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Remarks en Route Washington, DC

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

January 31, 2006

SECRETARY RICE: So we've just completed our trip. I'm sorry I wasn't able to stay for more of the Afghan conference because I think it was clear that the international community is very proud of Afghanistan's progress thus far and committed to trying to improve the situation for the Afghans. I thought that President Karzai's speech was terrific. But we did have a chance yesterday in an extended bilateral discussion to talk about how to move forward on a number of the issues that face Afghanistan. Obviously, I have to go back because I'm expected to be in my seat by 9 o'clock tonight for the State of the Union, but I think the Afghan conference will be a great success.

I thought that the Quartet did a very fine job yesterday in making clear that it supports the aspirations of the Palestinian people, that we want the Palestinian people to have a better and peaceful life, and that the democratic election that they've been through is an important step. And yet, as is often the case, the elected government has some conditions that need to be met if it is to receive the support of the international community. And so we look forward to trying to work with Abu Mazen, particularly over the next period of time while there's a caretaker government, to deal with several (inaudible) financial issues that the Palestinian Authority faces on a very urgent basis.

We had a long discussion last night of Iran with the P-5 plus Germany. The decision was taken by the ministers to support an extraordinary Board meeting on Thursday that would report Iran's dossier -- that means all resolutions that have been passed before, as appropriate, and I might note that one of those resolutions, the September resolution, is a resolution of noncompliance for Iran -- as well as report whatever takes place on the 2nd itself and to report that to the Security Council.

Let me be very clear. The language "to report" is the formal language of referral to the Security Council. If you look at the September resolution, it talks about "report to" the Security Council. So I want there to be no confusion here that a report is a formal step to the Security Council.

What we did agree is that once that report is made to the Security Council that the Security Council should await the

March 6th meeting of the Board of Governors, at which ElBaradei is to report on Iranian progress on answering the questions -- questions that are before it by the Board of Governors -- or by the Director General; but equally importantly, that there will also be a report on the implementation of what would be required of Iran in the February resolution. And I think you'll see that that relates not to past Iranian behavior but current Iranian behavior. So, after March 6th, the Security Council is then free to consider what steps should be taken in support of the IAEA.

One final thing. We all hope that the IAEA will be able to resolve this, and obviously the IAEA is the principal mechanism for dealing with issues of compliance. But this is now in the Security Council and we will see whether and how Iran responds to that new fact.

QUESTION: So then we're to assume, from what you're saying, that this is exactly the referral or report that you've been seeking all along and this isn't some diluted one or one that would require some other decision before the Security Council really took it up?

SECRETARY RICE: The only decision after this is in the Security Council itself as to what to do. The report will go to the Security Council. It's then up to the Security Council what it does with that report. So this is the report or referral that we've been seeking.

The one compromise that we were prepared to make is that, as you know, the Russians had argued very strongly and the Chinese had argued very strongly that we should wait until there was a report from ElBaradei -- that comes on March 6th -- before we referred or reported to the Security Council. We said let's report to the Security Council but we'll await action until after that report is made.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, just before we left London, there were reports out of Tehran that Mr. Larijani had already rejected -- or had warned that any kind of, whether it's a report or a referral, Iran will take steps. Are you concerned? I know the people at the IAEA are concerned about Iranian threats to basically stop cooperating and eject the inspectors. Are you concerned about the fact that if that happens you basically lose the best eyes and ears that the international community has in Iran right now on its nuclear program?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the situation that we currently have is that the eyes and ears that are there are watching the Iranians progress along a path toward the technologies that could lead to a nuclear weapon. So you know, sitting and having the IAEA watch the Iranians break seals, having the Iranians -- watching the Iranians start reprocessing and enrichment, of -- I assume -- seeing the Iranians start to introduce the gas, that's -- well, there's some value in seeing that, but what you're seeing is what the IAEA is watching is the slow erosion of the credibility of the international community as the Iranians take step after step after step in defiance of an international community that tried very hard to give them a chance.

One of the things that was very interesting last night about the dinner was Jack Straw started by rehearsing how we got to where we are, and he started with the fact that the entire process of the EU-3 negotiations began as a substitute for referral of the Iranians to the Security Council because of their past behavior, having for 18 years, for instance, hidden from the IAEA activities, only to be found out because of dissident reporting. So we have to remember that the EU-3 negotiations were to permit the Iranians a way out of being reported to the Security Council.

Then, of course, in September a resolution of noncompliance was passed. And again, those who voted for the resolution agreed not to formally report to give the, at that time, new Iranian Government an opportunity to find its footings and to give the Russian idea a chance. So when you go through that rehearsal, you recognize that without some movement forward, I think the international community would be rightly asked how long before there is going to be a consequence for Iran continuing to ignore the demands of the international community.

I don't know what the Iranians will do. I would hope that they would take the opportunity that's still before them to cooperate fully with the IAEA and reverse the course that they've been on in terms of restarting reprocessing and enrichment activities.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, you said after March 6th the Security Council is free to consider what steps should be taken. Are they also free to do nothing?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, of course. A lot is going to depend on Iranian behavior. And we'll see. Maybe this next step will convince the Iranians that it's time to reverse course. I suppose it's possible that the Iranians could restore the seals. I suppose it's possible that the Iranians could admit that they're not going to be able to research and process -- or reprocess and enrich on their territory. I suppose they could accept the Russian deal with no enrichment and reprocessing on Iranian soil. I suppose they could answer all the questions that the IAEA has had of them. And I suppose that they could return to, on that basis, negotiations with the EU-3. That would be quite a good outcome for the diplomacy.

But I think that's what is before them, and I think when you see the list that will come out of the February Board meeting on what is required of Iran, you will see the kind of guideposts that the Security Council will be looking at when it considers the question on March 6th.

QUESTION: Thank you. Is it your expectation that all of the signatories of the statement last night, or this morning, will vote in the affirmative to report Iran on Thursday or Friday at the IAEA Board? And do you have a sense of whether the other members of the Board, including some of the nonaligned movements, will go that way as well, including India?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I don't want to speak for other countries. I think there's a certain logic in the statement that was made last night that the extraordinary meeting should report. I think there's a certain logic in what that means for the meeting on Thursday. But you know, obviously countries will be free to make their choice.

But I think what's important here is that you have the P-5 plus Germany, the other member of the EU troika, united in agreeing that this should now be reported to the Security Council. Let me just be clear on what is being reported. What is being reported is what the Board will require -- is requiring Iran to do, but also the dossier on Iran, which is the resolutions and reports of the past as they were adopted.

And so you know, we will see. I'm not going to try to guess what others will do, but there's a certain logic to the statement.

QUESTION: Now that the case is basically before the Security Council, are you prepared to say what the United States wants the Security Council to do with it?

SECRETARY RICE: I have said all along that we needed to get the weight of the Security Council behind the IAEA

activities. When this report is made, that will, in fact, be the case because the Security Council will have the dossier. I do think that -- and I'm sure there are those who are appealing to them -- I think it's possible that you'll see some more diplomatic activity with the Iranians by the Russians and the Chinese to perhaps try and get the Iranians now to respond in a positive way to what is being asked of them.

And I think it's only fair to see what transpires over the next few weeks as the new reality of this becomes observable to Iran. But Iran has a long way to get back to even the place that it was when we backed the EU-3 negotiations because they've broken seals, they've made clear that they intend to enrich and reprocess, they've started unpacking and testing equipment. You know, there's a fair way back and maybe they'll make it, and I'm prepared to see whether they do.

We will consider very carefully what steps are going to be effective in the isolation of the Iranian regime. We want to be very careful, as I've said, to try and avoid isolation of the Iranian population in anything that is undertaken. And once you're in the Security Council and discussing this, I think there are a number of possibilities, but I don't want to get ahead of the diplomacy.

QUESTION: Change of subject. Two questions. Can you give us a sense of what the President might say tonight vis-à-vis foreign policy? Will he be just broadly reiterating some of the things you've been touching on, or any new initiatives we should look for?

And second, I know you've been, obviously, very busy, but have you gotten any readout on Jill Carroll's situation and do you have any thoughts on what the U.S. should be doing on that front?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, everything is being done to work with those who might have influence, and there are an awful lot of people who are calling for her release, and I mean people from the region, countries from the region, private concerns, religious leaders. I think there is a great mobilization on behalf of the fact that this is a tragedy and that it ought to be reversed. So the United States is -- we are following the situation very closely, obviously doing everything that we can to see if there is anything that can be done to get her release. But I think the entire international community is really mobilized on her behalf and, you know, it's everybody's hope and prayer that these people who took her -- an innocent person who was just trying to report on these historic events -- that they will release her.

As to the President's State of the Union, you know, I'll let it speak for itself. He's obviously going to make a strong -- again -- defense of what we're doing in the war on terror, about the progress that we're making, and obviously the importance of the freedom agenda for our security, not just because it is who we are. It is who we are, but also because it is the way that the United States best secures itself in the long run.

I think you'll also see the President talk about the compassion of America in some of the things that we've done.

QUESTION: How long did you spend talking about the Russian proposal last night, and at what point did Russia really come on board with sending a report to -- reporting Iran or referring Iran, as you've said, to the Security Council?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we did talk some about the Russian proposal. It was talked about in more detail. There was a ministers only session and then there was a political directors session. They talked more about it. We really spent the

bulk of the time on this question of the report and it really came down to the issue of whether or not to wait to report, and that is to put the dossier in the Security Council -- until March 6th or whether to do it now. And believe it or not, that took four hours. That's the way it is sometimes.

There was a lot of discussion of what might be done to get Iran to respond more favorably to what is being asked of it. I think the Russians and the Chinese will continue to make those efforts. But I want to be very clear. You know, at the end, we went around and we said we understand that this is now in the Security Council; everybody -- well, provided the vote is there on Thursday, but that what we're saying is it should be in the Security Council.

I think that the Russians and the Chinese were prepared to try to maintain consensus. They have said from the time we arrived that they wanted there to be consensus, that they thought this was important. For our part, we were prepared to be sensitive to their sense of timing of when this ought to be taken up in the Security Council.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask more about the (inaudible). It took four hours to get them to agree to report. Isn't there a danger that it gets to the Security Council and nothing happens?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we had a lot of discussion of what had happened before, how we'd gotten to where we are. I mean, sometimes you just have to talk through things and talk through them. I don't underestimate the difficulty of maintaining consensus as we move through this process. I want to be very clear. What is very clear is that there is a strategic consensus about the Iran problem, about the fact that Iran is engaged in activities that are problematic, that Iranian behavior is unacceptable in continually rejecting the options put before it for peaceful nuclear uses that do not involve the fuel cycle. There is a consensus that they can't be allowed to get technologies leading to a nuclear weapon and there is a strong consensus that diplomacy should continue but that the Iranians are not being responsive to that diplomacy.

Nobody argued that, well, you know, the Iranians have shown evidence that they're prepared to do this or that. That wasn't the nature of the conversation. There's obviously concern about the point that was mentioned about how you keep the IAEA engaged and how you strengthen the IAEA's hand. But there's a very strong consensus on what the problem is and that the problem has to be dealt with.

I expect that there will continue to be tactical differences about timing and there may even be tactical differences about precisely what is required. But that's the hard work of the diplomacy. Our goal last night, the goal of the EU-3 and the United States last night, was to get consensus that this ought to be now in the Security Council. If you remember, the question was: Should it stay "in the competence of the IAEA"? Well, nobody wants it to be outside the competence of the IAEA, that the IAEA should continue to work on it (inaudible). But it's now also a matter for the Security Council and that was the purpose of last night.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame Secretary. I wanted to ask you about the Russian proposal. In what format has the Russian proposal actually been considered? Has it been reduced to paper? How long is it? Is it still in flux? You suggested in the briefing on the way over here that elements of it might still be in flux, by which I mean you suggested that UF6, there are still some issues about how it might be converted and transferred out of the country and so forth. And last night, we were told by the senior Administration official who briefed us that even the Russians expressed their belief that the Iranians are not very serious about the Russian proposal. So is it even still a viable plan?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think that everybody has doubts as to whether or not the Iranians are serious because this has been around for a while and one reason that there isn't more detail is that the Iranians haven't really been prepared to talk seriously about it because every time the Russian proposal comes up, they say it's inadequate. And what they mean by adequacy is it has to involve enrichment and reprocessing on Iranian soil, and that actually is not the Russian proposal. The Russian proposal is that this would be a joint venture in which the Iranians might have a financial stake but not a technological stake to learn the processing of enrichment -- the process of enrichment and reprocessing.

So I think that if the Iranians were really prepared to seriously consider the Russian proposal within the parameters that everybody is prepared to live with, which is no reprocessing and enrichment on Iranian soil, then there would need to be more extensive discussions. But (inaudible) the first principle is decide that that's what the Russian proposal is, and so far the Iranians have not been prepared to do that.

The other point that the Russians make is that this is still within the context, from their point of view, of EU-3 negotiations so this is not a standalone proposal because they would want the weight of what the EU-3 is doing as well.

SECRETARY RICE: We have been discussing it orally with the Russians. We've had readouts of their discussions. But again, since the Iranians have not yet shown that they're all at interest -- let's even say in the concept that this would be done all on Russian soil, it's somewhat retarded the development of the proposal.

QUESTION: Basically on Hamas, almost immediately (inaudible) before you know, (inaudible) speaking yesterday Hamas rejected the premise of the statement. Do you hold out any realistic hope that there will be a change of behavior, a change of attitude there, or is it, in your view, a foregone conclusion that both the United States and other Quartet members will be withholding significant aid?

SECRETARY RICE: I think nothing is a foregone conclusion. I think it's a very fluid situation. I think Hamas has some difficult choices to make. It's six days after the election. I think that the choice is very clear and the purpose of the Quartet statement was to make the choice very clear so that there was no lack of understanding of what was needed in order to really engage the international system.

You know, there were other important things in the statement, too. I think some commitment to try and help the caretaker government in the interim so that there is not a kind of collapse of authority in the territories was also an important commitment that was undertaken. But I think we now have to give this a little time, but what was very good about last night's statement is that it left a very clear set of markers as to what is required by the international system.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, what is the compromise the Europeans will give for more time? You used a stronger tone against Hamas?

SECRETARY RICE: No, and in fact, there was no -- that discussion never took place. The European Union made its statement. The Quartet then made a statement. They are consistent in what they demand. I know there's been a lot of back and forth about -- I can't even remember the formula -- there's one until and one unless or something along those lines. I think these are, you know, semantical -- semantics because the issue is what has to be done by the next Palestinian government in order to have the support of the international community. That's the important issue and

that issue was consistent.

QUESTION: Thank you, Madame Secretary. Kevin Corke, NBC News. Real just basic stuff in terms of the writing so I'm clear. Should I just avoid using "referral" and just stick with "report"? That's part one.

And part two, really far off topic, if you all will indulge me, Super Bowl 40 coming up this weekend. Can I get a prediction and have you thought about where you might watch the game? (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: First of all, let's do the serious thing first. The formal terminology in the UN is "report." If you look at the resolution of September, it says "report to." We have all been using "referral." A referral, a report, simply means that the dossier is now in the UN, in the Security Council. So I think you're free to use either, but let me just make clear that this is the referral that we were seeking. This is the referral. It was a formal step to report a dossier -- resolutions and all of that -- to the United Nations.

I have picked -- I picked Pittsburgh to beat Cincinnati. I have picked against them every game since. I'm not picking against them again. So I think I believe the Steelers are going to win it. And I have been to only one Super Bowl in my life and that was when it was in Palo Alto when the Dolphins played the 49ers, and given (inaudible) pending events and if nothing transpires that keeps me from going, I plan to try to go to the Super Bowl.

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