



## Remarks With Italian Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Villa Madama  
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**FOREIGN MINISTER FINI:** (in Italian) First of all I said to the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, I expressed our feelings of traditional friendship between the Italian people and the American people, and our feelings of friendship – the friendly government to government relations as well. So, I said to the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that there's very strong friendship between the Italian and American peoples and in this time in history, there is also strong friendship and a strong cooperation between the Italian government and the Bush administration.



Now we've assessed the situation in the two theaters, as it were that we are most concerned about at the international level – in other words, in the Middle East and in Iraq. And we agreed on the fact that there is a positive evolution of the situation in the Middle East and the meeting which is being held now between the Palestinian leadership and the Israeli leadership of course represents a new development, a great new development, and international diplomacy must take this as a starting point in order to propitiate to facilitate a stable and long lasting peace, not only between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, but throughout the entire area of the Middle East.

Now I also stressed in my talk with Secretary Rice that Italy's role in the European Union must play a role in this area, in the Middle East, such that the European Union interests are closely connected – interconnected – with the concept of peace and stability.

We also had the opportunity to assess the situation in Iraq. And in fact, we have a positive assessment as to the objective role played by the elections that were just held there. And of course this confirms the need for certain countries -- and of course the United States are among these, as well as Italy -- the need for the contribution played by these countries in order to be able to hold those elections.

Now in the handling of the Iraqi situation, of the Iraqi developments, of course we have to try to ensure the utmost involvement on behalf of all international organizations and the United Nations must be involved in this stage, which of course has been launched with the elections in Iraq. I've made a proposal with regard to the possibility to follow up the Sharm el-Sheik Conference; in other words, we should once again meet with the international community in order to monitor the different steps and the different stages from now to the end of the year when the Iraqis, through free elections, will have to vote for a legitimate government.

Now one final assessment has to do with the Balkan States. Of course we are concerned about the fact that the international community's seeming to lose focus with regard to this area, which geographically is very close and there's still the risk of nationalism moves in these countries, and therefore we've decided that we need to commit to a closer relationship, not only between Italy and the United States on this matter, but also between the United States and the European Union. And perhaps this could be played through the role that Italy has always had in the Union and of course we are proud founding members of the Union.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I had a very good conversation with the Deputy Minister, and the Foreign Minister, Mr. Fini. We've met on a number of occasions and I think we'll meet again tomorrow in Brussels. So, it continues to be a very intensive dialogue at a time of great promise for this transatlantic alliance in doing what the alliance has always done well, which is facing down tyranny and working for the spread of democratic values and for liberty for people who have not enjoyed that liberty. We did have an extensive discussion first of the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

We agreed that this is a time of opportunity. We agreed that this is a time that the international community should engage with the parties in the region, and we both expressed our desire that today's Sharm el-Sheik meetings will be a positive development. We recognize that there's a long road ahead of the Israelis and the Palestinians. But it is a time when both parties seem committed to trying to take advantage of the opportunity before them, and we talked about the need for the international community, particularly the Quartet, to be involved in doing whatever we can do to help the Palestinians reform their security forces, so that they can fight terror to build the institutions that can be the basis for a democratic state, and of course to have the economic reconstruction of the Palestinian territories.

We also talked extensively about Iraq and as the Minister has said, we both see the elections as a positive turning point for the Iraqi people -- a time when the Iraqi people took the events into their own hands, and despite the continuing violence, have obviously made a decision that they want to pursue freedom. Of course, Italy has been a stalwart member of the coalition that has supported the circumstances that have allowed this to happen for the Iraqi people. We recognize the continuing dangers there, the sacrifice of the Italians most recently in Nasiriya, and we mourn that sacrifice. But Italy's steadfastness is greatly appreciated by the other members of the coalition, most especially the United States.

Italy of course, continues to play an important role in Afghanistan, and the broader Middle East initiative as well. As the Minister said, this is a time to support the Iraqi people and for everyone to support the Iraqi people. The United States welcomes the involvement of all international partners. The United Nations should be involved in Iraq. We really do appreciate the tremendous work of Mr. Valenzuela and Mrs. Perelli in supporting and arranging the Iraqi elections. And while it appears that the Iraqis are currently involved in a very intensive political dialogue among themselves, we should all stand ready and the United Nations should stand ready to help the Iraqis in any way that the Iraqis desire.

We did talk about the desire for the international community to be forthcoming and generous in contributions to the building of institutions in Iraq -- to reconstruction in Iraq -- and ways that we might have more international discussion of that.

We also talked about the Balkans. The Minister and I agreed that this is an area in which the alliance has made great progress, but we must not let it slip from our agenda and we look forward to full and complete preparation of the review conference for Kosovo and the Balkans later on this year.

I want to thank the people of Italy, the government of Italy and the Prime Minister, Berlusconi, and the Foreign Minister for Italy's steadfast friendship, for the friendship that goes beyond the governments, to the people of America and Italy -- many of whom share ties of kinship, and for a relationship that has been at the core of our ability to be successful in the past in the promotion of freedom and democracy, and that we believe will be at the core of our future efforts to do so. Thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** Madam Secretary, You are here in Europe talking about the spread of freedom and how Europe can help the United States with that goal. But if I can play devil's advocate for the moment, many people in Europe actually find that proposal hypocritical. They point to a regression in the United States regarding freedoms, regarding human rights with the Abu Ghraib, and the Guantanamo situations. What is it you can do to address those issues to persuade Europe that you can be a standard bearer for spreading rights around the world?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The spreading of rights around the world, of course, is not just a long tradition and concern of the United States, but a long tradition and concern of

the entire transatlantic alliance. The only reason that Europe is whole free and at peace is because this alliance was united in its ability to face down imperial communism, to stand by the patriots of places like Poland and Czechoslovakia, who never lost their thirst for freedom; for a divided Germany that was able to overcome that. So, this is not an American project. This is a joint desire to see people who have been denied those aspirations finally achieve them, and I should also just say that one does not impose democracy and freedom; one imposes tyranny.

You have seen in Ukraine, in Georgia, in the Palestinian territories, in Afghanistan and Iraq, what the people will sacrifice to gain freedom. This is not something that is imposed from the outside, it is desired from within.

As to the American standing to do this, I think it is well understood that America is a country of laws – that is, America is a country that was built on values and continues to practice those values. The fact that one is a democracy does not mean that bad things will not happen. Bad things do happen. Bad things happened at Abu Ghraib. Things happened at Abu Ghraib that have made us really, as the President said, sick to our stomachs that such could happen. But the real test of a democratic state as opposed to a dictatorship or totalitarian state, is how one deals with those circumstances. And that is why the multiple investigations that have taken place of reports of prisoner abuse, wherever they might have taken place -- that is why the fact that people have already been punished for anything that might have happened in those places.

Having been given their due course, or their due process rights, the people are being held accountable for what happened. That's what separates countries that adhere to the rule of law from countries that do not. I just want to repeat being a democracy does not mean that bad things will not happen, but being a democracy means that you will be transparent and open and investigate and punish any such activities.

**QUESTION:** Good morning, my name is Nigro from the La Repubblica daily. A question for the Secretary of State. You spoke with Minister Fini, and I would imagine that you also discussed the so-called "exit strategy" to leave Iraq. So, what are the details of your stabilization strategy for Iraq before being able to exit the country? And one quick question, one more. I don't know whether you talked about the UN reform at all in your talks. What is the position taken by the U.S. administration vis-à-vis the report submitted by the panel of experts convened by Kofi Anan with regard to the Security Council, reform in particular?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Minister and I never talked about an exit strategy; we talked about a success strategy for Iraq, because the Iraqi people have just demonstrated that they will take great risks, great personal risks, in order to pursue a free and democratic life in Iraq. And we all know that when there is a free and democratic and stable unified Iraq, not only will the Iraqi people be better off, but the neighborhood will be better off and the international community will be better off. We will all be more secure. And so, our goal is to help the Iraqi people to get to that stable democracy. Now part of that is supporting the Iraqis being able to take control of their own future. They took control of their political future on Sunday. Their security forces are not yet capable of supporting that democratic process – although the security forces really did perform much better in supporting the elections than anybody would have given them the chance to do, or the expectation to do.

So, what we need to do is to train the Iraqi security forces, the police, the army, the border guards, so that the Iraqis can take up their own security. The coalition forces are there as a multi-national force under a UN resolution, and somehow that fact often seems to get lost. People talk about forces, or occupying forces – this is a multi-national force that the UN has in its resolution mandated, and the Iraqis asked for such a force because they were not yet ready to take care of their own security. But it will be a very good day when the Iraqis are able to do that and our job has to be to accelerate the training and equipping of those security forces so that they can.

Oh...on the UN. We have talked many times about the need for reform in the United Nations. The United States of course believes in that reform. We are assessing the high-level panel report discussing it. We believe that any reform needs to be a comprehensive reform and we will remain in discussion with our colleagues about that reform.

**QUESTION:** Peter Mackler, Agence France Presse. Madam Secretary and Mr. Minister, as you know that we were on the verge of the summit in Sharm el-Sheik, where there is expected to be a cease-fire announced. My question is this, is that, - you, yourself Madam Secretary have said that the Palestinian security forces are far from being in a position to be fully capable of showing security. They need training; they need equipment, etc. My question is this: how can you hold the Palestinian Authority and Mahmoud Abbas accountable for what happened in that period if he is not logistically able to have preformed those tasks? And Mr. Minister, do you think it's only the Palestinians' responsibility in this, or do you think that in this particular delicate interim Israel bears responsibility?

**SECRETARY RICE:** First of all the question was for the Minister, but let me say that we've said all parties do in fact have responsibilities. As to the Palestinian security forces, I think they're variable. There are places where the Palestinian security forces are quite capable of acting. And they need to act where they can act. When they arrest somebody, they need to hold them. When they see bomb-making factories, they need to destroy them. When there are smuggling operations, they need to disrupt them. And those places that the Palestinians can act, they need to act. The overall reform of their security forces and unification of their security forces is something that the international community can help them with.

The reason that we appointed a security coordinator is because we wanted to be as organized and as quick a process as possible of helping the Palestinians get to security forces that can be fully capable across the wide range of Palestinian territories. I know that the Israelis have talked about the potential return of cities, gradually, as the Palestinians get ready to take those cities over, and can hold security in those cities. So this is a process in which the international community can help, in which the Israelis and the Palestinians need to coordinate, to make certain that when the Palestinians take over in certain places they're capable, and the Palestinian government, mostly in leadership, needs to show that it not only has the will, but it is in fact acting when it is capable of doing so.

**FOREIGN MINISTER FINI:** (in Italian) With regard to the Middle East again, they're going to declare a sort of truce, a cease-fire, and of course, we're on the verge of this very important new development. Now this means that we've overcome the phase which perhaps has been the most difficult, not only because of a lack of communication, but due to violence and terrorism against Israel and the military retaliation by Israel against the terrorists. Now, I think that we need to acknowledge the fact that the Palestinian Authority has acted as it said that it was going to do. Because the groups in the Palestinian world, hard liners, as it were, are now showing their will to cooperate with Abu Mazen.

Now I agree with what Secretary Rice just said. And that is that at the same time, Israel also needs to show a new behavior perhaps. It needs to show its will for a disengagement from Gaza within the guidelines of the Road Map and not as a replacement of the Road Map. The international community is now pursuing this peace process, on the one hand through the training of Palestinian police groups and forces, and on the other hand, through economic intervention, i.e. through the funding.

We mentioned a meeting in London which will take place on March 1<sup>st</sup> and I think that we need to remember that the meeting between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is also possible, thanks to the active and very positive role played by two very important Arab leaders, in a role they continue to play: Mubarak and Abdullah.

In fact there is an objective role which is being played by the United States and certainly an important role being played by the European Union, however, I think that the meeting in Sharm el-Sheik shows that there are Arab countries, which are rightly defined as moderate countries -- Egypt and Jordan -- it shows that these countries can play a fundamental role, which will lead these countries to a just and long lasting peace throughout the area.

**QUESTION:** (in Italian) Secretary of State, you're coming from the Middle East, and Minister Fini, you've just returned from Russia. Now I'm sure you've spoken about the relations with the relations with Russia, as well. How can we re-launch the role of the Quartet, revitalize the role of the Quartet, as it were?

**FOREIGN MINISTER FINI:** (in Italian) We did speak about this in fact, because above and beyond the fact that we've just returned from these areas, everyone knows that when we speak about the Middle East and when we speak about the Road Map and when we speak about the Quartet, we're talking about players -- subjects -- and one of these players is the Russian Federation. The role of the United Nations, the role of the United States and the role of the European Union, so these are the four players involved.

Now I said to the U.S. Secretary of State that I am convinced of the fact that today there is a great deal of attention being paid to a concrete prospect for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. However we must remember that this is an area of the world in which conflict isn't only related to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, but there are other countries involved, as well. And we must also remember that when Israel says "We have the right to live in security, and therefore in peace with our neighboring countries," Israel is saying something that is quite true, which is quite right. Now this requires a commitment by the international community, not only to establish peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but to have peace between Israel and the Arab world as a whole, overall. This is the so-called Syrian and Lebanese track which we need to reactivate, revitalize.

Everyone knows that Russia plays or has an influence in particular on Damascus. And everyone knows that Moscow is one of the main players in international politics and that it therefore must be involved, particularly in some scenarios. Now I think it would be wise for the European Union, and generally speaking for the international community, to look to the Middle East as a whole overall, and therefore we need to ask Russia to be consistent in its behavior with regard to ensuring the security to Israel and with regard to following and protecting the borders between the Middle East countries and hopefully it will be possible to reach a general agreement throughout the area. Now this may seem overly optimistic, if we think of what it was like just a few months ago, then I'm sure you'll agree with me when I say that today there are some options, some possibilities, opportunities there, as well, and therefore we have to broaden these opportunities.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I completely agree with the minister. He made the very important point in our meeting that we have to think about the region as a whole. The Palestinian rejectionists, the terrorists cannot be allowed to continue to try and frustrate the process, and so the ties of Syria or Iran to these terrorist organizations really need to be a subject for discussion, not just by the Israelis and the Palestinians, but of course by the Europeans, and we as well. The Russians have a very important role to play in this. They are members of the Quartet. I would hope that we are going to have a foreign ministers level meeting of the Quartet fairly soon, because the Quartet is not only a very important place to get together to help to deal with the issues of Palestinian security reform and the like, but it is also, of course, the group that oversees the Road Map and at some point we will want to get back onto the Road Map, so it's important that the Quartet pay attention to that.

**QUESTION:** I'm Preston Mendenhall from NBC News. Madam Secretary, Syria's role in everything from the Mid-east to the current conflict in Iraq seems to be somewhat unresolved in terms of U.S. policy. How will Syria be dealt with?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Syria has been unhelpful in a number of ways concerning particularly support for terrorists operating out of southern Lebanon. It is, of course, also the case that we and the French put forward a resolution that passed in the United Nations, 1559, that called the Syrians to account for the interference in Lebanese affairs. Lebanon is a fledgling democracy in that region and they need to be left to their work in ways that there is not foreign interference. So, on that matter as well you know, too, that we've had problems with Syria concerning what is going on on the Iraqi-Syrian border and support for insurgency from there. So there's a long list.

And while we sometimes make what I would call minimal progress, it is by no means the kind of progress that we need to make. I would hope that the Syrian regime would recognize that in the long-term Syria would not want to be isolated either from the international community nor have a bad relationship with the United States. And it is time for Syria to demonstrate that it does not want to be isolated, that it does not want to have a bad relationship with the United States. We have already used the Syrian Accountability Act to levy certain sanctions against Syria. I would hope that Syria could react in a more positive way so that we do not have to go further in that regard.

**QUESTION:** (in Italian) Spagnoli from Radical Radio. I have a question on Iraq. The Iraqi Kurds are not hiding their desire to be rather autonomous, and perhaps even independent, but this is something which isn't accepted by Turkey. Turkey plays a fundamental role in the Western alliance, and especially with regard to its role within the European Union. And there's also a strong anti-American sentiment among the people there. So, I'm wondering how the Administration is going to deal with the problem of the Kurds in Iraq.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I was just in Turkey for consultations with the Prime Minister and with my colleague, Mr. Gul, and we had extensive discussions of the commitment of the United States to a unified Iraq, it's territorial integrity intact and for an Iraq in which all Iraqis -- Kurds, Turkomen, Sunni, Shi'a -- can live together and be respected and be represented. That's a very important principle from the point of view of the United States.

The Kurds obviously have had a good deal of autonomy over the last twelve years or more and Iraq should be a federal state in which there is the ability of local governance, local control of all kinds of aspects of people's lives. It doesn't have to be a highly centralized state, but it does have to be a unified state. It does have to be a state that has a common foreign policy. It does have to be a state that has unifying institutions. I have not seen a desire thus far from the Kurds to undermine that principle, that there is a need for a unified Iraq. That's why the Kurds participated in the elections. That's why it appears that they will certainly participate in the government.

We have to recognize that what is going on in Iraq now is that now that the election has taken place, they are in an intensely political process, a democratic political process, in which they are going to have to come to terms with the differences that they have, differences, by the way, that were exacerbated by Saddam Hussein's regime and to find ways to overcome their divisions. But this a normal political process for a state that is just emerging from tyranny. It takes time, it takes good will, it takes effort, but I have said and I'm sure the American press corps will be tired of my saying this, but I've said on many occasions: sometimes we overstate or overblow when there are differences in Iraq, when statements are made, when people say that they're not satisfied with a particular outcome; that also is normal politics. So, I would suggest that we and the international community need to step back, give the Iraqis an opportunity now to build a unified Iraq where all of their divisions can be overcome, recognizing that it's hard, but recognizing that they appear, in fact, quite devoted to doing so.

**QUESTION:** Madam Secretary, you're a little more than half way through a trip to Europe and the Middle East, the European portion of which was widely seen as something of an attempt to change the subject from the opposition to the Iraq war in some European countries and sort of a general sentiment of anti-Americanism that's grown over the last couple of years. Can you point to a few things along the way that you think show where you are in that process of changing the subject and what your eventual goal is when you finish this week?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Anne, I don't think we came to change the subject. I think we came to move on from differences in the past to a new phase, and frankly the new phase, it was punctuated before I left by the Iraqi people themselves who demonstrated very clearly that they appreciated the opportunity afforded by their liberation to now build a different kind of Iraq and that really does call us all in the transatlantic alliance to associate ourselves once again as we have in the past with the aspirations of people who are trying to do that. But of course, it's not just Iraq, it's not just Afghanistan that were liberated by force, but it is also the Ukrainian people and the Georgian people who were in effect liberated by the power of ideas of this alliance standing fast and the unification of Europe and the pull of Europe. It's also the punctuation by the Palestinians of the selection of a new government there that is devoted to trying to build a peaceful solution with its Israeli neighbors.

And so, what I've come here to do and in all my conversations, all my discussions, I think I found the people more than willing to do so, is to talk about how this great alliance, which has had such a really glorious past, now can have an even greater future in sustaining an effort on behalf of those who are seeking to liberate themselves from tyranny and to build a democracy. We always understood in the Cold War that there was a fundamental link between our security and our values and in fact, I think you could argue that while we've used our military power to deter Soviet aggression for 50 years, our values really ultimately won out, and that's the history of this alliance and I think it's going to be the future of this alliance.

**QUESTION:** Maurizio Caprara from Corriere della Sera. After the success of the general election in Iraq, a kind of amnesty could improve the national reconciliation, especially with Sunni people; I mean an amnesty for a part of the insurgents that decide to leave the weapons away. Thank you.

**SECRETARY RICE:** There is no doubt that one of the most important goals before the Iraqi government when it is seated will be to create a situation in which all Iraqis can unite around a common future. I do not want to try and direct the Iraqi government in how that process should go forward, on how to bring more of the Sunnis into the process. I would just note though that a lot of the Sunnis who did not vote did not do so because they were boycotting -- they didn't do so because of the violence and the intimidation in the area. I think there was a desire on Sunnis to be a part of this process and that desire now should be mobilized. Obviously, there are still insurgents who are irreconcilable to democratic principles. These are people who want to take Iraq back to the days when Saddam Hussein's regime was repressing their fellow citizens, Shi'a and Kurds and indeed Sunnis, and those people are going to be irreconcilable to this process -- I don't care what you try to do, because their view, their goal is not a

democratic and unified Iraq -- their goal is an Iraq that looked like it did before its liberation. But it is up to the Iraqis to try and determine how to move this process forward, how to reconcile the entire country, not just the Sunnis but the entire country to a different kind of future given their horrific past.

**QUESTION:** A journalist from Syria. My name is Mohamed Ibrahim, correspondent of (inaudible). Your Excellency, I'm a Syrian from the Golan Heights. I was uprooted from my village in the Golan Heights. Isn't (inaudible) a form of terrorism and when will you promise me to return back to my village? Thank you

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I can't promise you anything. This is something that will have to be resolved between the Israeli government and the Syrians, recognizing that one day there will undoubtedly be and should be a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It will be enormously accelerated if governments in the region, including the Syrian government, do not support rejectionists who are trying to blow up the process of getting to peace. The more that the Syrian government wants to see an acceleration of the peace process that can lead to an ultimate comprehensive peace for the Golan and for others, the more the Syrian government needs to crack down on the terrorists that are using Syrian territory and using Southern Lebanon where Syria resides to make sure that those people cannot frustrate this process. I can't say it strongly enough. You cannot say on the one hand that you want a process of peace and on the other hand support people who are determined to blow it up.

So, I would just say to the Syrian government if it wants to see an acceleration of the peace process and a comprehensive peace, then deal with the terrorists in their midst. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** The last. Yosi (inaudible) from Israeli press, Yediot (inaudible). The role, can you explain better the role of the new coordinator General Ward? In the past we saw that all other coordinators didn't have a lot of success in the Middle East.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes, well, I have to agree with your last point. We have not been able to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace, but I do think that new circumstances and General Ward's job will be to bring the parties together around security to work with the parties -- not to supplant the efforts of the parties, because there needs to be bilateral security cooperation between Israelis and the Palestinians -- but to help train the Palestinian security forces to help coordinate training for them, to help monitor what is going on on the security front, and ultimately to, if necessary, help by bringing both the parties together. But we would hope that they're going to sustain the kind of positive momentum that they have sustained without it.

And if I could just use the opportunity to wrap the last two questions together. Everybody wants to see a Middle East in which all of the people who have been displaced or have had to live in difficult circumstances for the last decades can find reconciliation and peace. We have an opportunity for the first steps toward that, because the Palestinians have new leadership, the Israelis are going to withdraw from the Gaza and start to, for the first time actually return territory to the Palestinians, and because there seems to be will among the people of the Middle East to want to live in a different kind of Middle East.

If we can just get the help of not just the parties, but of the regional actors in the way that Egypt and Jordan are helping today at Sharm el-Sheik; if we can get the help of the Gulf states and other to provide the funding to the Palestinians that they have pledged; if we can as an international community insist that the states that are continuing to support rejectionists and terrorist activities stop doing that, then I think we really do have to have a chance this time to have not just a peace between the Israelis and Palestinians, but a comprehensive peace for all of the people of the Middle East who deserve better than they have had for the last decades, who want to raise their children free of fear and violence and with opportunity and prosperity.

**FOREIGN MINISTER FINI:** (in Italian) Thank you very much; we thank Secretary of State Rice once again. One final comment, because I think that you mentioned something, which is important, I say this for Europeans, it's important for Europe and I go back to what was said by the American journalist a moment ago -- Secretary of State Rice said that you cannot impose peace and democracy upon anyone, it's a dictatorship that can impose itself. And she also said that democracy has to start from the bottom, from the base, and therefore we have to spread, disseminate freedom. I think that if we look at things this way in Europe and in the United States, there cannot be any reason for any controversy for any difference because liberty, freedom is certainly the value that the United States returned to Europe in the last World War.

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