
Remarks En Route To Berlin, Germany

Secretary Condoleezza Rice
En Route Berlin, Germany
March 29, 2006

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SECRETARY RICE: ... I am, as you know, off to Europe, and so are you, and I just wanted to talk a little bit about the meetings in Berlin, in particular the meetings of the P-5 + 1. The first point I would make is that we've increasingly found this a useful forum in which to address one of the most important issues in the international system at this time, and that is the Iranian nuclear program and the behavior of Iran. And in this session we'll have a chance to look ahead. We have the presidential statement. The presidential statement is an international voice to the Iranians that they need to suspend their activities, return to negotiations and that they continue to be isolated by what is the unanimous view of the Security Council that they must take the steps that the IAEA has demanded. Given that we don't now have to negotiate text, we will really have an opportunity to sit and look ahead to what next steps we might wish to take. We'll also have a chance to look ahead and talk not just about the nuclear program but about the broader concerns about Iran on terrorism, given the issues in Syria and Lebanon, on which, by the way, this same group has associated in Security Council resolutions. We can talk about the situation with Iran in the Palestinian territories and of course we can talk about the nature of the Iranian regime and the kinds of comments that are coming out of Iran that show that this regime is really -- is a troublesome regime for peace and stability in the Middle East.

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QUESTION: Could you -- I don't know if this is going to come up in your discussions with Chancellor Merkel and with French President Chirac, but now that the Israeli elections are over and now that Hamas has now assumed the leadership of the Palestinian legislature, where do things stand in terms of aid to the Palestinians? What sorts of decisions do you expect to make with the other leaders and in the United States Government on this issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, our review of Palestinian assistance programs is drawing to a close. I mean, we've done the work, we've got a few more consultations to do, but it's drawing to a close. And I would expect to be able to look at some decisions pretty soon. I'm going to be away for a little while so that may well delay it. But the principle is very clear: We're not going to fund a Hamas-led government, provide funding to a Hamas-led government, but we are going to see what we can do to increase humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people and what mechanisms we can use to do that to make certain that the money is not indeed supporting the Hamas-led government.

I know that others are making similar reviews and similar decisions. We probably will have a chance to talk. A lot of the assistance, of course, for Britain and for France and for Germany comes through the European Union and we'll continue to have discussions with them as well. But we've been very much on the same page that what Hamas needs to do is to accept the Quartet requirements so that it can govern effectively and so that the world can support it. So I think that's where we are.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up. Well, what sorts of decisions do you have to make? Is it in terms of the level of aid or the types of things?

SECRETARY RICE: Level of aid is one of the questions. Really trying to sort what is humanitarian and what can go through NGOs, what kinds of aid might in fact get diverted, and so you want to avoid that. But we're trying to be as generous as possible to the Palestinian people because we know they have severe humanitarian needs. And we said on the first day that we were not going to cut off food assistance or refugee assistance or medical assistance to Palestinians. You have to go through program by program because sometimes categorizing is not that simple and we've had long histories of how we've delivered these. It's only recently that we delivered any direct aid to the Palestinian Authority in any case, but I think we just -- you know, it's taken some time to go through it, but those are the kinds of decisions that you have to make.

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QUESTION: Back to the Middle East. Madame Secretary, now that Hamas has taken control of the government there, what becomes of the U.S. relationship with President Abbas? Do you still think that he has some leverage over there or is it something that you're going to have to move on and find another partner?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, President Abbas is still the duly elected President of the Palestinian Authority. He was elected by 63 or 64 percent last January and that is a statutory position -- January of last year. Sorry, when, in April? January of last year. So he is still the duly elected President of the Palestinian Authority. He has been the principal contact with the Quartet, for instance. I talked to him myself about six or seven days ago. So I think that he still is someone who stands for the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, someone who still stands for a rejection of terrorism and violence as a way to end that conflict, and therefore someone who obviously because of the way that the Palestinians elected him also stands for many of the aspirations of his people. And so I think there is considerable value in that.

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QUESTION: Madame Secretary, to return to the Middle East for a second, the Israeli elections this week were won by Kadima and obviously on a platform of even if they have to unilaterally setting Israel's borders by 2010. The United States has always made its preference known for a negotiated settlement. You have problems with Hamas, but there's President Abbas there. Are you comfortable with this unilateral approach there and will you be pressing for negotiations at some point down the track?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, I think we'll have to let the Israeli Government be formed so that we then have a means or we have interlocutors with which to have a discussion about how Israel sees the future. Of course everyone would like to see a negotiated solution. That's what the roadmap is all about. I would note that the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was supported by the United States and ultimately by the international community. So I think it depends on what is being discussed here and that turned out to be a coordinated unilateral withdrawal. So I wouldn't on the face of it just say absolutely we don't think there's any value in what the Israelis are talking about, but I also can't -- we can't support it because we don't know. We haven't had a chance to talk with them about what they have in mind.

I would note that if you're going to have a negotiation though, you have to have partners. And the Palestinian Government that has just been sworn in does not accept the concept of a negotiated solution. What they say is that they retain the right to violence, they do not accept that the other party is actually legitimate or even has the right to exist. On that basis with that government, it's going to be hard to imagine a negotiation.

So that's the reason that I think you're getting so much from both the Quartet and from many of the Arab states that there needs to be a recognition by the new Palestinian Government that negotiation requires two parties and it usually requires you to recognize the right to exist of the other party as well as the primacy of negotiation and not to support violence.

QUESTION: (Inaudible.)

SECRETARY RICE: I think, look, you have a Palestinian Government. President Abbas retains certain authority as president, but we can't ignore the fact that there is also a Palestinian Government that does not recognize the requirements of the Quartet and of the roadmap and indeed the requirements that are necessary for negotiation.

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