



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Secretary Rice Travels to Israel and the... | Daily Press Briefing | What's New

KEYWORD SEARCH
Subject Index

+ BOOKMARK

Home Issues & Press Travel & Business Countries Youth & Education Careers About State Video

You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2005 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [April 2005: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

Interview With the Wall Street Journal

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

April 13, 2005

(10:45 a.m. EDT)

QUESTION: I think we're going to start on proliferation.

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, all right.

QUESTION: Well, we just wanted to start with a question on Iran. Obviously, when Sharon was at Crawford, and also evidently yesterday was pushing a sense of urgency out of Israel on terms of how far along Iran might be and wanting very much this to go the UN Security Council route perhaps faster than you would like it to go, I'm just curious how you -- what your sense is of that urgency and how much longer you're wanting to give the EU process.

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I would say that the discussions we had with the Israelis was not unlike discussions that we've had before and this has all been taken into account as we thought about how to move the process forward. So there wasn't a new revelation.

We obviously all think that there is -- that the Iranians ought to, sooner rather than later, try to instill confidence in the international system that they're going to live up to their obligations. That's really the issue.

Now, the diplomacy that's underway has -- first of all, has them in suspension right now, which is important, but eventually has to come to some conclusion that is a -- that has the prospect of a permanent means by which to keep the Iranians from having the means to build a nuclear weapon. This is really about the means. I don't think that anybody is making a claim about the current capability of the Iranians. The issue is really what means will they have to pursue a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power development.

We still believe that the best course is one in which you can maintain unity among the various actors who are negotiating with the Iranians, and that includes not just the EU-3 but, for instance, the Russians, who have gone to some length to safeguard the Bushehr reactor. That's something that I think was really not thinkable two or more years ago.

And so we think the diplomatic course that we're on is the right course, but obviously at some point in time the UN Security Council is an option, which is why we've worked very hard to unite everyone around the notion that that is, in fact, an option.

QUESTION: The Europeans would argue that you could do containment by the EU-3 as long as there's a suspension on the activity (inaudible) that would be enough. But the missile intelligence that you guys have gotten and developed that suggests that they appear to have a design for a warhead and perhaps have a parallel covert program, is time on our side if they do have a parallel covert program and what does the missile intelligence tell you about it?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you don't know what you don't know, unfortunately, and a covert program is, by its very nature, a program that is difficult to assess. No one wants to see the Iranians have the capability to build a nuclear weapon under cover of civilian nuclear power, and I think that's what really we should stay focused on.

There's a reason that when the President talked at the National Defense University he talked about not having enrichment and reprocessing capability because that's really the loophole in the NPT. So I think the issue is to make certain that those technological means are not available to states that have not proven themselves to be trustworthy in terms of their own international obligations, and I think that's what we really need to stay focused on.

QUESTION: So are you saying that there isn't a parallel covert program or --

SECRETARY RICE: I'm just saying that I don't have a way to judge the status of what we don't know. That's the intelligence problem.

QUESTION: And would you say if the status quo prevails by the fall, that that's enough time that the UN should start to deal with this?

SECRETARY RICE: I don't want to put a timeline on it, but I think we probably want to make an assessment this summer and see where we are and see how far we've gone. And, but I wouldn't put a timeline on it.

QUESTION: Are we talking months or years?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, again, I'm not going to put a timeline on it. Let's see where we get with the diplomacy. Let's see how -- whether or not it looks as if the Iranians are really serious about putting in place these -- the Europeans call them objective guarantees, which really means they can't have the technology to do this. I think that's what we have to assess and then we can see where we are.

QUESTION: Is there anything about the North Korean experience that makes one feel that Iran ought to be dealt with more urgently and is there any news from your trip to China on the North Korean -- because both of these countries, one's already got them and one's trying and --

SECRETARY RICE: The North Koreans have been at this for a really long time. I think most people believe this goes back to the late '60s in North Korea. And there was never an ability to get a handle on it for a variety of reasons, including essentially a split international community. There was a time when both the Soviets and the Chinese were helping in ways the North Korean program. Advertently or inadvertently I won't try to judge, but they were certainly helping.

That is not the situation we face in Iran now, where I do think you have unity of purpose to try not to -- not just not to help the Iranians to get this capability, but to stop them from getting the capability. So part of the lesson is that the international community just didn't get organized quickly enough in terms of North Korea because of splits during the Cold War and a whole variety of things.

The Iranians and the North Koreans are different in terms of their political orientation, too, in that I think the Iranians are probably more susceptible to the UN Security Council because this is not a state that I think can operate in total isolation, whereas the North Koreans have been quite capable of operating in total isolation. So, in some sense, I think you have greater levers with the Iranians.

The North Koreans, though, are facing circumstances in which what they appear to want, which is to be brought into the international community for their own purposes, which has to do really with doing something about their economy, where I think that is being frustrated by their unwillingness to deal with the nuclear issue. I did not -- I read only a Reuters report of the South Korean President when he was in Germany, but apparently saying that the nuclear issue is a hindrance to further economic development with the North.

Obviously, the normalization of relations that they had hoped for with Japan is not going to happen while there's a nuclear program on the table. So the North Koreans have managed to get themselves into a box.

Now, I did have good discussions with the Chinese while I was there about the fact that the North Koreans can not be allowed just to continue to string the world along and that they can't be allowed to continue to make statements about their nuclear capability, just essentially denying their responsibility to be in the six-party talks and to work for a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. I think the Chinese took that on board and I suspect that they'll be involved in a series of diplomatic engagements with the North Koreans to see if they can move them. But --

QUESTION: You mean formal engagements again or --

SECRETARY RICE: I think probably formal and informal. But we don't have total transparency on how the North Koreans and Chinese deal with each other.

QUESTION: But do you have any sense they've acted since you were there and --

SECRETARY RICE: I have a sense that there have definitely been discussions. I don't know how far they've gone.

QUESTION: The time on this -- there's no containment issue here.

SECRETARY RICE: No, there's no containment issue.

QUESTION: I mean, we know they have -- we know they've got the rods, we know they have a capability to continue to produce. So how long can you wait for them to be able to come back to the table? When will the United States admit failure?

SECRETARY RICE: Again, I don't think it's ever helpful to put a timeline on this, rather to try to judge the point at which you think that the diplomacy has run out of strength, and I think at that point you get signals from whether the other parties believe that they're getting anywhere with the North Koreans, whether the North Koreans are continuing to threaten.

I do think the North Koreans have been, frankly, a little bit disappointed that people are not jumping up and down and running around with their hair on fire because the North Koreans have been making these pronouncements. This is partly about attention-getting, and when they do this, what they do is they deepen their own isolation. They don't tend to get the international community reaction that they seem to want. So some of this is also managing the North Koreans in that sense.

QUESTION: Do you think this whole issue will be the biggest test of this administration?

SECRETARY RICE: No, I don't. I think the biggest test is the Middle East and the evolution of a stable and democratized Middle East, that that's really going to be the historical test.

QUESTION: So you don't see either of these --

SECRETARY RICE: I see --

QUESTION: I mean, if something goes wrong that completely makes -- the Middle East issues as big as we all think they are, kind of a second tier issue?

SECRETARY RICE: Something can always go wrong, but I would -- I don't think the North Koreans underestimate the deterrent capability of the United States. I don't think the Iranians underestimate the deterrent capability of their region to mitigate against any gains that they might make, which is, in a sense, why for either the North Koreans or the Iranians the acquisition of a nuclear weapon at the cost of complete isolation from the international system makes really no sense.

And so yes, I think it's a critically important issue. I think that the issue of, as the President said at one point, that something might fall in the hands of terrorists is something that we all are very concerned about. It's why the Proliferation Security Initiative is important. It's why stronger intelligence cooperation on this matter is important. It's why breaking up the A.Q. Khan network was important because there you had a non-state actor who really had very little to lose by the transfer of these technologies.

So I don't mean to diminish the extraordinary importance of the issue, but if I look at what happened to the United States on September 11th and I look at what is likely to resolve* for us the prospect of being continually under a threat of terrorism for generations, I have to think that it's change in the basic nature of the Middle East that is really the historical challenge and opportunity.

QUESTION: Can you elaborate a bit on what -- obviously, that has become clear going into the second term and there have been very many high-level speeches that you've given and the President's given. But what changes you plan to make on actual implementation of things from the active U.S. side that would push that along?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, you're seeing some of it in that we've managed, I think, over the last several months to unify the states that are on democracy's side, the democratic states, in a pretty common agenda about the democratization agenda, and it has several parts. Obviously, people are particularly interested in what's going on in Lebanon and Syria now, where our relationship with the French has given a kind of impetus to international cooperation to get the Syrians out of Lebanon. And while I know that there is a long road ahead for the Lebanese and people ask, well, what's going to be the role of Hezbollah and what's the role of this and what's the role of that, the enabling condition here is to get the Syrians out and then to see what the real balance of forces looks like in Lebanon.

Similarly, I think you've seen a pretty united front on what needs to be done in the Israeli-Palestinian issue, where there may be shades of difference here or there but where people are very focused on making the disengagement work and then where the roadmap provides a kind of unifying force.

And then finally in the -- well, intermediate step. On Iraq, I think you now have a pretty unified view of what needs to be done to support a new Iraqi Government as it moves forward to build capacity both in security forces and in its ability to manage the country to be able to have a political course that will ultimately defeat the insurgency.

And then finally, in the big sense, I think you'll see us very active on the broader Middle East agenda through the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, things like the Forum for the Future, which are -- have completely changed the conversation in the Middle East about what's possible. What the American President can do and what American diplomacy can do is not to "bring democracy to these countries" or certainly not force democracy, although my own view is that you don't have to impose democracy; you impose tyranny. People generally would rather be able to say what they think.

But what the American President can do is to open the realm of the possible so that what's possible looks different. I remember during the period of German unification, you know, one day German unification looked impossible and a few days later it looked inevitable. And in a sense, what you're seeing in the Middle East is that what looked impossible, what looked frozen, what looked as if there was never going to be any change in these authoritarian governments, now people believe it's possible and they're acting on that possibility, so that: the Lebanese no longer believe they have to live with the Syrians in their midst and they're acting on that; the Iraqis no longer believe that they have to be hostage to terrorism so they acted on that in the election. I think you're going to see more and more of that.

QUESTION: You know, I was going to say you're -- the (inaudible) in a lot of ways is through development (inaudible) and the interesting question of how you modulate the message, how hard you push, how soft you make the message. Crown Prince Abdullah is going to be in Crawford sometime soon. What's the dialogue with the Saudis like on this subject of democracy and what else do you have on the agenda with them besides that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it's a big agenda with the Saudis. The Kingdom, since May of last year, I think has recognized the threat of al-Qaida terrorism directly to the Kingdom and has been a very active and aggressive partner in the war

on terrorism. On the terrorist financing side we've gotten very much further. They closed down, for instance, Al Haramain and places. I mean, this is a big set of moves for the Saudis.

Secondly, we obviously share an agenda about bringing -- taking advantage of this opportunity for the Israeli-Palestinian issue to move forward.

And we do have, thirdly, an active dialogue with the Saudis about the reform agenda. Every country is going to move at a different pace on this and, obviously, Saudi Arabia is not very far along in terms of pluralism in their political structures or many of the things that we associate with the forward march of democracy, like women's rights and so forth.

But they're making a start and the municipal elections that they held made a start. Now, they're going to have to continue and they're probably going to have to accelerate, but at least they have made a start, and I think a lot of that is because the Crown Prince is somebody who recognizes the need for reform. There are always going to be constraints on how those reforms go forward in Saudi Arabia, but the first step is recognition and getting started.

And, you know, there is a picture that really sticks with me at the time of the municipal elections when this man brought his daughter and he actually had her put the ballot in the box. And it said something about what he expects that her life will be like if democratic reforms continue.

QUESTION: You didn't mention oil in that list.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah, of course. The oil.

QUESTION: I mean, they --

SECRETARY RICE: Everybody's -- well, the Saudis --

QUESTION: -- the Saudis are doing all they can do or --

SECRETARY RICE: The Saudis have said that they want to, you know, try to increase supply. I mean, I think they've tried to be responsible. But right now, we've got a supply-demand crunch because of the nature of the world economy and because there really does need now to be, I think, a more aggressive diversification of sources of energy. When you look at these economies and how they're all growing -- China, India -- the pressures are going to remain there. You know, the President has a comprehensive energy program before the Congress that he hopes to get passed. I think there are others that are trying to look at different ways to meet their energy supply because the pressure on oil is just going to remain.

QUESTION: Can I ask one more back on proliferation for a second? I mean, it's kind of conventional wisdom that there are no military options on North Korea because they are already a nuclear power. And even on Iran, having just finished reading a book about the long planning of the Israeli operation against Iraq, is it -- is one safe in assuming that the U.S. Government does have military options?

SECRETARY RICE: The President always leaves his options open and, you know, there are always options. The better option is to be able to do this diplomatically and particularly given all that is going on in the Middle East, I mean, it's important to put Iran in context. You know, we're very concerned about its nuclear ambitions, we're very concerned that we get the diplomacy on this right.

You also have to look at Iran as a state that is supporting terrorism, including in the very Middle East peace process that we're trying to promote. And so you say to people, the Iranians can't have it both ways. They can't, you know -- we can't have it both ways that the Iranians talk about the Iranian entry into the international system while they're -- when they're literally trying to support people who are trying to blow up the peace process.

And, of course, Iranian domestic circumstances where we've just been sitting here talking about small steps in Saudi Arabia. Well, Iran is going the other direction, where this is the place where the Iranian people have voiced their desire for democracy. This is a more open society, a society that has a great culture, where people travel and are refined educationally, and you have a group of unelected mullahs who are taking Iran in the other direction.

So Iran has a problem on a number of fronts, but if you look at Iran's geo-strategic circumstances today versus three years ago, they've got new neighbors in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is the prospect in Iraq of a Shia-led, non-theocratic, inclusive, democratic government that has the holy shrines of Karbala and Najaf, and that's a challenge to the Iranian revolutionary identity. In Afghanistan, you've got a state that was once a terrorist state that's now a good friend of the United States and is fighting terrorism. The Iranians could not have helped but notice that they assisted by allowing out-of-country voting in the democratic elections in Iraq and in the democratic elections in Afghanistan. What does that say to Iranians who are stuck with unelected mullahs running their lives?

So yes, Iran is a problem but I would not say that Iran's circumstances are so terrific when you look at what has happened in the last three years. And if we focus on getting -- helping the Iraqis get Iraq right, helping the Afghans get Afghanistan right, changes are taking place in Central Asia -- it's hard for me to believe that Iran is going to be immune to the changes that are taking place all around the Middle East region.

QUESTION: Now that there is a government in Iraq and -- are they free to have conversations with the Iranians? I mean, what would our position be on that?

SECRETARY RICE: Our position is we expect that they're going to have conversations. Iran is a neighbor. But Iran ought to try to pursue those relationships in a transparent, neighborly way, not in a way that is seeking to undermine what is going on in Iraq. And I don't really think the Iraqis want to trade the yoke of Saddam Hussein for subservience to the Iranian mullahs. That just doesn't seem to me to be in the cards.

Yeah, a lot of people lived in Tehran during the exile. They have relationships with Iraq. But there are many reasons that I don't think you'll see the Iranians with -- being a (inaudible).

QUESTION: When you were in India, the question of India dealing with Iran came up. This question of oil (inaudible) with China and India. Do you have any progress on that front? Doesn't it limit the U.S. ability or even the Security Council's ability to constrain the Iranian nuclear program if you have India, a country with whom you have a new strategic partnership, pursuing that? Did you make any progress with them? How are you going to try to cut that off?

SECRETARY RICE: I raised our concerns about it. Everybody understands -- and it's in the context of not just U.S. policy toward Iran, but, as I said, Iran as a destabilizing force in a region that is making a long progress. I mean, I just think people have to take that into consideration.

We do need to recognize and to help countries deal with the energy demands that they are facing. And if you look at China or India or any -- many other growing economies now -- Brazil, look around the world -- there is a demand for stable energy sources. It's one reason that we are -- you know, that we have energy dialogues that are popping up all over the place because we are going to have to look at what we can do because it's going to continue to happen that oil-rich troublesome states will have leverage if you can't help people find alternative means to meet their energy demands.

QUESTION: So does that mean that the U.S. is taking measures -- is the U.S. prepared to sell nuclear reactor technology to the Indians and, you know, work out a safeguard deal?

SECRETARY RICE: No, no, we're not there, that is not the case. We are having, as you know with the Chinese, civil nuclear discussions. We have agreed with the Indians that we can talk about a variety of energy sources, but obviously there are NPT implications that are quite serious about civilian nuclear power in India.

2005/408

Released on April 13, 2005

 [BACK TO TOP](#)



[Updates](#) | [Frequent Questions](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Email this Page](#) | [Subject Index](#) | [Search](#)

The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs, manages this site as a portal for information from the U.S. State Department. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views or privacy policies contained therein.

[About state.gov](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Copyright Information](#) | [Other U.S. Government Information](#)