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You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2006 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [May 2006: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

## Interview With the Associated Press Editorial Board

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

New York City

May 8, 2006

**QUESTION:** Well, I wanted to start off by asking you about the letter from President Ahmadi-Nejad. I mean, you've said that Iran is the single greatest threat from a state that the United States and perhaps the world faces. If they're willing to talk to us, don't we risk something by not being willing to talk to them?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, let me address the letter first. Let me first say that we have looked at it. We've not done our own translation of it, which of course we will do and we'll look at in greater depth. But the first read of it, there is nothing in this letter that in any way addresses any of the issues really that are on the table in the international community -- the nuclear program -- in a straightforward way -- the terrorism issue. I think it would be best to say it's broadly philosophical in its character; it's 17 or 18 pages, I think. And it is most assuredly not a proposal. Let me be very clear about that. And so we'll do further examination of it, but there is nothing in here that would suggest that we're on any different course than we were before we got the letter.

**QUESTION:** When you say it's philosophical, is it a rant? Is it hostile or is it friendly?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I'm loathe to say because we haven't done a proper translation of it; and speaking a foreign language myself, I think we want to do a translation of it. But it's not concrete in any way and it does not engage the issues. It's broadly philosophical, a little bit historical and it isn't something that you can sit and say, oh, well, here's what they're trying to tell us (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Is it an opening, though?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I don't see it that way.

**QUESTION:** What is to prevent the United States from taking up -- if there's an offer, however vague or general, to enter

into talks, what is the down side for us?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Let me just be very clear. This letter isn't it. This letter is not the place that one would find an opening to engage on the nuclear issue or anything of that regard. But I don't want to characterize it too much more because it's presidential correspondence. I also think that we need to get a proper translation of it. But it isn't addressing the issues that we're dealing with in concrete ways.

Absence of communication isn't really the problem here. We, the international community, have been very clear with the Iranians what they need to do. The Europeans, the Russians, the Chinese, just about everybody in the world is talking to the Iranians and communicating precisely what it is that they need to do. There are presidential statements and IAEA Board of Governors resolutions. And remember that this all started, this latest phase all started because the Iranians stopped talking. They walked out of the Paris negotiation. There were discussions going on. There were negotiations going on. And they walked out of them and decided to say they were getting nothing out of them and that led to the course of events that we've been on, including the latest enrichment tactic.

**QUESTION:** They weren't talking to us, though. Isn't that what they want?

**SECRETARY RICE:** They should want to come back into line with what the international community wants them to do and demands that they do. And so I think that's really the issue and I don't -- I think we don't want to get into a diversion of who they are or are not talking to. I think we want to keep the focus on what needs to be done.

**QUESTION:** I don't understand why you don't see this as an opening. Here's a country you've had very little direct dialogue with for three decades saying let's talk it over. That's not an opening?

**SECRETARY RICE:** This letter is not of that character. This letter is not of the "let's talk of our nuclear program" character. This letter is -- again, it's a kind of broad philosophical -- and it's about history and philosophy and religion and lots of things, but not how do we address our nuclear program, here we note what your concerns are and let's address that. That's not the character of this letter.

**QUESTION:** Then why send it now in the context of the UN Security--

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have no idea.

**QUESTION:** (Laughter.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm not going to try to judge the motivation.

**QUESTION:** But I mean, in the past you've characterized various things that the Iranians have done as an attempt to change the subject or deflect --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, that may well be. It may be an attempt to change the subject, an attempt to throw the international community off course from what it's actually discussing. But I don't know.

**QUESTION:** Have you felt that the Iranians are fishing for an opening in the last few years, like two or three years ago and -- or during Khatami's time?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, if you go back to Khatami's time, if you remember, we did have some discussions in the Afghan channel and Zal Khalilzad was there about Afghanistan. But I think we're -- I would characterize this even as helpful but Afghanistan is a very different situation than everything else that we -- we've said that at an appropriate time we'll activate the Khalilzad channel now that he's in Iraq and, in fact, Neumann -- Ambassador Neumann has had one set of discussions with the Iranians about Afghanistan. So we're not without contact.

We, of course, also have a New York channel that we use to pass messages and so we're not without ways to talk and a lot of Americans also talk to Iranians. So we're not without ways to communicate.

**QUESTION:** Are you likely to really reach some conclusion tonight with the meeting of the permanent Security Council members about what to do next, or do you think the Iran issue is likely to be, I don't know, kicked down the -- for lack of a better phrase, you know, kicked down the road a bit tonight?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't think we're going to reach any -- we're not trying to reach some outcome tonight. As a matter of fact we've acknowledged we're not trying to reach an outcome tonight. We are trying tonight to have discussion of what it is we face, what tools we have, of course, and trying to get a better sense of what may be standing in the way of the next step in the Security Council. Obviously, we've said that a Chapter 7 resolution or something that makes very clear to the Iranians that the next step that the international community is taking is to compel them, in other words, to have a mandatory requirement that they live up to, that they accede to the Board of Governors' demands, IAEA Board of Governors' demands. We've said that that's what we need to do. We need to get to something that's mandatory and binding and clear.

Our view is then that's a Chapter 7 resolution. The Russians, they seem to be a bit concerned about that. I think we want to get to the bottom of why that is and see what we can do to move it forward. But I absolutely don't expect an outcome tonight and really hope that we -- what we're not going to do is get ground down in textual analysis and negotiation of text because the reason the ministers are in our meeting is that we felt we needed to step back from all of that. The political directors can do that. The perm reps can do that. But at this level we need to step back and see how people think we're going to resolve this situation. If, in fact, we're not going to move in a way that we are talking about, then what are other people's ideas about how we are going to move?

**QUESTION:** Are you going to ask the Russians then not to stand in the way of some kind of sanctions regime that's outside the Security Council, sort of the backup plan that you've been working on?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we're never -- Anne, the idea here is that we're obviously going to pursue the work in the Security Council. If we start to get to a place that we get ground down in the Security Council and we can't move forward and the Iranians are continuing to move ahead, we are prepared to look outside with likeminded countries to see what steps might be taken on a parallel track. And by the way, it doesn't have to mean that you're not continuing efforts in the Security Council. They can work in parallel.

But I don't think there's any doubt in our minds that we have to bring some pressure on the Iranians to understand that

there will be a cost for their continued defiance of the international system, that they're not just going to get away with defying, defying, defying all the way up to continuing to improve their nuclear capabilities in dramatic ways by the end of the year next year, that that's not (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Can you explain how Vice President Cheney's remarks about the Russians late last week help you persuade the Russians to assist us at the Security Council?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we've been having the dialogue with the Russians with the Vice President for the last couple of years where we have been expressing concerns about the democracy or the halting of certain democratic evolution inside Russia, whether it's the press or the judiciary or the NGO law. I think I was probably the first to, at the time of the Ukraine gas crisis, to say that the Russians were using their gas as a political weapon. And so the Vice President hasn't said anything that we haven't been saying to the Russians for quite a long time now, and we've been able to work on areas of common interest. The Russians from time to time say things about our policies that we don't particular like either, and we manage to continue to work on issues that are of common interest.

And I don't see what we are doing in the Security Council as a gift from the Russians to the United States or to the EU. The Russians don't want the Iranians to have a nuclear weapon. Of that I'm quite certain, especially an Iran that lives much closer to Russia than it does to the United States. So I assume that what they're doing to try and prevent that outcome is because they believe it's in their interest, and so we're going to have areas of difference. We've had them before and what the Vice President said I think has been on the table for quite some time.

**QUESTION:** Did you know in advance that he was going to make those comments?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Absolutely.

**QUESTION:** You didn't object?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Not only did I not object, I've said those things.

**QUESTION:** Yet the Vice President said those things in Vilnius. It's a different situation. Doesn't it represent some stepping up?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the Russians didn't much like it when I said it in Ankara either. You know, the venue isn't the issue. This has been a series of concerns that we've had about Russian policy and in particular using your energy supply as a bludgeon against other states to bring them into line is just not the way that you -- that this should work. And we've been saying that and the small countries around Russia have been very concerned about it and we've been very concerned about it.

But the Vice President's speech also said the other half of what we've been saying, which is that we continue to work with Russia on areas of common interest and we hope those areas of common interest are going to grow. This is a good relationship on many different fronts, but we have some serious areas of difference.

**QUESTION:** The Iranians have had (inaudible) sanctions for many years and haven't really modified their behavior. Do

you think they'll be more successful this time and doesn't it give you nothing but a military option in any event?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I think there are many diplomatic steps ahead of us. The Iranians cannot afford the kind of isolation that the international community could actually bring about if it chooses to. Iran is very dependent on its integration into the international economy, both for its ability to get products or its ability to sell products. These are people who travel. They have diplomatic relations around the world. This is not North Korea. The North Koreans in some ways relish their isolation and this is not the case with Iran.

And Iran is a great country with a great culture and a great people and it shouldn't be isolated. And nobody wants to isolate the Iranian people, in fact. It's the regime that's isolating Iran from the international community. So no, I don't think that we are by any means out of diplomatic options. We're just beginning. And if Iran cannot bring itself to build a civil nuclear capability without the proliferation risk that the fuel cycle would bring, then I think it's going to find itself more and more isolated and less and less capable of delivering for what is a very sophisticated population that -- that will not be very pleased with the outcome.

**QUESTION:** One last one on Iran. If Iran is bound and determined to build a weapon and you think they are working toward, is there really anything that either the United States alone or in concert with others can do to stop them?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, look, the issue is at what price are they prepared to do that, and I don't think that the -- that they will ultimately be able to afford the price. And that's what we have to establish, because the Iranians would like to make this about civil nuclear power and their access to civil nuclear power. We have said very clearly nobody would question Iran's even right to have civil nuclear power. They can do that. But because of their history, no one trusts them with civil nuclear power derived from a full fuel -- from a fuel cycle on their territory, because the breakout potential from having the fuel cycle on their territory for a nuclear weapon is simply too great and it can happen despite the current inspection regime. And so nobody is prepared to let them have that.

So if they are prepared to have a civil nuclear energy program that is along the lines of the ones that the Russians have offered them or that the Europeans have offered them, then this is finished, the deal is done. And that's really the question here. Are they going to insist on having the fuel cycle that gives them breakout potential for a nuclear weapon? And by the way, if all they really want is civil nuclear power, then why are they insisting on this fuel cycle that has this breakout potential? That's the construct.

**QUESTION:** If we could move a few hundred miles to the west, perhaps a question for Iraq is the prospects of getting meaningful political progress. Al Jafari has been forced out but the Interior Minister is still there, and it was the Interior Ministry which (inaudible) the killings occurred, a lot of problems occurred. What are the prospects of making some significant changes that would bring some peace?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I think we'll see a substantially new government under Prime Minister Maliki. Everybody knows that the Interior Ministry is a problem and everybody knows that the -- an interior ministry in which people have confidence that is not being used for sectarian purposes and that is competent and that it can oversee the training of competent nonsectarian police is one of the two or three most important things that has to happen and everybody understands that.

And so I think what Prime Minister-designate Maliki has said is that he is working with the parties so that the ministries

are national unity ministries, just like the government is a national unity government. And so I think you'll see substantial changes (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Do you think SCIRI will still have the Interior Ministry?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I don't know. They're going to work out the, you know, politics of this. But the Iraqis have said that they want the choice of the so-called power ministries, critical ministries, to be based on competence and based on the ability of people to gain broad confidence, not on party affiliation.

**QUESTION:** Was the Administration not -- didn't see this problem with the Interior Ministry coming when the previous government was set up? Why was that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I met the Interior Minister at the time shortly after, and I think that he -- there was nothing to suggest that this was going to be a problem, but it turned out to be a problem.

But the structure is different now. I mean, that was still an interim government with a lot of party politics, based literally on party politics. And I think you now have a government that, as I said, Prime Minister Maliki said, you know, the Iraqi people have had enough. And I think there is a strong feeling that way among the people in this government that they have to deliver this time. And they're sacrificing a lot. I sometimes think that what we do is we spend most of our time analyzing, well, what is tearing them apart or what's going to cause them to devolve into civil war? You don't look at how hard they're working to hang together because they literally will hang separately or hang together, literally.

Now, there's no stronger incentive to get it right than the incentives that they have. And the notion that somehow we have stronger incentives for them to get it right than they have to get it right I think is just misplaced. And if you go and you talk to them and you talk with somebody like Tareq Al-Hashemi, who was -- is the head of the Iraqi Islamic Party, a Sunni leader who lost his brother and then said the only way to honor my brother is to stay in the political process, and then lost his sister and said the only way to stay in the political process -- to honor my sister is to stay in the political process, who are we to sit around saying, well, they don't have what it takes to pull this together, they don't have the commitment somehow or they're not trying hard enough?

And there is a little undercurrent of that in the American discourse. I think it's extremely unfortunate because when you sit with these people and you see what they are doing and you see their incentives to get it right, you realize that they're going to work as hard as they possibly can to do so and I think they're going to get it right. And there's probably the (inaudible) story that at the time of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, John Hancock signed the Declaration and he signed his signature and then something interrupted and people started talking and celebrating and so he said, "Would somebody else please sign this document, because if the British come right now my name is the only one on it?"

That's the kind of sense that you get from the Iraqis is they understand that they are not -- I mean, they don't have much room for error. They have to get it done.

**QUESTION:** Are you going to have any say in the U.S. troop withdrawals?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm sorry, what?

**QUESTION:** Are you going to have any input into the question of --

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm one of the President's advisors. I will obviously talk to him about this but he'll take his cues, of course, from the military, from his military commanders. And I strongly believe that we ought to have enough force on the ground to do the job and not another soldier more than that.

**QUESTION:** What is it you're going to be looking for that will lead you to recommend major withdrawals of U.S. troops?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The President will get his recommendation from his military commanders because they can best assess what the military situation is on the ground.

**QUESTION:** Well, you just said you advise him on it, though.

**SECRETARY RICE:** No, I advise him on politics. What I said is I am in complete agreement with the way that the President looks at this, which is that you want enough forces on the ground to do the job and not one soldier more. The only people who can give you the assessment of how many people you need on the ground and not one soldier more is the military commanders. And so that's where he's going to get his recommendation.

**QUESTION:** If Maliki came to you, though, and said -- you're kind of helping the Interior Ministry and all the things that really are State Department functions -- it would really help a lot if we had some more U.S. forces here, or certainly we don't want to see you pull some out, what weight would that carry with you?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Look, the process that George Casey (inaudible) is that he's going to sit down with the new Iraqi leadership when there's a new Iraqi leadership and they're going to come to a joint understanding of how the security concerns are going to be met: what role do MNFI forces, coalition forces play in that; what role do Iraqi security forces play in that; how does that work over time; how does it track with what's going on in the reconciliation efforts as people leave the fighting and decide to come over to politics? That's a whole big system, but it's going to be discussed with Iraqis because obviously the question that George is being asked: What are the proper troop levels for any particular stage has all of those elements (inaudible)? But yes, of course the Iraqis are going to be a part of that process. But it can't happen (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Are they doing the right things since you left (inaudible) have a government in a week and then what happened?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well --

**QUESTION:** Are you concerned about any loss of momentum here?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I'm not. Actually, they're moving pretty quickly and pretty expeditiously. And they may not make it on the 9th, but I think they'll make it -- I mean, they actually have till the 21st. He's just, I think, trying to put some pressure on his own system to move it along.

**SECRETARY RICE:** You talked for a little bit about the undercurrent of assumption in America today about how Iraqis should be thinking and feeling, and there's a lot more venue for that point of view to be expressed rather loudly in domestic politics. How do you weigh that? How do you judge that? How do you factor any of that into how you calibrate what you're thinking or saying or recommending?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, obviously it's very important to keep talking to the American people and working with the Congress and getting -- trying to make sure that we all recognize what it is we need to do to move this process forward. And so that's all a part of it, and indeed I go out and I will probably do more through domestic speeches so that on the home front people understand what we're doing too because we're a democracy and there has to be an understanding of what is happening there.

But my only point was that there's sometimes, I think, not enough attention to how committed the Iraqis are to the political process in which they're engaged. And that means leaders that two -- that I don't think we even knew their names a year and a half ago or two years ago. And particularly on the Sunni side, where leadership has emerged that is much closer to the Sunni communities, I think, and a genuine Sunni constituencies, it's the leadership that's basically decided to boycott the elections and now recognizes that that was a bad idea and is now coming into the political process. But you know, it's a pretty gritty, tough Sunni leadership that I find now quite mature and quite capable of defending its interests in ways that I think were not there just a while ago. So that's the sort of thing that doesn't really get enough attention here.

**QUESTION:** How has U.S. influence over events there changed with this development? Are you able to influence things less as Iraq comes into its own politically and also, of course, (inaudible) makes it a little harder for your diplomats to work in the different departments?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the diplomats are (inaudible) getting out there and we are in several provinces and will be in more and that's one of the commitments that we've made is that we do have to be outside of Baghdad, particularly because one of the real weaknesses in the Iraqi system's provincial capacity -- you know, the constitution actually gives a lot of authority to provinces and localities, but since this was a dictatorial system run completely from the center, you don't have corresponding institutions out in the provinces. And so we're going to have to get out there and help to build them.

But as to influence, yeah, it's changed. We've got the Coalition Provisional Authority handing down orders, which, by the way, were always worked with Iraqis too. I remember working with Jerry Bremer (inaudible), he had an order and he had to work with whoever was in the governing council at the time. But now you have -- and for the first time, they have a permanent Iraqi government that has the complete legitimacy of having really been elected, not just the kind of interim government that was supposed to be setting up elections or a transitional government that was supposed to be setting up a constitution, but a legitimate leadership that has been elected by the Iraqi people. And that means you deal with them as you deal with any other leadership. But of course, it's still a leadership that recognizes that it needs a lot of help and has told us that it needs a lot of help, and but it's more of a partnership, clearly more of a partnership. And there are going to be times when we don't agree with the leadership and that's okay. That's why we went to Iraq, so that we can have a democratic leadership.

The other point -- and actually, it was Don Rumsfeld who made this point and I thought it was really absolutely right on -- they're about to have a legislature. I mean, a real active assembly. And things are going to come out of that assembly

that -- because people are going to talk and they're going to get up and they're going to make speeches for their constituencies and some of those things we're going to like and some of those things we're going to hate. And it won't be unlike dealing with almost any other government where parliamentarians say what is on their minds.

(Inaudible) incredibly exciting. I can't tell you how exciting it was to be in Iraq these last two times and to sit with -- particularly this notorious Sunni leadership with, now, Shia leadership and Kurdish leadership and to hear the discussions among them as they figure out how to move forward. That's (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Well, what is your discussion now with them on the issue of the U.S. troop presence? Because they're dealing with their own political constituents, a large part of which tell us, certainly, and the polls, such as they are, say they'd be happy if the U.S. troops started to make their way out.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I think that they want to take responsibility for their own security and I think that's a good thing. But they've been telling us they're not ready to take responsibility for their own security. They want to see acceleration of the training and, you know, can't we get them more capable. That's what I was saying earlier because there needs -- there will be a process that George Casey will be involved in, Don will be involved in, of sitting with the Iraqi leadership and working through here's the security challenge we face, now what role can Iraqi forces play in that reasonably, given their state? What role will the coalition forces continue to have to play? What role do political decisions that might bring people out of the fighting -- what role does that play? And I think you'll see that after they've got their footings, the government has its footing, it has a minister of defense, it has a minister of interior, then those discussions can move ahead.

**QUESTION:** When do you think the security situation will actually start to get better there? Because it seems it's been getting worse and worse.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I don't know that it's getting worse and worse. I think the character of it has changed from time to time. There's no doubt that there's been a rise in sectarian violence, because there are people who believe that the way to keep this government from coming into being and functioning is to set Sunnis against Shia and Shia against Sunnis. And so there are militias and sometimes just gangs that go out in the name of sectarian violence. There have been some sectarian assassinations.

But despite that, they have not derailed the political process that is leading to a national unity government. And I can't tell you when you'll start to see violence come down, but I can tell you that the entire history of insurgencies is that when they lose their political -- the political water in which they swim, that they start -- literally start to die off and dry up. And what that means is that there has to be a period of time in which people make choices. Are they -- do they believe that this fight is any longer "legitimate," do they believe that this fight is any longer advantageous; and if not, is it time to lay down arms? That's the history of every insurgency.

And then you have some people who refuse to lay down arms and they have to be defeated. But because there's now a national unity government with high-ranking authentic Sunni leaders, I think you have a much better chance now of having more people make that decision to leave behind armed conflict. There will be some who can't afford to because they have no future in the political process. You know, some of the Saddamists don't have any future in the political process.

But there are an awful lot of people who saw themselves as outside the process who now see themselves as inside the process. And more and more, those who still remain outside of it will continue as a criminal or worse. And already you see Iraqis saying to the foreigners, like Zarqawi, "We really don't need you to come and kill our children to help liberate Iraq." So there is a real turning against foreign fighters and I think as people (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Can we talk about -- are we done with Iraq or can we talk about a couple of other things you're doing while you're here?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** The Quartet meeting tomorrow, I imagine (inaudible) that'll be focused on the continuation of aid to the Palestinians and how you negotiate that. What is the U.S. going to do beyond this period where you said you'll increase some humanitarian assistance? I mean, is there a long-term plan here for how to sustain the Palestinians, keep them from descending into utter poverty that the U.S. can participate in?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the first thing is to say to Hamas, Hamas has a responsibility to prevent the descent of Palestinians -- of conditions for the Palestinian territories into a situation of deprivation. Hamas needs to do that. Now, the way that Hamas does that is it finally comes online in terms of some actually very simple requirements of the international community: Just recognize the peace process is the only way that you're going to make life better for your people, and there are some things associated with that; and then the international community will support a Palestinian government that is trying to provide for its people and is also committed to peace.

But the one thing that we cannot do is to let people continue to -- Hamas continue to pretend that it's the international community's fault that there's a healthcare problem in the Palestinian territories. Those resources were being made available to Abu Mazen because Abu Mazen was committed to peace. So Hamas needs to take responsibility for its own people.

Having said that, when we read circumstances like yesterday and the last few days where we've been reading about the shortages of medicines and the shortages of healthcare equipment, we're going to respond to that. And I think tomorrow we'll be talking about a plan to provide substantial new in-kind rapid -- rapid intervention into the healthcare situation so that Palestinians can have healthcare.

The international community will obviously want to discuss how to support Abu Mazen, will want to discuss how to continue to deal with humanitarian relief and I think will also want to send a very clear message to Hamas that it is really Hamas's responsibility now to govern. And you can't govern from a position saying that you cheer when there's a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv, you cheer that and say it was legitimate and then expect the international community to support you. Can't do it.

**QUESTION:** The in-kind donations, you're talking about medical supplies and so forth or for money for hospitals?

**SECRETARY RICE:** It'll be a combination of things. We'll have an announcement tomorrow, but it'll be a combination of things (inaudible). I need to talk to David because he was previewing it with some people and I don't want to (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Can you talk a little bit more though about sort of the image side of it? I mean, the facts that they are -- there's a growing feeling in the Arab -- broader Arab community that the Palestinian people are going downhill really fast and it is the West's fault and how do you combat that? What kind of public diplomacy? What is it you're doing?

**SECRETARY RICE:** You know, it's kind of interesting. I wouldn't read it quite that way. Hamas is running all over the world and (inaudible) at a level they would like to continue (inaudible) there is some mysterious EU foreign minister (inaudible). I think that they are being in a sense held to account by people who say that they need to change their ways and we need to continue to press that case. To the degree that the Palestinians are suffering humanitarian or essential services deprivation, then I think we have to find a way to deal with that and it's the best thing to do. But I don't hear anybody saying, anybody, turn over money to the Palestinian government run by Hamas. I haven't heard that argument because everybody understands that Hamas is not living up to Palestinian obligations that have been undertaken by Palestinians for more than a decade.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) out then for you, you'll -- sort of the U.S. approach to this and you get to draw a firm line and isolate Hamas to the extent possible?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I think that it is the only way that Hamas will take the choice about its future dealings with the rest of the world. Remember that it's not the -- we use this term international consensus or international community, but it's actually the Arab consensus that the peace process and the roadmap are the way forward. It's the Arab consensus that this needs to be a negotiated two-state solution.

**QUESTION:** But there have been little indications here and there that not everybody is completely on board with that. I mean, Putin meeting with (inaudible) Hamas.

**SECRETARY RICE:** And the Russians delivered a very clear message to Hamas, which was in order to move forward, you need to get in line with the international consensus. And when people meet with Hamas, that's what's clear to Hamas, that's what we ask, but I think you will find that there isn't any Arab state or any responsible Arab state or European state or any other state that is embracing Hamas and saying that it's the world that needs to change its policies, not Hamas that needs to change its policies.

Everybody's concerned about the status of Palestinians. Everybody is concerned about that. And nobody wants to see deprivation and nobody wants to see essential services not delivered. And so I think there will be a lot of discussion about how to do that. But I don't think that you're going to see any movement on the view that Hamas is the party that needs to make a change.

**QUESTION:** Do you see any movement within Hamas itself?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have not. I have not.

**QUESTION:** And how long do you give them for there either to be the possibility of change or when do you say there is no --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, but it's also an internal Palestinian (inaudible). I mean, we tend to talk a lot about the international community and Hamas, but there's also Hamas and Abu Mazen, there's also Hamas and Fattah, and an

internal deliberation inside the Palestinian territories on how long they can continue to let this go along in a way that begins to destroy the foundations of the institutions of a Palestinian future state that have been developing over some time.

**QUESTION:** To Afghanistan?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** How satisfied are you with the progress there? It seems that there has been some regression. I mean, the cocaine production is back to Taliban levels. There's been a lot of deaths from the fighting forces on a per capita basis, much higher than in Iraq. There seem to have been a lot of setbacks in the last several months.

**SECRETARY RICE:** There's no doubt that we are in the period of time when the Taliban has historically gotten active and they are pretty active this year and they are being fought by Afghan forces as well as by coalition forces. But yes, there's been sustained violence. But this is a tough job and there will be some ups and downs. But the trend or the trajectory of Afghanistan is a positive trajectory. I worry most about the counternarcotics fight and making real progress there. There have been some good developments there in that the governors are now taking more responsibility and, indeed, a couple of governors have been fired for not taking responsibility. But it is still a difficult problem on the counternarcotics side and that's where we really do have to concentrate.

But you know, I think we have to step back and, if you look at Afghanistan in 2001 and you look at Afghanistan now and you have a stable government with both a parliament and president having been elected, remember how much people talked about the warlord problem? I mean, you weren't going to be able to deal with warlords, you weren't going to be able to mobilize militias. Well, in fact, a lot of that has happened. They're building a national Afghan force. Afghanistan, I think, will increasingly integrate into its regional context, the kind of South Central regional context, because Afghanistan was never really a stand-alone economy. It was a land bridge in that area and that relationship has to be rebuilt and they're having discussions with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and countries around them about how to become -- play that role again.

So there is -- I think the trends in Afghanistan are very, very positive. And yes, there are some negatives. There is some downsides, too. But I think the trend line is really, really positive, particularly if you look at what we were dealing with, which was a completely failed state, completely taken over by al-Qaida, with no central authority whatsoever, warlords in all the major areas, no national army to speak of and 25 years of civil war where people couldn't walk down the street. You know, read the stories (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** How much longer do you think the American public will continue to show patience on both of these wars which are now three-fourths as long as World War II?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the President made clear all the way back on September 20th, 2001 that we were going to have to be in this for a while, that the -- and it probably wouldn't be a kind of VE Day or VJ Day in the classic sense. And I think Americans just want to know that progress is being made. And I know that it's hard sometimes when Americans see what's on their television screens, particularly in Iraq, because it's much harder to write or to see the story, televise the story of the political story that is going on there. It's much harder to see that. So mostly they see the violence that is going on there and I know -- I don't think it's impatience; I think it is the question of whether or not we're going to

be successful. And our responsibility is to continue to talk about the progress that we see, the challenges that we see, to be honest about the reverses that we see and to let the American people know that we have a course that is going to succeed. And I think that that's entirely possible to do because I think the path ahead in Iraq is actually becoming pretty clear with a new government now in place.

**QUESTION:** Looking at the global war on terrorism, have there been any concrete steps toward progress on stopping the funding of the global terrorist networks or is there something -- some steps that have been taken more recently that suggest that --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I wouldn't say more recently. I think the infrastructure went into place and has really evolved over the last several years to the place that most financial institutions have really been tough on anything that they think might be terrorist connected.

**QUESTION:** And the Saudis are helping?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The Saudis are indeed helping. Because particularly after the Riyadh bombing a couple years ago, the Saudis, I think, recognize how much this was a threat to the Kingdom, perhaps in ways that they had not prior to that. And they have really been trying to dry this up.

Now, look, it's hard because what happens is you have these nongovernmental institutions that sounds good on the surface of it, but then you learn actually are engaged in terrorist financing of one sort or another, so you close that down and they go off and do something else. It's not a lack of will. It's sometimes just very difficult to do. But I think you would find that it is really hard to move money if you believe that -- if people believe that you've got terrorist connections.

It is one of the problems that Hamas is having. Because of the terrorist financing law, Hamas is having a very good time -- a very difficult time getting their deposits accepted. It's just evidence that you don't see as clearly when you're dealing with these others of some of the difficulties that are involved if people associate you with the terrorist list. It is not a good thing to be on the terrorist list and to try do financial (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** What impact, if any --

**MR. MCCORMACK:** I think this is going to have to be the last one.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** The midterm elections in this country, do you think there will be pressure on the Administration to draw down in Iraq in order to appeal to voters?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I think the President is going to do what he thinks is best. I know the President is going to do what he thinks is best. I've known President Bush really well now since 1998 and he is somebody who is very committed to doing what he thinks is right. After September 11th, I mean, he came to understand, more clearly probably than most of us, but all of us came to understand that we had entered into a period that was not an ordinary time. (Inaudible) ordinary time, but I don't want to plagiarize your title, but this isn't an ordinary time. This is an extraordinary time. And

it means taking difficult decisions and doing what's right. Because you're not doing it for the midterm elections; you're doing it for the standing of the United States and the ability of the United States to influence well into the future and for the future of the Middle East. That's what this is about.

I do think that we're getting to a point in time in which, as we talk to the Iraqi Government about what role coalition forces and American forces need to play in Iraq, that that's changing. It's simply changing. It's changing of its own accord. It's not changing because we have midterm elections in 2006. It's changing of its own accord because we've trained more security forces, because there is a political track now that is really robust, because there is a government that wants to take more responsibility. All of those things are fundamental changes that happened to come about in the year 2006. And so, you know, we will see what comes of these conversations, but that's the nature of the discussions in Iraq.

**QUESTION:** I've got one quick political question.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** If Vice President Cheney were to step down and President Bush asked you to become Vice President, would you do it?

**SECRETARY RICE:** (Inaudible.)

**2006/T13-1**

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