Israel keeps on hindering all suggested peace initiatives?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** We are doing everything we can to bring about a peaceful solution in the region. We are reminded of all of the appropriate UN Resolutions. We have been working with the Palestinians to help them transform their leadership and we have been working with the Israelis as well. The roadmap that has been presented by the Quartet places obligations and responsibilities on all of the parties. We must see the end of terror and the end of violence. We will press the Israeli side to do everything that is possible to make it easier for people to move around the territories and for them to play their role as we move forward. We will have a conference in due course when circumstances permit, but our commitment is firm, is unmistakable. We want to see a Palestinian State created, and as soon as possible.

The President's vision was for three years from the time he gave his speech, but we have got to get going, and I think we now have a moment where we can get going with the delivery of the roadmap, with Mr. Abu Mazen in place as the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, with the commitment of the United States and the other members of the Quartet, and with the assistance of the countries in the region to help in stopping terrorist and violent activity and supporting such activity. That was part of the message that I provided to my colleague here today.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, on what issues did President Asad indicate a willingness to cooperate, and on what issues raised by President Asad were you receptive?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The President and I went over all of the outstanding issues whether they had to do with sealing of the border between Iraq and Syria and keeping it sealed and turning over any individuals who might show up in Syria from Iraq -- senior officials, or officials who might have knowledge of weapons of mass destruction activity. We talked about weapons of mass destruction themselves. We talked about support to Hizballah, and we talked about a variety of other issues.

In every instance, the President said that he wished to consider the point of view that I presented, and we will be following up in various channels, diplomatic channels as well as direct conversations that I might hold with Syrian officials in the future, as they have a chance to reflect on these issues.

I made it clear to them that the United States was committed to a comprehensive solution in the region that would include Syria and Lebanon, and would include the Golan Heights. We talked about humanitarian issues also with respect to custody cases as well as individuals who have been missing in action from various countries, a variety of humanitarian cases as well. It was a candid discussion, it was straightforward and I wanted to make it clear to the President, and I believe I did, and I believe he understood, that there is a new strategic situation here. We want to cooperate with Syria in adapting to that new strategic situation and we will be watching very carefully and anxious to engage with Syria on various performance measures as we move forward.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, I was wondering if you have handed President Lahoud a copy of the roadmap plan, and I know that the roadmap plan has not have any mention of the Palestinian refugees, and probably you must have heard from President Lahoud that this is a major concern for Lebanon. So are there any plans to adjust to the Lebanese concerns and how are you going to deal with that problem?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** The roadmap will be presented to the President by our Ambassador and that will be taken care of, but I believe he has had the chance to see what is in it, but we will make a formal presentation from the Ambassador. That specific issue is not dealt with in the roadmap. The roadmap concentrates on the issue between the Palestinians and the Israelis and the current conflict in the occupied territories. We fully recognize that a comprehensive solution, as we go forward, there has to be another track in addition to the track that is laid out clearly in the roadmap, there has to be another track that deals with Syrian concerns and Lebanese concerns and that of course includes the Palestinian refugees who are in Lebanon.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible)

**SECRETARY POWELL:** There has to be a solution that is part of the comprehensive approach that must deal with the issue of the Palestinian refugees who are in Lebanon.

**QUESTION:** Mr. Secretary, did Syria do anything to close down or discourage the radical groups in Syria? Did they close them down? Did they do anything in advance of your trip as a sign of good faith?

**SECRETARY POWELL:** They did some closures. I expect them to do more with respect to access and appearances of various officials of these organizations and we provided some other suggestions to the Syrians which they are taking under advisement and I expect to hear back from them in the future.

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