



On-the-Record Briefing to Press in London

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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SECRETARY RICE: Good evening. I want to express the deep appreciation of the United States to Prime Minister Blair and Foreign Minister Straw for hosting this event. The prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians are the best they've been in many years and this meeting reflects our determination and that of others in the international community to seize this opportunity for peace.

We are encouraged by the preliminary steps that the Palestinian leadership has taken on security toward the restoration of law and order and in establishing the basis for a ceasefire. We are also encouraged by the Israeli response to these steps. Last week's bombing in Tel Aviv reminds us, however, that a ceasefire will not bring permanent peace. The roadmap rightly calls for the dismantling of terrorist networks. Otherwise, the path to peace can be blocked by terrorists at any time.

Our efforts here have focused on ways to build momentum for this process, achieving an end to violence and terror that would permit the implementation of the roadmap and help build the institutions for a sovereign, independent, democratic and viable Palestine that can live at peace with a safe and secure Israel.

The contributions of other states in the region remain essential. Egypt and Jordan have played a critical role over the years. I was pleased to hear their commitment and that of other regional states to support the important changes underway in Palestinian society. The United States will continue to do its part. Lieutenant General Ward has made his first visit to the region as Senior U.S. Security Coordinator and he will lead an active effort to help reform and rebuild Palestinian security capabilities in conjunction with others who wish to help.

We have also moved forward with our \$41 million quick impact program and we are planning for our \$350 million assistance program to the Palestinians, targeting job creation, private sector development and infrastructure construction. We will keep doing all we can in the months and years ahead.

These are momentous times in the Middle East. In barely two months, we have seen historic elections in Palestine and Iraq, an opening toward broader participation toward municipal elections in Saudi Arabia, and very important decisions by President Mubarak to open up competition in Egyptian presidential elections, as well as, of course, the dramatic outpouring of popular desire for freedom in Lebanon.

Many challenges lie ahead, but it is deeply in all of our interests to help the people of this region shape a more promising future and that is exactly the message of this conference in support of the Palestinians. Now I am happy to take questions.

MR. BOUCHER: Let's start down here with the Associated Press.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame Secretary. You and your French counterpart had some pretty tough words on Syria in the Lebanon situation earlier today. Do you see a particular openings now to do what has not happened for 15 years with the removal of Syrian troops? If so, why and what might an international stabilization effort look like? Are you talking about peacekeeping forces?

SECRETARY RICE: I think we're not yet at the point that we can talk about specific plans, post the withdrawal of Syria. The first task is, of course, to impress upon the Syrians the importance of complying with Resolution 1559, which requires that Syrian forces withdraw. And I want to be very clear; we mean Syrian military forces and their security services.

The events in Lebanon on the last couple of days are quite dramatic, the resignation of the Lebanese Government. There will need to be preparations for elections that are free and fair and that are independent of the influences, the contaminating influences, of foreign interference.

Now, the Lebanese will have to take control of this themselves. The international community cannot step in for the Lebanese in doing the hard political work ahead of them. But what the international community can do is to offer its help in any way that the Lebanese as they move forward deem necessary. And so part of the reason that the Assistant Secretary Bill Burns met with his French counterpart is to talk about what might be required. This will all be done in the framework of Resolution 1559 and that means that there will need to be conversations also with Mr. Larsen, who is Secretary General Annan's special representative for the implementation of 1559.

So we have a long road ahead of us. I don't want to get ahead of the steps that we're taking because so much is still unfolding. But what you had from the French and from us -- we were the co-sponsors of 1559 -- is a strong determination to see that resolution implemented, and I think it is really one of the strongest statements in quite a long time about what needs to happen in Lebanon.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay. Try the gentleman in the center with the beard.

QUESTION: Secretary of State, on Lebanon again, the Hezbollah has actually got missiles which can reach large parts of Israel. They are the only strong militia there once the Syrians are keeping (inaudible) with their own pullout of Lebanon. What actually practical steps are there when the Syrians move out? In 1983, when British and -- when American and French troops with -- we saw the attacks again and was very unpleasant situation. So what practical steps would be left?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, a lot has happened since 1983 in Lebanese society and obviously there would need to be support for Lebanon to have a stable and democratic government that can address all the many groups and divisions that have been there in Lebanese society. But as a first step that they would be able to have elections that are free of foreign interference would certainly set a different course for Lebanon and that is what we're concentrating on now. It is obviously the case also that there cannot be terrorist militias operating in the territory of Lebanon. A lot of that is coming out of southern Lebanon where, of course, the Syrians have forces and personnel. And we expect that the dismantling of terrorist activities would have to be an important part of anything moving forward. There can't continue to be terrorist strikes against Israel or anyone else from southern Lebanon. And that message has also been very clear to the Syrians.

MR. BOUCHER: Let me go to NBC down here, please.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. On the subject of Iran, Madame Secretary. Andrea Mitchell from NBC News.

With the Secretary General, or the representative, rather, of the EU, Mr. Solana, told us that there were good vibrations or are good vibrations coming from Washington

on the subject of Iran, when do you think you might have some proposal showing some greater flexibility, some response to what happened last week? And do you think that that would be, in fact, in the next few weeks, before the next round of talks?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I can't put any timetable on the considerations that the President and his advisors have undertaken. We did find the discussions when the President was here in Europe to be very fruitful. We found, as the President said in each of these press conferences, that there was unity of message that Iran must not have a nuclear weapon and that they must not use civilian nuclear activities to cover activities that might lead to a nuclear weapon. There seemed to be a firmness about that.

But I think we still need to explore, we need to discuss and see how we can come further together, perhaps even, on support for the EU discussions with the Iranians. But let's put the onus here where it belongs. The onus is not on the European Union; it's not on the United States. It is on the Iranians to take the opportunity that is being given to them by the European Union to demonstrate that they're prepared to live up to their international obligations in a way that is verifiable and that gives confidence to the international community that they are not going to try to build a nuclear weapon.

So we are in discussions. We will continue to have discussions. I can't give you a timetable. But I can say that we need to remember that the Iranians are the ones who are isolated. They need to cooperate better with the IAEA. They need to make certain that they are living up to their obligations. And thus far they have not indicated that they are prepared to do that.

QUESTION: Will they have to show something to you before you would consider WTO membership or could there be some carrots that would precede some actions from Iran?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think what we need to do is we -- these are questions that are being considered, but what we need to do at this point is to have a very strong message to the Iranians that there is a path that has been laid out for them on the nuclear matter by the European 3 and they ought to take the opportunity that is being given to them.

Now, it has to be in a way that is verifiable. It has to be in a way that lends confidence to the international community that the Iranians are actually going to live up to their obligations. The Iranians have not yet demonstrated that, and of course there are other steps that the international community can take if Iran is not prepared to do that, including referral to the Security Council, which we have always thought is eventually going to have to be the case if Iran is not prepared to do what it needs to do.

I might just mention, Andrea, that in the discussions the nuclear issue gets all of the -- or in the commentary the nuclear issue gets all of the discussion, but let's remember too that we have been here in London talking about peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, listening to President Mahmoud Abbas talk about taking difficult decisions within the Palestinian territories to try to provide a secure environment both for the Palestinians and for Israelis, talking about Israeli obligations to support a democratic Palestinian state; and we have Iran refusing to recognize the existence of Israel, refusing to support the peace process, and indeed supporting and encouraging rejectionist groups who are against the peace process.

So that is an issue with Iran for the entire international community, as is for those of us who happen to live on the right side of the democratic divide, the side which -- where we enjoy those freedoms, concern about the human rights record of Iran and concern about Iran's unelected few who continue to frustrate the will of their people for a more democratic future.

MR. BOUCHER: The gentleman in the middle, in the red sweater.

QUESTION: Anton LaGuardia of the *Daily Telegraph*.

There's been a lot of talk today on the question of reciprocity. Is it your understanding that Israel -- that Israelis and Palestinians are now in the roadmap, or are they before the roadmap, and therefore are the mutual obligations applicable to Israel as we stand?

On the question of Syria and Lebanon, are there further punitive measures that you, or you collectively with other countries, are considering against Syria?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are at a point right now where the Syrians are getting a pretty clear and strong message and I think we'll leave it at that. We, obviously, have imposed some sanctions on Syria. We have others at our disposal. We'll see. As to where we are in the process, I think we are exactly where Prime Minister Blair said we are: We are trying to lay a foundation for a successful movement through the roadmap toward a two-state solution.

Now, in order to do that, we have to build Israeli -- we have to build Palestinian security forces. And let me just say that General Ward -- General Ward's mission was talked about a lot here today. General Ward's first, second, third and fourth job is going to be to coordinate the security assistance that is being offered to the Palestinians so that we can have viable, lawful security forces on the Palestinian side who answer to one voice and one government, and that's the duly elected government of the Palestinian Authority.

And so that is the primary function of General Ward. He will also assist when the parties need it, and again, not to supplant the direct talks on security between the parties but to help as needed. And there is a function that when it is needed to report some information on how things are going in terms of what the Palestinians are being able to do in the security field and the like, I would expect him to be able to report back to me and indeed to the Quartet.

But I want to be very clear that it is a monitoring function. We aren't anticipating large numbers of Americans out observing in Tulkarem. We are talking about a monitoring function which, for instance, I believe that ambassadors have done before for the United States. And we had a mission of this sort during the Aqaba period and it would be similar to that.

But I'm going to say to General Ward first, second, third and fourth, I want you to work with your counterparts, Egypt, Jordan -- the European Union has a very fine representative on security forces -- and help the Palestinians reform their security forces, because that is the key.

And if I could just clear up one other thing. I think I may have used the word with General Ward -- Richard tells me I did, anyway -- "relocate," which got the General's attention. He will remain in Europe but will travel frequently to the region.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay. Let's go to USA Today down here.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, Barbara Slavin of *USA Today*. I wanted to go back to the Iran question just a little bit. The Iranians have told the Europeans that they will be reevaluating their talks with them in March and that they do want to see some sort of incentive. And Javier Solana said in response to a question that he does expect to hear back from the United States within a couple of weeks. That is what he said.

So I know you said there was no deadline, but is it realistic to assume that there will be some sort of decision on, say, WTO applications by Iran by the end of this month?

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, Barbara, let me just again state what it is we're trying to do, what the President is considering. What the President is considering is how can he -- given what he heard in Europe, how can he support the Europeans in the effort that they are making to get the Iranians to sign onto a program of cessation ultimately,

suspension for the time being, of their activities, the enrichment activities. Because there is no confidence in many quarters now of the international community that the Iranians are not trying, under cover of civilian nuclear power, to build a nuclear weapon. That's what this is about.

So I think we can concentrate too much on this incentive or that incentive. Let's remember what it is we're trying to do. The President is going to consider it. He is talking to his advisors. There is no deadline, but obviously we will try to do it as soon as we can and in a timely fashion to try to help in any way that we can with what the Europeans are trying to do.

MR. BOUCHER: Okay. We'll go to the gentleman down here on the end.

QUESTION: (Inaudible), Saudi Arabia. There are reports coming from the Minister of Foreign U.S. two days ago about the human rights in Saudi Arabia and it's not satisfied with the human rights, as I understand. What do you want the Saudi Government to do? What do you want them to hear from you and what do you want to hear from them?

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. Well, the President said in a couple of his speeches that we also expect our friends to recognize human dignity, human rights and the democratic impulse. There are some positive signs in Saudi Arabia. The municipal elections there are a positive sign. But we will be very straightforward with our Saudi friends and they are our friends. This is a relationship that has been strategic for a long time with which we do -- a government with which we do many things, including fighting the war on terrorism.

But obviously, the human rights concerns are there. There's a published report on it. We have not tried to hide it from anyone and we will most especially not hide our concerns from the Saudi Government. We will make them known to the Saudi Government.

MR. BOUCHER: I think we have time for one more. Let's go to the lady on the aisle in the second row back there.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mrs. Rice, pardon me, my English is not very good. I am (inaudible) from Radio Monte Carlo from Paris. What if Syria refused to get out of Lebanon and does U.S.A. think that -- of a possibility of a military action since your forces are on the border, on Syrian and Iraqi border?

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Your English is just fine, thank you very much.

The Syrians know what they need to do. They've been told now by the UN Security Council what they need to do. We have also said to the Syrians that the support for the Iraqi insurgency that is coming from Syrian territory has got to stop. And there is the issue of the support for -- that is coming from Syrian territory for Palestinian rejectionists like the Palestinian Islamic Jihad that was, we have reason to believe, based in Syria at the time of those attacks.

So this is a long list of concerns about a Syria that is standing in the way of Lebanese, Iraqis, Palestinians and others in their aspirations for a better world. Now, we have used sanctions against the Syrians. We are using international pressure with the Syrians. And so I think we have a very good set of steps that we've taken and will continue to take to get the Syrian Government's attention and hopefully to spur the Syrian Government to action.

And I think at this point in time we believe that we have done what we need to do. The President always looks to see what else is needed, but at this point the pressure of the international community is quite palpable on Syria; and rather than making excuses or trying to set conditions about what must happen before they live up their international obligations, they really should get about to living up to their international obligations.

Thank you very much.

MR. BOUCHER: Thank you very much. Ladies and gentleman, I'm sorry but that's all we have time for.

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