



Remarks With French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

London, United Kingdom

March 1, 2005

FOREIGN MINISTER BARNIER: (In French) Well, thank you for being here this morning. I shall say a few words about the meeting that Dr. Rice and I have had. Of course, we shall have an opportunity of other meetings during this very important occasion which is the first stage following the dynamics that were started after Sharm el-Sheikh. The Sharm el-Sheikh meeting between Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas, this is something for which we should all consider ourselves as co-sponsors and should all give our support to the efforts made by the Palestinians and the Israelis. We should also consider that after this first stage there will be a second stage during the second half of this year, an international conference to which the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also, the international community, shall come together so as to watch the continuation of this process.



But I would also like to say that with Dr. Rice, we have been discussing the question of Lebanon. It is a very important event, as the Lebanese people have very courageously expressed their aspirations, their aspiration to freedom, their aspiration to a sovereign Lebanon. The Lebanese want to be masters of their own fate, and we, in France, we encouraged this because in France nothing, we can never be indifferent to what is happening in Lebanon, and our way of encouraging this is to repeat what is included in the document which we co-sponsored with the United States. We want the complete implementation of Resolution 1559. We also want the truth, we want the truth to know who is responsible for the death of Rafik Hariri, and we also want all the foreign military troops to be withdrawn from Lebanon, and also the organization of true, genuine elections in this country.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure to meet again with my counterpart, French Foreign Minister Barnier. We had very good discussions.

I want to just first say, a thank you to Prime Minister Blair for the opportunity to be here. This is a very important conference which looks to helping the Palestinians prepare themselves for the events that will come over the next several months, to help them prepare for the parliamentary elections, to help them prepare the institutions that can be the basis of statehood, institutions that are transparent, institutions that are accountable, institutions that are democratic. We have had discussions of governance. There will be discussions of economic reform, and there will, of course, be discussions of security and how to help the Palestinians have security forces that can indeed fight terrorism, because without a sustained effort against terrorism it will be very difficult, indeed impossible, to sustain the momentum for peace.

We have a lot of work ahead of us over the next several months and I think we will see how the international community can best continue to support this, but the work before us today and over the next several months is to help the Palestinians in their reform efforts and also to help with the peaceful withdrawal of the Israelis from the Gaza.

We had a very good discussion of Lebanon and that is why we wanted to appear here together. Obviously events in Lebanon are moving in a very important direction. It is also the case that the Lebanese people are beginning to express their aspirations for democracy, their aspirations that they be able to carry out their political aspirations without foreign interference. This is something that we support very much. Resolution 1559, which was co-sponsored by France and the United States within the UN Security Council, calls very firmly for free elections, free and fair elections to take place in Lebanon, for foreign forces, both troops and intelligence forces, to withdraw and for the Lebanese people to be able to conduct their affairs, Lebanese for Lebanon, and not with foreign interference, and this is something on which we agreed very much.

We also want to make certain that we intensify our dialogue about Lebanon and have asked our political directors to meet later today, here in London, to talk about how we can further support the process of elections in Lebanon, how we can further support the removal of foreign elements of interference in Lebanese affairs and how we can move forward to the full implementation of Resolution 1559 within the UN framework. So, that was the bulk of our discussion today and we will gladly take just a couple of questions because we need to get back to this very important conference.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, you aren't simply exhorting Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon. What specific actions did you discuss, if any, to try to force Syria to do so? If the Syrians do withdraw their troops, do you believe there is any need for any kind of other force, say UN forces perhaps, to deploy to try to prevent a security vacuum?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are going to have our political directors meet. I think we will also want to meet with Mr. Larsen from the UN, who is Secretary General Annan's representative on this issue, to examine what more needs to be done. But the Syrians have a very clear view of what needs to be done. They know what is required in Resolution 1559, it should be recognized. But at this point in time, we have a circumstance in which on several fronts, whether it is Iraqi insurgents who are being supported on Syrian territory and causing the kind of hideous attacks that we had yesterday against the Iraqi people; or support for terrorists who are trying to frustrate the Palestinian/Israeli peace; or, keeping foreign interference in Lebanese affairs that the Syrians are out of step with where the region is going and out of step with the aspirations of the people of the Middle East.

The important thing is that Resolution 1559 is very clear that foreign interference should not be carried out. We will focus very much, I think also, on what we can help the Lebanese to do. That means support for free and fair elections, that means election observers if necessary, monitoring if necessary, and as we see how the Lebanese will move forward, I think we have to look at what can be done in terms of helping them to stabilize the situation should that become necessary. But we have not yet had detailed discussions on that.

FOREIGN MINISTER BARNIER: (in French) Yes I wanted to add to this, that first of all that things must be put quite in order. This is a resolution of the international community as a whole. It is a very clear resolution and it stands alone, and there can be absolutely no excuse to postpone this implementation or not implement it at all. This resolution demands the withdrawal of all military forces in [Lebanon]. This is something which is supported by the international community at large and is to be done under the framework, in the framework of the United Nations under Mr. Larsen, and this particularly at a time when the Lebanese people are expressing their intention, to once again become the masters of their own fate.

QUESTION: (In French, no translation)

FOREIGN MINISTER BARNIER: (In French) Well, the question was concerning Iraq. There has been a cassette recorded by Florence Aubenas in which she's asking for the help of Mr. Julia.. Are you intending to rely upon his help? And the answer was, well, as from the moment in which we heard of the disappearance of Florence Aubenas and her interpreter Mr. Anud, we immediately committed ourselves to spare no effort to try and help them, and in Baghdad -- it is very difficult and dangerous situation, as you know -- we have been multiplying contacts and in fact as we did concerning the situation of Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, which turned out well.

We have taken note of this call for help of Florence Aubenas. We shall check this cassette very carefully, we will check the chronology, but what is important to note first of all, is that she is alive. A few days ago we had another evidence of the fact that she was alive, and I informed her family of this. But now, as I was saying, we need to check this cassette very carefully, we need to check the chronology, and as concerns this Member of Parliament whose name you gave, he has expressed his availability and now we shall take all of the measures which we consider useful.

We, the French Government, the Prime Minister, myself, we shall spare no effort, because for us the main thing is to ensure the safety of Florence Aubenas.

Thank you.

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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