



Remarks with Indian Minister of External Affairs Yashwant Sinha After Their Meeting

Secretary Colin L. Powell

Benjamin Franklin Room
Washington, DC
January 20, 2004

(1:30 p.m. EST)

SECRETARY POWELL: I've just concluded a very successful meeting with Minister Sinha, and, as you know, earlier in the day he met with President Bush, where he had an excellent discussion with the President.



I think I'd like to start out by saying that we are so pleased at how far we have come over the last couple of years. When the Minister and I were here together some 18 months ago, I guess it was, we were worried about a conflict breaking out in the region, and how that conflict might escalate. And here today, we are able to talk about the success that the Indians and the Pakistanis achieved recently in Islamabad, how they have been reaching out to one another, how transportation links are being reestablished; how two leaders, Prime Minister Vajpayee and Secretary Musharraf, have set themselves on a course for dialogue and discussion of all of the issues that are outstanding between the two sides.

We are very pleased at these developments, as you might imagine, and we are also very pleased at the improvement in the U.S.-Indian bilateral relationship, as evidenced in so many ways, but most recently in the announcement made by President Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee last week with respect to what is often referred to as a glide path as we move forward in areas of cooperation having to do with civil nuclear initiatives, space initiatives, missile defense, as well as high-technology trade exchanges.

All of this, I think reflects the understanding between our two nations that we are two nations that share common values, we believe in democracy, two of the oldest democracies in the face of the Earth systems draw us closer and closer with each passing day.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for all the effort he has put into this relationship, and all that he has done to help with the improved relationship between India and Pakistan.

And, so, Mr. Minister, it's a great pleasure to have had you here. And as always, I found our discussions most useful, informative and warm.

Thank you.

MINISTER SINHA: Thank you, Secretary Powell.

I am returning to the State Department after a gap, as Secretary Powell said, of about 18 months. I was here in September of 2002.

We've had, since the morning when I met President Bush and now with Secretary Powell in the State Department, some very productive discussions.

As Secretary Powell has mentioned to you, we discussed the developments in the subcontinent, the developments in the SAARC context, India-Pakistan, and also discussed our bilateral relationship. Both sides are very happy at the statement which has been issued by President Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee on the "quartet issues," and there is seriousness and keenness on both sides to take this initiative forward and start implementing the understanding which has been reached on these issues.

We also spent our time discussing various other global issues. We spent a little time discussing Afghanistan. We spent a little time discussing Iraq, the developments in Iran, in the Middle East. I can say that, you know, these discussions have been in the friendliest of and most cordial atmosphere, and there is a great deal of meeting of minds on many of these -- most of these issues. And I'm very happy that I have had a very productive visit to Washington, and I am happy that both President Bush and Secretary Powell have been able to take time to spend their time with me and bring me up to date with regard to various developments.

Thank you.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you.

Barry.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, with all respect to the -- our friend from India, I have to ask you about Iraq.

We've heard about refinements for three, four days now. Can you be a little more concrete and tell us, if there is such a decision, how the U.S. is going to adjust, with the cooperation, of course, of the Iraqis, to adjust the plan for transferring sovereignty back to Iraq? Is the deadline really immutable? Because now, your friend Pachachi is talking about, we hope to meet the deadline.

SECRETARY POWELL: We are still committed to the 15 November plan, which includes a deadline of 30 June of this year for transfer of sovereignty. Obviously, we'll see how events unfold, but I believe that it is still possible to meet that deadline, and we're not shifting off that date.

With respect to refinements, we know that there is a great deal of debate and discussion as to whether or not elections could be held between now and then. The Ayatollah Sistani has spoken about this, and yesterday very good meetings were held in New York between the Secretary General and his staff, Ambassador Bremer and his staff, as well as the Governing Council members.

And what we hope the Secretary General will see his way clear to do is to send a team over to meet with the various parties, and especially with the Ayatollah, and to explain what the Secretary has characterized as the difficulty in arranging elections that soon, and to see whether or not there are refinements that might assist the Ayatollah and others in accepting that elections aren't timely or appropriate at this time, but there is a way to show an appropriate level of representational activity so that people can feel that the transitional assembly and government that will be created is representative of the people.

So those are the kinds of things we're talking about. There is not a specific decision point and there is not a specific plan on these refinements. That's something that we'll be in discussion with the Secretary General about.

After the meetings yesterday, I spoke to Secretary General Annan about 7:30 last night, reviewed the day's activities. The Secretary General said he wanted to consult with his staff, and I expect to hear back from him in the not too distant future.

Some of Ambassador Bremer's experts stayed on in New York to speak to the Secretary General's staff about the caucus arrangement that is in the 15 November plan to see if refinements of that might be something that people could work with. But we're sticking with the plan, sticking with the dates in the plan, and are open to refinements if there are refinements that make sense and get the support of all of the different parties.

Andrea.

QUESTION: Yesterday, the IAEA Director General Mohamed ElBaradei met with U.S. and British representatives. What can you tell us about the status? There's a U.S. team that's in Libya right now. How soon do you think Libya's nuclear program will be dismantled and then brought out of the country? And do you see this as the beginning, maybe a first step, in rapprochement between the United States and Libya?

SECRETARY POWELL: As the President said when this deal was announced some weeks ago, he hoped it was the beginning of a new relationship with Libya. But it begins with complete removal of these weapons of mass destruction and the infrastructure for them.

We do have a team in Libya. Ambassador Don Mahley is there leading our team. We have been in touch, as you noted, with Dr. ElBaradei. Under Secretary Bolton and British representatives and Dr. ElBaradei met yesterday to work out the arrangements that would be followed as the U.S., the UK and the IAEA work together with the Libyans to identify that which should be removed and must be removed.

I think things will start to happen rather quickly. I can't give you a timeline now until the work is done on the ground, but we do have people on the ground now working with the Libyans.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, there's increasing attacks now between Israel and Lebanon -- air raids on -- from Israel today, and Israel is blaming Syria and, of course, its support for Hezbollah. Is the U.S. concerned by this escalation, and what role do you see Syria playing in the problems?

SECRETARY POWELL: I think it's unfortunate that Hezbollah, once again, has caused this need for a response. The deliberate action they took, which resulted in the loss of life, once again demonstrates the nature of that organization. And we believe that all parties who are interested in peace should condemn this kind of action by Hezbollah. And I would hope the Syrians would, once again, understand that any support, whether it's vocal support or allowing their leadership to stay in Damascus, or whether it's serving as a transshipment point for weapons to Hezbollah, is destabilizing in the region and is not in the interest of peace.

And so both sides need to monitor their actions carefully, both the Israelis and the Lebanese, and everybody should try to remain consistent and within the agreements that they had with the Secretary General with respect to the line between Northern Israel and Lebanon.

QUESTION: A follow-up?

SECRETARY POWELL: An Indian. Yeah.

QUESTION: I'm Parasuram, Press Trust of India.

Both of you described the meetings as very productive. I was wondering, sir, whether it's possible for both of you to flesh it out a little as to where you expect the most progress very soon and what do you expect in the long term?

MINISTER SINHA: Well, you know, I mentioned to you that we discussed, for instance, the "quartet issues" and the statement which had been issued by President Bush and Prime Minister Vajpayee. And we have agreed that we'll engage each other very soon on the next steps which are needed, especially to start quickly implementing the phase one of that agreement.

And we are hoping that it should be possible for both sides to start discussing this in the very near future. We'll get back -- I've told Secretary Powell that we'll get back to him and let him know when we are ready for such discussions. But the fact that the statement came from the President and the Prime Minister shows the seriousness of the intent with which we are moving on this path, "the glide path."

SECRETARY POWELL: I would just add that yes, we are pleased that the Indian side will take a look at the ideas that were put forth with respect to moving into the phase one of "the glide path," and I'm confident that we'll be moving in an aggressive way and promptly.

But there are so many other aspects to our relationship that we discussed. We have strategic conversations taking place at a variety of levels. We want to get our counterterrorism discussions underway again. We talked about global issues having to do with trafficking in persons. There is no area of dialogue that we are not pursuing, and pursuing in a very, very profitable way. We've noted that trade has increased significantly between the United States and India over the last year.

All of this reflects, I think, a rapidly improving relationship between the United States and India on strategic matters, on trade matters, and the cooperation we see between the United States and India on regional matters.

During my meeting, I also took the opportunity to thank the Minister for the significant contributions that India made to rebuilding and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan and for the commitment they made at the Madrid conference to provide some funding for Iraqi reconstruction as well.

Yes, sir.

QUESTION: This question is addressed to both you, Secretary, and the Foreign Minister. The apprehensions have been quite rampant in the American press that there could be a possible coup in Pakistan. If this is true, how does it all go well for Indo-Pak relations and -- Indo-Pak relations?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, speculation in the American press is speculation that can't be made true. We are fully supportive of President Musharraf. We believe that he is making the right decisions for his nation. We believe that the two recent coup attempts -- or not coup attempts, but assassination attempts -- fortunately failed, but it shows that there are still terrorists within his country that do not like what he is doing. But as we saw at the SAARC meeting in Islamabad, he is stepping up to the challenge of improving relations with India, and as we also saw in the speech that he gave to the parliament earlier this week, that he is prepared to speak out for what he knows is right for Pakistan.

So we support him and will continue to support him, and we hope and are confident that he and his security people will be able to round up these terrorists who don't want to see a better future for the Pakistani people.

One more.

MINISTER SINHA: I would just add one sentence to that comment, and that is that stability is very important to carry forward the initiative which has been taken. And the Prime Minister of India has already wished President Musharraf well, all the very best to him when he was talking to him on the telephone as he was leaving Islamabad.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, China has said that the proposed referendum in Taiwan could take Taiwanese-Chinese bilateral relations to the brink of danger. Do you share that concern and do you think the referendum could alter the status quo?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, it remains to be seen. And we're still studying the language in the referendum and we're also studying the response that we've heard from Beijing.

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