

## Press Availability With German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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**FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER:** (Via interpreter) ...

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be able to welcome here today the American Secretary of State. It's actually not her first visit to Berlin and we're very happy to have her here with us again. And I'm quite aware of the fact that this is indeed a burden on her at the – because it comes at the end of a visit that she paid to six countries in the Middle East and now she's dropping in on – giving us the opportunity to share with us her impressions and the results of her trip to the region.

Thank you very much indeed for this, Secretary of State, because this provides us with the opportunity to go into the General Affairs Council of the European Prime Ministers next Monday the President of the European Union being in a position to share these impressions. Now, we've just had a first exchange of views which focused surprisingly on the Middle East, but this is not going to be the only topic on our agenda tonight. We will discuss other items later today. Now, as to the Middle East, allow me to say the following. Again a word of thanks to you, Condi, for showing the commitment that you have shown to provide new impulses and to the talks that have been resumed between the Israelis and the Palestinians. I believe that to be very important indeed and I also believe it to be important that the international community, given the situation we're finding ourselves in, makes it very clear that they are working together and with determination towards the same objective. And that we are making a contribution in our own different ways to seeing that the conflict parties, Israel and the Palestinians, can move towards each other.

Of course, as concerns the political readiness of the parties to the conflict cannot – this is not something that we can do in their stead. But what we can do is provide impulses and be ready to help them in those situations where they cannot make headway without outside support. The revival of the Middle East Quartet proposal could offer such a possibility. We've talked about that more than once over the last few weeks and months and we both believe that the time has come for a meeting of the Quartet members and both of us expect this meeting to take place early soon, probably at the beginning of February which would then take place in Washington, D.C.

Now, as to the Middle East itself, I trust that you too have observed the fact that President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert have not only talked to each other, but in those talks also it has cast first concrete steps and agreed on such first concrete steps. So of course these steps have to be followed by further steps. But apart and beyond from this fact, steps like these always touch upon the issue of what kind of political horizon we can create for the people in the region. We do have to ask ourselves how we can see to it that the shared vision of a two-state solution can become reality. And indeed, a response to that question is more urgently required these days than ever. And therefore I believe it to be right if we set about now trying to find an answer to that question.

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**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, thank you very much, Minister Frank-Walter for welcoming me here. Thank you very much for taking the time this evening to talk about the very broad agenda that we have. I am delighted to be here in Germany because I think that after the trip to the Middle East and given the extremely broad global agenda that we share, it is important that we have these consultations. I am very much looking forward to working with Germany during its presidency of the European Union. I look forward to my meeting with Chancellor Merkel tomorrow.

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I do look forward to inviting the members of the Quartet to Washington during the week of January 29th, probably toward the end of the week, in other words, the 1st of February or the 2nd of February. And so I look forward to that meeting as we reenergize the Quartet in its efforts to support the progress in the Middle East that could lead to a two-state solution and Israel and a Palestinian state living side by side in peace, democracy and freedom.

So thank you very much and I gather we're going to take a few of your questions, if you'd like.

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**QUESTION:** What can the Germans – Madame Secretary of State, what can the Germans do in negotiating a peace in the Middle East? What do you expect from the Germans as European chefs for six months?

And one question for Foreign Minister Steinmeier, what do you expect concerning the reestablishment of the Quartet or is this just a charm offensive?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first, Germany as both a member and, of course, now as the president of the European Union, is a member of the Quartet, and it's important to recognize that we have a roadmap that was internationally agreed. It has the backing of Israelis and Palestinians, but it also has the backing of the entire international system. And the Quartet is the guardian, in a sense, of that roadmap. And so I would expect that as we try to accelerate progress on the roadmap, the Quartet would try and lend assistance to the parties as they try to do it.

I will give you an example that was not a roadmap example. But for instance, when we had the movement and access agreement, the European Union has been playing a very important role monitoring at Rafah. And so there are concrete things that members of the Quartet do in response to the needs of the parties. But I think it's also going to be important as this moves forward, as hopefully it will, that the Quartet continue, as the Minister put it, to give an impulse to these discussions. Because undoubtedly, they will reach difficult moments, they will reach times when things are not moving forward, and the Quartet, because of its composition, Russia, the United Nations, the European Union and the United States, has the capacity to keep pushing the process forward. And so I very much look forward to working with the Minister in that regard.

**FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER:** Madame (inaudible), perhaps I may add something. I think it would be a misunderstanding to assume that the Quartet was an end in itself, you know, just a former framework because that's not what it is about. The Quartet cannot force upon others that they engage in peace efforts, you know, if the efforts are not there in the region as such.

But the situation we find ourselves in now is somewhat different. We have had first talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. And given the situation, the Quartet under such circumstances in a situation where the conflict parties start to talk, can sort of moderate in selecting the agenda items that ought to be put on the agenda first, can sound out, you know, and in so doing, can have a very important steering function. And because of this being so, I've always pleaded in favor of a meeting of the Quartet because we put an end to these competing ideas that are being presented by separate countries, individuals countries, you know. But the Quartet allows us to sort of bundle and in so doing, strengthen our common efforts. And I am confident that we are going to succeed.

And this is a response to your second question, I believe that the American Secretary of State, by traveling to the region, by talking to the people who she talked to and by achieving the results she has achieved, has made it quite clear that this is not a charm offensive but that is about more that the American Government, the American Administration is trying to assist the efforts aiming at stabilization in the region and supporting peace in the region.

(In German.)

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**QUESTION:** (Via interpreter.) Minister, a question – Mr. Minister, a question addressed to you. The Quartet meeting that is now being scheduled for the beginning of February, what relationship does it have to the three-way talks that the Secretary of State, Madame Rice, hinted at? What – at what meeting are you going to talk about the strategy, for what meeting?

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**FOREIGN MINISTER STEINMEIER:** (Via interpreter.) If I may respond to the first part of your question, I think from the fact that we are meeting here and now, you may glean that we're not only trying to harmonize our efforts, but that we are actually in the process of doing so. We've just talked about the signaled three-way talks. There's a desire expressed on the part of the Palestinians and also on the part of the Israelis that direct talks ought to take place between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas under the guidance and accompanied by the American Administration.

For me, this is anything but an impediment; on the contrary. I think it is a supportive action for the steps that hopefully are to follow at the horizon end at a later point in time. And I think the American Secretary of State is going to say it in her own words, these three-way talks -- there has not been a date yet set for these three-way talks, so it's still outstanding whether that is a meeting that is going to take place first or whether the Quartet meeting will come before it.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes, I'm happy to say I believe that we will need to prepare the talks between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas and the ones that I will help to facilitate. I expect that that will take still a few weeks and I do think it will be useful to have a meeting with the Quartet in advance of that meeting, in fact, so that as Minister Steinmeier has said, there are a lot of ideas floating around about how we might get the Israeli-Palestinian peace process back on track. And I think to get together and actually talk about how those ideas relate to one another is going to be a very useful thing because we want to have a concerted and unified effort, not multiple efforts, and I think that the Quartet is a very useful mechanism for the coordination and integration of international efforts.

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