



## Briefing En Route to Kabul

**Secretary Condoleezza Rice**

En Route to Kabul  
October 12, 2005

**SECRETARY RICE:** Good morning. Is everyone wide awake? I guess yesterday was a little rough wasn't it.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, I wasn't tired, no (laughter), not at all, not at all. Well, we're on our way now to Afghanistan and then you probably know that we are then going to make a stop in Pakistan after Kabul.

Afghanistan is almost four years to the day from the liberation by coalition forces and I think it's fair to say that the Afghans are now opening a new chapter in their lives, not only has the country been liberated but the Bonn process has been completed and they have now a foundation for a democratic society. They have a freely elected president. They have a freely elected parliament. They're in the process of building capable ministries. I think you can only say that Afghanistan has made remarkable progress. There's obviously still work to do, and I do want to go to Afghanistan and tell the Afghan people how impressed the international community and the United States, in particular, is with their progress thus far but then to talk about the next steps. And I think the next steps are several.

First of all, to begin to think about what the post-Bonn, international process will look like. I think everybody believes that there needs to be some kind of follow on to Bonn, to keep the international community's intense involvement with Afghanistan, while it continues to try to root out terrorism and while it continues to try to consolidate its democracy and rebuild its economy. So there have been some conversations with others about how we might structure a post-Bonn period and so I'm going to talk to the Afghans about that.

Secondly, to talk to the Afghans about the remaining considerable difficulty, as I mentioned yesterday, with narcotics. I'm going to have a meeting with the members of the cabinet who are responsible for the narcotics problem and to discuss with them how we might accelerate those efforts. We and the British -- the British, of course, have the lead on this -- to help the Afghans to root out narcotics. If they can do that then I think they really have made a major step forward in stabilization -- they will have made a major step forward in stabilization.

The third is that obviously in the post-Bonn -- post-Bonn one process and with the successes that they've had against the Taliban, there is a lot of discussion going on about making certain that the military structures are appropriate to the new tasks ahead, as well as finishing the war on terrorism. And there has been discussion in NATO about strengthening ISAF. There is discussion about new PRTs that might be developed in parts of the country, about the transfer of PRTs from some state to other states. It's not surprising that the military -- the provincial reconstruction teams, the civil-military unified teams that are out in remote parts of Afghanistan. So we'll talk about making certain that the military structures are appropriate to this new period.

And then fourth, it's really time to have serious discussions with the Afghans about how they're going to build a sustainable economy over time. I think it's fair to say that for a country that had 25 years of civil war, a lot of the traditional economic patterns and strengths have simply been broken. Afghanistan was once the major land bridge in that region. It depended a lot on being able to be a transit point for goods and services in that region.

I said yesterday when I was talking with a Kyrgyz, and I will again when talking with the Kazakhs and Tajiks, that obviously Central Asia wants Afghanistan, as a region, could have considerable potential. But we've got to talk about how to build a sustainable economy in Afghanistan, what is going to be its basis in agriculture. How do you build a sustainable agricultural economy for exports, given the deteriorated state of the Afghan infrastructure? So roads are very desperately needed. How should we think about trade relations moving forward?

It's actually a very pleasant task to be talking about how to make a sustainable Afghan economy, because it shows that it's becoming a normalized country and that's very important. I've asked Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, Josette Sheeran Shiner, to lead a U.S. Government effort to look at these questions and she's going to be working with Faryar Shirzad at the White House on making sure that we pull together all of the elements to help the Afghans work this through and work it through with the international financial institutions. So that's the quite heavy agenda in Afghanistan, but it will be my second trip to Afghanistan and it comes at a time when the Afghans have turned a new page, and I think are moving smartly along the road.

We're then going on to Pakistan where, first and foremost, I do want to simply say to the Pakistani people and affirm with them that the international community and the United States -- the people of the United States are with them in this terrible time. The devastation is really quite extraordinary and so I want to reach out in that way, but it's also the case that the Pakistanis have made a broad appeal for international assistance. They are going to go through relief and rescue and recovery and ultimately they're going to have to go through reconstruction. Everybody understands that that's going to be a long-term process and that the international community is going to have to be mobilized to help them.

I have meetings scheduled with the president and with the prime minister to talk about how they see the road ahead and then, since I am going on to Europe, including to talk with Jack Straw and the presidency of the European Union, I would hope to be able to communicate directly some of the concerns and needs of the Pakistani leadership to those with whom I meet.

I'm also going to ask that we -- we will, inside the U.S. Government again, put together a task force that can look at this as a longer-term issue of how we help with others and with the international community and with the international financial institutions, which I'm sure will be involved to support the Pakistanis in this difficult time.

But I should just mention that I've also -- I spoke a couple of days ago with the Indian Foreign Minister as well. There's been devastation in India as well and India has reached out to Pakistan. Pakistan has accepted that help, so that's a very positive development in their relations. And I'm going to leave General Odierno here, who can talk to you more about the specifics of what we're doing on the ground in Pakistan to give you some detail about that. I might just mention that it's been a little bit off the front pages, but Guatemala of course also experienced devastating events out of the mudslides and we have rescue efforts going on there as well, so that's where we going. So, yes, Anne.

**QUESTION:** Will you be going to Pakistan with any new promises of U.S. aid or do you anticipate that there is further aid coming soon?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, our initial response was to try to get as many assets on the ground as we could to help with relief and recovery. And so General Odierno will describe to you what we've done there and, of course, we've made \$50 million available in immediate aid. I'm quite certain that as the needs emerge that the United States is going to need to do more, and I will go and have discussions with the Pakistanis about what other kinds of assistances is going to be needed. But I have no doubt that the United States is going to need to do more.

**QUESTION:** Can you fill us in on how talks are going with NATO to take over more of the security needs in Afghanistan and whether this could lead to a draw down in U.S. troops strength?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, discussions are going on within NATO really about two issues. One is about how to strengthen the ISAF command and make certain that the appropriate rules of engagement are there because some of the NATO forces may be moving into areas that are a little less pacific than some of the areas that they've been in. And so that's one set of discussion that's going on.

The other is how to support provincial reconstruction teams, perhaps in other parts of the country. There's going to be considerable movement and reshuffling of forces, I think around the region, which is a natural thing as needs are changing and NATO command is just trying to make sure that it all makes sense in terms of securing -- continuing to secure the country. U.S. force levels are constantly reviewed in terms of what is actually needed there and I think we'll just have to see. It's a needs-based assessment. Obviously things are changing in Afghanistan and over the next several months, I think we'll have to see what the effect is of the really now seating of a permanent stable government on Karzai's efforts at reconciliation and repatriation of low-level Taliban. And there are still quite a bit of hardcore al-Qaida and Taliban out in certain parts of the country and I'm sure we're going to be fighting them for a while.

But I think U.S. troop levels are definitely going to be reviewed, but they'll be reviewed with an eye toward what needs -- remains to be done and making sure, not so much just the troop levels, but making sure the mix is right given the changing circumstances on the ground.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, just a little bit out of your region, but how many Afghan police and military have been trained to date? And how do you respond, Karzai in recent days has begun to say that the United States shouldn't be able to just indiscriminately target various sites?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'll get you the numbers, Andrea. The number of Afghan army forces is somewhere in the 30,000 range, I believe. But I'll get you the numbers. The counterterrorism fight goes on, and I think that Karzai understands that the counterterrorism fight is continuing. He has been the strongest supporter of rooting out the Taliban and rooting out the al-Qaida when they are there. Now, obviously what we don't want to do is to complicate the politics in regions. And as the politics changes, so then too can what we need to do. But I would -- Karzai has been such a strong supporter of our operations that I just don't read much into that particular comment. He says that he is absolutely devoted to dealing with the terrorism threat.

Do you have those numbers, yeah? Yeah, the Afghan National Army is 26,300, yeah, so I'd say close to 30,000. And then Ministry of Interior is around 52,000.

**QUESTION:** Two things: first of all there was an attack this morning and two rockets landed close to the U.S. Embassy. Are you concerned at all and could you tell us anything more about the attack? And secondly, the warlords have done very well in the elections. Is the United States concerned about the rise, again, of the very people whose rule contributed to the emergence of the Taliban?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, on the rocket attack, I'm aware that it's there, but we've heard to reason to believe that there's any, particularly changed security environment. It happens from time to time and so it doesn't change our plans.

In terms of the composition of the parliament, people ran on a variety of platforms. To my knowledge, nobody ran on the platform of taking Afghanistan back to the Taliban, including some of those who had fought the Taliban as mujahideen. And I think you have to understand that in Afghanistan some of these people who fought the mujahideen, fought as mujahideen against the Soviets and then during the civil war, are viewed differently than they might be viewed from the outside. And they call on, in certain regions, a certain respect for what they did during the civil war.

Now we're believers in institutions and in the effect of democratic institutions on how people behave. I might note that the Afghan parliament is also heavily populated by women, much more so than anybody expected, and that a few of the women who won seats were some of the ones who've been the harshest critics of those who are going to be sitting next to them now in the parliament. So this is a democratic process. Afghanistan is a country in transition. It is, I think perfectly -- it's unsurprising that you're going to have a variety of backgrounds and experiences that are going to populate this parliament. But the most important thing is it's a democratically elected parliament. It's now accountable to the Afghan people and when you talk to the Afghan people they want security, which means they want an end to the kind of conflicts and terrorism and warlordism that has affected Afghanistan.

Secondly, they want economic development. They want jobs and they want the ability to pursue a better life. And third, they want respect for their own individual rights and liberties, which they won in a very hard way and I think they're going to demand it from anybody who's in the parliament.

**QUESTION:** Thank you Madame Secretary, to take you to another subject, Iraqi's constitution remains in flux. Reports suggesting now a compromise whereby a committee will be named by the new parliament, the new Assembly that can revise what they already have. I just wondered if you have reaction to this and when will this be done? Will it help get the Sunnis to participate?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, it is a moving target (laughter) at this point. They're still discussing, they're still talking, they're still trying to improve the chances that all of the -- or that the majority of the parties in Iraq feel that this is a constitution that represents their interests. And I don't think we help them really by trying to do a play-by-play on what's going on there. This is obviously a very intense political time in Iraq. But, surprise, politics has broken out in a newly democratic Iraq, and I think it's really quite remarkable that they are -- what they're really trying to do is to use politics and compromise to resolve very deep cleavages and differences that they used to resolve by violence and repression, and that's really what's going on here. And so we'll see how they come out.

Whatever happens with the referendum and we will -- our role has been simply to encourage them to vote. Whatever happens with the referendum, they do have elections coming up in December. Everybody says that they're continuing to look toward those December elections and so the political process is on the way in a very healthy manner.

**QUESTION:** Are you really saying that we had nothing to do with this? That Ambassador Khalilzad wasn't behind the scenes?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I didn't say that Ambassador Khalilzad was not involved in this; I said it's remarkable that Iraqis have wanted to try and do this through compromise and through politics. And I can tell you, if you were to talk to Zal, he would tell you the politics was very intense. He's been able, because he has very good relations with people, to go back and forth and be a go between, but this is Iraqi politics that's involved, not American politics.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, on the one hand your visit shows continued support for Afghanistan. But on the other, you're already prepared to talk about reviewing U.S. troop levels. Now given that after the Soviet Union was ejected from Afghanistan, after the Afghan people felt the United States abandoned them, do you not worry that that's the sort of fear that you're inspiring in them now?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Saul, let's quote me correctly. I said American troop levels are always being reviewed in the context of the needs on the ground. And I want it written that way because that's what I said: American troop levels are always being reviewed in regards to what's going on, on the ground. NATO is reviewing also the structure of our forces in Afghanistan because a lot has happened. Afghan forces are coming up in their levels and numbers. The Taliban -- there's a major reintegration effort going on that they're trying to bring the Taliban in. It would be surprising if we were not consistently looking at what kind of military presence is going to support this next phase.

But the Afghan people have nothing to worry about. Having made the mistake of leaving this region once before and having, first chaos and then the Taliban and then al-Qaida in Afghanistan, America's going to be with and in Afghanistan as long as we're needed. This is a long-term commitment to Afghanistan and I want that fundamentally understood.

The United States is committed to a long-term relationship with Afghanistan. That includes a long-term relationship in terms of its security, in terms of its economic development and in terms of its political stability. We're not going to make that mistake again.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, it seems -- there's an attack of some sort in Afghanistan almost every day. And the judgment is that the violence may have diminished slightly over the last year but barely so. And the various things you're talking about, the training of Afghani troops, increasing business investment, what do you think is actually going to change the violence situation, which remains perilous?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Joel, yes, there are attacks in Afghanistan, but I do not think that you can make the case that Afghanistan looks like it looked a year ago or two years or three years ago. When we drive down the streets of Afghanistan, I think you're going to see a bustling business community, people that are out on the streets. I was not there three years ago or two years ago, but people will tell you that that was not the picture that you saw.

Yes, there are some remnants of the Taliban that continue to be able to pull off an attack here or there. They have not been able to stop either of the elections that took place. They've not been able to stop the training and equipping of the Afghan security forces. This was a country that's come out of 25 years of civil war and in four years they have liberated themselves from the Taliban with our help. They have gone through a process that's given them a president and a parliament that are free and fairly elected. Economic life is returning to the country -- this is a remarkable change. And, yeah, some violence is going to continue, but this is a place that's come a very, very long way. And I think you'll start to see that people will invest.

And I've got to sit down, bye.

**2005/T15-7**

Released on October 12, 2005

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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