



Remarks with Indian Minister of External Affairs Natwar Singh After Their Meeting

Secretary Colin L. Powell

C Street Entrance
Washington, DC
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(5:55 p.m. EDT)



SECRETARY POWELL: Well, good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I've just had a delightful conversation with my new colleague, Natwar Singh, the Minister of External Affairs of India. He is reminding me on the way out the door of our first meeting some 17 years ago when I was National Security Advisor and we were talking about President Reagan. And I am very honored that the Minister is here to participate in the memorial service for President Reagan tomorrow and it gave me the opportunity to have a good first meeting with him.

Every occasion on which I've visited India over the last several years, some three times, I believe, I did have a chance to meet with Mrs. Gandhi, and Natwar was always present at those meetings, as was the Prime Minister. So we know each other and we look forward to working with each other.

In our meeting just now, we discussed the full range of bilateral and regional issues. But I would just say the most important issue we touched on was the fact that the United States and India has a very good, strong relationship right now and we intend to not only keep it strong but to build on that relationship, to move forward.

The Minister said to me that he planned to move very, very fast, and I said I would do my best to keep up with him, because it is in the interest of the American people and the people of India that we move forward on our economic relationship, our security relationship, and we stay in close touch with one another as we work on regional problems.

And so, Natwar, it's a great pleasure to have you here. I thank you for coming to represent your government and I invite you to say a few words.

MINISTER SINGH: Thank you, Secretary of State. I wish I had come here on another occasion and not so sad an occasion as I have to represent the Government of India at the funeral of a President who was greatly admired and loved in India. An odd quirk of history, I was in Washington for the funeral of President John F. Kennedy in 1963.

As the Secretary said, we had a very frank, wide-ranging, lively, occasionally amusing discussion on every single aspect of our relationship. I have also informed him about the change of government in India and that we intend to continue the policies that we have followed for 57 years. There has been a broad national consensus on India's foreign policy. That will continue. And we've hit the road running and I continue to do so. And since the Secretary of State is ten years younger than me, I'll have to run very hard.

We also discussed the situation in various parts of the world and how it affected them and how it affected us, and there was broad agreement except for on one or two areas. And with your permission, sir, since it is my first visit, I don't really want to put my foot into it and I'll leave it out.

I have come to represent the Government of India on this sad occasion. The passing away of President Ronald Reagan has been widely mourned in India. President Reagan played an important role in strengthening Indo-U.S. relations. He and Mrs. Reagan received with great form Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during her visit to Washington in 1982. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi counted President and Mrs. Reagan among their friends. I personally had the honor of being received by the President at the White House on two occasions and have always cherished the memory. In his passing away, India has lost a steadfast friend, the United States an inspiring leader, the world an outstanding statesman.

My visit also comes at a time when India and United States are witnessing a period of close engagement in our bilateral relations. Our relations are expanded in scope and depth and my government is determined to work closely with the U.S. Administration to take this partnership forward in all areas. Both our countries have clear commonalities in shaping a democratic and pluralistic world order free of terrorism.

Finally, the Prime Minister and my colleagues in the cabinet and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, who is the Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the United Alliance, have sent their condolences and have also conveyed their good wishes to you.

To, Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, India has strongly endorsed the recently passed UN resolution on Iraq. Did you bring up the introduction of Indian -- did you request the introduction of Indian peacekeeping forces to Iraq?

And, Mr. Minister, now that the UN resolution has been passed, will you consider providing such troops under the UN umbrella?

SECRETARY POWELL: We are very pleased that the Indian Government showed such strong support for the resolution. And as you know, there are a number of requests out for support to the multinational force effort and we did talk about it, but I would yield to the Minister for what he would care to say about the conversation or the deliberations that are taking place within the Indian Government.

MINISTER SINGH: Well, as you know, we have been following events in Iraq with very great interest. And we are delighted that the United States and the United Kingdom tabled a resolution in the Security Council which has been unanimously adopted. That's a welcomed step and we have always been in favor of the United Nations being involved in a central responsibility along with their friends and other members of the Security Council.

With regard to the question you asked about the Indian troops, nobody has asked us. We'll look at the resolution very minutely. We are not in the Security Council. And we'll take a decision when the time comes.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, given the fact that we now know there was a spike in terrorist activity in 2003, can the Administration credibly claim that the war on terrorism

is being won?

SECRETARY POWELL: As you know, the terrorism report that you're making a reference to, we found errors in it and those errors will be corrected. And it reflects an intensity of activity and we'll see what the corrected report looks like.

Nobody has suggested that the war on terrorism has been won; quite the contrary, the President has made it clear that it is a war that continues and that we have to redouble our efforts, and that's why we're working with all of our friends around the world on law enforcement activities, on intelligence exchanges, on military action when it comes to it, and certainly police action, to go after terrorists.

And our goal with respect to reports such as the report you're making reference to, our annual terrorism report, is to give the American people the facts. And we are rechecking those facts and I think I will wait until I see the revised report before making any comment on the trends that are reflected in the revised report from last year's report.

MINISTER SINGH: Just one second, if I might just go back on the resolution on Iraq. We are a coalition government so the matter will have to be discussed by the government and by the cabinet committee on security. There is a resolution of the last parliament on this issue in which we had given our opinion that we were against sending troops to Iraq. Now the situation is changed. There is a resolution unanimously passed in United Nations and there are Arab members in it. We'll look at it very carefully. But I must emphasize that this matter will have to be placed before the government at the highest levels so it would be premature for me to say yea or nay.

QUESTION: As far as terrorism is concerned, as we speak now, Mr. Secretary, terrorism in Kashmir still goes on, as you have been saying in the past that General Musharraf made many promises to you. Terrorism went down, you said, last year and several months ago. But it has gone up now, even on the first day of the new government in India.

And secondly, how you think you will have interaction with the new government, because you never expected, I believe, that BJP or Atal Bihari Vajpayee will lose or that this new government will come in power? How will you interact with the new government as far as many issues that we have been working on?

SECRETARY POWELL: With respect to the first question, I think we have seen that the rate has gone down and we continue to monitor that rate and we continue to express our concern about the infrastructure that remains behind.

With respect to the new government, the people of India have spoken. India is a great democracy and we will work with the government that people of India have selected. And we have demonstrated, I think, out here today that will be a warm, productive relationship that is intended to move us forward and to build an even stronger relationship with India.

We don't place bets on elections. I've learned that long ago. And we will now support the government and work with the government that the Indian people have decided upon.

One more, then I think we have to go.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary.

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes.

QUESTION: The United States -- it has emerged that the United States is investigating whether or not Libya was -- had a plot to actually assassinate Crown Prince Abdullah. Given that you're investigating this, does it mean that you still think you can trust Colonel Qadhafi?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, as you said, we are looking into this matter. I don't know, really, what the facts are or the truths of the matter are, and it would be premature to make a judgment.

Mr. Qadhafi knows what is expected of his government with respect to terrorist activities. A roadmap has been put out there that is well understood by the Libyan Government and certainly by us. And so let's keep looking into this matter to see what we can learn of it and see where the truth lies before making a judgment as to what it means.

Thank you.

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