



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

KEYWORD SEARCH

[Subject Index](#)+ BOOKMARK    ...[Home](#)[Issues & Press](#)[Travel & Business](#)[Countries](#)[Youth & Education](#)[Careers](#)[About State](#)

You are in: [Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice](#) > [What the Secretary Has Been Saying](#) > [2007 Secretary Rice's Remarks](#) > [May 2007: Secretary Rice's Remarks](#)

## Press Availability Following the Iraq Neighbors' Conference

### Secretary Condoleezza Rice

Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt

May 4, 2007

**SECRETARY RICE:** Good afternoon. We've just completed a very successful meeting of Iraq's neighbors in an expanded format with the Group of Eight, the G-8, and the Permanent Five members of the Security Council of the United Nations. There were really three very important messages from this meeting. The first is that the Iraqi Government spoke to its own responsibilities to foster national reconciliation and to create an Iraq for all Iraqis. The neighbors spoke to their desire to foster an environment in which that national reconciliation can take place, particularly taking their responsibilities concerning borders and concerning energy and noting that it is, of course, in their interest that Iraq be stable and secure. And third, the international community took its place alongside Iraq and its neighbors to commit, as it did yesterday through the International Compact, to a set of obligations as Iraqis move forward on their obligations, but also to continue the process to foster international support for the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Maliki.

I hope that the Iraqi people recognize the extraordinary nature of this gathering and the degree to which the international community supports them in their struggle against terrorism and extremism and in their efforts to form a democratic basis for their political life.

Finally, we agreed that there should be working groups that should be convened on an expeditious basis and that they should work intensively on matters of border security, on matters of energy supply and on issues of refugees.

Thank you very much.

**MODERATOR:** We only have time for a very limited number of questions.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, please can you provide details on the meeting that Ambassador Crocker had with the Iranians? What was the U.S. message in that meeting and why did you choose not to meet Mr. Mottaki yourself to deliver a message?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all the opportunity simply didn't arise for the Foreign Minister of Iran and me to -- as I said, I would have taken that opportunity; the opportunity didn't arise. But our officials did, as they did in Baghdad, have an opportunity to exchange views about the substance of this meeting which is how to help Iraq be more secure and the responsibilities of neighbors and those who are active in Iraq to help the Iraqis secure themselves.

**QUESTION:** If I could just ask you, Madame Secretary, we just heard from the Iraqi Foreign Minister. He said it was in his country's interest to see a reduction in tensions between Iran and the U.S. But what do you make (inaudible) opportunity to meet the Iranian Foreign Minister (inaudible)? Also, can we get some reaction to you -- from you to his speech in which he made a fairly blunt attack on the U.S. saying (inaudible) my country was the cause of the violence (inaudible) and also on the issue of those (inaudible) Iranian diplomats being held by (inaudible) not in the interest of (inaudible).

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, a number of views were expressed during this conference and I think the overwhelming majority of those views focused on the positive role that the international community can and should play in Iraq and a recognition that the multinational forces in Iraq of which the United States is a part are there, of course, by UN Security Council resolution and at the request of the Iraqi Government. They are also there to help to train Iraqi security forces that can then help Iraq secure itself. And no one looks more forward to the day when Iraqis can secure themselves and defend themselves than the United States, but until that day, the multinational forces, of which the United States is a part, need to be there to help the Iraqis against extremism, terrorism, and to make certain that security is provided.

As to comments to the contrary, I think it simply speaks -- I've simply spoken to the facts on the ground. And the facts on the ground are that those forces are there by invitation of the United -- invitation of the Iraqi Government and by UN Security Council mandate. I think that this was an opportunity for people, rather than thinking about what others should do, to think about what they should do.

And there was quite a lot of talk by the neighbors of the importance of securing the borders and that means stopping the flow of foreign fighters, it means stopping the flow of arms and sophisticated technology to those -- to not just to foreign fighters, but also to militias and those who are killing innocent Iraqis as well as endangering multinational forces. So that is the point that I made and everybody was free to make their own points, but I think that the facts on the ground speak for themselves.

**QUESTION:** (Off-mike.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** I reassured the Iraqi Foreign Minister when we talked about it, that the United States has no desire to have anything contribute to a more difficult set of circumstances for Iraq. We want Iraq's neighbors to behave in a way that is consistent with a democratic and stable Iraq. That's why this conference was convened. And it gave us a chance, all of us, including the Iranians and the United States and, for that matter, the Syrians, who have not been in the same room together; it gave us an opportunity to commit to doing something about the problems that Iraq faces in becoming more stable.

Now it will be an opportunity for these neighbors to actually carry out the obligations that they undertook today at this conference. So the breakthrough was to have all of Iraq's neighbors in the same room with the international community

to face up to their responsibilities and obligations, to cease activities that are increasing instability in Iraq.

**QUESTION:** Thank you, Madame Secretary. The communiqué of this conference calls for the disarming and dismantling of all militias and illegally armed groups without exception. Do you have the confidence that the government of Prime Minister al-Maliki has the capability and the will to dismantle all militias including that of Moqtada al-Sadr? And on your relationship -- in your meeting yesterday with the Syrian Foreign Minister, how do you plan to further this in terms of the talks and relations with the U.S. and Syria? The Syrian Foreign Minister called it a new beginning. Do you see it as such and do you anticipate on the return of an ambassador to Damascus? Thank you.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, on the second part of your question, Elise, I thought that this was an opportunity in the context of this neighbors' conference to talk to the Syrian Foreign Minister about how we see the situation and about the need to stop the flow of foreign fighters. We would hope that there can be greater cooperation on stopping the flow of foreign fighters, but that was really the extent of our conversation. Let's take this one step at a time. This is an important -- I think it was an important conversation. I am very glad that had the opportunity here in this context, but this was not about anything other than Iraq and we will certainly see whether we can observe words being followed by deeds. That's what we'd like to see.

As to the communiqué, the communiqué laid out obligations that the Iraqi Government itself has undertaken as a part of its own program. And a part of that is to dismantle and disable militias that are not a part of the Iraqi security forces. And I'm quite confident that the Iraqi Government intends to do that; that it has the will to do that. It is a process and it is a process that's taking place in a particular political context and it has to be an Iraqi process, but that the Iraqi Government is committed to having unified security forces that report to and are responsible only to the elected officials of Iraq is something that the Iraqis themselves have set as a goal and I'm certain that they intend to achieve it.

**QUESTION:** Follow up on a couple of things you said, Madame Secretary, about (inaudible). You have -- it was reported that you said to the Foreign Minister of Syria that you (inaudible) deliver on this issue on the borders of Iraq and we were looking to normalization. Is this an indication of a new policy of the United States (inaudible) the requirements -- the other requirements for normalization, including Lebanon and the tribunal? And secondly, do you -- the impression is that you were chasing the Foreign Minister of Iran and he was snubbing you. What do you read between the lines? Why didn't he really make an effort on his part?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, you can ask him why he didn't make an effort. (Laughter.) Look, I'm not given to chasing anyone. (Laughter.) But I thought that we've had a very good conference here and the interactions that I've had have been excellent interactions. As to the point about Syria, there are a lot of issues with Syria. It's not just an issue of Iraq. But in the context of this meeting, it seemed to be a reasonable thing to do to engage with the Syrian Foreign Minister to deliver the -- our very strong view that the cessation of the flow of foreign fighters across that border, the foreign fighters being a principal source of the suicide bombers who are endangering innocent Iraqis as well as endangering our troops, to talk about that was very important to do in the context of this meeting.

Now, of course, we have diplomatic relations with Syria. Let me remind that we, that we actually have a chargé in Syria and we would hope that that chargé, as he has the obligation to do and the authority to do, can continue discussions. But this was not about U.S.-Syrian relations. This was about the neighbors and those of us who are involved in Iraq doing everything that we can to give Iraq a chance to fight off the terrorists, fight off the instability, and get on with building a stable and secure Iraq and so that's why this conversation was important.

I think we should take one from Egyptian Television.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible) from Al-Arabiyya.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I said, Egyptian Television. (Laughter)

**QUESTION:** Well --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Go ahead.

**QUESTION:** Okay. Other than the meeting about Iraq, today there was a meeting of the Quartet with the Arab countries (inaudible) about the initiative, the Arab Initiative (inaudible). With the (inaudible) Israeli problems, there is a deadlock now in this process. How do you view this in the light of (inaudible) visit to the area?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the informal discussion that we are going to have will take place after this. And so we've not yet had that informal discussion. It's just an opportunity for the international Quartet to -- we're taking advantage of the fact that we're all here for the international Quartet to hear from the Arab League committee that is going to be presenting in various quarters the Arab League Initiative, as was sent out of the Riyadh summit. So we've not yet had that discussion.

**QUESTION:** Thank you very much. This is a question by Egyptian Television. Thank you, Madame Secretary. Well, you seem to be very confident and optimistic about the compliance of the Iraqi Government to the commitments that they made in the Compact. But there is a lot of criticism as to the issue of reconciliation in particular, which is also an issue to the Sunni Arab governments here. General Petraeus himself and Ambassador Crocker were telling the Iraqis that Washington's watch is must faster than that of Baghdad's in terms of meeting those commitments. I'm not sure whether, Madame Secretary, you have specified certain timelines that you are going to be evaluating the progress made by the Iraqi Government as (inaudible) to those benchmarks. And particularly General Petraeus said that they would -- he would do an overview by September. Do you think September is a suitable time?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes. General Petraeus has said that in that timeframe we should have a better sense of how the Iraqi -- how the Baghdad security plan and its associated elements are working. And so yes, of course, we're going to evaluate as we go along, but that seems to be a time to step back and make an overview. But I wouldn't put everything on September either. This is a process that we're in, helping the Iraqis to bring population security to Baghdad as a breathing space for them to engage in national reconciliation and to prepare their own forces to be able to take the dominant security role.

Now, it is the case that the United States is absolutely committed to this and the President has made very clear that he is not going to be responsive to artificial timetables set in Washington when he has just begun a process on the ground with General Petraeus who's, by far, everyone understands the best counterinsurgency General in the United States. We have a new Ambassador, Ambassador Crocker. And so why would the United States tie its hands with artificial timetables when the General and the Ambassador are carrying out a program with the Iraqis to try and bring about stability. The fact is that our security, the security of the United States, the security of the region, the security of the international community is going to be served if there is a stable Iraq and it is going to be harmed probably irreparably

if there is a vacuum and if the terrorists and those who are trying to keep Iraq unstable are left to their own devices. So people should not misunderstand the debate in Washington. We're a democracy. We're having a debate.

But the President of the United States is absolutely committed to our role in the multinational force, to our role in supporting Iraqi security forces, and to our role in helping to create the conditions in which the Iraqi reconciliation can take place. It needs to take place urgently. And we talked here at the conference about the fact that only Iraqis can determine what kind of Iraq this will be. Only Iraqis can make the overtures and the compromises necessary to overcome their differences. Only the Iraqis can carry out the national agenda that they have established for themselves, that is, matters of the national oil law, of de-Baathification reform, of constitutional review, of holding of provincial elections -- those are the things the Iraqis must do. I should add to that budget execution, so that funding can get from the center to the provinces and get closer to the people. These are things that the Iraqi Government must do. But the international community needs to maintain and be committed to maintaining its efforts to support them so that those conditions can be met.

Thank you very much.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible)

**SECRETARY RICE:** Iranian question. Yes.

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible)

**SECRETARY RICE:** We'll take two more. The lady in the pink scarf as well. All right, sorry, Sean, you've lost control.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Once the U.S. Government talked about the "axis of evil," but today U.S. public opinion shows that the -- maybe there is a necessity to change this policy on Iran. Don't you think that it's time for a change in policy towards Iran in your behavior? Thank you.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, we have no desire to have difficult relations with anyone. There's a history with Iran that goes back now more than 27 years. It is also the case that we have no problem and no tension with -- from our point of view with the Iranian people.

Iran is a great culture. And it is a culture and a country that should play a positive role in the international community. We have a number of policy problems with the way that Iran is conducting its policies in international affairs. We have been here together to talk about how to stabilize Iraq and I sincerely hope that Iran will act in what it says is (inaudible) self-interest to stop the flow of arms to extremists who then use them to hurt our forces and innocent Iraqis. I hope that the Iranians' support for terrorism will cease. And certainly, we all hope that the day will come when Iranians, like people all over the world, can express themselves freely.

But let me just say, as to talking to Iran, we have been very clear that if Iran is prepared to accept the obligations that have been placed upon it by the international community, not by the United States but in Security Council Resolutions that represent the international community, to suspend its enrichment and reprocessing activities, so that the international community can be certain that Iran will not seek a nuclear weapon, we are prepared -- the United States --

to change 27 years of policy and engage with Iran on a broad range of issues, whatever is on anybody's mind.

But that is not a U.S. demand. That is a demand of the United Nations Security Council. So it's my hope that Iran will take that course, rather than the course of isolation. We will continue to work to reach out to the Iranian people. We have had the Iranian wrestling team -- the American wrestling team in Iran. We've had people from Iran who are specialists in disaster relief. We're going to continue those efforts. But there is a path ahead if the Iranian Government intends to take it.

This lady, and then I've got to --

**QUESTION:** (Inaudible).

**QUESTION:** My question is: Some countries have already agreed to start negotiations with Iran without the enrichment problem, for the sake of (inaudible) a diplomatic problem with -- of this thing. Will the U.S. -- going to do that? Are you willing to go for that?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, the path ahead is clear in the combination of the last security resolution -- Security Council Resolution 1747, and the statement by the foreign ministers of the six. The path is clear. The statement of the foreign ministers of six -- the EU-3, Germany, France, Great Britain, the United States, Russia and China -- that statement says that we are prepared to enter into negotiations, based, by the way, on what are already clear benefits that have been offered to Iran out of a package that was put together back on June 1st of 2006.

But the international community believes that those negotiations and demands of those negotiations take place in a context in which Iran is not improving its nuclear capability by continuing enrichment and reprocessing. And so the suspension of that activity -- enrichment and reprocessing -- would bring negotiations on what I think is a very favorable set of circumstances for Iran.

And I just want to say one other thing. There is sometimes that I hear the United States wants to deny Iran civil nuclear power. No. The United States does not. The United States believes that civil nuclear power, which does not have proliferation risk of the fuel cycle, is something that we should be exploring around the world. We believe that countries should have access to civil nuclear power. But Iran has a history with the IAEA, and it has to overcome that history, and there is a path that has been put forward by the six parties, and I hope that the Iranian Government would find a way to accept that path, which would lead to negotiation and engagement rather than to isolation.

Thank you very much.

**2007/T6-12**

Released on May 4, 2007





[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](#)