



Briefing En Route to London

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Well, good morning, everybody, and we're off now to London for what I think will be a very important conference. This is a conference in which the international community can come together to demonstrate to the Palestinians that they will have international support for their extremely important reform movement. The reforms need to be undertaken, obviously, on the governance side. There were some important steps taken recently in that regard with the selection of the Palestinian cabinet and we look forward to beginning to meet those ministers at some point in time and to helping on the governance issues.

The economic issues will be very important. The President has already made clear that he intends to support economic reform but it will be an opportunity for the international community to hear from the Palestinians how they plan to carry out economic reform and what technical assistance they need. And then, of course, we will look at the security issues, but this is principally about capacity building among the Palestinians on the security side. And General Ward will be joining me in London to talk about what the United States can do in that regard.

So, we're on our way to an important conference. The Prime Minister has done a very important thing in putting this together. I will say that against the backdrop of what we just experienced in Tel Aviv it is even more important that an emphasis be placed on the ability of the Palestinians to fight terrorism, on the willingness of the international community to isolate rejectionists and for everyone to recognize that the fighting of terrorism is going to be a key feature if we are indeed going to be able to make progress toward getting back to the Road Map and getting to the two-state solution.

So, I'm happy now to take questions.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Slightly off topic, I was wondering if you could tell us what you make of President Mubarak's announcement on Saturday and also amplify a little bit on your decision not to go to Cairo, at least for the time being. And what might be the circumstances under which you would go to Egypt?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the step is a welcome step, it's a good step, and we have a large agenda with the Egyptians. Obviously, on the Palestinian-Israeli issues I will see counterparts here in London on matters having to do with reform. We hope that the Egyptians, after they've had an opportunity, as they said, to consult more widely prior to convening the kind of conference, the G-8 conference (inaudible), I would look forward to having a chance to talk to them further about that. And, obviously, a good deal is going on in Egypt concerning how Egypt can move forward on reform.

So, my hope is that at the time that I would go that we would be able to make progress along the broad front of issues in the Egyptian-U.S. relationship. Given that the conference had been canceled, it seemed like the conditions were not quite right for going, but I look forward to going sometime in the near future.

QUESTION: You mentioned the attack on Friday in Tel Aviv. In the wake of that and the accusations by Israel of Syrian involvement, where does that put President Abbas, who will be in London tomorrow? And I don't know whether you'll have a chance to talk to him, but what can he do to make sure that third countries or third parties don't do what they did on Friday, if they actually did it?

SECRETARY RICE: Right. And we don't have any confirmation of who -- of whether there was foreign involvement. But, obviously, the involvement of the Syrians with terrorists and terrorism is well known and it's been one of the most important barriers to improved relations with the Syrians on the part of the United States. We've said many, many times that the Syrians can not have it both ways, talk about an important peace process and still support rejectionist elements who are intentional -- who intend to blow up that process or to frustrate that process.

President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority said at the time of the Tel Aviv bombing that this was not just an attack on Israel, it was, of course, an attack on the aspirations of the Palestinian people. I'm paraphrasing, but it was something along those lines. That's exactly right because there has got to be a concerted effort to fight terrorism in order to have conditions in which Israelis and Palestinians are going to be able to live in peace and move to a two-state solution.

And so what we would hope to hear from President Abbas, but also from the international community, is that there is a concerted effort, a concerted will, to fight the rejectionists in every way possible and that the first phase of the Road Map, of course, requires the Palestinian Authority to deal with terrorism and to begin dismantling the terrorist infrastructure. And so that's what we will be looking for. We know that the Palestinians need help in creating security forces that can be part of the solution, not part of the problem, and that's why we've asked General Ward to come over from Seventh Army Europe and to coordinate the efforts of the parties, as well as the international community. Nothing can substitute for the efforts of the parties themselves and I just want to be very clear that anything that we do is to support the effort of the parties themselves, not to supplant their efforts.

But there is no doubt that Tel Aviv, the bombings in Tel Aviv, are again a reminder that there are going to be groups that are determined to try and destroy this process and that they have to be dealt with and they have to be dealt with firmly.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madam Secretary. Can you tell us after your visit to Europe last week what steps you think might be in order, in order to find a solution to the Iran problem? Is there some more flexibility? Are you considering some carrots as well as sticks? And have you rethought the U.S. position vis-à-vis the European position? Is there some way to work more closely together?

SECRETARY RICE: What we came out of the European meetings with is a kind of clarity of purpose and I think pretty clear unity of purpose that everybody is in agreement that the Iranians cannot have a nuclear weapon, that the Europeans are seriously negotiating on that basis, and that there was a firmness there that I think everybody recognized. Now, we are considering -- the President is considering -- what options he might have to support the European efforts to get the Iranians to live up to their international obligations and to not seek a civilian nuclear program under cover -- I'm sorry, not to seek a nuclear weapon under cover of a civilian nuclear program. And the President is considering what he heard in Europe and considering what we might do. But that's where we are at this point.

QUESTION: What would Iran have to do in order to get, for instance, WTO status?

SECRETARY RICE: What Iran has to do is clear now. It's not a matter of what more the world needs to tell Iran. It's that Iran needs to convince the international community that it is prepared to live up to its international obligations, that it is prepared to have the kinds of verification measures and efforts that will convince the international community that it's prepared to live up to those international obligations, that it needs to be transparent with the IAEA. There are new questions out there today from ElBaradei just saying that he hopes for better cooperation with the Iranians, or more forthcoming cooperation. The Iranians know what they need to do and the Europeans are offering them a way to show that they're prepared to do this, and they should take that way.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, just to follow on the Tel Aviv fallout, do you think that Abu Mazen has the will and/or the ability to take on PIJ and the other rejectionist groups? And second, if it's going to take time to develop the Palestinian security forces, how do we avoid in the meantime falling into the old trap which it looks like we're falling into already? The cabinet announced it was going to pull back on some of its agreements at Sharm over the weekend.

SECRETARY RICE: I don't think we are into the same old pattern. I first want to note that the statements of the Palestinian Authority were clearer on this point than anything that we saw in the old days. Linking it directly to Palestinian aspirations was very important. It is also the case that I would hope that you'll continue to see cooperation on the security front to deal with this particular incident between the Israelis and the Palestinians, and I think there is some evidence that that is going on.

As to whether or not Israelis can safely pull out of the cities, that's a judgment that the Israelis are going to have to make, I would hope in discussion with the Palestinians. But we need to focus on the fundamentals. There are going to be ups and downs in this process. It's not going to be a straight line. And what we're trying to do is to improve the underlying fundamentals, improve the Palestinian security forces, improve the capability of Palestinians and Israelis to talk to one another and to move forward, but recognizing that there are going to be bumps in the road, there are going to be ups and downs.

There is an obligation on the part of the Palestinians in the first phase of the Road Map to deal with rejectionist groups and to begin to dismantle that infrastructure. They've talked about some of the things that they might be able to do. Obviously, when you have Palestinian Islamic Jihad taking responsibility, then something needs to be done about that because they are clearly challenging directly the Palestinian Authority, and the Palestinian Authority has said there should be one gun, one authority, one law.

But we are not in any way distressed by the response to this on either side. I think it's shown considerable maturity on the part of the parties to know that there are going to be some ups and downs and we'll have to get through them. The best thing we can do is to improve the capability of the Palestinian security forces and the best thing that the Palestinians can do is to recognize that they have taken on in the Road Map a commitment to really fight the terrorists.

QUESTION: But do you think the will is there?

SECRETARY RICE: Everything that we've seen thus far has demonstrated that the Palestinians understand this moment of opportunity and that the will is there to make it succeed, yes.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madam Secretary. I know you've been on the road a lot, but have you had a chance to confer with the Congress about the \$350 million that the President recommended? And it seems to me like a bombing like this in Tel Aviv is just the kind of thing that would get people in Congress saying, "Whoa, what are we doing here with the aid?"

SECRETARY RICE: Again, there will be ups and downs in this process and we just have to recognize it. I was on the Hill testifying about the President's both budget and supplemental requests just last week and answered questions about what we would be doing, what the money might be used for. I would expect after discussions here in London, where we have a better sense of what the Palestinians think their needs are, that I would have further consultations with the Congress about how these funds would be deployed.

And, obviously, the strengthening of the Palestinians on the economic front so that there is something to show for the Palestinian people from a Palestinian Authority that is dedicated to peace is an important part of getting a better environment in the Palestinian territories in which security and everything else can be assured. So I would expect to have further consultations, but I was just up on the Hill last week testifying.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, two quick things. What precisely do you think the United States itself can do, besides the money that the President has said he'll ask Congress for, to actually strengthen the Palestinian security forces? You talked a lot about what the Palestinian Authority has said since -- you've talked a lot about what the Palestinian Authority has said since the Tel Aviv bombing, but in your statement you said you wanted actions. Have you seen remotely those kinds of actions or commitment that you want to see?

And on Iran, there's a report that the President is considering incentives like trade, aircraft spare parts, civilian aircraft, support or at least no opposition to WTO. Are those things actually on the table?

SECRETARY RICE: On the last question, the President is considering what he heard in Europe and looking at what he thinks might be necessary to support European diplomacy but hasn't made any decisions and he's really reviewing and looking back on the conversations that he's had. It was a good set of conversations. He said he was going to consult. Now he's going to take those consultations into consideration.

In terms of the Palestinians, yes, of course, there needs to be action. There were some arrests made. The attitude of the Palestinians about what happened there I think was very important. But, of course, there needs to be action and there needs to continue to be action because this is -- these rejectionist efforts are a threat not just to the Israelis but to Palestinian aspirations as well.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. First, if you could give us some more details about General Ward's position, what he's going to be doing, whether there's going to be some sort of security committee that he would head.

And then on Iran, I did want to quote one thing that you said on your last trip, which I was not on because I was in Iran. You said at the time -- you were asked about WTO membership and Russia. You said, "It can have the effect of promoting democratic development." Why is the same not true for Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, WTO membership can very often have exactly that effect. It, obviously, depends on the conditions in the country that is applying for WTO membership, but as a general matter I don't think there is any doubt that the WTO can have that effect. Whether it does in specific circumstances, as you know, when you apply the same rule to different circumstances, sometimes you get a different outcome. But, I will say that there's no doubt in our mind that WTO can have that kind of effect.

As to General Ward, General Ward is really going to focus very much on helping the Palestinian security forces get organized, equipped, trained. There are a number of other states that are obviously critical to that equipping and training, including the Egyptians, the Jordanians. We'll see what kind of structure works best for that coordination. His efforts and his willingness to coordinate were certainly welcome in the region when he was out there last week, I think it was, but we will see what kind of structure makes sense. We want to make certain that this is a coordinated effort so some kind of structure is going to be needed.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, bearing in mind your relations with Syria and Iran, I just wonder how you can think in -- I just wondered how you can clamp down or help clamp down on extremism, on terrorism, when relations between, say, Syria and Iran, as far as the States is concerned, are so poor.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, in part, relations are poor because of Syrian and Iranian engagement with terrorism, and so the key here is for not just the United States but the international community to recognize that you cannot have it both ways. You can't say you want a peace process to succeed between the Israelis and the Palestinians and fail to call to account those who support rejectionists and terrorists. It just only makes sense. If we really do believe this is a moment for Israeli-Palestinian peace to really have a chance, then everybody has to do everything possible to disable and to frustrate the efforts of those who don't want that process to succeed.

And so this is -- yes, the United States is putting pressure where it can, but there needs to be more than just American pressure.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, first of all, can you confirm that the U.S. knows for sure that Saddam Hussein's half-brother had been hiding out in Syria and with Syrian knowledge and, based on U.S. support, handed him over to coalition and Iraqi forces?

And can you also -- what needs to happen tomorrow from the U.S. perspective in order for this conference to be a success?

SECRETARY RICE: The conference simply needs to affirm in a concrete way that the international community is prepared to back a reformist agenda for the Palestinians and that that reform is a critical element of getting back onto the Road Map and getting to a two-state solution. You know, the nature of the Palestinian state is going to be very critical in whether or not you really do have two states living side by side in peace.

Yes, a lot of other things will be important. The territory, as the President said the other day, will be important. But a state is not just its boundaries. A state is also the institutions, the character of the state, its commitment to democracy. And I think if there's a very strong message out of this conference that the reform agenda is important to the international community, that will be very successful, and then concrete steps that can be taken to support that reform agenda.

As to the first question, Andrea, I have seen the reports. I can't confirm it but I can say that, obviously, we are continuing to press Syria on matters concerning the insurgency. There have been discussions with them on a couple of occasions about stopping the activities or finding a way to stop the activities of those who may be supporting the insurgency from Syrian territory.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: We don't know enough at this point to make a judgment. But I do think it's very important that the Syrians press extremely hard to stop anyone who is engaged in supporting the insurgency from Syrian territory.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, first of all, is there a timeline associated with the President deciding about the incentives to offer the Iranians through the Europeans and is there a timeline associated with when we expect the Iranians to agree to a permanent abandonment of its weapons program?

And secondly, do you plan to use your trips and your level of engagement as a signal of, or a sign of encouragement for change, as appears to be the case, with Egypt? (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, that's not how I saw it.

Look, the United States has a clear agenda about political reform and democratization. It couldn't be clearer. The President of the United States does it in the Inaugural. He talks about it again in the State of the Union. I did it in my speech in Europe. He did it. It couldn't be clearer. And so, I do believe countries understand where we stand and that it's going to be a part of our dialogue wherever we are and whenever we engage those countries.

As to Iran, there isn't a timeline. I mean, the President is considering what he heard and I assume I'm going to have further discussions while I'm here. I'll encounter various parties and I'm sure I'll have further discussions. So, there's no timeline. As to when the Iranians ought to make very clear that they're prepared to cease these activities, they ought to do that really as soon as possible because what is happening is that as it becomes clearer that the Iranians are engaged in activities or have been engaged in activities that call into question whether this is really a civilian nuclear program, they're just engaging in their own isolation, and I would think they would want to end the isolation sooner rather than later.

QUESTION: Eve Conant with *Newsweek*. Thank you, Madam Secretary. Can you give us a few more details on General Ward and who he'll be meeting with tomorrow, and also if he'll be sending any political messages to the people he's meeting with, urging them to clamp down on terrorist groups?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, General Ward will be at the conference with me. We haven't determined when he'll go back out to the region again, but he is still having consultations on what mechanism might work best to do the kind of coordination that he needs to do.

I would just again cite three things. He's going to help coordinate the activities of those states that wish to contribute to the training, equipping, the reforming of the Palestinian security forces. Secondly, he will obviously be an important set of eyes, ears and information about what is going on on the ground and how well the parties are living up to obligations that they take, the so-called monitoring function. And third, he will, when necessary, but only when necessary, be available should security cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians need the United States to be involved in that.

But in no means is it intended that he would supplant the bilateral discussions that the bilateral discussions that the parties are having. We'll see when he goes back out, but the principal reason that he's coming here is to attend the conference, to hear the discussion about what's going to happen on the security side, and then to see whether we come to some decisions fairly soon about what kind of mechanism would be best to do that.

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, there was supposed to be a meeting March 5th of Palestinians which has been canceled. Is that a sign that Abbas is having trouble negotiating some kind of *modus vivendi* with these groups, or how should it be interpreted?

SECRETARY RICE: I really don't know enough about it to give you an interpretation. Obviously, the Palestinians are trying to move forward on creating calm in the region and hopefully they will be able to do that. But ultimately people are going to have to be willing to fight terrorism one way or another and ultimately there is going to have to be both a desire and a capability to bring an end to the terrorist infrastructure that feeds attacks. That's why it is an obligation under the first phase of the Road Map because there's a recognition that without that it's going to be very hard to move forward.

Again, this process is going to have ups and downs. If you simply look at where we were several months ago, we've had a lot of ups recently. It's not surprising that those who wish to destroy this process are going to try to do so, but I thought that the behavior of the parties -- and I mean the Palestinians and the Israelis, who suffered a terrible event -- that the behavior has demonstrated that people want this process to keep going, and that's really very important.

Thanks a lot.

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