



Remarks With Greek Foreign Minister Petros Molyviatis After Meeting

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Benjamin Franklin Room
Washington, DC
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(2:45 p.m. EST)

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I would like to welcome the Greek Foreign Minister. We were just saying that we've already met a couple of times since I have been Secretary of State. We had, of course, met before that.

We had an opportunity to review the excellent state of relations between Greece and the United States, the outstanding bilateral relationship that we have, and also our joint desire and commitment for the spread of democracy and freedom throughout the world. Greece has been a strong supporter of the work that we are doing in the broader Middle East, in Afghanistan, in supporting the people of Iraq as they are concerned and looking forward to a better future based on the elections that they've had.



We also had a very good opportunity to talk about the Balkans, a place in which we believe great progress has been made but, of course, there are many challenges yet to meet. And we have no better friend in meeting these and other challenges than our friends in Greece.

Thank you very much, Foreign Minister, for being here and I look forward to many other opportunities to continue our discussions.

FOREIGN MINISTER MOLYVIATIS: I thank you very much, Madame Secretary, for inviting me here. I appreciate very much the chance that we have had to meet once again. I'm afraid my statement will be rather monotonous because I can only repeat what the Secretary has said.

Indeed, we had an excellent opportunity to review our excellent state of bilateral relations and also to express and reaffirm our determination to further promote that relationship into strategic cooperation on several fields.

We, of course, discussed the Balkans and the Mediterranean and we greeted with satisfaction this mobility towards the spread of democracy and freedom in many parts of the world. I think President Bush has reasons to be quite happy these days.

Also we discussed, of course, Cyprus and we considered ways in which we can promote our common objective, which is the reunification of the island, by -- through negotiations on the basis of the Annan plan. And, frankly, I could say that we have both agreed to further strengthen our cooperation in all fields.

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you. Hello. We'll take two. Adam?

MR. ERELI: Elise.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, I know the events in Kyrgyzstan are moving very quickly, but if you could speak to what you think is going there and whether you're concerned that the opposition's message of democracy and your own calls for democracy are being somewhat diluted by the rather violent nature of the protests.

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, thank you very much. First of all, we are watching the events in Kyrgyzstan and we are trying to help to promote a process there that will turn the developments into the ground -- on the ground into a democratic process that can get for the Kyrgyz people a stable and -- a stable government and a move toward a better democratic future.

It's obviously a very fast-moving situation. I talked with Ambassador Young earlier this morning. I talked with the President this morning. We're following the events very closely. But our desire is for a process that will lead to a stable outcome in which elections can be held and where this can move forward. Obviously, everyone should put aside violence. There is no place for violence in a process of this kind. There is only a place for political dialogue and discussion leading to a process that will allow Kyrgyzstan to emerge as a stable democracy.

QUESTION: I have a question for --

SECRETARY RICE: Yes, please.

QUESTION: Hello, I have a question for Madame Secretary. I heard both of you telling us about the working together on strategic areas. Could you be more specific where Greece and the United States could work together?



SECRETARY RICE: Of course. First of all, we did talk about our joint responsibilities as members of NATO and the responsibilities that we hold in trying to promote stable and progressive developments in the Balkans. That is a place where we've had very, very good cooperation and where it's extremely important that that process move forward. We have some reports that will be coming forward, for instance, on Kosovo. We believe that this is an area that is ripe for cooperation between Greece and the United States, as well as the other members of NATO.

I can remember quite well, for instance, at our recent NATO ministerial that we talked about the need for there to be constant dialogue and discussion as we move forward through the spring on the situation in Kosovo. We also talked about the Mediterranean, where we share interest and where there are now very active movements toward democracy, and perhaps we could find a strategic common purpose there. The Foreign Minister also talked about what they might be able -- what Greece might be able to do as we continue to try to stabilize Afghanistan and as we try to provide for the Iraqi people support for their newly elected transitional government.

So this is wide ranging. We did not have a talk today although we have talked, of course, in the past about the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, where Greece has an important role with us to play in helping the Palestinian people to develop institutions that can be the institutions on which a state can be built.

So we have a broad strategic course ahead of us and the good news is that since Greece and the United States are good friends, since we're both democracies, since we work together in a number of institutions, we look forward to using all of those opportunities to promote this agenda which is focused very much on the spread of freedom and democracy and, I might say also, greater prosperity to the peoples of the world.

Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. Foreign Minister, Madame Secretary. Thank you.

You mentioned a moment ago that the United States is trying to turn what is happening on the ground in Kyrgyzstan toward democracy, toward stability. Specifically, what are we doing in that context? Does the United States have contact with the opposition movement there? If so, how extensive?

And also, what do we know about the Russian reaction to these events? Should we be encouraged or discouraged by it? And does an event like this help you in your efforts to persuade the Russians to move toward democracy?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the OSCE is really the lead international organization in this process. We are trying to support their efforts. Obviously, we have a broad range of contacts ourselves that we are pursuing. But this is not an issue for the United States to try to resolve on its own. This is -- the OSCE has a very important role to play here and they are playing that role.

We have noted that there is united, I believe, view in Europe, including the Russians, that the keys here are that everybody should forego violence, there should simply be no violence here, that the only course is for political dialogue, that we should not at this point try to prejudge how events are going to come out on the ground, but simply to hold out in front of the Kyrgyz people a desire for a process that will lead them to the development of the next stages in their democratic process and then ultimately to a stable and democratic Kyrgyzstan.

I would just note that the events on the ground are moving very, very quickly and so we are in constant contact with people on the ground, including with the OSCE. When I leave here I'm going to speak with the Slovenian Foreign Minister, who is also currently the executive secretary for the OSCE, and we will see how those events are going.

But the United States is very much in contact with the OSCE, with the European Union. I talked about this earlier this morning with Jack Straw. And so the entire international community is united here and I think the Russians are a part of that view.

QUESTION: May I follow up? A follow-up, if I may?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

QUESTION: Is this a good thing, what's happened so far, or is it a mob action?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the events on the ground are moving very fast. But, obviously, if this can be turned into -- and I'm confident that it can be -- if we can take events on the ground -- all of us responsible parties can encourage the various parties in Kyrgyzstan to move into a process that will then lead to the election of a government and move this process of democracy forward, it will have been a very good thing.

The Kyrgyz people have a desire and an aspiration for freedom and democracy, as do people around the world. The responsibility of the international system -- the Foreign Minister and I talked about this -- is to help people when they express this to channel this into a set of processes that then lead to stable institutions.

It doesn't happen on day one, James. It would be too much to ask today that the full outline of how events in Kyrgyzstan are going to move forward would actually be observable right now. I think I'm always talking to the press about the impatience of the daily headline, but the fact is this is a process that's just beginning. We know where we want to go, I think the OSCE knows where this needs to be led, and we'll work with all the parties involved to try to lead it there.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you said you recognize Greece's key role in the Balkans. In that framework, would you back a specific role for Greece in the Contact Group to help find a solution in Kosovo? And also, because you mentioned excellent relations, what role does the personal chemistry between Foreign Minister Mr. Molyviatis and yourself play in this developing role?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think the fact that we like each other a great deal and like being around each other helps. It's not that I don't like everyone -- I do -- but I particularly like the Foreign Minister here. We have a very good relationship. He has a wonderful sense of humor and I always find that when you can share a sense of humor with somebody, that it's maybe one of the most important ingredients for a really warm relationship. And I think we've developed a warm relationship. I'm really very fond of him.

In terms of Greece's role, there is going to be a broad consultation on where we go with Kosovo. Obviously, Greece is in the neighborhood. The Foreign Minister was describing to me some of the very active diplomacy that they have been doing in the region to try and get all the parties to see that the notion of standards before status can be achieved, that we need to move forward on questions in the region like the surrender of war -- people charged with war crimes to the ICTY, that we need to work on the economic development of the region. And I thought the Foreign Minister made a very important point that the hope, one day, for the integration of this region into the European structures is also an extremely important incentive and drawing card for the peaceful resolution of all of these conflicts.

I'm an old specialist on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and this region, and I have to tell you that at the time of 1989-1990 when the Balkans and Eastern Europe began to change, one might not have been able to see that some 16 years later we are in very much better condition than we might have thought, that the ability of these governments to see a future that is a European future has served to dampen a lot of long-held, old conflicts in the region. And I think we have to draw upon those incentives, draw upon that draw to the European structures, to help us to manage this period.

Yes.

FOREIGN MINISTER MOLYVIATIS: Just one word. I just wanted to say that the feeling is mutual and I am as fond of you as you say you are of me.

(Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER MOLYVIATIS: Thank you very much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

(Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER MOLYVIATIS: Thank you very much.

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