



Remarks With Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

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(10:30 a.m. EST)

PRESIDENT KARZAI: It is a great privilege to have the good opportunity of meeting once again -- and this time in London -- with Secretary Rice, a good friend of Afghanistan, a supporter of our country and a lady that always brings us good news, as we heard also today. Afghanistan is honored to have her friendship and partnership with her country. We discussed the security issue in Afghanistan, the partnership between us, questions in the region and the way ahead for Afghanistan as it grows and prospers further with the strength of its institutions in place. And I was very happy to hear today that the United States will remain committed to Afghanistan, will remain as a friend and an ally with us in the fight against terror and in helping Afghanistan move forward.

Thank you very much for the assurance, Madame Secretary. Welcome.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank, you, Mr. President. It is very good to be with you again and to have an opportunity here at this conference, first of all, with 60 countries to reaffirm our very strong commitment to Afghanistan and to its people's future. I think tomorrow we will have a chance to celebrate how much progress Afghanistan has made since the dark days when the Taliban ruled and oppressed the people of Afghanistan to the election of you as President and then as a freely elected parliament. It is quite a wonderful story and it is testament to the spirit of the Afghan people and their desire for liberty.



And we will also have an opportunity tomorrow to reassert the importance that the United States and the international community attach to our relationship with Afghanistan. We will talk about an Afghanistan compact. And we've been through the Bonn process and so we are entering a new phase with the freely elected Afghan Government and we look forward to opportunities to talk not just about foreign assistance for Afghanistan but about a road to sustainable economic growth and development for Afghanistan. Because the Afghan people, I am quite certain, when they have the right tools, that they will be able to stand on their own two feet in the international system, and that should be our goal.

In that regard, the United States has been very interested in marrying our government assistance programs with efforts by the private sector to open up the possibility of private sector development in a place like Afghanistan. We have an initiative that I'm going -- that I've talked to you about today, an initiative called Businesses Building Bridges, which will hopefully help to stimulate private sector development. These business leaders are going to lead private sector assistance in training and mentoring Afghan entrepreneurs in attracting future foreign investments and in leading business delegations to Afghanistan so that as the infrastructure and the economy grow, that it has a healthy private sector element to that growth.

I know, Mr. President, today you were -- by the U.S. Trade and Development Agency, you were named the -- were given the Country of the Year Award for the Building Bridges initiative. It's \$500,000 to train Afghan entrepreneurs, and I congratulate you on that honor. But I just want to say to the people of Afghanistan, as we will tomorrow, Afghanistan is a wonderful success story but we recognize that there is a long road ahead and you will have a good partner in the international community but especially in the United States. We look forward to a partner -- a stable, democratic Afghanistan, a warrior in the war against terrorism, as you have been; and we know that that will make for a more stable Afghanistan, a more stable region and a more stable world.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Great. Thank you very much.

You pick the questions. I'll just enjoy myself.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh my. Okay, in the back.

QUESTION: Yes, my question is this morning we listened to your Foreign Minister saying you want more funds for the public sector in Afghanistan, you want for your own (inaudible) the Afghanistan Government and here we think (inaudible). If you had the chance to choose between money being channeled into your public sector and money being channeled into the private sector or NGOs or sending more troops and so on, what would you prefer?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Well, the public sector, in my view, means the government and the administration -- that is one area that Afghanistan needs to be supported and strengthened in to enable it to deliver better services to its people. But the growth of the country, the engine of growth for any society, for any free country, democratic country especially, is in the private sector. So as much as Afghanistan would like support to enable to add to its capacity, we would also want support to strengthen the private sector in Afghanistan, strengthen investment in Afghanistan. That ultimately means a wealthier Afghanistan, a well-to-do Afghan society.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, the EU seems to be taking a wait-and-see approach to continued aid to a Hamas-led government for the Palestinians. Is there any daylight between you and the Europeans? And if Hamas were to fulfill the conditions that both you and the Europeans want them to, would you reconsider direct U.S. aid?

SECRETARY RICE: We have been very clear that we are waiting to see if Hamas is going to live up to the obligations that Palestinians have taken over now, the period of more than a decade, and to see whether or not they are going to also live up to the obligation that comes with governing, as they try to meet the aspirations of their people. I think that to say that a Palestinian government must be committed to peace with Israel is at the core of what we are saying. But quite clearly, to be committed to peace with Israel, you have to recognize Israel's right to exist. You have to renounce violence and terrorism. You cannot with one hand talk about peace with Israel and on the other hand countenance suicide bombings.

So, this is just a practical matter and I think we are all saying exactly the same thing, that there are choices now confronting Hamas and we will see what they do. We clearly want to be attentive to the humanitarian concerns of the Palestinian people. We know that they have humanitarian needs and we have said that we are going to review our assistance programs and that will be a process that we will begin, but we have a Quartet meeting in a little while where we can talk about these issues. But I think everybody is saying exactly the same thing -- there has got to be a peaceful road ahead and a peaceful road ahead has certain requirements. You can't be on the one hand dedicated to peace and on the other hand dedicated to violence. It's simply -- those two are irreconcilable.

QUESTION: (Inaudible)

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: I'm talking about Iran. There seems to be some disparity now between the European and the American position in regards to (inaudible). Apparently the opinion polls (inaudible) like John McCain (inaudible) were saying that we want to keep that leverage, I think is the phrase -- leverage of possible military action.

At the same time, you've got the Russian potential compromise to enrich the uranium for the Iranians, so there's no danger in using enriched uranium for military purposes. What's your message to Iran today?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, on the Russian proposal, we were supportive, first of all, with the way that the Russians structured the Bushehr nuclear reactor with a fuel take-back provision. We think the Russian proposal is a good basis for, perhaps, finding a way for the Iranians to have peaceful nuclear uses, because it does not permit the fuel cycle, the enrichment and reprocessing, which is the dangerous part of the fuel cycle, on Iranian territory.

That proposal, however, has been out there for some time. It's not as if the Russians proposed this last week. This has now been several months. So, when the Iranians now evince interest in the Russian proposal, one has to wonder if that isn't because they now face the prospect of referral to the Security Council. And even in evincing that interest, they have done so, saying that the Russian proposal is -- I believe they said inadequate to their cause.

So, let's remember what happened here. We, several months ago, tabled -- there was a resolution to refer the states that voted for that resolution and the Board of Governors agreed that we would not go through with a referral to give time for the Iranians to respond. And how did they respond? They responded by breaking their moratorium, ending negotiations, and breaking the seals on the equipment so that they could enrich and reprocess.

So, I think we've had our answer from the Iranian government. It's not a very satisfactory one. And I look forward to the meeting tonight of the P-5. I also look forward to the special meeting of the Board of Governors. But it seems to me we have quite a lot of agreement among the international community here that Iran should not be allowed to get a nuclear weapon and that also means denying them the technologies that could lead to breakout capacity for a nuclear weapon, that they need to suspend the activities that they have reengaged in and they need to go back to negotiations.

Differences about tactics and timing, there may be, but I don't hear anyone saying to the Iranians that they're on the right side of this issue. And so, the Iranians need to hear that message.

As to military issues, we have said that it is not on the agenda because we believe that there is a lot of life left in the diplomacy. There is a diplomatic solution for the taking. After all, going to the Security Council is not the end of diplomacy; it's just diplomacy in a different, more robust context. But the President of the United States doesn't take his options off the table and frankly, I don't think people should want the President of the United States to take his options off the table.

QUESTION: Dr. Rice, could you please explain the replacement of your forces with NATO forces and (inaudible) the south of Afghanistan, taking in account that your force -- European forces are not very sure about fighting the battle, I mean, the Enduring Freedom?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you. Let me start with the fact that the United States has a robust commitment to Afghanistan militarily, politically, economically and we're going to continue that robust presence because as long as the people of Afghanistan need American partnership they're going to have it. We made the mistake once before of leaving Afghanistan and not only did Afghans pay for it, Americans paid for it on September 11th. We're not going to make that mistake again.

We have 16,000 forces still in country, we are by far the largest presence in the country. It is true that there are some adjustments being made as the requirements change in different parts of the country. But the United States will continue to fight the counterterrorism threat wherever we find it in Afghanistan. In places where we are also trying to do more in the way of the provincial reconstruction teams, civil affairs, marrying peacekeeping elements with more political and economic development, it's only right that some of that might transfer to other kinds of forces.

But the United States, of course, is a member of NATO; a key member of NATO, and we remain involved in that way as well. But I would encourage everybody, especially the people of Afghanistan, not to focus so much on are there a thousand troops here or a thousand troops there, but to focus on the fact that we are committed with the Afghan government and leadership to getting the job done. That means an Afghanistan that is not a haven for terrorism and that is not constantly fearing terrorist attacks, an Afghanistan that is stable, that has an army and police that are capable, an Afghanistan that can fight its narcotics problem and an Afghanistan that can have peaceful development for its people.

I've been in Afghanistan now twice, and what really is remarkable to me is that the Afghan people, who've experienced more than 25 years of civil war, have come back out onto the streets. You see Afghan merchants, you see the development of a private economy there. You know that Afghanistan has good leadership. The future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to a peaceful future for the United States. That means that we're going to remain a strong partner.

QUESTION: (In Farsi.)

SECRETARY RICE: Mr. President, would you translate for us? (Laughter.) Thank you.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: He is as doubtful about the Afghan government as I am. (Laughter.) So the question suits me very much.

The question is about the change of ministers, when a contractor's time with a donor country or with an implementing agency, would the administration, if there's a new minister, be committed and faithful to the previous contractor or will they try to find a new partner? So as much as I distrust governments, I'll give him an answer that will satisfy governments.

(In Farsi.)

SECRETARY RICE: What was your answer, Mr. President?

PRESIDENT KARZAI: I told him that if a policy is made and implementation is decided, and regardless of who the minister is, that policy will continue unless the government decides to change the policy, which we will not. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Good. Last question.

QUESTION: India has said that it's going to abstain from the IAEA vote following some comments from your Ambassador in New Delhi. You have said all along that you would like to have consensus on Iran. Does India's abstention weaken your case and will this affect the deal that you are currently negotiating with India?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, I'm not going to react to an anonymous quote from an Indian Government official. We will see what happens when we come to the vote. India is a sovereign country. It has to make its decisions in conjunction with its interest. That's what we expect. It is the character of a partnership that we believe that we have had good discussions on this and I do believe that the Indians are committed, as the entire international community is, to not having an Iran that is nuclear-

armed. And so we will continue to have discussions not just with India but with Russia, with China and with other states in the lead-up to the Board of Governors meeting. The European Union-3 called for this extraordinary meeting because they felt, and we believe, that it is time to have a referral.

As I said to the gentleman earlier, we've been down this road before of saying, well, if the Iranians don't do something, then we will refer. The fact is, the last time we said if the Iranians don't do something, then we will refer, they did something. They walked out of the talks. They broke the seals. They unilaterally ended their moratorium and began preparation for reprocessing and enrichment. I think there's a lesson in that and I think that all of those who are committed to and dedicated to nonproliferation and to solving the Iranian problem need to take heed of the way the Iranians have behaved.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT KARZAI: Thank you very much.

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