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Interview With A.M. Lukman of Al-Arabiya

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Washington, DC

May 23, 2006

QUESTION: Thank you so much, Secretary Rice. I was just telling our viewers that we appreciate you always to talk to us. Let me just start with the visit of Israel Prime Minister here and there's talk about a plan that he has. Do you think Olmert's plan will undermine your plan?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, Prime Minister Olmert is coming here in his first visit as Prime Minister. I think that he and the President will get an opportunity to know each other and that's really the principal reason for this visit. He was elected saying that he wanted very much to have a negotiated solution and that he believes in the roadmap and that, of course, would be the first priority. I do know that they have also been talking about ways to move forward in any case, because we all want to see progress in the Middle East peace. We will listen to the Prime Minister's views. We'll listen to his thoughts.

I think he does not yet have a plan. In fact, he has said that he just wants to share some ideas with the President. But obviously the President is committed to a two-state solution and we need to get to a two-state solution. The problem now, of course, is that we need to make certain that there is a Palestinian partner for peace. We all admire and respect Mahmoud Abbas. We hope that the elected Palestinian Government that is now led by Hamas will make clear that it, too, is committed to a two-state solution and will accept the requirements that have been set forth by the Quartet so that we can get back to peace talks.

QUESTION: So you are in this visit will not discuss or will not receive any formal plan from Olmert as planned and you will discuss?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, the plan here is to have just discussions about how we can move forward. I would note that the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza, which everyone said would be completely unilateral, turned out to be a coordinated withdrawal with the Palestinians. And Gaza is now free of Israeli settlers and Israel military presence. And so there are many ways to make progress, but we don't expect, certainly, to be signing onto particular proposals during

this visit, no.

QUESTION: And why you are having this second -- wanting to have meetings with Prime Minister Olmert? Do you think some ideas from the U.S. will be presented?

SECRETARY RICE: This really is an opportunity for the two men to sit and talk about their views of the future. They've not had an opportunity to meet in this position. The President met Prime Minister Olmert all the way back when he was mayor of Jerusalem, but they've not had a chance to talk about the current situation. It's a good time to get together and share ideas, to talk about concepts. But we really do want to underscore that the Prime Minister himself has talked about a negotiated solution.

QUESTION: Any ideas and particulars will be presented? You are thinking about exchanging some ideas from the U.S. side? Do you have any idea in particular?

SECRETARY RICE: The only thing that the United States wants to say is how much we want a two-state solution. The President has great respect for the Palestinian people and also great empathy for the difficulties of the life of the Palestinian people on any given day. And we would like to see nothing better than the Palestinian people represented by a government that could represent their aspirations, that could bring peace and prosperity to the Palestinian territories and that could lead to a Palestinian state. The President was the first American President to, as a matter of policy, say that there needed to be a Palestinian state and he remains devoted to that. And I think the two of them will talk about how a two-state solution might move forward.

QUESTION: This President is still optimistic. I know his plan. He is hoping to have two state. He is working hard to achieve that and he's hoping to have that before his presidential term. But Olmert himself describing Abu Mazen as powerless, unable to negotiate and that he's stating a negotiation with him under the current circumstances with Hamas in power will not produce any result. How do you think that?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, it is a difficult matter to understand how one would go forward with this split situation. Everybody respects Mahmoud Abbas. Everyone does. He is a man of peace. He's made very clear that he believes in a negotiated solution to the conflict. But of course there is currently within the Palestinian territories, within the Palestinian political space there is some tension because Hamas does not accept the Palestinian commitments that have been made over decades now -- over a decade for a commitment to a two-state solution that is negotiated.

The Arab consensus is that there needs to be a two-state solution on the basis of the roadmap. The international consensus is that there needs to be a two-state solution based on the roadmap. Currently, it's really only Hamas that stands outside of that consensus and we would hope that Hamas will find a way to accept that consensus so that we can move forward.

QUESTION: Any consideration for contact with Hamas to accept what you are calling on it to accept, that commitment to the roadmap, to renounce terrorists and to accept Israel? Any consideration for a contact with Hamas to have them accept these conditions?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we have a policy that is clearly based on the fact that the United States lists Hamas as a

terrorist organization and so we won't have contacts. But there are plenty of people who are having contacts with Hamas in the Arab world who are giving them the same message; that they really need to accept the international requirements. It isn't too much to ask that if you plan to try to have a peace negotiation that you have to at least accept the existence of your neighbor. Nobody's talking about political recognition. It's simply the right of Israel to exist.

It is also important to note that the Palestinian people have a heritage, a tradition, of tolerance, of the rights of women, of being multi-religious and to having a multi-religious society. And so it's also important that those elements, those traditions of the Palestinian people who have a greater civil society than almost any place else in the Arab world, that those traditions be respected too.

But I want to be very clear. We would like nothing better than to have the current Palestinian Government accept the international requirements so that we could continue on the roadmap and get to a two-state solution. When people say we want the current government to fail, it's simply not true. We want this government to succeed, but it will only succeed on the basis of the recognition of Israel's right to exist, the recognition of the need to renounce violence and to get back onto the roadmap. That's the road to success.

QUESTION: So do you think regional powers could play any role to convince Hamas to accept this terms. Are you in contact with some of them?

SECRETARY RICE: We are in contact with the regional powers. As a matter of fact, when the Quartet met in New York a couple of weeks ago, we were joined by the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, of Egypt and of Jordan because we recognize the important role of the regional actors, the regional states in this development. And those are all states that are committed to the roadmap and we would like to see a recommitment to the roadmap by all of the important parties of the Palestinian territories.

QUESTION: There is another issue regarding to the settlement. There is the Israeli Defense Minister recently confiscate some lands from West Bank to give to a new settlement and the position of this Administration against a new settlement. What do you think about this?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we've been very clear that we believe that the expansion of settlements ought to stop because again, as one of the obligations of the roadmap, that is an obligation that the settlements would stop. We do recognize though and it's important to note, Israel is out of Gaza. Israeli settlers are out of Gaza. Israeli military is out of Gaza. We have worked out an arrangement for an international border between Egypt and Gaza at the crossing at Rafah, which I personally negotiated myself.

There is movement forward, despite the fact that we've not been able to have negotiations on a peace settlement, so it is important that all parties live up their obligations: Palestinians to fight terror, Palestinians to do what is right for their people, and Israelis to ease the difficulties of daily life for Palestinians. And both sides, no one, should do anything that will prejudice a final status settlement.

QUESTION: I think I have to ask you, this new development with regard to this new settlement, what you will do to stop the Israeli -- to stop this?

SECRETARY RICE: We talk all the time to the Israelis about the importance of living up to its obligations under the roadmap. But again I just want to note, a lot has happened in this very recent period of time. And if we could use the momentum of the withdrawals from Gaza, if we could use the momentum of elections in the Palestinian territories and elections in Israel to get back onto the roadmap and to make progress toward a two-state solution, I think we could make real progress, but everybody has to be committed to that roadmap.

QUESTION: We are going to Iraq. The President described the formation of a new Iraqi Government as a major defeat to the terror, and at the same time he said any talk about immediate withdrawal, it will be premature. And this is agreeable. Don't you think the United States now it's close to have a notion about when it will start to consider or look into something like that to start pulling out from Iraq?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we are looking only to success in Iraq, success for the Iraqi people, success for democracy in the Middle East, and that means that this new Iraqi Government has to be given a chance. It is the first permanent elected government. It is broadly based. It has serious people. I've met with some of the new leaders of Iraq when I was out there and they're very serious and focused people. And so we need to give them a chance.

Now, the United States has always wanted, when Iraqi forces are capable, to begin to withdraw our forces. That is the idea. Iraqis ought to be providing their own security. But we have to do this on the basis of conditions on the ground, not on the basis of some artificial timetable. Iraqis are making progress on behalf of their own security. They are securing more of their own territory. They're growing in numbers. They're securing roads, like the road between the highway and the international zone. So they're making progress. But the multinational forces that are there are there to assist in the training of Iraqi forces and to assist in continuing to fight terrorists until the Iraqis are able to do it themselves.

QUESTION: Why -- the new Iraq is very vital to the regional point in Middle East. Prime Minister Maliki said that the Iraqis themselves, they might be able by the end of the year to assume a bigger role on securing the country. Do you think at that time we'll be having an idea about when the United States would start pulling out?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, we're going to sit down and talk to the new Iraqi Government. General Casey will sit down with the Iraqi military people, with Iraqi civilians, with Prime Minister Maliki himself to try and determine what needs to be done, what role we will play in the coalition forces, what role the Iraqis will play.

But when I talked to Foreign Minister Maliki I was really impressed with how much he wants Iraqis to be able to secure themselves. He wants Iraqis to be responsible for their own security and so do we, but they have to be ready to take that responsibility. And so we look to continue to work on the training of Iraqi forces, to continue to work on rooting out terrorists and defeating them in Iraq. But everybody looks forward to the day when Iraqis can do this for themselves.

QUESTION: Saddam Hussein is on trial, ma'am. Do you personally following this trial in court and do you think he's having a fair trial?

SECRETARY RICE: It looks to me as if the Iraqis are doing a remarkable job despite very difficult odds of due process and of a trial. I don't follow it on a daily basis. But from all I see, you have very committed and indeed very honorable judges who are trying to do their work. It has been very painful in many ways to watch when the families of people who were murdered by Saddam were testifying. It was very painful to realize what the Iraqi people had been through under

this dictator. But he is getting not just a trial, but he's getting one that the whole world can watch, and that's very different, of course, than he treated the many victims that he summarily executed and killed.

QUESTION: Iraq and the neighbors, the neighbors of Iraq are very vital on Iraqi security. All of them is -- Iran. And you know the historical religious relationship between some Iraqis and Iran. Do you think Iran will be a key player on the future of Iraq security?

SECRETARY RICE: Iran will clearly play a role. It's a neighbor. And we don't have any objection or expectation about Iran not having a role. Of course, Iran will have a role. The question is: Will it be a positive role? Will it be a role that is befitting a good neighbor? Will it be a transparent role, state-to-state relations rather than trying to interfere? Will Iran be a stabilizing neighbor rather than trying to stir up trouble in the south and trouble with the militias?

If Iran chooses to play a stabilizing role, chooses to play a transparent role, chooses to play a neighborly role, that would be a very good thing for Iraq. But Iran is not Iraq's only neighbor and the entire region now needs to support this new government. It is a government that is broadly based. It is a government that has Sunnis and Shia and Kurds altogether. And it's very good that Iraq's neighbors are taking more of an interest in Iraq. We hope that they will soon be developing diplomatic relations, sending envoys, sending ambassadors. That will be very important.

QUESTION: Some officials, some of them here, (inaudible) that the Iraqi Government is the one that could determine whether they have contact with Iran with regard to their security. And now we have a unity government. Will you encourage such contacts, as the United States of America?

SECRETARY RICE: The Iraqis are quite capable of running their foreign policy. They've been doing it really now for some time and I'm quite confident that they will do it well and we will do what we can to help. We hope to help mobilize the international community to give more support to this new Iraqi Government, more support in terms of debt relief, more support in terms of reconstruction assistance, more support in terms of technical assistance for building the ministries. We've considered that to be our role. But I'm quite confident the Iraqis can manage their own foreign affairs.

QUESTION: About the Iran nuclear program, the Iranian President rejected every offer last week. The United States of America is insisting on a diplomatic solution and yet there is (inaudible). What do you think about this and dealing with this issue on a daily basis for a long period of time? You meet with your counterpart. Have you given a sense that you're feeling the diplomatic support or diplomacy is dead right now; it's not working anymore?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I think we have many ways still to explore and to pursue the diplomatic path. I have no doubt that the international community is determined that there should be a diplomatic solution and the United States shares that view. But we are working to show Iran that there are really two courses that are possible. One is to accept a civil nuclear program that would be acceptable to the international system, one that does not have the risk that Iran could use a civil nuclear program to build a bomb.

Iran sometimes wants to say, well, we have a right to civil nuclear energy. No one would deny that. The question is, after the many years now of having lost the confidence of the international community, Iran needs a period of time in which it is pursuing civil nuclear power that is acceptable to the international community, that doesn't have the full fuel cycle, that doesn't allow for the building of a bomb. And so that civil nuclear program is available to Iran. It's been offered by

Russia, it's been offered by the European-3.

The other course is isolation. And the United Nations Security Council can act. There are ways to act outside of the international -- outside of the UN Security Council by likeminded states, through financial measures, for instance. So Iran should really make the right choice here. Its people deserve to be integrated into the international community. This is a great culture and a great people. And nobody wants to see Iran suffer the kind of isolation that the international community can bring.

QUESTION: And this isolation, you are going through the UN and also seeking another way (inaudible). And at the minimum, as I learned from the State Department building that you are seeking a resolution from Chapter 7 resolution. How likely that option?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. We do believe that it should be a Chapter 7 resolution because, under Chapter 7, you compel a state to act. Let me be very clear. We understand that Iran is not Iraq. And so when we talk about a Chapter 7 resolution, we are not talking about movement toward the use of force. The President is not going to take his options off the table and those options remain on the table as well. But this can be a diplomatic solution and Chapter 7 is a good vehicle for bringing a diplomatic solution. But the choice is Iran's.

The world has said that there is a perfectly good course of cooperation, a civil nuclear program, other benefits in the international system, or there is a course of continuing with a program that the international community does not support and facing isolation. We hope that Iran takes the course of cooperation.

QUESTION: And am I correct to understand that the maximum -- still the security -- the military option is still on the table, as you just said?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the President doesn't take any of his options off the table. But we have plenty of room for and plenty of time for a diplomatic solution; and if the world remains united, if we continue to convince the Iranians that they should take this course and if Iran acts in the interests of its own people and its own state, then we can get this done diplomatically. And I fully believe that we will.

QUESTION: Any consideration for direct or indirect contact with Iran in this regard?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the issue isn't lack of communication. The Iranians know America's views. The Iranians know what the international community is asking of them. And we have worked very hard to make this a multilateral approach. Very often the Iranians want to make this between the United States and Iran, this is the United States and Iran that are clashing. No. Iran is on the wrong side of the international community. Not on the wrong side of the United States, on the wrong side of the international community. And so it has to solve the problem with the international community. That means that the multilateral approach that we're taking, I think is the appropriate one.

QUESTION: We'll go quickly to Syria and then if I have time the Resolution 1680 from the United States and -- from the UN. And you have supported that resolution which has called on Syria to draw border with Lebanon and to exchange diplomatic relationship. And one day after that resolution, a military group from Syria entering Lebanon and support one Palestinian group. Do you see that as (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, obviously, Syria wasn't listening. The resolution didn't say support a single Palestinian faction within Lebanon. It said treat Lebanon as an independent and sovereign neighbor that deserves to have a border that is demarcated and delineated and that deserves to have ambassadorial contact; it deserves to have normal diplomatic relations. That's what's being asked of Syria.

Syria has too long treated Lebanon and the Lebanese people as if they were somehow clients of Syria. Lebanon is a proud independent country that has a wonderful heritage of many different peoples living in the same country. And if it is allowed to pursue its affairs independent of this kind of -- the foreign influence that Syria has practiced for the last decade, Lebanon will be a fine democracy and a prosperous country within the Middle East. But that's what the world is saying to Syria: Stop treating Lebanon like a client, treat it like a client state. Treat it like a neighbor. Treat it like an independent and sovereign country and then we can move on to a more peaceful and prosperous future for the Lebanese people.

QUESTION: 1559 calling on disarming the Hezbollah. Is there any deadline you are going to give to them?

SECRETARY RICE: We are -- this is being worked in the Lebanese process. The Lebanese know that they have obligations under 1559. I believe that they will indeed undertake those obligations and those obligations include the disarming of militias. But this is a transitional period and we understand that. And so allowing Lebanon to work on this is very important.

QUESTION: I'm told that my time is up, but this is the last question. I saw in your meeting with Prince Saud a musical exchange. How did you think that will play into relation between the two countries? And actually you inspire a lot of people. One of our young editor in the newsroom asked me, she want to be at foreign ministry and what do you have to advise her so (inaudible)?

SECRETARY RICE: Oh, that's so nice. (Laughter.) Well, actually, first of all, in terms of music, everybody loves music, so it's very nice to have that in common with so many people. And indeed, His Royal Highness Prince Saud did give me some of the songs that I love best and so I'll try to return the favor when I go to Riyadh.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) on Fox. I saw you grooving. (Laughter.)

SECRETARY RICE: Well, I can't help it, you know. If music starts, I start, too. And so -- but I would say to your young editor that the sky's the limit, you know. This is a time to really go after your dreams. I know that these are difficult times in the Middle East. I know that these are uncertain times because so much is changing. But a lot is changing for the better, particularly I think for women a lot is changing for the better. So often now when I go to the Middle East there will be young women who are in trade ministries and economics ministries and in cultural ministries. And they remind me a little bit of myself when I was a bit younger, because they're in their first meetings for their government and it's very exciting to do that.

But I would not be at all surprised if -- that at some point in time there are going to be several women foreign ministers from the region and that will be a great day. Because democracy is the birthright of every human being. Liberty is the birthright of every human being. But you can't have half a democracy. It has to include women, too.

QUESTION: Thank you so much and those issues we'd like to debate it in our morning show. I hope one day that will happen.

SECRETARY RICE: I look forward to it.

QUESTION: Thank you so much.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Thank you.

QUESTION: Secretary Rice, as we always appreciate it.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

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