

Other State

[KEYWORD SEARCH](#) |

[Home](#) | [Issues & Press](#) | [Travel & Business](#) | [Countries](#) | [Youth & Education](#) | [Careers](#) | [About State](#)

You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2006 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [February 2006 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

Interview With Marcel Ghanem of Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC
February 14, 2006

(4:40 p.m. EST)

QUESTION: (In progress)and the historical transformations in Lebanon since 14 February 2005 and until now we have with us the U.S. Secretary of State Mrs. Condoleezza Rice and an interview about those major changes and about the future.

Mrs. Rice, good evening, and thank you for giving us an interview. This is a very important for Lebanon and for the Arab world.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, good evening, and it's very good to be with you.

QUESTION: Mrs. Rice, at the outset, what is your message for the Lebanese on the first commemoration of Prime Minister Hariri's assassination and his companions?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, like everyone around the world, we here in the United States were shocked and saddened by the tragic assassination of Prime Minister Hariri. And today's commemoration in the streets of Lebanon reminds us how much the Lebanese people value their freedom, how much the Lebanese people value their democracy. This great nation of people from all walks of life today, from all aspects of Lebanese society came into the streets in a peaceful manner to demonstrate that Lebanon intends to have a free and democratic and tolerant society. And it reminded me that, though the death of Prime Minister Hariri was indeed a sad and tragic one, it was not in vain because it mobilized the Lebanese people to seek their freedom and seek their democracy and it was heartening and it was inspirational and the United States wants to stand with the people of Lebanon as they pursue this democratic future.



QUESTION: Mrs. Rice is the change that you have dreamt about for Lebanon fully achieved and if not, what does it still lack?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the road to democracy is always hard and days like today allow the Lebanese people together, to commemorate the start of their democratic transition and to recommit to the ideals of Prime Minister Hariri and those who are pursuing this democratic ideal. I saw the flags of Lebanon and I thought that it was a tremendous expression of what Lebanon can and will be, but of course the road is hard. There are many economic reforms that need to be made. There are still political -- there's still a political evolution that needs to take place, as Resolution 1559 of the United Nations Security Council is fully implemented. We would hope that the presidency of Lebanon will become one of which the Lebanese people can all be proud and one that looks to the future of Lebanon, not to its past.

And of course we continue to stand by the Lebanese people so that the Lebanese people know that they will not be intimidated by their neighbors. The international community insists that Syria in Resolution 1559 be true to that resolution and that there not to be interference in Lebanese affairs and that there not be intimidation of the Lebanese people. So there's still a long road ahead; we understand that, but the democratic journey has clearly begun. The Lebanese people are clearly committed to it and the United States and the international community want to stand by Lebanon while it achieves that goal.

QUESTION: Mrs. Rice on this day many political leaders in Lebanon demanded the resignation of President Lahud. A while ago you said that the Lebanese should unite around the issue of presidency. Are you calling for President Lahud to take the decision of resigning, for instance?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, of course, this is a decision that has to be made in the Lebanese political context, but I think it's everyone's view that the presidency should be something that looks to the future in Lebanon, not to its past. It should be a presidency that looks to a truly independent Lebanon, not to a Lebanon that remembers a foreign occupation and foreign influences that were deep through security forces and through nontransparent means. And so the presidency ought to be one that is of the future Lebanon.

This is, of course, all in the context of the freeing of Lebanese political institutions of foreign influences and the freeing of Lebanese political institutions of their past.

QUESTION: Mrs. Rice, Lebanese political leaders, and specifically Mr. Saad Hariri, gave the impression that there is a U.S. deadline for the implementation of the 1559. What is this deadline or is it an open deadline?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, there isn't a deadline for the implementation of Resolution 1559 and it's not, of course, a U.S. resolution; it's a Security Council resolution, and so it is an international obligation of Lebanon to live up to Resolution 1559. We do understand that the Lebanese political system is evolving and that this is a transition period, but ultimately you cannot have a political system in which people try to be both part of the political system and try to maintain an armed militia. That simply isn't acceptable in any political context.

And so Lebanon needs to work through this, but our very strong view is that all aspects of 1559, including the disarmament of militias, must take place in order for Lebanon to gain its complete and rightful place in the international system.

QUESTION: Was the Deputy Saad Hariri capable of convincing you that Hezbollah is not a militia?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, our view is -- our view toward Hezbollah has not changed. It is an organization that has committed terrorist acts, not just against the people of the Middle East but, in fact, against Americans. And so it is a terrorist organization and it has to give up terrorism and it has to disarm.

The Lebanese political system is obviously one that is complex and is still in transition, but ultimately Resolution 1559 did not make distinctions about armed militias. It talked about the importance of there being one authority for Lebanon and one army for Lebanon; in fact, that the international community wants to help Lebanon develop its national security forces, its national army that can control all of Lebanon's territory on behalf of the Lebanese people. That is the issue before the international community and therefore the issue before Lebanon.

QUESTION: Mrs. Rice, how does Washington look at the meeting and the agreement that took place between General Aoun, whom you met in Lebanon, and Hezbollah? Were you surprised by this meeting? Do you approve this meeting and is it an entrance to the access between Syria and Iran versus Washington?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, anything that happens in Lebanese political life at this point must be in the context of Lebanon's international obligations. And Lebanon's international obligations are clear under Resolution 1559 to disarm all militias and to have a national army. Nothing is said in Resolution 1559 about resistance movements, nothing is said in Resolution 1559 about militias, except that no distinction is made between those. And therefore, the international community expects that there will be the disarmament of all militias including Hezbollah.

Now, there is a political transition that is underway and we have been, I think, more than willing to have this all take place in a Lebanese context, but Lebanon does need to remember its obligations under Resolution 1559. I will say that the international community is supportive of what Prime Minister Siniora is doing, supportive of the effort of the Lebanese Government to be a functioning and working political system and government so that it can get about the business of economic reform, political reform so that the people of Lebanon can have a better future. But this resolution must be kept at the heart of whatever Lebanese political figures do.

QUESTION: What is the fate of the economic forum for Beirut now that you have requested the Lebanese Government to ensure a consensus around a plan for economic reform?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the desire for economic reform is one that, of course, we share with the Lebanese Government. There has to be economic reform. Lebanon faces a crushing debt burden at this point. Lebanon faces a statist economy that doesn't function very well, where entrepreneurship and private enterprise are -- need to be greater encouraged. Lebanon has to root out corruption there.

There are a lot of very difficult economic reforms ahead, but the advantage to economic reform is that it then brings economic benefit and it also brings with it the support of the international financial

institutions, of donors around the world who want to work with Lebanon for an economic future that will be bright and prosperous, but the reforms need to be taken by the Lebanese Government. I, myself, have had discussions with the Prime Minister and with other ministers of Lebanon that I think understand what needs to be done. But it is extremely important that the economic reforms be taken, that they be taken seriously, so that Lebanon can get the kind of international financial support that it needs to build a prosperous and functioning economy.

QUESTION: Mrs. Rice, our last question. Some political forces are saying that Syria is trying to make Lebanon another Iraq and some are saying that al-Qaida members are infiltrating in Lebanon through Syria. What is the position of Washington towards this?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we believe that the policies of Syria are harmful to several of its neighbors: harmful to the people of Iraq, who simply want the insurgent forces in Iraq to stop killing innocent Iraqi children, and the forces that come in through Syria are, of course, therefore harmful to the people of Iraq; harmful to the people of the Palestinian territories, as they support rejectionist forces that continue to frustrate the efforts to have a more peaceful future there; and especially harmful to the people of Lebanon, not only in allowing the infiltration of groups that might cause harm to the Lebanese people, but also in supporting on Lebanese territory terrorist groups, Palestinian terrorist groups. It was a disgrace when in Damascus there was a meeting of terrorist groups to talk about activities that might take place in the future. And of course, the Syrians continue to create an atmosphere of intimidation and insecurity in Lebanon that we think lead directly to the kinds of assassination attempts -- assassinations, successful assassinations, that have taken place against Lebanese political figures and Lebanese journalists and Lebanese civil society figures, like Mr. Tuani who was gunned down not too long ago.

I think what the commemoration of the death of Prime Minister Hariri says today is to remind the Lebanese people that it's still a long road ahead to complete independence, to complete democracy, and to remind the international community that it must demand of Lebanon's neighbors, particularly of Syria which has had this terrible history of the 30-year occupation of Lebanon, that Syria is no longer going to be allowed to intimidate Lebanon, no longer going to be allowed to interfere in Lebanon's political system.

It is not a question of having good or bad relations with Syria. That's not the issue. We want Lebanon to have good relations with all of its neighbors. But it is an issue that Syria and Iran and other forces in the region should allow the Lebanese people to do what they came into the streets to express today, to build a nation that is at peace, that is prosperous, that is democratic and that is truly free. That is the dream of the international community for Lebanon, it is the dream of the United States for Lebanon, and I think it is the dream of the Lebanese people for themselves.

QUESTION: Does the U.S. Administration intend to change the regime in Syria or do you fear a chaos in Syria that you cannot deal with for the time being?

SECRETARY RICE: We have been very clear that our concern is the behavior of the Syrian regime. The Syrian regime needs to change its behavior. It is a negative force in the Middle East and it needs to become a positive force in the Middle East. And I think that if the international community remains united in requiring Syrian adherence to Resolutions 1559 and 1595, complete cooperation with the investigation of the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri, and makes very clear to Syria and indeed to Iran that the Lebanese people deserve a future that is one in which Lebanon is for the Lebanese and in which the decisions are made by the Lebanese, then Lebanon will be well on its way to a peaceful future.

QUESTION: We hope that this dream will indeed be fulfilled. We thank you for your interview, Mrs. Condoleezza Rice, for giving us this interview through LBC and we hope to meet you soon again.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. And thank you very much for the interview.

2006/188

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

Published by the U.S. Department of State Website at <http://www.state.gov> maintained by the Bureau of Public Affairs.